

Profile of students of a Dentistry course: reasons for their choice

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present cross-sectional, quantitative study was to evaluate the profile of students on the Dentistry course of a private college in Campinas (São Paulo) and their perception of and reasons for choosing such a course. Of the 153 students enrolled in 2016, 102 (66.7%) agreed to participate in the study. The research tool was a structured, self-administered questionnaire featuring 22 questions that dealt with socioeconomic and demographic profile, perception of the course and reasons for choosing it. Of those who responded, 81.4% were female. The 17 to 20 year-old age group predominated (67.3%), while most of the sample were single (89.3%), had attended a private high school (80.4%), and had a family income of over R\$ 8,800.00 (54.0%). When asked about the reason for choosing the course, 61.7% said it was because it was part of the area of health, while 29.4% were influenced by a dentist. Regarding professional intentions, 6.8% wanted to work in the public sector only, 47.0% wanted to be salaried employees and set up their own business and 38% wanted to be self-employed in a dental surgery. A total of 62.8% declared themselves satisfied with the teaching staff of the course; 72.5% said they were satisfied with the curriculum, and the majority (70.5%) planned to do a specialization course after graduation. With regard to their choice, 97.0% were satisfied; while 96.0% felt prepared to enter the job market. The perception of the respondents about their training was positive. A trend towards salaried work in the profession was noted, although a desire to work in the private sector was also noted.

Descriptors: Dentistry. Choice of Profession. Students.

1 INTRODUCTION

The process of choosing a profession tends to be difficult and filled with anxieties, among which are insecurities about one's choice, the varied options for courses, socioeconomic and cultural

aspects related to the profession, the job market and the competitive selection process of universities¹.

Like every profession, Dentistry has particularities that require further explanation in order to allow an understanding of its current

position, as well as the comprehension and elucidation of the difficulties it involves². In recent years, there has been a greater interest in the course due to the incorporation of oral health teams in the Family Health Strategy (PHS), as this framework presents challenges regarding the appropriate training for work, in accordance with the principles of the Unified Health System (SUS) and the need to provide a better supply of health professionals throughout the regions of Brazil³.

The historical evolution of Dentistry in Brazil, involves transformations ranging from its perception as the art of caring for teeth to the acquisition of autonomy and as a science administered by educational institutions⁴.

Professional motivation and identification can emerge from the personal and family history of the students on the course, and can be explained by the frequent contact with Dentistry from childhood. Similarly, when a student starts the course, motivation is evident due to passing the entrance exam and beginning college. Over the course of the semesters however, they may feel unmotivated and consider another choice of profession⁵.

The perception of the course of Dentistry in terms of the success and elite status of professionals in the area, as well as the possibility of avoiding the social commitments of other health professionals, has been one of the advantages that have motivated the choice of the subject for years⁶.

The educational institution has a strong influence on the adherence and permanence of students, as during undergraduate studies, the student will go through stages that may or may not consolidate their professional choice⁷.

There are new professional standards in terms of the reality of the job market and the needs of the population, based on the current and new professional training of the dental surgeon. The National Curricular Guidelines for teaching undergraduate Dentistry dictate that professionals in the area must provide integral care for their patients,

focusing on ethical, fair and humane care, regardless of the market in which they are inserted, be it public or private⁸.

The college's mission is to prepare critical and reflective health professionals, cultivating pedagogical techniques which will assist them when they enter the job market with an ethical and responsible profile⁹. On the other hand, the desire for a professional career, the manner in which students conduct their studies in the academic phase, how they manage their interpersonal relationships and how they play their roles in society prevents the academic institution from having a determining role⁶.

According to data from the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC)¹⁰ there are currently 451 Dentistry courses in Brazil. The greatest concentration is in the southeast region (98), distributed across the states of Minas Gerais (30), Espírito Santo (11), Rio de Janeiro (27) and São Paulo (30).

Students, when finishing the Dentistry course, carry with them expectations of the institution that trained them, which requires them to be qualified professionals capable of carrying out activities relating to both the technical/scientific areas of the profession and the oral health of the population, based on ethical principles and ethical and legal principles¹¹.

In this context, the objective of the present study was to evaluate the profile of Dentistry students from a private institution, as well as their perception of and motives for choosing the course, together with their reasons for choosing the profession, identifying the social and personal influences that underly such decisions.

2 METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional observational study was carried out. The survey was performed in a private institution, based in Campinas in the state of São Paulo. The study population consisted of all students

(n=153) of the Dentistry course, of both genders, who were properly enrolled in 2016.

Students who were not present on the day the questionnaire was applied, visitors, exchange students from other universities and those suspended from the course were excluded from the study, resulting in a sample of 102 students.

For data collection, a semi-structured questionnaire was used. This was previously validated in the study by Junqueira et al.¹², and contained 22 multiple choice questions and two subjective questions relating to the student's behavior, profile and reasons for choosing the Dentistry course.

Prior to data collection, the researchers were trained so that they fully understood the research instrument, in order to obtain reliable results, as well as to verify possible methodological flaws. The survey was carried out on five consecutive days in August 2016 during both the morning and afternoon. Students were approached in the classroom, given an explanation about the research, and then provided with a Free and Informed Consent Form (FICF). The questionnaires were given to those students who agreed to participate in the research, who were given 10 to 15 minutes to provide the answers. The instruments were applied without the intervention of the researcher, who was, however, available to provide clarifications. The data obtained were inserted and organized in the Microsoft Excel® (MS-Excel v. 16.0) program, in order to obtain the relative and absolute frequencies of the answers of each question. For statistical analysis, the Chi-Squared, Fischer's exact and Odds ratio tests were used. The level of significance adopted in the statistical tests was 5% along with a Confidence Interval (CI) of 95%.

3 RESULTS

The first part of the questionnaire involved data relating to the socioeconomic variables of the

interviewed students. There was a significant number of females, who made up 81.4% (83) of the sample. A total of 67.6% (69) of students were aged 17 to 20 years, 89.3% (91) said they were unmarried; 80.4% (82) reported having attended a private high school. The economic level of the students is privileged in terms of Brazilian monthly family income, with 54% (55) of the sample reporting earnings over R \$8,800.00 (Table 1).

The second part of the results involved questions about the reasons that led the students to choose the Dentistry course, with two options available on the questionnaire. The response with the highest score (61.7%) (63) was "because it is a course in the area of health". In terms of perspectives of the beginning of professional activities after academic training, 47% (48) opted for the public sector and setting up their own practice. After graduation, 70.5% (72) of students intended to undertake a specialization course to improve their qualifications. When asked about their desired salary after five years of training, 52.9% (54) intended to earn between R\$ 4,401.00 and R\$ 7,040.00 (table 2).

When questioned about their expectations for the Dentistry course, 34.3% (35) said "to improve their current practical skills". Of those interviewed, 96.0% (98) chose the option "think they are being prepared for the job market"; and 97.0% (99) declared themselves "satisfied with the choice of dentistry" (table 3).

More than half of the interviewees (62.8%) (64) were satisfied with the teaching staff of the institution. A total of 44.1% said they intended to undertake a scientific internship and/or monitoring position. Regarding the perception of their performance in dentistry, more than one answer was possible, and 67.6% (69) chose "the prevention of disease and maintenance of health". When questioned about which subjects should be excluded from or included in the course, 72.5% (74) were satisfied with the curriculum offered (table 4).

Table 1. Descriptive analysis of sociodemographic variables of research participants

Sociodemographic Variable	Period										P-Value
	2nd		4th		6th		8th		Total		
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Gender											
Male	04	16%	04	15.4%	06	23%	05	20%	19	18.6%	0.8894
Female	21	84%	22	84.6%	20	77%	20	80%	83	81.4%	
Total	25	100%	26	100%	26	100%	25	100%	102	100%	
Age											
From 17 to 20	20	80%	22	84.6%	16	61.6%	11	44%	69	67.6%	0.0067
From 21 to 25	02	08%	02	7.7%	05	19.2%	13	52%	22	21.6%	
≥ 26	02	08%	00	00%	02	7.7%	01	04%	05	4.9%	
Did not respond	01	04%	02	7.7%	03	11.5%	0	00%	06	5.9%	
Total	25	100%	26	100%	26	100%	25	100%	102	100%	
Marital Status											
Single	23	92%	20	77%	25	96.2%	23	92%	91	89.3%	0.8004
Married	01	04%	04	15.4%	01	3.8%	01	04%	07	6.9%	
Separated	-	-	01	3.8%	-	-	-	-	01	01%	
Widowed	-	-	01	3.8%	-	-	-	-	01	01%	
Did not respond	01	04%	-	-	-	-	01	04%	02	1.8%	
Total	25	100%	26	100%	26	100%	25	100%	102	100%	
High School Education											
Public school only	03	12%	01	04%	02	08%	02	08%	08	7.8%	0.7026
Private school only	19	76%	21	80%	20	76%	22	88%	82	80.4%	
Mostly in public school	-	-	-	-	-	-	01	04%	01	1.0%	
Mostly in private school	02	08%	02	08%	02	08%	-	-	06	5.9%	
Half in each	01	04%	01	04%	02	08%	-	-	04	3.9%	
Did not respond	-	-	01	04%	00	00%	-	-	01	1.0%	
Total	25	100%	26	100%	26	100%	25	100%	102	100%	
Monthly Income											
Up to R\$ 880.00	-	-	04	15.4%	-	-	-	-	04	3.9%	0.2631
From R\$ 881.00 to 2,640.00	02	08%	01	3.8%	01	3.8%	02	08%	06	5.9%	
From R\$ 2,641.00 to 6,160.00	02	08%	02	7.7%	03	11.5%	04	16%	11	10.8%	
From R\$ 6,161.00 to 8,800.00	08	32%	04	15.4%	08	30.8%	04	16%	24	23.6%	
Over R\$ 8,800.00	13	52%	13	50%	14	53.9%	15	60%	55	54%	
Did not respond	-	-	02	7.7%	-	-	-	-	02	1.8%	
Total	25	100%	26	100%	26	100%	25	100%	102	100%	

Table 2. Analysis of variables relating to choice of course, expectations regarding the start of professional activities, continuing education and anticipated salary after graduation

Variables	Period										P-value
	2°		4°		6°		8°		Total		
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Reason for choice of course											
Vocation	05	4.9%	04	3.9%	04	3.9%	15	14.7%	28	27.4%	0.2856
Financial reward	01	0.9%	05	4.9%	05	4.9%	05	4.9%	16	15.6%	
Liberal profession	03	2.9%	04	3.9%	13	12.7%	05	4.9%	25	24.5%	
Local University	-	-	-	-	01	0.9%	01	0.9%	02	1.9%	
Family influence	02	1.9%	05	4.9%	06	5.9%	02	1.9%	15	14.7%	
Forms part of area of health	15	14.7%	18	17.6%	13	12.7%	17	16.7%	63	61.7%	
Influence of dentist friends/relatives	06	5.9%	08	7.8%	10	9.8%	06	5.9%	30	29.4%	
Others	01	0.9%	-	-	-	-	-	-	01	0.9%	
Expectations regarding start of professional activities											
Public sector employee	02	1.9%	00	00%	02	1.9%	03	2.9%	07	6.8%	1.0000
Private sector employed	07	6.8%	09	8.8%	08	7.8%	15	14.7%	39	38.2%	
Public sector employee and set up own practice	14	13.7%	14	13.7%	15	14.7%	05	4.9%	48	47%	
Work in rented practice	02	1.9%	02	1.9%	01	0.9%	02	1.9%	07	6.8%	
Does not intend to work in dentistry	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Did not answer	-	-	01	0.9%	-	-	-	-	01	0.9%	
Intentions following graduation											
Further training	-	-	-	-	-	-	04	3.9%	04	3.9%	0.1385
Specialization course	16	15.6%	20	19.6%	21	20.5%	15	14.7%	72	70.5%	
Master's or Doctorate	08	7.8%	04	3.9%	04	3.9%	04	3.9%	20	19.6%	
Internship	01	0.9%	02	1.9%	01	0.9%	02	1.9%	06	5.8%	
Doesn't intend to do anything	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
What salary do you expect to earn five years after graduation											
Up to R\$ 2,640.00	01	0.9%	01	0.9%	-	-	-	-	02	1.9%	0.1562
From R\$ 2,641.00 and R\$ 4,400.00	01	0.9%	02	1.9%	03	2.9%	01	0.9%	07	6.8%	
From R\$ 4,401.00 and R\$ 7,040.00	12	11.7%	20	19.6%	06	5.9%	16	5.6%	54	52.9%	
From R\$ 7,041.00 and R\$ 8,800.00	08	7.8%	02	1.9%	09	8.8%	05	4.9%	24	23.5%	
Over R\$ 8,801.00	03	2.9%	01	0.9%	08	7.8%	03	2.9%	15	14.7%	
Total	25	100%	26	100%	26	100%	25	00%	102	100%	

Table 3 – Analysis of students about their expectations for the course

Variables	Period										P-value	
	2nd		4th		6 th		8th		Total			
	n	%	n	%	N	%	n	%	n	%		
What do you expect from your training on the Dentistry course												
Prepared for work	09	8.8%	08	7.8%	09	8.8%	07	6.8%	33	32.3%	0.2708	
Broad overall learning	08	7.8%	07	6.8%	05	4.9%	13	12.7%	33	32.3%		
Improve current practical skills	11	10.7%	10	9.8%	04	3.9%	10	9.8%	35	34.3%		
> Level of instruction	08	7.8%	07	6.8%	03	2.9%	10	9.8%	28	27.5%		
Prepared for research	03	2.9%	04	3.9%	03	2.9%	07	6.8%	17	16.7%		
Improve current professional situation	02	1.9%	04	3.9%	02	1.9%	07	6.8%	15	14.7%		
Knowledge to better understand the world	02	1.9%	04	3.9%	01	0.9%	09	8.8%	16	15.6%		
Possibility of higher salary	03	2.9%	03	2.9%	07	6.8%	06	5.9%	19	18.6%		
Couldn't say	02	1.9%	03	2.9%	05	4.9%	00	00%	10	9.8%		
Prepared for work	09	8.8%	08	7.8%	09	8.8%	07	6.8%	33	32.3%		
Do you think you have been well prepared for the job market												
Yes	25	24.5%	23	22.5%	26	25.4%	24	23.5%	98	96%		0.1334
No	-	-	03	2.9%	-	-	01	0.9%	04	3.9%		
Are you satisfied with your choice?												
Yes	25	24.5%	24	23.5%	26	25.4%	24	23.5%	99	97%	0.311	
No	-	-	02	1.9%	-	-	01	0.9%	03	2.9%		
Total	25	100%	26	100%	26	100%	25	100%	102	100%		

4 DISCUSSION

The issue of the female predomination of dentistry has been widely discussed. In the present study, the results indicated that 81.4% (83) of the sample was female, which agrees with data from the Regional Council of Dentistry of São Paulo, which reports that 51.0% of registered dentists are women. Among those with provisional registration, the difference is even greater, with 67.0% of female dentists¹³. In the study by Oliveira et al.¹³, only 7.5% of the sample had a family income of over R\$ 6,000, unlike the present study, in which the majority had an income that was considered high and greater than this level. These results were very similar, corroborating studies carried out by the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, in which, among a sample of 88 interviewed students, there was also a prevalence of women – 75.0% of

the sample – who were aged between 17 and 22 years (89.2%) and single (91.7%). The majority had studied in a private school and had a family income of ten times the minimum wage¹⁴, results which were ratified by the data from the present study.

According to this study, most participants studied in private schools, which agrees with the studies of Santos et al.¹⁵, carried out among 94 students of the Dentistry Course of the Universidade de São Paulo (FOUSP), which reported that the majority were female and aged between 17 and 27 years, the same characteristics found in this research. In all the studies that agreed with these results, a prevalence of female students was observed. According to data from the National Qualification Plan of the Ministry of Labor and Social Security, women represent the majority in schools, universities and qualification courses¹⁶. From the

Table 4. Demonstration of the perception of Dentistry students regarding: teaching staff, scientific internship and/or monitoring, main purpose for choosing Dentistry

Variables	Period										P-value
	2nd		4th		6th		8th		Total		
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Evaluation of Teaching Staff											
Excellent	19	76%	14	53.8	15	57.7	16	64.0%	64	62.8%	1.0000
Very Good	06	24%	10	38.5	10	38.5	09	36.0%	35	34.4%	
Good	-	-	02	7.7	-	-	-	-	02	1.9%	
Fair	-	-	-	-	01	3.8	-	-	01	0.9%	
Poor	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Total	25	100%	26	100%	26	100%	25	100%	102	100%	
Scientific internship and/or monitoring											
Intend to do	23	92%	12	46.1%	09	34.7%	01	04%	45	44.1%	0.0001
Already do with scholarship grant	-	-	04	15.4%	05	19.2%	09	36%	18	17.6%	
Already did	-	-	-	-	-	-	06	24%	06	5.9%	
Do not intend to do	-	-	-	-	02	7.7%	-	-	02	1.9%	
Would like to do	01	04%	04	15.4%	05	19.2%	04	16%	14	13.8%	
Already do without scholarship grant	01	04%	06	23.4%	05	19.2%	05	20%	17	16.7%	
Total	25	100%	26	100%	26	100%	25	100%	102	100%	
Main aim of studying Dentistry *											
Prevention of disease and maintenance of oral Health	16	15.4%	14	13.7%	17	16.7%	22	21.6%	69	67.6%	0.2835
Prevention of disease and treatment	17	16.7%	14	13.7%	14	13.7%	14	13.7%	59	57.8%	
Serve the Community	09	8.8%	01	01%	09	08.8%	08	07.8%	27	26.5%	
Treat Diseases	06	06%	11	10.8%	12	11.8	14	13.7%	43	42.1%	
Promote Hygiene and Aesthetics	13	12.7%	14	13.7%	13	12.7%	18	17.6%	58	56.9%	
Be Well Paid	01	01%	03	2.9%	07	06.8%	08	07.8%	19	18.6%	
Total*	62	60.8%	57	55.9%	72	70.6%	84	82.3%			
Of the subjects studied, should any be excluded from the curriculum?											
Yes	01	04%	13	50%	19	73.1%	14	56%	47	46%	0.0007
No	23	92%	13	50%	07	26.9%	11	44%	54	53%	
Did not respond	01	04%	-	-	-	-	-	-	01	01%	
Total	25	100%	26	100%	26	100%	25	100%	102	100%	
Is there a subject that should be included in the curriculum?											
Yes	02	08%	01	3.8%	04	15.4%	08	32%	15	14.8%	0.0176
No	21	84%	24	92.4%	17	65.4%	12	48%	74	72.5%	
Did not respond	02	08%	01	3.8%	05	19.2%	05	20%	13	12.7%	
Total	25	100%	26	100%	26	100%	25	100%	102	100%	

*More than one answer given

1970s, significant transformations have taken place in the profile of the activities of women, which resulted in changes in their economic needs and the

opportunities offered by the labor market. The social and cultural demographic changes that took place in Brazil affected women, giving them access to

universities, which consequently opened up space for new job prospects.

Regarding the perception of students about their choice of course and proximity to the desired area of study, a strong tendency towards specialization was evident. This is a common worldwide reality due to globalization, where the labor market demands more and more specialized professionals and the demand for advanced technology leads new graduates to seek further training. The study by Mattos and Tenório¹⁷ involving dentistry students found that technical-scientific improvement and personal effort were seen as determinants of professional success, with specialization and being self-employed cited as future expectations among the majority of respondents.

Due to the large number of professionals in the self-employed labor market, especially in large urban centers, many graduates seek formal positions. However, setting up their own practice remains one of the objectives of the dental professional, a result that is clearly seen in this research, in which most reported a desire to be self-employed; not least because of the possibility of a generous financial return¹⁵. In contrast, studies by Freire et al.¹⁸ revealed that personal beliefs about dentistry were responsible for the choice of being self-employed.

In this study, students were satisfied with the curriculum matrix, findings also presented in the study by Medeiros et al.¹⁹, which found that the majority of dentistry students were satisfied with their performance to date. According to Lazzarin, Nakama and Cordomi Jr.²⁰, much like in any higher education course, the quality of teaching in dentistry is related to the suitability of the pedagogical model of the university and the course. In addition, the continuous training and refreshing of knowledge (both technical and didactic-pedagogical) of the teaching staff are essential to provide generalist, humanistic, critical and reflective training. In this

study, it was found that the students surveyed are satisfied with the teaching staff.

In many institutions, academic monitoring has been found to be an excellent way of complementing and improving the teaching-learning process in higher education courses, since this activity brings great responsibility in terms of the process of socialization in university teaching, as well as contributing to the quality of vocational training offered in all areas. Academic monitoring represents an area of training for the monitor, as well as being a process that can contribute to improving the quality of undergraduate education. It is therefore of great value for the training of future professionals²¹. In relation to this issue, the results of this study demonstrated that most of the interviewees aimed to carry out a specialization and/or monitoring course. Oliveira and Coelho²² emphasized that actions aimed at the teaching-research-extension course tripod should be constructed through intersectoral actions, involving professionals and academics in strategies that strengthen training and practice-based actions with a view to promoting health.

In relation to the opinions of the students about the curriculum, most of those interviewed said they were satisfied, but results were found that either agree or disagree with those of the present study in the referenced articles. Nevertheless, in the study by Saliba et al.²³ it was observed that the issue of infrastructure depends on investment in the adaptation of the curriculum, which has been carried out in Brazilian public and private universities in recent years, with a view to improving teaching. The authors point out that most universities base their teaching on scientific evidence, qualified teachers and disciplines that support the professional, which brings recognition to the university.

A limitation of the present study was the lack of external validation, as the sample does not extend to students of other institutions.

The study showed that as the choice of

Dentistry as a profession by the students interviewed is closely linked to their desires for their futures. It is important to identify the profile of Dentistry students, so that greater investment can be made in the training, infrastructure and reputation of a university, as research such as this can lead to the incorporation of important values for the effective performance of the course by the academic community.

5 CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the participants were motivated to study Dentistry due to its role in the area of Health Sciences, as well as the fact that the profession can be carried out on a self-employed basis, allowing an additional income, with entrepreneurship a key focus.

RESUMO

Perfil dos estudantes que ingressam no curso de Odontologia: motivos da escolha

O objetivo deste estudo, com recorte transversal de natureza quantitativa, foi avaliar o perfil, a percepção e o motivo da escolha pelo curso de Odontologia em uma faculdade particular de Campinas (SP). Do total de 153 alunos matriculados em 2016, 102 (66,7%) aceitaram participar da pesquisa. O instrumento de pesquisa foi um questionário estruturado, autoaplicável, com 22 questões que versavam sobre perfil socioeconômico, demográfico, percepção sobre o curso e os motivos de sua escolha. Entre os respondentes, 81,4% eram do sexo feminino. A faixa etária de 17 a 20 anos predominou (67,3%), sendo a maioria solteiros (89,3%), tendo cursado ensino médio em escola particular (80,4%), com renda familiar acima de R\$ 8.800,00 (54,0%). Quando abordados sobre o motivo da escolha pelo curso, 61,7% optaram por ser da área da saúde; e 29,4% sofreram influência de um dentista. Quanto à pretensão profissional, 6,8% querem trabalhar somente no setor público, 47,0% querem ser assalariados e montar seu próprio negócio e 38% querem trabalhar de forma autônoma em consultório. Sobre o curso,

62,8% se declararam satisfeitos com o corpo docente; 72,5%, com a matriz curricular, e a maioria (70,5%) deseja cursar especialização após a graduação. Sobre a escolha, 97,0% estão satisfeitos; e 96,0% se sentem preparados para enfrentar o mercado de trabalho. A percepção dos respondentes é positiva quanto à formação. Há o reconhecimento da tendência de assalariamento na profissão, embora demonstrem o desejo de atuação no setor privado.

Descritores: Odontologia. Escolha da profissão. Estudantes.

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