

## Exploring Dental Students' Career Motivations and Aspirations: A Cross-Sectional Survey

Dr. Nidhi Pruthi Shukla<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Vaibhav Bansal<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Ariba Tajammul<sup>3</sup>

### Author

**Dr. Nidhi Pruthi Shukla**, HOD, Department of Public Health Dentistry, Rama Dental College, Hospital and Research Centre, Rama University, Kanpur, India.

**Dr. Vaibhav Bansal**, Reader, Department of Public Health Dentistry, Rama Dental College, Hospital and Research Centre, Rama University, Kanpur, India.

**Dr. Ariba Tajammul**, Postgraduate student, Department of Public Health Dentistry, Rama Dental College, Hospital and Research Centre, Rama University, Kanpur, India.

### Corresponding Author:

Dr. Nidhi Pruthi Shukla

Mail id: [drnidhipruthishukla.rdc@ramauniversity.ac.in](mailto:drnidhipruthishukla.rdc@ramauniversity.ac.in)

### Abstract

**Introduction:** India has emerged as a significant hub for dentistry, hosting one of the highest concentrations of dental professionals worldwide. A considerable number of dental students aim to pursue postgraduate education after graduation, while others consider careers in the private or public sectors.

**Aim:** To examine the motivations behind choosing dentistry and to evaluate the career outlook and aspirations among dental students (interns and final-year undergraduates) at Rama Dental College, Kanpur.

**Materials and Methods:** A cross-sectional survey was carried out using a structured, self-administered questionnaire shared via digital platforms. The tool assessed demographics, career motivations, perceptions of dentistry, and future professional intentions.

**Results:** A total of 115 students participated in the study, of which 70 were female (60.9%) and 45 were male (39.1%). Final-year students made up 54.8% of the sample, while 45.2% were interns. About 52% chose dentistry due to not getting into medical school, whereas 27% had genuine interest. Around 43.5% felt positively about their career choice, and 35% believed they had acquired strong clinical competencies. Endodontics was the most favoured postgraduate specialty (33%). Approximately 64% of the students expressed a desire to study abroad, with the USA and UK being the most preferred destinations. Job scarcity was a concern for 48%, and 35% considered civil services as an alternative career path.

**Conclusion:** The increasing number of dental graduates has created a competitive job environment in India, prompting students to explore alternative career options. Many view dentistry as a secondary choice, primarily selected due to external circumstances.

**Keywords:** Dental student perceptions, Career choice, Professional aspirations in dentistry

## INTRODUCTION

Dentistry in India has seen substantial growth, both in educational institutions and practitioner numbers. With advanced techniques and improved access to care, the field attracts numerous aspirants. Nevertheless, establishing a career in dentistry requires years of commitment and clinical training.<sup>1</sup> Currently, over 300 colleges offer BDS and more than 260 provide MDS programs, contributing to an estimated 25,000 graduates annually. This expansion has improved the dentist-to-population ratio but also intensified job competition, creating anxiety about career prospects.

Choosing a career path is a critical and impactful decision for any student. Rising competition and a surge in dental graduates have increased the importance of understanding students' motivations and expectations. This study aimed to assess the factors influencing dental students' decisions, their perceptions of dentistry as a profession, and their post-graduation plans.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Study Design

A descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out in January 2025 among 115 dental students (final-year and interns) from Rama Dental College, Kanpur.

### Methodology

A validated, self-administered questionnaire hosted on Google Forms was distributed via social media and email. The form included demographic details and questions related to career motivation, perception, and future planning. Ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional review board.

**Table 1: Questionnaire**

Statement	Options / Categories
Gender	Male Female
Level of Study	Final Year Intern
Reason for joining BDS	Genuinely interested in the course Parental/relative influence

	Could not get MBBS seat Uncertain / No specific reason
<b>On a scale of 1–5, how do you perceive dentistry as a career?</b>	1 – Excellent 2 – Very Good 3 – Good 4 – Poor 5 – Very Poor
<b>On a scale of 1–5, how confident are you about the clinical skills acquired during BDS?</b>	1 – Excellent 2 – Very Good 3 – Good 4 – Sufficient 5 – Insufficient
<b>If your choice is 3–5 in the above question, what will help you improve your confidence level in clinical skills?</b>	By doing more cases By assisting PGs during clinical procedures By handling more complex/difficult cases All of the above Others
<b>What are your plans after BDS?</b>	Start own clinic Pursue MDS Courses in esthetics, implants, endodontics etc. Undecided Want to change career
<b>Which MDS specialty are you inclined toward?</b>	Endodontics Oral Pathology Prosthodontics Orthodontics Others
<b>Are you interested in going abroad for MDS/other fellowship courses?</b>	Yes No
<b>If YES, why would you choose to study abroad?</b>	Low quality of dental education in India More job opportunities Personal interest Family/friends influence
<b>Which country would you prefer for further studies?</b>	USA UK

	Australia European Countries Arabian/Asian Countries
<b>If planning to change career, your preference would be:</b>	Civil Services Family Business Army/Navy Others
<b>Reason for change of career</b>	Less job opportunities after BDS Less income Saturated profession Not interested in dentistry

## RESULTS

A total of 115 dental students participated in the study, comprising 70 females (60.9%) and 45 males (39.1%) as shown in Table 2. Among them, 54.8% were final-year students and 45.2% were interns. Over half of the respondents (52.2%) reported choosing dentistry because they could not secure an MBBS seat, while 27% joined out of genuine interest (Table 3)<sup>2</sup>. When asked about their perception of dentistry as a career, 43.5% rated it as very good, and 20% rated it as excellent. In terms of clinical skills, 34.8% felt they had acquired very good skills, while 29.6% felt their skills were good. To improve clinical confidence, the majority (74.8%) believed that engaging in more cases, assisting postgraduates, and handling difficult cases would be most effective.

Regarding future plans (Table 4), 51.3% of participants intended to pursue MDS, with endodontics being the most favoured specialty (33%), followed by oral pathology (27%), prosthodontics (22%), and orthodontics (18%)<sup>3</sup>—as illustrated in Figure 1. A strong inclination toward international education was observed, with 64.3% expressing interest in studying abroad—primarily due to better job prospects (40.9%) and personal interest (42.6%). The most preferred countries for higher studies were the USA (40%) and the UK (39.1%)<sup>4</sup>. When asked about alternative career preferences, 34.8% of students favoured civil services, and 47.8% cited limited job opportunities after BDS as a major reason for considering a career change.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 2: Demographic Data**

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>	Male	45	39.1%
	Female	70	60.9%
<b>Level of Study</b>	Final Year	63	54.8%
	Intern	52	45.2%

**Table 3: Motivation and Perception of Dentistry**

Statement	Options / Categories	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
-----------	----------------------	---------------	----------------

<b>Reason for joining BDS</b>	Genuinely interested	31	27.0%
	Parental/relative influence	13	11.3%
	Could not get MBBS	60	52.2%
	Uncertain	11	9.5%
<b>Perception of dentistry as a career (1–5)</b>	Excellent	23	20.0%
	Very Good	50	43.5%
	Good	33	28.7%
	Poor	6	5.2%
	Very Poor	3	2.6%
<b>Confidence in clinical skills (1–5)</b>	Excellent	18	15.7%
	Very Good	40	34.8%
	Good	34	29.6%
	Sufficient	16	13.9%
	Insufficient	7	6.0%
<b>Improving confidence in clinical skills</b>	By doing more cases	14	12.2%
	Assisting PGs	5	4.3%
	Handling difficult cases	6	5.2%
	All of the above	86	74.8%
	Others	4	3.5%

**Table 4: Future Plans**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Options / Categories</b>	<b>Frequency (n)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Plans after BDS</b>	Start own clinic	8	7.0%
	MDS	59	51.3%
	Courses in esthetics, implants, etc.	31	27.0%
	Undecided	10	8.7%
	Want to change career	7	6.0%
<b>Interested in studying abroad</b>	Yes	74	64.3%
	No	41	35.7%
<b>Reason for studying abroad</b>	Low quality of education in India	10	8.7%
	More job opportunities	47	40.9%
	Personal interest	49	42.6%
	Family/friends influence	9	7.8%
<b>Preferred country for higher studies</b>	USA	46	40.0%
	UK	45	39.1%

	Australia	13	11.3%
	Others	11	9.6%
<b>Alternate career preference</b>	Civil Services	40	34.8%
	Family business	22	19.1%
	Army/Navy	14	12.2%
	Others	39	33.9%
<b>Reason for career change</b>	Less job opportunities	55	47.8%
	Low income	17	14.8%
	Saturated profession	27	23.5%
	Not interested in dentistry	16	13.9%

## DISCUSSION

This study explored the perceptions of final-year and intern dental students toward their profession. Consistent with earlier findings, a majority had selected dentistry after being unable to join medical courses. Despite this, a significant proportion held a positive outlook on the profession and expressed confidence in their clinical skills.<sup>6</sup> Endodontics remained the preferred MDS specialization, likely due to its financial appeal and demand. A large number of students expressed the desire to pursue further education abroad, mainly in Western countries, citing better prospects and academic quality.

A notable number also considered alternative careers due to perceived market saturation and job scarcity—factors pushing many toward civil services or entrepreneurial ventures.

## CONCLUSION

The data highlights that dentistry is often chosen as a secondary option due to external factors. Although many students grow to appreciate the profession, concerns about employment and growth opportunities persist. Educational policy makers and institutions must address these concerns to help guide students more effectively in their professional journey.

## Acknowledgement

We would like to thank all the dental students of Rama Dental College, Kanpur who have participated in the study.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

## REFERENCES

1. Toriya M Shaji, Pushpalatha Govindaraju. Perception and future plans of students for choosing dentistry as a career - A cross sectional survey after career JDSR. 2022; 13(2): 1-5.
2. Kapoor, S., Puranik, M., & Uma, S. (2014). Factors influencing dental professional career in India: An exploratory survey. J Indian Assoc Public Health Dent. 12, 113. <https://doi.org/10.4103/2319-5932.140278>.
3. Riya, R., Narang, R., Shinh, A., Nadaf, I., Parwal, S., & Kaur, R. (2022). Choosing Dentistry- Reasons and Reflections. Paripex Indian Journal of Research. <https://doi.org/10.36106/paripex/1308159>.
4. Krishna, K. (2017). Future Prospectives and Career Intentions of Dental Students of AP State in South India. IOSR Journal of Dental and Medical Sciences.16, 102-105. <https://doi.org/10.9790/0853-160601102105>.
5. Bommireddy, V., Chandu, V., Kommineni, H., Vijaykumar, A., Ravoori, S., & Neeli, G. (2021). Is the profession of dentistry losing its yesteryear's glory? An exploratory study from dental students' perspective. Indian Journal of Dental Research.32, 35 - 38. [https://doi.org/10.4103/ijdr.IJDR\\_111\\_20](https://doi.org/10.4103/ijdr.IJDR_111_20).
6. Dental Council of India. Available from: <https://dciindia.gov.in/>. [Accessed on September 7, 2022].