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**FACTORS AFFECTING THE CHOICE OF
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF GRADUATES
FROM DENTAL MEDICINE**

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Abstract

Choosing a career is a complex process, that affect the all areas of life, and is one of the most important decisions of a person throughout life. Over the last years there has been a growing interest into the factors influencing the career choice in medical field because right choice can directly influence the academic performance. The purpose of this study was to examine the factors affecting the career decision-making. Responses to a self-completed questionnaire of all final (sixth) year students at the Faculty of Dental Medicine, Ovidius University of Constanta were analyzed to identify factors influencing their career choice. Sixty percent planned to immediately enter private practice after finishing dental school. Data showed that women to be more likely to enter private practice than male. The influence of family members, of a mentoring dentist and the family dentists were in a positive correlation with the decision to enter private practice. 30% of participants expressed their desire to continue their professional education through participation in residency exam. Lately, as a consequence of increasing numbers of dentists in Romania, increase the necessity of specialty training after dental school. However, the large number of graduates intending to immediately practice general dentistry in private practice is directly influenced by the desire to gain financial independence. This study suggests that graduates from the Faculty of Dental Medicine, manage to fructify theoretical and practical knowledge acquired during the study period by the by varied career options and this will contribute to an increasing of engaged workforce.

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Keywords: Dental graduate; career choice; motivation; workforce.



1. Introduction

The choosing moments are key moments and the career choice is a complex process that affects all fields of life, and is one of the most important decision throughout a person's life. Everyone tries to choose a career in the community that in addition to supply his material needs, it could bring psychological satisfaction (Shafiabadi, 2012). In the past, the majority of students were heading to the dental profession with an idealistic vision; while with change in societies, the young generation's attitude in choosing a career has changed due to the long period of education and high costs and because of the fact that career changing is rarely possible for dentists. For these reasons those who for whatever reason are not suitable for the profession, are not professionally and psychologically satisfied (Skelly & Fleming, 2002). According to Chambers' report, 20-50 percent of dentists would not choose the dental profession in the event of further chance for choosing a job (Chambers, 2001).

The healthcare workforce is an important element of society and an essential resource within healthcare (Dussault, & Dubois, 2003) and with dentistry is the same (Gallagher, Clarke, & Wilson, 2008). This essential compartment of the healthcare workforce is influenced by the wider context including political, societal, and economic change (Gallagher, Patel, Donaldson, & Wilson, 2007). It is therefore important to understand the views and career expectations of new entrants to the dental profession to protect and develop this resource. Studies have shown that dental students, because of lack of concern for employment after graduation, are in better mental state compared to other students (Gilavand, Espidkar, & Fakhri, 2015).

Previous studies made by Gallagher and his collaborators (2008, 2009), have revealed that the final year dental students aim to acquire 'professional experience', 'independence', and financial stability' on a short-term basis whereas long-term goals involved improving 'standard of living', 'balance between work and life', and 'achieving financial security', largely within their country of training.

Till now, there has been no information on the career expectations of dental students from the Romanians dental faculties. Evaluating the practice plans of graduating dental students and the factors influencing their decisions is of great importance for dental educational systems around the world.

2. Objective of this study

The objective of this study was to investigate career plans and the factors affecting the career decision-making of the final-year dental students (graduating in 2016) of Faculty of Dental Medicine, Ovidius University of Constanta.

2.1. Study Population and Procedure

Final year dental students (n=57) of Faculty of Dental Medicine, Ovidius University of Constanta from the academic year 2015 – 2016, were invited to participate in this study; and fifty of them were included in the study, because seven were absent when the study was performed. The students did not receive incentives to participate in the study and they were under no obligation to complete the questionnaire.

A questionnaire was composed to assess the graduates' opinions on future career plans and influencing factors. The questions were developed, applied and the results were interpreted by psychologists from the Center for Counselling and Career Guidance, Ovidius University of Constanta. The final version of the questionnaire had a total of 20 questions that explored students' demographics, their opinions on the employment prospects in dentistry, their future practice plans including practice sector and location, and the factors that influenced their practice decisions. All students were given the opportunity to add comments.

Final-year dental students who graduated in 2016 were asked to participate in the study and all students that were present ($n = 50$; 76% female, 24% male) were included in the study population.

To obtain the maximum response rate and minimize disruption to the study, the questionnaires were distributed following the final test in the sixth year. All of the students received verbal information regarding the study from the research group before deciding whether to participate. It was explained to them that there was no right or wrong answer for the questions. The study was anonymous and all information would be available only for group analysis. The students had the right to refuse participation or to quit at any moment. Verbal consent was obtained from all participants.

For completing the questionnaire required approximately 25 minutes were necessary. Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS Version 16.0 for Windows (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). For all the tests, significance was adopted if the p value was less than 0.05 (5% level of significance).

3. Results

3.1. Students' characteristics

A total of 50 final-year dental students participated in this study, of whom 76% ($n = 38$) were female and 24% ($n = 12$) were male. In total, 78% ($n = 39$) of the students were residents of Constanta County, whereas the remaining 22% ($n = 11$) were from another Counties: Tulcea 10% ($n = 5$), Călărași 6% ($n = 3$), Prahova 4% ($n = 2$), and Buzău 2% ($n = 1$). All the respondents graduated in 2016 and will have the licensing exam in September. Characteristics of the study participants are presented in Table 1. The influence of gender, and region of origin on results was examined but was only reported when significant differences were identified.

Table 1. Characteristics of the study participants (N = 50)

Characteristics	n	Percentage
Gender		
Male	12	24
Female	38	76
Year of graduation		
2016	50	100
Region of origin		
Constanta County	39	78
Other provinces	11	22
Total	50	100

3.2. Students' opinions on career plans after graduation

Students' opinions about the possibility to find an ideal practice position immediately following graduation: 4% (n = 2) were very confident of finding an ideal practice position, 44% (n = 20) stated that it will not be difficult to find an ideal practice position and 56% stated that it will be difficult.

Sixty percent respondents (30) planned to immediately enter private practice after finishing dental school. Data analyses showed that women 70%, (n = 21) to be more likely to enter private practice than their male colleagues 30%, (n = 9). The remaining 30% (n = 20) of survey participants expressed their desire to continue their professional education through participation in residency exam. Out of these 10% (n = 2) have expressed their desire to enter academic world and pursue doctoral studies. Marital status or having a family member in dentistry have no significantly influence for students planning to enter practice immediately from those with other career plans. The respondents were given a list of factors that may have influenced them in generating career plans and were asked to select all important factors that applied. Personal development, salary and social benefits, practice location, relevance to their major requirements and the influence of family members, of a mentoring dentist and the family dentists were the most important factors.

Regarding the 'ideal practice location', 70% (n = 35) intended to practice in the city of Constanta and 8% (n = 4) intended to practice in other cities from the Constanta County. All of the respondents from Constanta intended to remain in there following graduation. Among all eleven students from other regions, 27,27% (n = 3) wanted to practice in Constanta after graduation, while 72, 72% (n = 8) wanted to return to their home town or near their hometown (Table 2).

Table 2. Ideal practice location (N = 50)

Characteristics	Constanta	Other regions	Total
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Region of origin			
Constanta	39 (78)	0 (0,0)	39 (100,0)
Other regions	3 (27,27)	8 (72,72)	11 (100,0)
Total	42 (84)	8 (16)	50 (100,0)

The reasons underlying the students' choice to practice in other regions were that they preferred to practice in their home town or in a location near their home town 50% (n = 4), employment opportunities in Constanta are too competitive 25% (n = 2), the living costs are too high in Constanta 12,5% (n = 1) or the stress of practicing was too high in Constanta 12,5% (n = 1) (Table 3).

Table 3. Students' choice to practice in other regions (N = 8)

Characteristics	n	Percentage
Practice in home town or in a location near home town	4	50
Employment opportunities in Constanta are too competitive	2	25
Living costs are too high in Constanta	1	12,5
Stress of practicing was too high in Constanta	1	12,5
Total	50	100

3.3. Strengths and limitations of the study

This is the first study exploring the views of the final year dental students (graduating in 2016) of Faculty of Dental Medicine, Ovidius University of Constanta. The study contributes to the literature on final year dental students' career aspirations to select dentistry as a profession. This research incorporated the views of the dental students from just one dental school in the Romania and consequently, prudence should be taken for relating these findings to the overall Romania dental students; however, the results raise certain topics for debate and future research.

4. Discussion

Dental faculties are the primary source of education for future dentists. By providing data on dental students' career plans and the factors that influence those plans, dental faculties can play an important role in forecasting trends in the dental workforce. This analysis is also essential for future development of the dental profession.

This study results suggest that women form an important part of the emerging dental workforce in Romania. In this study, the number of female dental students was three times higher than the number of male dental students. Dentistry is an attractive career option for women worldwide. Data from other countries show that the increasing numbers of female applicants and female students in dental schools and the constantly increasing number of female dentists are a major ongoing dental workforce trend (Tandon, 2004; Solomon, 2009). In many countries, female dentists choose to leave work or to work on a part-time basis after marriage or childbirth (Davies, *et al.* 2008; Gallagher, Patel, & Wilson, 2009). In Romania happened the same, because the opportunity to work in a flexible or part-time job is very present and another and because the female dentists are important income providers in their households. Child care and family responsibilities will, to some extent, limit the contribution of females to the dental workforce and also affect female dentists when they compete with male dentists for a particular position.

The results of this study highlights that 30% (n = 20) of graduates had plans to continue their professional education through participation in residency exam, which was similar to the rates of previous international studies (Okwuje, Anderson, & Valachovic, 2008). Positive family encouragement is important to the progression of students' academic careers. Other studies have shown that strong encouragement from other influential parties, including spouses, relatives, mentors, and advisors can greatly increase pursuit of a specialty program (Scarbecz, & Ross, 2007).

In this study, the percentage of graduates planning to immediately find and enter in clinical practice (60%) was higher than the percentage of graduates wishing to continue their professional education and similar to the percentage reported in other previous international studies (Okwuje, Anderson, & Valachovic, 2008; Nashleanas, McKernan, Kuthy, & Qian, 2014). I hypothesised that other influences to be significant factors predicting the probability of planning to enter practice immediately after dental school. The influence of a spouse's occupation was significantly higher among those planning to immediately enter practice. Students who plan to immediately enter practice may have more pressure to accelerate the entry into the work force and generate income due to their spouses' occupation, or lack

of occupation. The influence of family members other than spouses and the influence of a family dentist were also rated significantly higher among those students planning to immediately entering practice.

When making practice plans, respondents primarily consider opportunities for personal development, salary and social benefits, and practice location. All respondents from Constanta intended to remain in Constanta after graduation and 27,27% of the dental students from other regions indicated that they would like to practice in Constanta, while 72,72% of dental students from other provinces preferred to return to their home town or to practice in a location near their home town. These findings agree with those of previous studies and suggest that dentists are most likely to begin practice in the region in which they were raised or attended school (Lin, Rowland, & Fields, 2006). These results indicate that large, economically developed cities are preferred by dental graduates.

5. Conclusions

Our study showed that when planning their future practice, graduating dental students considered their career prospects and individual development. the number of female dental students was three times higher than the number of male dental students and play an important role in the emerging dental workforce.

In late years, as a consequence of increasing numbers of dentists in Romania, was the necessity of specialty training after dental school. However, the large number of graduates intending to immediately practice general dentistry in private practice after graduation is directly influenced by the desire to practice and gain financial independence.

Dental faculties should emphasize professional competency, enhance dental competitiveness, provide more employment guidance and help dental graduates to face the current labor market. This study suggests that graduates from the Faculty of Dental Medicine, manage to fructify theoretical and practical knowledge acquired during the study period by the by varied career options and this will contribute to an increasing of engaged workforce.

The results highlight the need for national annual surveys of graduating dental students to obtain information on their practice and advanced education plans following graduation, in addition to the decisive factors that influenced their postgraduate plans.

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