
GENDER AND FEMINIZATION - THE CHANGING FACE OF DENTISTRY

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ABSTRACT

Background: Over the last few years, the proportion of women in dentistry has been rising steadily, raising questions about the effects of this feminization on the profession. This is the first study of its kind to provide data regarding the self-reported career choice motivation and intentions after graduation of female dental students in India.

Methodology: A cross-sectional questionnaire survey of female dental students attending a large accredited dental college in Northern India.

Results: A total of 112 female dental students were given the questionnaire. Analysis of the motives for choosing dentistry as a career revealed that the most important factors that influenced their choice of dentistry. Our study showed Students' attitude towards profession, that maximum students were happy being dentist

Conclusion: We are witnessing a significant increase in the number of women choosing dentistry as a profession. We should encourage our Female Colleagues to practice their profession to give justice to their education and themselves.

KEYWORDS: Women dentist, Female Dentist, Gender, Feminization, Motives, Attitude

INTRODUCTION

Gender heterogeneity focusing on the stark contrast between males and females is prevalent in many health fields, including medicine and dentistry. Dentistry is a profession dominated by men. Women have been making significant inroads only since the 1970s¹ as a result of professional initiatives and women's movements, raising questions about the effects of feminization on dentistry, defined as an increase in female

presence and a corresponding shift in the occupation.^{1, 2} Will this shift be paralleled by changes to the profession? Some speculate that feminization will have significant implications in terms of labour supply, practice characteristics and professional ideals.¹⁻⁶ With different societal and familial pressures, will female dentists have different goals and expectations in life and career? Will they have different work pattern compared to their male counterparts? Are women more likely to take career breaks? Will they leave Dentistry after marriage? Will they work part time after they have children? Do some women study Dentistry only for better marriage proposals? Will this kind of thinking pattern of women affect their patient care? To break these myths and to highlight the truth we conducted a survey among women Dentists.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was carried out in a teaching dental hospital in north India. This was a descriptive, cross-sectional survey of dental students undergoing internship and was based on a structured questionnaire format. The purpose of the study was explained to the participating students; confidentiality was ensured. Written informed consent was obtained from the students before filling the questionnaire. Female Dental students were administered a pretested questionnaire, modeled on compilation of factors in previous literature.⁷ The questionnaire had both open- and close-ended questions. The first section contained questions pertaining to demographic data. The second section contained a list of factors that could have influenced students' choice of dentistry as a career. The factors of motivation were rated from 0-4 on a Likert scale; 0 = not important, 1 = disagree, 2 = slightly agree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree. Students were

asked to rate the importance of each motive for attending dental school using this 5-point scale. The third section contained question on future plans after graduation and the preferable choice of subject for specialization. The last section consisted of questions on attitude about dental profession. Statistical analysis was done using counts and percentages. To find the most important independent driving force for choice of dentistry as a professional career, aggregate scores were derived for each principal motivating factor; ranking of motivating factors was done after calculating mean and standard deviation. Some of the questions had multiple responses to choose from; therefore sum total of percentages was more than 100%.

RESULTS

A total of 112 female dental students were given the questionnaire. The response rate was 100%. Age in the sample ranged from 19-23 years. Majority of the parents were well educated; parental education background revealed that majority of fathers (90%) and mothers (86%) were graduates. Most of the students completed schooling from private schools. 63% students stayed in hostel, whereas majority of the students resided at home. Analysis of the motives for choosing dentistry as a career revealed that the most important factors that influenced their choice of dentistry. Students in the study reported that the decision of choosing dentistry as a career was largely their own decision although their parents and friends encouraged them. This can be attributed to the fact that Indian parents often take a central role in the decision-making process of their child's career. The choice of dentistry was based as a vehicle for the achievement of personal goals, where maximum being interested in medical science followed by no emergency work, flexible work schedule, etc. Some students opted Dentistry for good marriage proposal (Table 1). Our study showed Students' attitude towards profession, that maximum students were happy being dentist and were confident about their doing doctor-patient relationship abilities and performing all kinds of dental treatment. However few students agreed that they were stressed about future job and finance, resulting in dentists who do not practice with optimal enthusiasm and

operational efficiency (Table 2). Regarding future career plans after graduation, 46% planned to do post-graduation in India; while 15% planned to pursue post-graduation abroad. 22% planned to work at a dental clinic in the future. Fewer respondents were interested in pursuing a research-based career.

ITEMS	INTERNSHIP STUDENTS (N=112) %
Family/Friends Advice	11
Prestige And Social Status	6
Interest In Medicine Science	19
I Want To Help People	5
Independence In Job	7
Flexible Work Schedule	9
Regular Working Hour	9
No Emergency Work	12
I Can Work Abroad	2
Financial Security	8
Good Job Security	5
For Good Marriage Proposal	7

Table 1: Top most factors motivating students in the choice of dentistry

DISCUSSION

Motives around which decision making of students is organized also revealed that apart from family approval, an interest in medicine science played a major part. Similar to results of our study, interest, prestige, good job opportunity abroad, and regular work hours were the most

important factors. However, rather than material rewards, the motivating factors for career in dentistry should dominantly involve factors such as intellectual challenge, manual dexterity, and caring nature of dentistry.⁸ Dentistry provides a clear avenue for pupils from scientific background wishing to pursue an academic career.⁹ It not only gives an opportunity for self-

ITEMS	INTERNSHIP STUDENTS (N=112) %
I Am Happy And Proud To Be A Dentist	31
I Do Not See Enough Abilities In Myself To Treat Patients	13
I Am Confident About Doing All Kinds Of Dental Treatment	17
I Am Confident About My Doctor-Patient Relationship Abilities	15
My Job Does Not Leave Me Enough Time For Extracurricular Activities	5
I Feel Stressed About Future Job, Finance, etc.	19

Table 2: Students' attitude towards profession

employment, but also enjoys a prestigious position in the healthcare profession. A study by Scarbecz and Ross organized students' motives around four themes: People, money, flexibility, and business factors.¹⁰ In a study in North India, 53.7% of the students reported pursuing dentistry because it offers stable work; is highly paid (38.7 percent); and due to the ease in finding a regular job in dental schools or hospitals (7.6%). Flexibility (44.4%) and being self-employed (36.6%) were also acknowledged as important

motivating factors. Overall, this study found that financial and professional factors were the chief criteria for students pursuing dentistry in India; however, the strongest influence in the choice of dentistry was the students' parents or family.¹¹ A study in Brazil demonstrated the choice for dentistry made on the basis of economic reasons (73.5%), vocational reasons such as interacting with others and helping people (68.3%), professional reasons (67.8%), and personal reasons (56.6%).¹² Female dental practitioners, experience the dilemma of wanting to be perceived as competent dentists while fulfilling their role as a mother. Daily challenges to achieve professional goals and fulfill marital and maternal obligations were driving force to conduct this research. It is ultimately critical to provide a supportive workplace for female dentists to provide high-quality services and to ensure that the productivity of the dental workforce is not negatively affected.¹³ In 2010, Adams performed a study examining the nature of this male ,female gender segregation in the healthcare professions in the United States and Canada for the periods of 1930-1931 and 2006-2008¹⁴. The results showed that the percentage of female practitioners joining different health professions increased dramatically during these years, as many areas of expertise opened up. Reskin and Roos claimed that the increased number of women in the workforce was due to enhanced levels of education, social changes and occupational changes, as well as women's increased passion to practice within health professions and a concomitant steady or decreased enthusiasm among men¹⁵. Additional reasons for the feminization process may be the abundance of job opportunities in many health sectors¹⁶⁻¹⁸ and the emigration of countless foreign female practitioners to developed countries such as the United States and Canada. As a result, many arguments have focused on whether the influx of women into traditionally male-dominated health occupations would lead to positive or negative consequences.² The findings of this study indicate that family responsibilities, workplace settings, societal obligation, economics, and individual preference are all interwoven into the female dentists' life which helps her to choose dentistry and reflects her attitude. Working full-time will

bring focus to their careers and developmental growth. The crucial point is that female dentists should have the capacity to work when they are willing and able to do so. The study has few limitations. The sample size is very small and thereby limits the scope of students' perceptions. Moreover, mutual influence between the students could not be ruled out. The data is from a specific region, so results cannot be generalized. Some bias is inherent in a self-reported survey research. Future research using randomly selected larger sample size from other institutions and also including male students is warranted to validate these findings among both genders.

CONCLUSION

We are witnessing a significant increase in the number of women choosing dentistry as a profession. This correlates with the representation of women who apply to dental colleges. However, such changes provide new challenges and consequently necessitate an in-depth analysis and examination of the special concerns and needs for women at work. A supportive work environment helps encouraging women to utilize their Dentistry skills and knowledge to the best of their ability. Women generally face a greater number of obstacles in order to succeed at work and female dentists are no exception. The societal norm that suggests the primary role of a woman is to fulfill family responsibilities may be to blame. Women are gaining importance in all walks of life. The role of women in Indian society has been evolving over many years, and the same holds true in Dentistry. We should encourage our Female Colleagues to practice their profession to give justice to their education and themselves.

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