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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Factors Influencing the Career Choices among Medical University students of King Saub bin Abdulaziz University, Riyadh Saudi Arabia; A Cross-sectional Study Design

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Abstract *Aim:* This study investigated the factors that influence career choice among second year dental, medical and nursing students at King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences. *Methodology:* One hundred and fifty questionnaires were distributed to 2nd year pre-professional medical, dental and nursing students (50 questionnaires per group). First part of questionnaire was regarding demographics and in the second part consisted of 23 factors that might influence the students' career choices which were divided into six dimensions namely social status, economy, profession, vocation/service, interest in science/education, and personal background. *Results:* We received 119 completed questionnaires (medical = 40, dental = 40 and nursing = 39) with the response rate of 79.3%. We found that the social status of being a doctor or a dentist motivated medical and dental students compared to being a nurse for nursing students and the difference was significant among three groups (P value: 0.01). Furthermore, dental students when compared to both medical and nursing students were more likely to be motivated by factors related to profession that were job security, flexible timings and many others. On the other hand, with regard to factors relating to personal background, medical students showed lower motivation in comparison with dental and nursing students. Nevertheless the difference in attitude related to personal

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background was significantly different among three groups (P value < 0.01). *Conclusions:* Through this study we concluded that factors related to professional security, personal background influenced the career choices of pre-professional medical, dental and nursing students. However we cannot generalize the finding as it was done in one hospital of Riyadh. Nevertheless, this study was able to provide valuable information on the reasons for choosing a professional career among Saudi Arabian students. Further multicenter studies are needed to build upon the findings of the current study.

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1. Introduction

There are numerous professional career choices available in this modern age.¹ The right career choice plays a major role in molding a student's future.¹ In Saudi Arabia, the acceptance for a higher education mainly requires three main grades which are *Qudurat*, *Tahsely* and high school.^{2,3} The *Qudurat* test focuses mainly on the students' knowledge about algebra and Arabic language skills. The *Tahsely* test is about the basic science and English language evaluation. High school grades are calculated accumulatively for all the three years spent in high school. All these grades are taken under consideration but it usually differs from one university to another.³ In King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences (KSAU-HS), evaluation takes total of 40% from *Tahsely* test, 30% from *Qudurat* test and the remaining 30% from the high school grades.⁴ The system in our university has changed in recent times. The students choose their specialty depending on their Grade Point Average (GPA) in the first preparatory year.³

Literature has shown that students choose their career or specialty according to many factors such as financial and social status etc.⁵⁻¹² Many countries have conducted research for determining the factors that led people to choose their specialty from many others.⁵⁻¹² A study from United Kingdom, by Crossley and Mubarik found that dental students were significantly motivated by status and security and the nature of the occupation while medical students were motivated by career opportunities, patient care and working with people, use of personal skills, and interest in science. However, work experience was a strong motivation in the case of both dental and medical students.¹⁰ Hallissey et al. found that ease of employment, being self-employed, working regular hours, followed by the opportunity of good income, and the opportunity to help people were the reasons for choosing dentistry as a career. In the same study, having relatives or friends in the profession and lifelong ambition were the least important factors. They also found that there were no significant differences found in most responses when analyzed by gender.¹²

Regionally in Jordan, Al-Bitar et al. investigated the factors among dental students only, and found professional prestige was the highest factor followed by serving people. Also, male scored higher points on choosing dentistry for financial reasons than females.¹¹ In Kuwait a study conducted in 2012 reported that looking for a good treatment outcome for patients (66; 45.8%) and a challenging specialty (58; 40.3%) were the most influencing incentives when selecting a future specialty among medical student.¹³ In Saudi Arab few studies had been conducted related to the specialty preferences among medical student.¹⁴⁻¹⁶ Study conducted in 2012 in Saudi Arab reported that factors like competitive field, shortage of

specialists, and diversity of patients were prevalent among the male students and factors like prestige of specialty and teaching opportunities were related to career choices among female students.¹⁴ In 2004 a study was conducted in Riyadh to understand the attitude and knowledge toward nursing profession concluded that the knowledge of high school students was reasonable but the attitude was lacking and out of 479 only 5.9% want to pursue nursing as a profession.¹⁶

Very few studies have been conducted in Saudi Arabia to assess the reasons behind different career choices among medical students. This study aimed to investigate the factors that influence career choice among second year dental, medical and nursing student of KSAU-HS.

2. Methodology

Questionnaire based cross-sectional study design was conducted among 2nd year students of medicine, dentistry and nursing of KSAU-HS Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Convenient sampling was done. The sample size was calculated based on the study by Bernabe et al.⁷ A sample size of 34 per group with 80% power to detect a difference in means of 0.92 (difference between males (3.00) and females (2.08), assuming that the common standard deviation of 1.32 by using a two group t-test with a 0.05 two sided significance was calculated using Epi Info. We had rounded-off the total sample size per group to 50. Since we planned to compare between the groups, we liked to have equal number of respondents in each of the three groups (Medical, Dental and nursing), as done by Corssley and Mubarik.¹⁰

The questionnaire used in this study was based on previous studies.⁷⁻¹⁰ It starts with demographic questions, admission required exam grades for higher education and socio-economic status of the family. After that, 23 factors were divided into six dimensions which were the factors that might influence the students' career choices. Each factor contained a statement which required the respondent to indicate the level of agreement on a five point Likert scaling ranging from 0 = Strongly Disagree to 4 = Strongly Agree. The six dimensions were social status, economy, profession, vocation/service, interest in science/education, and personal background.

Total 150 questionnaires were distributed, 50 for each group that was medical, dental and nursing students. Out of 150 we received 119 complete questionnaires.

2.1. Statistical analysis

Frequencies and percentages of socio-demographic factors are given in the form of tables. Mean and standard deviation were calculated for the educational score.

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