

PERCEPTION OF DENTAL INTERNS ON THE IMPACT OF THEIR GENDER DURING TRAINING PERIOD AND FUTURE DENTAL PRACTICE – CROSS SECTIONAL SURVEY IN DENTAL COLLEGES IN CHENNAI, INDIA

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Abstract

The field of dentistry has always been dominated by males in the past century. In the recent days, this gender disparity is becoming an increasingly significant issue as it has affected men and women differently, in service providers and recipients' aspect. With the increased entry of females in the field, its consequence is yet to be understood globally. As interns are the future generation of dentists, it is necessary to understand their perception of the issue. This is a cross-sectional questionnaire based study was done in 8 dental colleges in Chennai, Tamil Nadu on students doing their Compulsory Rotatory Internship (CRI). After statistical analysis, it was found that the "narrowing" gender divide is yet to have its complete impact on the perception of people. There is absence of stigma on working on patients or working with doctors of other gender and there is a healthy trend in outlook towards the other gender.

Keywords: Gender, Dentistry, Perception, Intern.

INTRODUCTION

Women have been described in all cultures as caring and nursing, however, in the modern medical system, this has not much penetrated. Since the inception of modern medical education and its professional expansion, it has always been patriarchal with little scope for women. However, nursing was predominated by women as portrayed in many contemporary sculptures and paintings around the globe. Further, women practiced obstetrics and folk medicine. (Medichesse, 2014) In the recent days, this gender disparity is becoming an

increasingly significant issue. It has been observed to affect men and women differently, in service providers and recipients aspects. (Tiwari et al., 2019)

Women were often prohibited from enrolment into medical schools. The first woman to receive a medical degree was Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, in 1849 in New York State. Dr. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson in 1865 was the first woman physician and surgeon in Britain. She also proceeded to co-found the London School of Medicine for Women. Further, until 1909, Royal College of Physicians was devoid

of women doctors. (History of the Royal College of Physicians, 2021) After these significant milestones at major universities, slowly the admission of women within the medical colleges began,

With the population of females being more than males in medical and dental streams, currently it is being felt that there may be a reduction in attraction towards medical education in men. This may be a reflection of underperformance in secondary education by boys. (Jha and Kelleher, 2006) Further, males may be attracted to shorter and more lucrative pathways like finance and IT industry. They also provide more financial stability, specifically earlier in life. Men's greater mental emphasis on economic status may also have a role to play in this. (Scarbecz and Ross, 2002; Van Wyk et al., 2016; da GraçaKfour, et al., 2017) .

Further, social activism for safeguarding women rights have a major role to play in this change in demographics of medical profession. It is also observed that in countries with restrictive laws, statistics of women in medical profession is much lesser. Therefore social policies and outlook have a say in participation of women in medical profession. It is also clear that women have chosen to stay in certain specialties, possibly due to level of investment of time and effort, predetermined concepts, and various hurdles.(Sharma, 2019) With time, gender representation in various disciplines of dental profession is also changing, reflecting the change in attitude and cultural outlook. Usually maxillofacial surgeons are predominantly males. Reasons for choosing particular specialties may be related to need for flexible and predictable work-patterns as needed by working mothers, refraining anti-social hours, and importantly the compromise between personal and professional life. Multitude of factors is at play regarding this issue.

In the beginning, there was a belief that even if a woman became a dentist, she would only treat other women and children. The world has come a very long way today, where number of women is constantly increasing in the dental

profession, leading to more women leaderships. (Prasanna et al., 2015)

The consequences of feminization in the dental profession is yet to be understood globally.(Kilminster et al., 2007) It is also believed that patients have certain predilection to be treated by male or female dentist. Usually, dental extraction is considered as a male task while softer treatments like scaling and restorations are accepted to be delivered by a female dentist. This is because of a popular misconception that extraction is a test of physical strength. Also, it is thought that care given by female doctors to female patients are more effective as there can be a confluence in approach and style of communication. However, Research suggests there is no difference between care given by doctor of either gender to either gender patients. As interns are the future generation of dentists, it is indispensable to both understand then and train them for a better tomorrow. In this regard, this study is performed to determine the perception of dental interns on the impact of their gender during training period and future dental practice. Hence this study aims to assess the perception of dental interns on the impact of their gender during training period and future dental practice.

Materials and Methods

This cross-sectional questionnaire/ survey based cross-sectional study was done in 8 dental colleges in Chennai, Tamil Nadu. The survey was conducted among students doing their Compulsory Rotatory Internship (CRI). This group of students were intentionally chosen since they have been exposed to theoretical and clinical based education for four years. The questionnaire consisted of 15 questions which were meticulously formulated to reflect the opinion of students on the influence of gender dominance during their study period, clinical practice and whether it will influence their career in the future. The purpose of the study was explained to the students before giving the questionnaire. Anonymity was maintained to ensure

confidentiality. A total of 372 (Males 185 and Females 187) samples were collected from the students and was analysed using chi-square test.

Results:

The responses of male and female interns were analysed for similarities or differences. (Table 1) In general, it was felt that dentistry is a gender dominated profession, predominated by males. However, academic performance was statistically similar in both genders. In current population, not much of impact of gender dominance is experienced during study period. Also, there was no specific gender dominated discipline in dentistry in current scenario. Dedication to subject, performance in clinical practice, financial and family based impediments, patient convincing are all similar

in both genders and are perceived similarly too. Better performance by the opposite gender is not felt as discouraging. Further, there was no significant preference for patients to be treated by same gender doctor. As a corollary, doctors too, do not have stigma to work on patients of opposite gender.

From the analysis it was found that Q5, 9 and 10 were statistically different amongst them. For the question “Who are more interested in pursuing masters/post graduation”, males feel that females are more interested and females feel that males are more interested. For the question 9 “Who have more obstacles to practice dentistry” either genders feel that other gender has more obstacles. For the question 10, “Do you think females have more impediments to practice dentistry more than males”, surprisingly females think otherwise to the common perception.

Table 1. *The summary of the survey*

Questions	Responses		P Value
Q1 Do you think dentistry is a gender dominated profession	Male	Female	0.382
Male	71	41	
Female	50	25	
Q3 Who do you think perform better during their study period	Male	Female	0.366
Male	48	59	
Female	33	47	
Q4 Did gender dominance impact you during your study period	Yes	No	0.359
Male	41	53	
Female	44	49	
Q5 Who are more interested in pursuing masters/post-graduation	Male	Female	0.002*
Male	31	73	
Female	66	17	
Q6 Do you think some specialities in dentistry are dominated by a particular gender	Yes	No	0.379
Male	55	54	
Female	42	36	
Q7 Who do you think are more dedicated towards their career	Male	Female	0.331
Male	56	51	
Female	36	44	
Q8 Who do you think do better in clinical practice	Male	Female	0.288
Male	56	50	

Female	47	34	
Q9 Who have more obstacles to practice dentistry	Male	Female	
Male	18	69	0.001*
Female	63	37	
Q10 Do you think females have more impediments to practice dentistry more than males	Yes	No	0.004*
Male	61	32	
Female	36	58	
Q11 Which is more common impediment to practice full-fledged dentistry	Financial	Family commitment	0.446
Male	55	54	
Female	41	37	
Q12 Who do you think are better in convincing a patient for treatment	Male	Female	0.083
Male	41	50	
Female	54	42	
Q13 Do you feel discouraged when your counterpart of the opposite gender performs better than you	Yes	No	
Male	45	50	
Female	51	41	0.169
Q14 Do you think patients prefer being treated by a doctor of the same gender	Yes	No	Not sure
Male	36	29	16
Female	38	33	15
Q15 Do you have stigma to work on a patient of the opposite gender	Yes	No	
Male	36	49	0.185
Female	51	51	

Discussion

When the participants were questioned about their feeling on gender domination in dentistry, participants from both genders said that it was male dominated. The trend of male domination existed few decades ago. However, currently more women are entering the profession due to various reasons described in the introduction. According to a report, 29.8% of all dentists in USA were females, which were higher than the percent in 2010 (24.5%). They also found that female dentists were more likely to be general dentists or pedodontists. Predominantly female dentists were employees or part time workers.(Dentistry today, 2021). This trend in found globally and hence the perception can be justified.

With regard to academic performance, there was an agreement that females perform better than males. Many studies have reported facts relevant to this finding. Mafla et al., (2019) have reported that relation of Academic self-efficacy with academic performance was present in females. Almalki et al., (2019) have

said that gender contributes to academic performance. In current study there was no significant difference between the genders in their opinion. With regard to the impact of gender dominance during study period, the difference in opinion, though statistically insignificant, the impact of gender dominance was present as reported by about 45% of the responders.

With regard to a question on interest in pursuing post-graduation in dentistry, males say females have higher interest and females say males are so. The difference is statistically significant. However, a previous report shows that gender did not affect the interest in post-graduation.(Scarbecz& Ross, 2007) Another report has suggested that burden of debt is a major factor in the career decisions.(Andriole&Jeffe, 2012) Further, multifactorial influence, especially having a dentist as a relative, family commitment, spouse's career, etc. have profound influence on the decision and is not just the gender. Also, Nashleanas et al., (2014) have reported findings that is counter to the their national norm. Increase in females are expected in UK as

reported by Puryer et al., (2017). However, in this study only perception is studied, where participants point out other gender as more interested. Respondents also think that some specialties in dentistry are dominated by gender. There is a clear deviation from reality and perception in this response.

In the aspect regarding dedication towards career, both genders think they are more dedicated towards career. Nevertheless, the number is not statistically significant. Hence, there is no clear outcome for this question. It may be reported that interest in career is uniform among the genders. Similar scenario is seen with regard to clinical practice. It appears that both genders perform similarly.

There was statistically significant difference in perception of obstacles to practice dentistry. Both the genders point at other gender to have more obstacles. Females predominantly opine that they have less impediments compared to males. These differences in responses are statistically significant.

With respect to impediments to practice, both financial aspect as well as family commitment, have equally contributed in both genders. The differences were statistically similar. Further, performance of both the genders in practice, regarding convincing a patient, willingness to work on patient of other gender and being preferred by the patient to work on them were all statistically similar. Precisely, gender domination is slowing vanishing from the profession, however, the perception is not changing at the same pace.

Conclusion:

From the survey, following conclusions were made

- The “narrowing” gender divide is yet to have its complete impact on the perception of people
- Currently, there is absence of stigma on working on patients or working with doctors of other gender

- There is a healthy trend in outlook towards the other gender.

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