

Student Corner

Career Counseling in Pakistan-Need of the Hour

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Objective: The concept of career counseling is virtually non-existent in Pakistan. This results in lack of guidance to our youth who are reaching the pivotal stage of selecting a career for their future which is the most critical juncture in one's professional life. The aim of our study was to assess (a) the driving factors & career choice (MBBS or Dentistry) satisfaction (b) collate the views about the significance of career counselling among medical & dental students of a private sector medical & dental college (Fatima Memorial College of Medicine & Dentistry, Lahore, Pakistan).

Methods: Student responses were collected through a statistically validated questionnaire and then analysed.

Results: The driving factors behind career choice were predominantly personal choice. A quarter of students in the study adopted the profession under parental influence. A similar proportion were not satisfied with their career choice. Vast majority of students were familiar with the concept of career counselling and felt that formal structured career counselling could have helped them or the next generation of students at the stage of selecting a career path in context of joining Medicine/Dentistry as a career path or not.

Conclusion: The study highlights that about one fourth of our medical and dental students are not satisfied with their career choice but most feel that a true insight and flavor of the profession in the form of career counselling at the point of their career selection could have assisted them in having some practical insights into Medicine and Dentistry.

Keywords: Career, Dentistry, Medicine

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Introduction

The terms “career counselling” and “career guidance” emerged in the 17th century.¹ Career counselling or guidance is a vital service that all students must receive in order to make the right decision regarding the choice of their careers.² As medical education is one of the central components of any country's education system, the students and their respective societies can gain a lot from career counselling in medical education.³⁻⁵ Ideally, it should be provided at the matriculation/O/A level so that students can explore their interests and pursue the careers that they are the most motivated and passionate about.

The concept of career counselling is uncommon in Pakistan not just for the medical/dental profession but for most other professions as well. With ongoing advancements in both medical and non-medical sciences, appearance of new career fronts like artificial intelligence etc there are several career options available in present times contrary to the three mainstreams of Medicine, Engi-

neering and Arts few decades ago, the selection of the right career is extremely important in shaping the future of the students. Lack of career guidance results in some students having to take up professions as per their parent/peer influence rather than as per their passion, enthusiasm or innate capabilities. Such students may not be able to excel in their respective fields and their real talents/ capabilities can become rusty which can result in professional mediocrity, sense of misfit and low self-esteem. This, apart from negating the real potential of the student as an individual, does not help the society/country getting the best out of their youth who are its future.

Methods

A cross-sectional descriptive survey was conducted amongst 187 students at a private medical college (Fatima Memorial Hospital College of Medicine & Dentistry) in Lahore, Pakistan. Stratified sampling was done and a statistically validated questionnaire (attached) was distributed amongst the students from both MBBS

and BDS. Anonymity of every participant was maintained to minimize reporting bias. Brief demographic details about the subjects including age, gender, medical/dental school name, educational degree (MBBS/BDS), year of medical/dental school were questioned. The questionnaire had 17 Likert type questions with responses ranging from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly disagree”.

Responses were recorded. Data was entered onto SPSS version 23.0 to calculate descriptive statistics such as frequencies & percentages which were used to analyze student’s perspectives & career choices.

Results

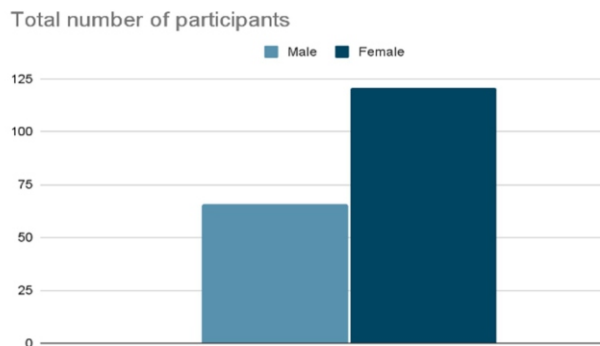


Figure 1:

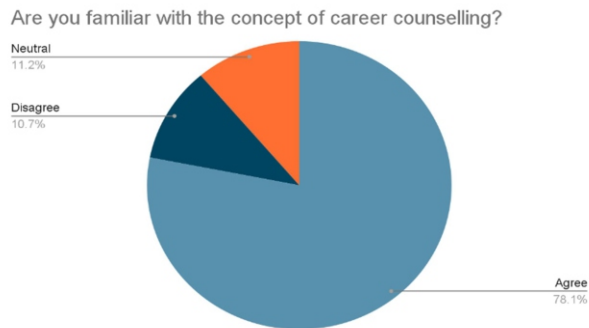


Figure 2:

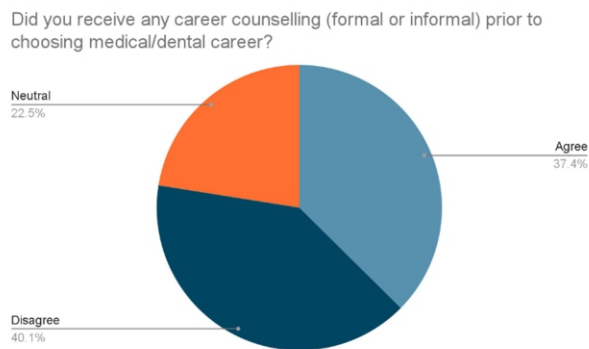


Figure 3:

Table 1: Career satisfaction answer breakdown from the study questionnaire

Are you satisfied with your career choice?	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Disagree	7	3.7
Disagree	10	5.3
Neutral	25	13.4
Agree	65	34.8
Strongly Agree	80	42.8
Total	187	100.0

Analysis showed that 65% (121 individuals) of the participants were females and 35% (66 individuals) were males. 72% of the participants were enrolled in MBBS and remaining 28% in BDS. Approximately 78% of the students were familiar with the concept of career counselling but only 37.4% had received career counselling (formal or informal). 81.9% of the students agreed that it was their personal choice to pursue medical/dental career and 77.6% of the students were satisfied with their career choice.

24.6% of the students were influenced by their parents to enter the medical/dental profession and 25.2% agreed that if given the opportunity, they would consider changing their careers. While 59.9% agreed that it matters if the career they have is not something that they are passionate about, 29.4% were not given the chance to pursue their passion as their career. Furthermore, 65.2% think that they would have been more successful if they were pursuing a career of their own interest.

Discussion

Pursuing a career in medicine is a challenging process and requires a lot of devotion and commitment. It is observed in this study that 40% of medical students did not receive any kind of career counselling before choosing this career. When students decide to select medicine as a career without knowing much about it, they may not completely understand the responsibilities, working environment and other essential aspects of this field. It can lead to a mismatch between expectations and the reality of a medical career, which can eventually cause unhappiness, burnout, or even dropping out of medical school. In this study, 25.2% of the participants agreed that they would consider changing careers if given the opportunity.

Comparing other studies 84.5% of the students felt that a career counselling service can help the youth prior to making a career decision to decide if medical/dental career is the one they want to enter. 63.2% of the students agreed that they have thought about their inborn talent but only 40.1% were encouraged by their teachers/ parents/ peers to explore their inborn talent towards making a

career choice.⁶⁻⁸ Other local studies have reported variable factors for medical/dental career adoption.⁹

This emphasizes the need of timely career counselling so that only intrinsically motivated students opt for this field as motivation may play a vital role in influencing the academic performance of learners in medical education.² Furthermore, students interested in pursuing a career in medicine sometimes have unrealistic expectations, which can lead to disappointment and loss of interest once they become doctors. One way to deal with this problem is that interested students should be encouraged to shadow doctors before selecting a career to get an insight into a doctor's life and make the right choices for themselves.

Conclusion

A structured medical career counselling service can not only increase the passion and enthusiasm of the majority of students who joined the profession of their own accord and remain satisfied with their choice but may also reduce the percentage of students who after opting for the profession are dissatisfied with their career choice. Hence career counselling for the field of Medicine and Dentistry is the need of the hour in Pakistan to help the country produce even more energetic and professional doctors, dentists.

Conflict of Interest: None

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