


Professional success: perception of students in the dentistry course of a public university


Manoelito Ferreira Silva-Junior¹

 [0000-0001-8837-5912](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8837-5912)


Débora Cristina Lima de Almeida²

 [0000-0002-5259-0829](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5259-0829)

Amanda Havresko Rutyna²

 [0000-0001-9128-5205](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9128-5205)


Anna Bárbara Maluf²

 [0000-0003-0118-692X](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0118-692X)

Cláudia Lobelli Chandler³

 [0000-0002-0087-6868](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0087-6868)

Cristina Berger Fadel²

 [0000-0002-7303-5429](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7303-5429)

¹Universidade Estadual do Sudoeste da Bahia (UESB), Departamento de Saúde, Jequié, Bahia, Brasil.

²Universidade Estadual de Ponta Grossa (UEPG), Ponta Grossa, Paraná, Brasil.

³Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp), Piracicaba, São Paulo, Brasil.

Correspondence:

Manoelito Ferreira Silva Junior
E-mail: manoelito.junior@uesb.edu.br

Received: Oct 23, 2022

Approved: Nov 20, 2023

Last revision: Sept 02, 2024

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/deed.en>



Abstract The objective of the study was to analyze the perception of professional success among dentistry undergraduates from a public university in the perspective of Abraham Maslow's Theory of Human Needs. The qualitative study was carried out with a saturation sample among students finishing the Dentistry course at the State University of Ponta Grossa (UEPG) in 2017. Data collection was carried out in a private room, by two interviewers simultaneously using a guide script, and the interview was individual and recorded. For the analysis, only one trigger question was used: "What is professional success for you?". After transcribing the material, content analysis was carried out according to the method proposed by Bardin, by two researchers, whenever some doubt appeared, they were assisted by a third researcher. Next, there was a systematization of the categories that emerged according to the hierarchical levels of Abraham Maslow's Theory of Human Needs. Twenty-four out of the 57 students participated in the study. The analysis highlighted nine categories, which were related to all hierarchical levels of the theory: physiological needs ("comfort"), need for safety ("stability" and "clinical performance"), social need ("return to society"), need for esteem ("professional recognition" and "problem-solving skills"), cognitive need ("professional qualification") and need for self-actualization ("honesty" and "personal satisfaction"). Therefore, the dentistry undergraduates' perception of professional success which emerged in the categories was less focused on the most basic levels, such as comfort and safety, and more focused on higher levels, such as esteem, cognitive and self-actualization factors.

Descriptors: Students, Dental. Professional Competence. Academic Success.

Éxito profesional: percepción de los egresados de odontología de una universidad pública

Resumen El objetivo del estudio fue analizar la percepción de éxito profesional entre los egresados de Odontología de una universidad pública, bajo la perspectiva de la Teoría de las Necesidades Humanas de Abraham Maslow. El estudio cualitativo se realizó con una muestra de saturación entre los graduados de la carrera de Odontología de la Universidad Estatal de Ponta Grossa en 2017. La recolección de datos fue realizada en una sala privada, por dos entrevistadores simultáneamente utilizando un guión, de forma individual y grabada. Para el análisis se utilizó sólo una pregunta desencadenante: "¿Qué es para usted el éxito profesional?". Luego de la transcripción del material, se realizó un análisis de contenido según el método propuesto por Bardin, por parte de dos investigadores. En caso de duda, la asistencia fue proporcionada por un tercer investigador. Poco después se produjo una sistematización de las categorías que surgieron según los niveles jerárquicos de la Teoría de las Necesidades Humanas de Abraham Maslow. 24 de los 57 alumnos participaron en el estudio. El análisis destacó nueve categorías, que estaban relacionadas con todos los niveles jerárquicos de la teoría: necesidades fisiológicas ("comodidad"), necesidad de seguridad ("estabilidad" y "rendimiento clínico"), necesidad social ("regreso a la sociedad"), necesidad de estima ("reconocimiento profesional" y "resolución"), necesidad cognitiva ("cualificación profesional") y necesidad de autorrealización ("honestidad" y "satisfacción personal"). Por lo tanto, la percepción de éxito profesional de los graduados en Odontología emergentes en las categorías estuvo menos enfocada en los niveles más básicos, como comodidad y seguridad, y más enfocada en niveles superiores, como estima, cognitivo y autorrealización.

Descriptor: Estudiantes de Odontología. Competencia Profesional. Éxito Académico.

Sucesso profissional: percepção de formandos de Odontologia de uma universidade pública

Resumo O objetivo do estudo foi analisar a percepção sobre sucesso profissional entre formandos de Odontologia de uma universidade pública, sob o viés da Teoria das Necessidades Humanas de Abraham Maslow. O estudo qualitativo foi realizado com amostra de saturação entre os formandos do curso de Odontologia da Universidade Estadual de Ponta Grossa do ano de 2017. A coleta de dados foi realizada em sala reservada, por dois entrevistadores simultaneamente com uso de um roteiro-guia, de forma individual e gravada. Para a análise utilizou-se apenas uma questão disparadora: "O que é sucesso profissional para você?". Após transcrições do material, houve análise de conteúdo segundo o método proposto por Bardin, por dois pesquisadores. Em caso de dúvida, houve auxílio de uma terceira pesquisadora. Logo após, houve uma sistematização das categorias emergidas segundo os níveis hierárquicos da Teoria das Necessidades Humanas de Abraham Maslow. Participaram do estudo 24 dos 57 formandos. A análise evidenciou nove categorias, que foram relacionadas a todos os níveis hierárquicos da teoria: necessidades fisiológicas ("conforto"), necessidade de segurança ("estabilidade" e "atuação clínica"), necessidade social ("retorno à sociedade"), necessidade de estima ("reconhecimento profissional" e "resolutividade"), necessidade cognitiva ("qualificação profissional") e necessidade de autorrealização ("honestidade" e "satisfação pessoal"). Sendo assim, a percepção sobre o sucesso profissional para os formandos de Odontologia emergidas nas categorias foi menos focada nos níveis mais básicos, como conforto e segurança, e mais focadas em níveis superiores, como estima, cognitivo e autorrealização.

Descritores: Estudantes de Odontologia. Competência Profissional. Sucesso Acadêmico.

INTRODUCTION

Success is a concept of individual, multidimensional, and mutable nature. In the work effort dimension, either physical or intellectual, it involves aspects of self-confidence, ability to make decisions, and self-esteem when facing failure. In the socio-relational dimension, it refers to human and communication relationships, inner satisfaction, and health maintenance¹.

However, the individuals' professional success perception varies according to external factors such as salary, hierarchical position achieved, and the perception of others regarding their work, and internal factors such as their own perception of being a well-succeeded person, identification with their careers, competence, life-work balance, contribution to society, employability, maintenance of their values, team success, development, and creativity².

Studies have shown that the individuals' perception of success is influenced by sex, schooling level, and personal experiences^{3,4}. Therefore, success presents dimensions related to 'having' and 'being', and the meanings it is ascribed are directly linked to personal motivation, which motivates individuals to seek their goals⁵, along with the idea of being able, managing, winning, and achieving¹.

The professional career choice, either traditional or modern, is determined by personal perceptions of success⁶. The term career is applied to the view of a person with a profession or whose professional life is well-structured with continuous progress and can also refer to the way the person realizes their own professional life over time⁷.

Professional competences have changed over the years. In addition to cognitive and technical abilities to carry out work activities inherent in the profession, more complex social skills have been valued. Thus, professionals must be prepared to deal with the specificities of each profession and types of service, for example, public or private, and also the profession needs and their own satisfaction with the work developed⁸. For this reason, some studies have used the Theory of Human Needs created by Abraham Maslow³ to analyze individuals' perception regarding individual and work satisfaction^{3,5,9}, including among health professionals^{10,11}.

Such theory consists of a pyramid, which was initially structured in five levels, but later on established six levels according to human needs. They are structured from the most basic ones, such as physiological and safety needs, which are at the basis of the pyramid to more complex ones such as esteem, cognition, and self-actualization, which are found at the top of the pyramid. Each individual must climb their own pyramid up to the top, which represents the achievement of the desired target⁵.

In the dentistry area, studies have sought more information about the students' profile, reasons for choosing this profession, and job market¹²⁻¹⁴, while studies focusing on professional success are mostly found in the nursing area¹⁰⁻¹¹. Understanding future professionals or an area regarding professional success might guide their motivation to develop their work with responsibility and, therefore, deserves more attention in the dentistry area.

Taking all that into consideration, this article aimed to analyze the perception of professional success by students finishing the dentistry course at a public university considering the view of Abraham Maslow's Theory of Human Needs.

METHOD

Study design and ethical aspects

This is a qualitative and exploratory study developed with students finishing the Dentistry course at the State University of Ponta Grossa, Brazil, in December 2017. The study was approved by the institutional Research Ethics Committee (CAAE: 79531717.2.0000.0105, Opinion nº. 2.414.036) and all participants signed the Free and Informed Consent Form.

Place of Study

The Dentistry Course Pedagogical Project (PPC) for those concluding in 2017, was in its version 10, and included those entering the course up to 2015. The course workload was 5,164 horas, in the full-time regime, with a five-year minimum time and nine-year maximum time for conclusion. The higher education institution (HEI) offers 60 annual vacancies in this course, with one annual entrance (first academic semester of the year). The vacancies for those entering the course are 45 distributed in two annual entrance exam and 15 distributed in the Serial Selective Process (PSS), which is carried out throughout the three years of high school.

In 2007, UEPG adopted the affirmative action policy with vacancy reserve for social quotas according to the candidates' family income (public school) or race/color (black) in the vestibular exam. In each of the following annual vestibular exams, a different division was set. The vestibular annual vacancies total 45, but they have been divided in different ways over time. Among those entering the course up to 2020, 5 vacancies were destined to black candidates, 18 to candidates who had studied high school in public schools, and 22 universal vacancies. The HEI also has additional vacancies in the Vestibular for Indigenous Peoples, and whenever there are excess vacancies, the institution provides calls for external transfer and holders of another graduation certificate.

Universe and sample

The study universe included students finishing the dentistry course, and in 2017 there were 57 eligible individuals. The inclusion criteria required the participants to be concluding the dentistry course and being duly enrolled in the 2017 second academic semester. Students who had failed any subject that prevented them from graduating in 2017 were excluded.

The sample was determined by the data saturation method¹⁵. This occurs whenever there is a consensus among researchers to finish data collection, when they understand that the information collected is repeated and the participation of other individuals would not change the meaning of the phenomenon investigated.

Data collection

Data was collected in the last week of the course, in December 2017, in individual interviews at the institution, in a

private room destined to professors in the clinic since the interviews were carried out after the clinical dental practice.

The interviews were carried out simultaneously by two interviewers and recorded using a digital voice recorder aided by a novel guide script containing information about the participants' perspective of entrance in the job market, with partial data published in a previous study¹³. The participants also answered questions about sociodemographic and schooling data for sample characterization.

Before the data collection, the interviewers were trained to address the context and meanings ascribed by the interviewees in depth and without bias. In addition, the interviewers did not have previous direct contact or link with the interviewees¹³. The mean time planned for each interview was 10 minutes.

After data collection, the recordings were fully transcribed by a researcher aided by transcription software (Voicemeeter, <https://vb-audio.com/Voicemeeter/>).

Data analysis

This study analyzed a single trigger question: "What is professional success for you?".

The data was analyzed by two researchers, initially independently, and then collectively. A third researcher assisted them whenever there was doubt. The content theme analysis followed the method proposed by Bardin¹⁶, employing a set of interpretation techniques that aimed to describe and decoding the components of a complex system of meanings.

The analysis had three phases: 1) pre-analysis; 2) material exploration, categorization or codification; and 3) treatment of results, inferences, and interpretation. In phase 2, the categories of representation of the meaning ascribed to professional success by the concluding students were extracted, while in phase 3, a systematization of the representations according to the Theory of Human Needs by Abraham Maslow was carried out, that is, the analysis categories were related to the theory. The theory was initially built up in a five-level hierarchical pyramid, namely, physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization^{3,5}, mainly related to work^{3,5,9}. Later, Abraham Maslow added another level, that is, the cognitive needs, which hierarchically precedes self-actualization needs^{10,11}. The analysis did not seek to confirm all levels of Maslow's Theory, but rather relate conceptually whether the categories found in the discourses represented elements for the discussion of the hierarchical levels.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Twenty-four students concluding the Dentistry Course at UEPG took part in the study and the time taken for the interviews ranged between five and fifteen minutes each. Most of the participants were women (75.0%), 22 years old (33.3%) (mean age = 23.3 ± 2.33 years), single (95.8%), without own income (95.8%), with family income between five and six minimum wages (41.7%), who had entered university for passing the vestibular exam (75.0%), without using the social quotas (54.1%) (Table 1).

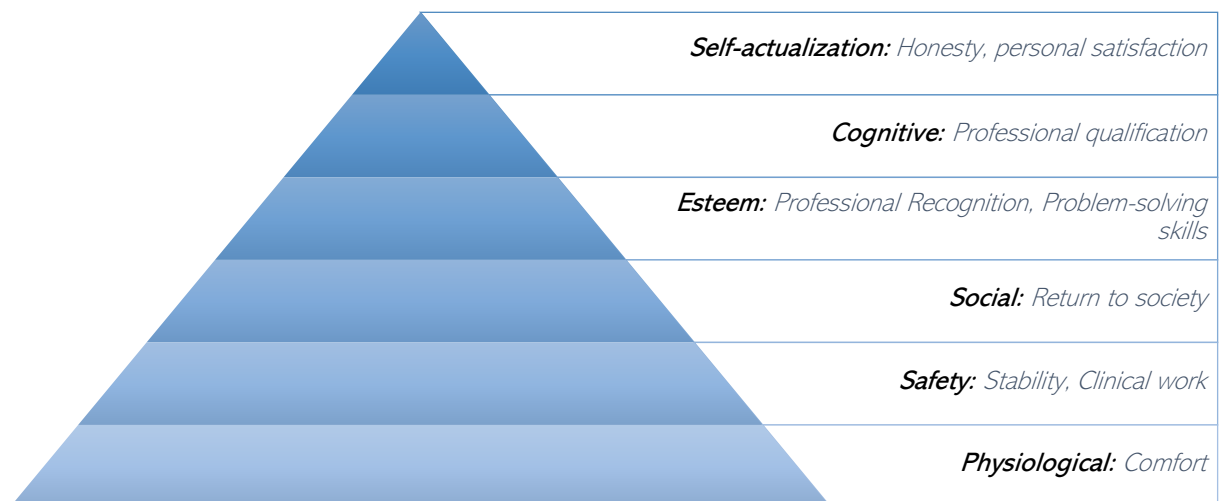
Regarding the characterization of subjects in this research, we found a sample in which most participants were women, which confirms the current profile of feminization of the dentistry course observed not only in Brazil¹⁷, but globally¹⁸, and a pattern of family income among the dentistry students. The professional career observed until the 1970s was marked by stability, enrichment, progress and the work sexual and social division, in which only men worked, and ascension was achieved by the socially dominant groups¹⁹. Currently, a reduction in the job market inequalities regarding gender and social groups has been observed¹⁹.

After the theme analysis and systematization from the hierarchical levels of Abraham Maslow's Theory of Human Needs, it was possible to identify categories that referred to all six levels of needs (Figure 1).

Table 1. Characteristics of the sample of students finishing the Dentistry course at UEPG.

Participant	Sex	Age (years)	Marital status	Own income	Family income (MW)	Type of entrance exam	Use of quotas
1	Woman	26	Single	No	5 to 6	Vestibular	Yes
2	Woman	22	Single	No	5 to 6	PSS	No
3	Woman	22	Single	No	5 to 6	Vestibular	Yes
4	Woman	23	Single	No	7 to 8	Vestibular	Yes
5	Woman	23	Single	No	1 to 2	Vestibular	Yes
6	Woman	24	Single	No	5 to 6	Vestibular	No
7	Man	26	Single	Yes	3 to 4	Vestibular	Yes
8	Man	23	Single	No	7 to 8	Vestibular	Yes
9	Man	21	Single	No	5 to 6	Vestibular	No
10	Woman	23	Single	No	5 to 6	Vestibular	Yes
11	Woman	22	Single	No	> 8	PSS	No
12	Man	22	Single	No	3 to 4	Vestibular	Yes
13	Woman	22	Single	No	3 to 4	Vestibular	No
14	Woman	24	Single	No	7 to 8	Vestibular	No
15	Woman	24	Single	No	Not answered	Vestibular	No
16	Woman	22	Single	No	1 to 2	Vestibular	Yes
17	Woman	22	Single	No	> 8	Vestibular	No
18	Man	23	Single	No	5 to 6	Vestibular	Yes
19	Woman	22	Single	No	5 to 6	PSS	No
20	Woman	23	Single	No	> 8	Vestibular	No
21	Woman	32	Casada	No	> 8	ET	No
22	Man	26	Single	No	3 to 4	Vestibular	Yes
23	Woman	21	Single	No	5 to 6	PSS	No
24	Woman	22	Single	No	5 to 6	ET	No

MW: Minimum wage (BRL 937.00). ET: External Transfer. PSS: Serial Selection Process.

**Figure 1.** Categories of analysis of the professional success perception according to hierarchical level in the Theory of Human Needs by Abraham Maslow among students concluding the Dentistry course at UEPG.

Physiological Needs

Individuals' physiological needs refer to their biological needs¹⁰ and are directly related to their existence and survival, that is, hunger, thirst⁹⁻¹¹, clothing, sex^{10,11} and living conditions⁹, such as access to basic sanitation^{10,11}. Attention to physiological needs is also associated with work and includes exposure to death risk, breathing problems related to bad ventilation or type of work, fatigue, desire to work in a dry or heated environment, position that favors health conditions and body posture during work⁹, such as a comfortable chair, work garment, or toilet access situation¹⁰.

Comfort

In this study, professional success was associated with this level by means of the comfort category found in the discourse: "(...) [Obtaining] certain comfort, (...) a house, a car, being able to do whatever I want, travel with my own money, this is top" (E13).

At the level of physiological needs, they are mostly multi-determined, that is, they operate as a channel to satisfy other subsequent needs⁹. As shown in the excerpt above, comfort was associated with access to material resources and financial or emotional independence. Therefore, a suitable salary, for example, would be the variable confirming the acquisition of the physiological need called 'comfort'⁹.

The needs ascribed to comfort seem to be the more critical basic physiological needs, dominating the direction of the human behavior whenever neglected. Thus, individuals who did not have such requirement met might be only concerned with satisfying it, and thus, their view of the future would be limited and determined by such need¹⁰. Conversely, individuals who always had this need fulfilled in their social context, might not even consider it a basic need. Therefore, when analyzing the socioeconomic characteristics of the participants of this study, whose family income is in general high, we observed that social and economic ascension is naturally ascribed to the profession chosen. This result confirms the findings of a study with dentistry students whose main objective was to identify the reasons of their professional choice and their conviction regarding such choice¹².

Safety Need

The safety level refers to the need for individual protection against dangers and threats such as health, work, insurance, social security and social order^{10,11}, that is, aspects related to the achievement of an organized life, with employment security, health and life insurance, good financial reward, and stability, among others⁵.

Stability

Seeking professional success by means of stability, as expressed in the reductionist discourse "*Stability is at the top*" (E06), might mean for the participants an advantage linked to the safety need. Therefore, seeking stability would correspond to higher comfort and safety in their personal life²⁰, thus resulting in greater possibilities besides work such as more time destined to their families, religious practices, having a stable routine and life philosophy¹⁰.

In the workplace, safety is a relevant condition since depending on the job challenges how arbitrary managerial actions or inconsistent and incoherent decisions might destabilize individuals regarding their permanence in the work²¹. This aspect of stability seems to motivate the interest of dentistry students in the public service^{13,22}. Moreover, a current study verified that women showed greater interest in the public service, and possibly not only due to the financial stability, but also for other safety aspects involved in the public service, such as maternity leave¹⁴.

Clinical Work

Professional work and performance depend on the individual's choice, vocation, and motivation. This aspect might impact their financial return and, consequently, his/her comfort and stability in the job market²³. For this reason, working with self-confidence was a critical factor for the participating students as expressed in the discourse: "*for the professional*

success as surgeon-dentist, I think that nothing could aggregate more to my graduation than the clinical work" (E08). More specifically, the work based on an area of specialization was seen to be relevant in two moments in this study, as shown by the excerpts below: "*working in the area [oral-maxillofacial surgery]*" (E14); "*I believe that everything you do well results in success, there are several implantologists in the city, but there is one or maybe there are two that are reference, there are many pediatric dentists, but there is one that outstands, then I think one must observe the existing market, what kind of specialty is missing, what one likes doing, and follow that path*" (E06) and "*managing to have a good demand of patients to care in my area of specialization*" (E21).

Seeking to become a specialist appears as a professional satisfaction factor, and the work in the specialist area seems to be associated with greater importance than financial reward²⁴. In fact, traditional perspectives of the biomedical model, in the logic of health fragmentation and valorization of specialties seem to be strongly rooted in the new surgeon-dentists^{25,26}. However, at this point, it is relevant to consider the profile of professional qualification described in the National Curriculum Guidelines (DCN) of dentistry courses, which guide the generalist education of the surgeon-dentist and qualification while exercising activities related to the population's oral health, based on the understanding of their social, cultural and economic reality²⁵.

Social Need

Social needs or those related to love are inherent in society life, thus joining needs such as coexistence, friendship, respect, love, leisure, and participation, referring to the individuals' need for affection such as friends, fiancée, wife/husband, and children^{10,11}. Human beings tend to build up affective relationships with the purpose of feeling integrated and to belong to a group in society¹⁰.

Return to society

The social aspect such as the desire to be useful and help others is inherent in health professions, including dentistry, and is one of the factors considered by the individuals in their choice of profession².

In Brazil, a country with a lot of social inequalities, the reduction in barriers to access health services might become a professional motivation of future surgeon-dentists, as observed in the discourse of one of the interviewees: "*Then, to feel rewarded as a professional, I think I would have to do well in my practice, and know that I can also take care of those that cannot afford an appointment in my office*" (E21).

A study reported that most of the dentistry students believe that the most important factor responsible for the professional fulfillment of a surgeon-dentist is their ability to promote health²². Another factor is the intrinsic understanding of the health work process as something that must benefit the community, a value reinforced by the DCN and other studies with dentistry students²⁷, the excerpt previously presented also demonstrates some social commitment of the future professional with those that cannot access or afford treatment. Therefore, their career might mean at the same time a paid job, and the development of unpaid activities, as in voluntary work, for example²⁸.

Although the teaching-service-community integration logic, which emphasizes the importance of joining technique and awareness of the other^{2,26,28,30} is observed, it might be relevant to mention that the discourse above seems to avoid the logic of abilities in a type of education in the perspective of health social production to work in the health system development, aiming to guarantee full health for the population. Therefore, the work in the Brazilian unified health system (SUS) would be better understood as the knowledge production *locus* for dentistry students, or even their future workplace.

The surgeon-dentist career, in thesis and historically, focuses more on the self-employment characteristic of the job, which despite being more unstable¹⁹, provides the professionals with greater autonomy regarding their own career⁶. However, maybe due to the private market saturation, insecurity regarding the investment in a private office, and public policies guiding to the work at SUS in Brazil, there is currently a trend of work in popular clinics and franchises, as well

as the public service³⁰. Thus, several factors might determine the change in the profession pattern and students' perception of professional success and career desire for surgeon-dentists, and further studies are still needed to deepen this discussion.

Esteem Need

The esteem needs or 'ego' are related to self-satisfaction such as the feelings of independence, appreciation, dignity, recognition, subjective equality, respect and opportunities^{10,11}. They refer to self-evaluation with the self-esteem based on one's personality¹⁰, which includes feelings of self-confidence, worthiness, strength, capability, sufficiency, and usefulness in the world¹¹.

Professional Recognition

Regarding work, the esteem shown by others is a relevant factor⁹. Such aspect was observed in the study when the students reported that "*I want to be recognized as a good professional in the area I choose, of course I also want to make money, but I think it is great when you are recognized as a good professional in whatever you do (...)*" (E04).

As shown in the speech above, this level of desire is guided by achieving something with competence, to gain status, recognition, attention, importance, appreciation, and the need to trust yourself and be somebody in the world⁹. When individuals lack esteem, they lose dignity and their prestige is threatened⁹, feelings of inferiority, weakness, despair might appear, and even trigger a severe traumatic neurosis³¹.

Problem-solving

Besides wanting to be recognized by other people, individuals expect to recognize themselves as able and have reasons to be proud of what they do⁹. One of the factors influencing professional satisfaction, which is understood here as part of the professional success, was problem-solving skills, that is, the ability to solve their patients' problems when they appear³², as evidenced in this excerpt "*Managing to carry out any procedure and managing to take care of any person*" (E13).

Problem-solving skills involve several aspects such as patients' satisfaction, technologies, the resources available in the health service and accessibility³³. Concern about one's ability to solve problems in the patients' health demands was also observed in a study with surgeon-dentists, who felt more satisfied with the concluded treatment³².

The perception of lack of problem-solving in the health public service still affects surgeon-dentists' decisions regarding whether to work (or work exclusively) in that sector or not²⁷. However, there has been an increase in the health public policies in Brazil seeking to improve SUS services, including oral health, which might favor the migration of professionals and more interest in the health public job market.

The individuals' professional career can be divided into three dimensions, 1) objective career, measured or observed by others^{12,34} and mainly portrayed in the curriculum³⁴; 2) career development, as the ability to work with growing levels of complexity²; 3) subjective career, noticed and experienced only by the individual's own subjectivity^{2,34}. The two first types of career, that is, objective and development, appeared in the speech of the participant students, regarding recognition and problem-solving, respectively, both at the level of the esteem need. As for the subjective career, this aspect was explicitly revealed in the self-actualization need.

Cognitive Need

Within the cognitive need is the desire to know, understand, systematize, organize, analyze, and find relations, that is, the human beings' natural need to find meaning for things^{10,11} so that they can organize their understanding of the world where they live¹⁰.

Professional Qualification

The desire to seek further knowledge and development of new abilities was observed in this study, when the students reported: *‘‘Then, after I finish my doctoral program, I want to end the clinical part too so that I reach my full professional ideal’’* (E17).

Professional qualification by means of graduate studies, mainly *stricto sensu* programs, suggest professional recognition since many consider the clinical practice of less prestige among new graduates²². Constant search for new knowledge, attending postgraduate programs, and the improvement of clinical abilities generate a sense of greater competence in the professional, thus resulting in greater satisfaction and professional success²⁶.

A qualitative study carried out with graduate students from the health area reported a perception of a broadened view at that level of education, and mainly, improvement of the knowledge and skills to be applied in the professional practice³⁵. That study also pointed out that skills developed by individuals engaged in research, mainly graduate students, allow economic benefits when they become professionals, thus leading systematic knowledge to other economic activities³⁵.

The valorization of postgraduate studies was observed in the reports of the participants who stated: *‘‘I will feel fulfilled if I conclude my specialization, work in the clinic, but I would also like to teach! Then, I intend to get a master’s degree, a PhD, which would be the best to have it all. Continue in the clinic, but also teaching’’* (E15); *‘‘I want to teach, the teaching part, being a professor, there are professors in the undergraduate course that are a role model, when trying to pass knowledge on and keep learning. Then, I think that this part of being a professor, I think is something that will be rewarding, both the clinic and the theory in undergraduate courses’’* (E22); and *‘‘I want to be somebody that I see and...like, there are professors here that really care about their patients. (...) This is the success that I want to achieve and how I want to be throughout my career, and if I am like that, I might be able to set an example for my students that it is worth to be a good person and do good things for others’’* (E11). Therefore, these discourses show that teaching seems to be a professional success by means of shared knowledge.

Self-actualization Need

At the level of self-actualization or motivation target, the full use of individual potentialities outstood along with capability and the existence of ideologies, expressing the highest level of these needs and being directly related to the individual’s complete fulfilment^{10,11}.

Self-actualization is a need to grow to reveal each individual’s pursuit of fully developing their potential. Such trend can be expressed as the person’s desire to overcome themselves all the time until they get the highest level of development¹⁰.

Honesty

At the level of self-actualization related to work, complaints might refer to inefficiency or the world imperfection toward people, in general, lack of truth, injustice, and dishonesty⁹, as observed in the discourse: *‘‘Being sincere, being honest, we sometimes see dentists that do not have ethics in what they do’’* (E04).

Such concern with ethical practices might also result from the discussions promoted by the bioethics courses that aim at integrating the theme in the teaching-learning process in health sciences courses. Such issue has special importance currently, when severe competition leads individuals to dispute patients, and the ethical dimension of the profession might be disregarded³⁶.

Personal Satisfaction

The self-actualization need does not only refer to the satisfaction of the other needs in the pyramid such as physiological, safety or esteem¹⁰, as evidenced by the interviewees when relating professional success to personal satisfaction: *‘‘Doing*

what I like, without being forced, (...) waking up every day feeling happy and knowing that what I do is what I like, helping people is the most important, and secondly, being financially well' (E12).

In this sense, the professional career might be a vocation, with affective commitment with the work, or just an occupation, seen as some need or obligation. Personal satisfaction as expressed in this study refers to the work in an area of vocation, which promotes a feeling of wellbeing in the daily routine. Vocation appeared in other studies as one of the determining factors in the professional choice^{23,26}, those studies also pointed out that working in dentistry without having this vocation would result in a frustrated professional, even in the presence of a good financial reward^{23,26}.

The feeling of working according to one's vocation might refer to the search for perfection, and to become what the person has the potential to be⁹. In such context, individuals must do what they know, using their best skills³¹. The quest for personal satisfaction also shows the individuals' capability to overcome challenges, using their potential and knowledge²⁰. Therefore, it becomes a cycle since the greater the satisfaction experienced is, the more important the need to seek it is¹⁰.

Identifying with one's profession is more than being able to provide for oneself, it is the way professionals find their role in society and build up their identity^{32,37}. Studies have shown that students starting the dentistry course have a more positive view of the profession than those concluding it, even if those finishing the course say that they are ready for the job market^{22,38}. This aspect might be caused by several factors such greater knowledge of the job market and lack of self-confidence at the beginning of the career.

After presenting all the categories of this study, we found more discourses related to the higher levels of Maslow's Theory. This result was expected since a study reported that higher education levels related to higher levels in the Maslow's Theory Pyramid³⁹. This is highlighted as an intrinsic aspect in a sample of students concluding their bachelor's degree at a public institution. Moreover, being able to study in a full-time course, without their own income, and in a situation of family high income, shows that their basic human needs are well satisfied, thus they seek ways of reaching more advanced human needs. Also, their desire to graduate in a course in the health area, that is, dentistry, might express the option for a profession that works directly with human relations and responsibilities linked to life, therefore, they seek high social prestige with this profession⁴⁰.

CONCLUSION

The perception of professional success by students finishing the dentistry course in a public institution, even if having an individual and subjective nature, was related to elements at all levels of the Theory of Human Needs proposed by Maslow. However, the categories did not focus the basic levels of needs such as physiological or safety needs, but were mainly concerned with the more advanced levels such as the esteem, cognitive and self-actualization needs.

REFERENCES

1. Maia N, Poeschl GE. Efeito do meio profissional nas representações do sucesso profissional. *Psicol* [Internet]. 2004;18(1):47-65. doi: <https://doi.org/10.17575/rpsicol.v18i1.411>
2. Costa LVA. Relação entre a percepção de sucesso na carreira e o comprometimento organizacional: um estudo entre professores de universidades privadas selecionadas da grande São Paulo [Thesis]. Universidade de São Paulo; 2010.
3. Ferreira A, Demutti CM, Gimenez PEO. A Teoria das Necessidades de Maslow: a influência do nível educacional sobre a sua percepção no ambiente de trabalho. In *Anais XIII SEMEAD, Seminários em Administração*. Rio de Janeiro; 2010.
4. Marti KC, Lanzon J, Edwards SP, Inglehart MR. Career and professional satisfaction of oral and maxillo facial surgery residents, academic surgeons, and private practitioners: does gender matter? *J Dent Educ* [Internet]. 2017;81(1):75-86. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.0022-0337.2017.81.1.tb06249.x>

5. Gimenes AM, Moreira JC, Andrade MH. Fatores motivacionais que levam os profissionais ao alcance do sucesso. *Rev Eletr Multi S@ber* [Internet]. 2017 [cited 2022 Jul 07];49:1-15. Available from: https://www.inesul.edu.br/revista/arquivos/arq-idvol_49_1499378998.pdf
6. Lima TCB, Paiva LEB, Aderaldo Neto EO, Aquino JPC. Percepção de sucesso na carreira: semelhanças e diferenças entre profissionais do setor público. *ReCaPe* [Internet]. 2015;5(1):18-33. doi: <https://doi.org/10.20503/recape.v5i1.23317>
7. Schein EH. *Identidade Profissional. Como ajustar suas inclinações a suas opções de trabalho*. São Paulo: Editora Nobel; 1996.
8. Colombo G, Prati LE. Maturidade para escolha profissional, habilidades sociais e inserção no mercado de trabalho. *Rev Bras Orient Prof* [Internet]. 2014;15(2):201-212. Available from: https://pepsic.bvsalud.org/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1679-33902014000200010
9. Hesketh JL, Costa MTPM. Construção de um instrumento para medida de satisfação no trabalho. *Rev Adm Empr* [Internet]. 1980;20(3):59-68. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0034-75901980000300005>
10. Regis LFLV, Porto IS. A equipe de enfermagem e Maslow: (in)satisfações no trabalho. *Rev Bras Enferm* [Internet]. 2006;59(4):565-568. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0034-71672006000400018>
11. Regis LFLV, Porto IS. Necessidades humanas básicas dos profissionais de enfermagem: situações de (in)satisfação no trabalho. *Rev Esc Enferm USP* [Internet]. 2011;45(2):334-341. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0080-62342011000200005>
12. Costa SM, Durães SJA, Abreu MHNG, Bonan PRF, Vasconcelos M. Motivos de escolha da Odontologia: vocação, opção ou necessidade? *Arq Odontol* [Internet]. 2010 [cited 2022 Oct 25];46(1):28-37. Available from: http://revodonto.bvsalud.org/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1516-09392010000100005
13. Almeida DCL, Fadel CB, Silva-Junior MF. Mercado de trabalho público: percepção de formandos em Odontologia de uma universidade pública. *Res Soc Develop* [Internet]. 2021;10(8):e49110817702. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.33448/rsd-v10i8.17702>
14. Rutyna AH, Maluf AB, Fadel CB, Silva-Junior MF. Perfil e fatores associados ao mercado de trabalho desejado entre ingressantes do curso de Odontologia da Universidade Estadual de Ponta Grossa. *Rev Abeno* [Internet]. 2024;21(1):2206. doi: <https://doi.org/10.30979/revabeno.v24i1.2006>
15. Fontanella VBJB, Ricas J, Turado ER. Amostragem por saturação em pesquisas qualitativas em saúde: contribuições teóricas. *Cad Saude Publica* [Internet]. 2008;24(1):17-27. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0102-311X2008000100003>
16. Bardin L. *Análise de conteúdo*. São Paulo: Edições 70; 2011. 229p.
17. Nunes MF, Leles CR, Gonçalves MM. Gênero e escolha por especialidades odontológicas: estudo com egressos de uma universidade pública. *ROBRAC* [Internet]. 2010;19(49):142-145. doi: <https://doi.org/10.36065/robrac.v19i49.435>
18. McKay JC, Quiñonez C. The feminization of Dentistry: implications for the profession. *J Can Dent Assoc* [Internet]. 2012 [cited 2022 Sep 03];78(c1):1-7. Available from: <https://jcd.ca/article/c1>
19. Souza LRF, Silva GD, Oliveira CAS, Zocratto KBF. Mercado de trabalho: perspectivas dos alunos do curso de odontologia de uma faculdade particular de Belo Horizonte. *Odontol Clín-Cient* [Internet]. 2015 [cited 2021 Oct 22];14(3):707-712. Available from: http://revodonto.bvsalud.org/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1677-38882015000300006&lng=pt&nrm=iss&tlng=pt
20. Guimarães FAL, Martins MCF. Valores e prazer-sofrimento no trabalho: um estudo com profissionais de nível superior. *Estud Psicol* [Internet]. 2010;27(2):133-145. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0103-166X2010000200001>
21. Chiavenato I. *Recursos humanos*. São Paulo: Atlas; 2010.
22. Marques MD, Souza CA, Pazos CTC, Amaral DS, Vieira EG, Campos WCS, Carvalho EJA. Expectativas dos estudantes de Odontologia quanto ao futuro profissional. *Rev Abeno* [Internet]. 2015;15(3):60-68. doi: <https://doi.org/10.30979/rev.abeno.v15i3.225>
23. Bartalotti O, Menezes-Filho N. A relação entre o desempenho da carreira no mercado de trabalho e a escolha profissional dos jovens. *Econ Aplic* [Internet]. 2007;11(4):487-505. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S1413-80502007000400002>

24. Oliveira RS, Morais HMM, Goes PSA, Botazzo C, Magalhães BG. Relações contratuais e perfil dos cirurgiões-dentistas em centros de especialidades odontológicas de baixo e alto desempenho no Brasil. *Saude Soc* [Internet]. 2015;24(3):792-802. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-12902015128285>
25. Faé JM, Silva-Junior MF, Carvalho RB, Esposti CDD, Santos Pacheco KT. A integração ensino-serviço em Odontologia no Brasil. *Rev Abeno* [Internet]. 2016;16(3):7-18. doi: <https://doi.org/10.30979/rev.abeno.v16i3.286>
26. Silva ST, Macedo MA. Carreira profissional: um panorama do curso de Odontologia no Brasil. *Rev Cien Geren* [Internet]. 2007;21(33):2-6. doi: <https://doi.org/10.17921/1415-6571.2017v21n33p2-6>
27. Pinheiro FMC, Nóbrega-Therrien SM, Almeida MEL, Almeida MI. A formação do cirurgião-dentista no Brasil: contribuições de estudos para a prática da profissão. *RG0* [Internet]. 2009;57(1):99-106.
28. Bendassolli PF. Recomposição da relação sujeito-trabalho nos modelos emergentes de carreira. *RAE* [Internet]. 2009;49(4):387-400. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0034-75902009000400003>
29. Freitas SFP, Kovaleski DF, Boing AF. Desenvolvimento moral em formandos de um curso de Odontologia: uma avaliação construtivista. *Cienc Saude Colet* [Internet]. 2005;10(2):453-462. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S1413-81232005000200023>
30. Pucca Junior GA, Gabriel M, Araujo ME, Almeida FC. Ten years of a National Oral Health Policy in Brazil: innovation, boldness, and numerous challenges. *J Dent Res* [Internet]. 2015;94(10):1333-1337. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022034515599979>
31. Maslow AH. *Motivación y personalidad*. 1 ed. Barcelona: Sagitario; 1954.
32. Usual AB, Araujo AA, Diniz FVM, Drummond MM. Necessidades sentida e observada: suas influências na satisfação de pacientes e profissionais. *Arq Odontol* [Internet]. 2006 [cited 2022 Sep 12];42(1):65-80. Available from: <https://periodicos.ufmg.br/index.php/arquiosemodontologia/article/view/3399>
33. Turrini RNT. Resolutividade dos serviços de saúde e satisfação do cliente. In Cianciarullo TI (Org.). *Saúde na família e na comunidade*. São Paulo: Robe Editorial; 2002. p.102-122.
34. Judge TA, Cable DM, Boudreau JW, Bretz RD. An empirical investigation of the predictors of career success. *Personne Psychology* [Internet]. 2005;48(3):485-519. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.1995.tb01767.x>
35. Costa CMM, Chagas HMA, Matsukura TS, Vieira GI, Marqueze EC, López CG, Ghelardi IR, Lefèvre A, FLefèvre F. Contribuições da pós-graduação na área da saúde para a formação profissional: relato de experiência. *Saude Soc* [Internet]. 2014;23(4):1471-1481. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-12902014000400028>
36. Amorim AG, Souza ECF. Problemas éticos vivenciados por dentistas: dialogando com a bioética para ampliar o olhar sobre o cotidiano da prática profissional. *Cienc Saude Colet* [Internet]. 2010;15(3):869-878. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S1413-81232010000300030>
37. Antunes R. *Os sentidos do trabalho: ensaio sobre a afirmação e a negação do trabalho*. São Paulo: Bomtempo; 2002.
38. Rezende FP, Nakanishi FC, Machado ACP, Quirino MRS, Anbinder AL. Perfil, motivações e expectativas dos graduandos e graduados em Odontologia. *Rev Odontol Univ Cid São Paulo* [Internet]. 2007 [cited 2021 Nov 28];19(2):165-172. Available from: https://arquivos.cruzeirosuleducacional.edu.br/principal/old/revista_odontologia/pdf/5_maio_agosto_2007/perfil_motivacoes_expectativas.pdf
39. Ferreira A, Demutti C. A influência do nível educacional na percepção da Teoria das Necessidades de Maslow no ambiente de trabalho. *Rev UNIABEU*. 2013;6(13):57-72. Available from: <https://www.etica.eco.br/sites/textos/teoria-de-maslow.pdf>
40. Toscano GS, Martins IC, Carvalho RA. O prestígio social dos cursos da saúde na Universidade Federal da Paraíba. *Rev Fac Educ* [Internet]. 2016 [cited 2021 Oct 05];25(1):35-56. Available from: <https://periodicos.unemat.br/index.php/ppgedu/article/view/3939/3132>

Conflict of Interests: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

Funding: No funding to declare.

Authors' contribution: Study conception and planning: MFSJ, CBF. Data collection: ARH and DCLA. Data analysis: MFSJ, DCLA. Data interpretation: MFSJ, ARH, DCLA, CBF. Manuscript elaboration: MFSJ, ARH, DCLA, ABM, CLC. Manuscript review: MFSJ, CBF. Final version approval: MFSJ, ARH, DCLA, ABM, CLC, CBF. Public responsibility for the article content: MFSJ, ARH, DCLA, ABM, CLC, CBF.