

Understanding the journey and decision-making process of doctors throughout their career



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ABSTRACT

Background: Often, we perceive healthcare from the patient's point of view. Very seldom do, we think about the doctors, pillars of our health-care system. They have to overcome the journey and faced challenges before fully established. **Aims and Objectives:** This study aims to explore this area on the perception of doctors about their career, the support they desire and the challenges they face to establishment of their private clinical practices. **Materials and Methods:** The data were collected from doctors using questionnaires circulated through digital platform during COVID-19 pandemic situation for cross-sectional study. Cluster followed by snowball sampling method was followed to collect the data using two different Google form questionnaires for doctors completed under-graduation and completed postgraduation/super-specialty. Chi-square analysis was used to assess the frequency count variables. **Results:** The millennial as well as senior doctors have securing financing the highest rank overall as the major challenge, they faced before starting a clinic. **Conclusion:** Decision-making process of doctors is very complex and dynamic influenced by different factors throughout their career. Factors such as securing post-graduation, securing finance and procuring equipments for the establishment of clinics were found to influence career decision.

Key words: Decision-making; Influencing factors; Specialist doctors

INTRODUCTION

Usually, in our society, healthcare is perceived from the patient's point of view instead of that of the doctors who provide the care directly. The journey and challenges doctors face and the time before they can fully feel that they are established in their profession is an area that has been quite unexplored.

There is an increasing imbalance of general physician and specialist doctors in different subspecialties of medical sciences in both developed and developing countries.^{1,2} Career preference is subject to change during the undergraduate course even for those having the strong desire for a particular specialty at the beginning.^{3,4} A possible reason behind such indecisiveness can be that

at the beginning of professional training, most of the students have misconceptions.^{5,6} The choice can be a conglomeration of their skills and abilities, availability of career opportunities and future financial as well as social status. Resultant uneven distribution of medical students across the specialties leads to shortage in some specialties and huge competition in others.⁷⁻¹¹

Crossley and Mubarak found in their study from the United Kingdom that dental students were attracted by social status, securities, and nature of occupation, while medical students were motivated by career opportunities, patient care and working with people, use of personal skills and abilities, and interest in the science. Furthermore, past work experience was the strong motivational force to choose a specialty for both dental and medical students.¹²

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Opportunity of employment, being self-employed, good income, to help people, regular working hours are the important factors to choose career as found by Hallissey et al.¹³ They also found that having relatives or friends in the same profession and lifelong ambition were the least important factors. Professional prestige and serving people are the most important factors among dental students of Jordan found by Al-Bitar et al.¹⁴ Treatment outcome and challenging specialty were the other important influencing factors among medical students to select a specialty found in a study in Kuwait.¹⁵

Prior Indian studies in this topic focused chiefly on perceived factors that urged the undergraduate interns or MBBS students to pursue certain career paths. They found income, career prospect, parental influence, and perceived respect to be strong motivator.^{16,17} A study in South India used factor analysis where apart from demographic features such as gender, geographic background, and MBBS experience, they found three motivational factors, namely, personal growth, professional growth, and personal satisfaction.¹⁸ Another recent study found similar patterns while estimating career choice in one particular specialty, namely, Pediatrics.¹⁹

To fill up the existing lacuna in Eastern and North Eastern India, this study aims to explore the perception of doctors about their career, the support they desire and the challenges they face to establishment of their private clinical practices.

Aims and objectives

This study aims to explore this area on the perception of doctors about their career, the support they desire and the challenges they face to establishment of their private clinical practices.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Quantitative data collection and analysis were conducted among a sample size of total 239 respondents including doctors who have already passed their postgraduation/super-specialty and 40 undergraduate doctors pursuing MBBS from different colleges in West Bengal. The study aims to focus on millennials belonging to 22–40 years of age. An approach applying Cluster Sampling first and then snowball sampling method was followed. The data were collected in the form of questionnaires circulated through digital platform during COVID-19 pandemic situation. Due to the current situation, one on one interviews could not be taken and the Google form had to be circulated digitally among the limited respondents of the state of West Bengal. Two different questionnaires for two different clusters were prepared, one for completed under-graduation, and another for completed postgraduation/super-specialty.

Statistical analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 16.0 was used for the analysis of the data of this study. Descriptive analysis was computed in terms of mean and standard deviation for continuous variables and frequency with percentage for ordinal and nominal variables. Chi-square analysis was used to assess the frequency count variables.

RESULTS

An overall analysis

The sociodemographic profile revealed that majority (87%) of total respondents (n=239) are male in this study. Majority (69%) of the total respondents are millennial. An overall representation shows 37% of the doctors perceive that it would take 2–4 years to establish a clinic. Millennial (78%) opined that it takes 4–6 years to establish a clinic and 44% of senior doctors opined that it takes <2 years to establish a clinic.

The millennial as well as senior doctors have securing financing the highest rank overall as the major challenge, they faced before starting a clinic. An overall representation shows 52% of respondents prefer their residential area for establishment of their practice. Senior doctors (54%) prefer residential area compared to 51% of Millennial. An overall representation shows that 88% of the respondents want their personal contact numbers and mail id to be a constant mode of communication between them and medical organizations. About 94% of senior doctors prefer personal contact as compared to 86% of Millennial. The millennial as well as senior doctors have given equipment and facilities the highest rank overall as the assistance they desire.

For the postgraduate respondents

For the postgraduate doctors, the sample (n=199) has been divided into millennial falling in the age group of 22–40 years and the age group above 45 years connoted as Senior Doctors. The specialties have been divided into –

1. Group A (56%): This is comprised Pediatrics, ophthalmology, ENT, Anesthesiology, Gynecology and Obstetrics, General Medicine and Dentistry;
2. Group B: Consisting of Surgery, Dermatology, Chest Medicine, Psychiatry, Urology, Nephrology, Cardiology, Gastroenterology, Orthopedics, Neurology, and Neurosurgery;
3. Group C: With Pathology, Biochemistry, Physiology, Anatomy and Physical Medicine, and Rehabilitation.

Of the various career choices given to the respondents, 48% of them are not practicing, but are associated with varied choices ranging from working in a corporate hospital

to training under senior doctors. About 23% of the respondents are solely involved in private clinical practice. About 32% of our millennial doctors have been involved in private clinical practice through a span of 10 years. Whereas, the senior doctors' practice lives span is a period of >11 years. About 43% of the millennials and 30% of the senior doctors opined that it takes 2–4 years to establish a clinic. About 41% of the respondents belonging to the mass specialties category and specialties category have responded that it takes 2–4 years in establishing a clinic. About 90% of the respondents would like to keep constant contact with different medical organizations through personal contacts such as contact numbers and personal mail ids. About 89% of mass specialties and 91% of specialties would prefer personal contacts as their constant mode of communication with medical organizations. On a scale of five, equipment and facilities hold the highest score in weightage. About 51% of the respondents would want equipment and facilities as their primary kind of assistance from different medical organizations.

For the undergraduate completed respondents

About 72% of the respondents are male. About 79% of the total respondents are below 25 years of age. About 45% of the respondents chose preparation for postgraduation as their 1st choice to pursue their career followed by training under a senior doctor for a certain period of time as their 2nd choice. About 75% of the respondents have been practicing for a span of 1–5 years after completion of their MBBS, only 25% of the respondents have been practicing for less than a year. About 50% of the female doctors believe that it would take them 2–4 years to fully establish their clinic, whereas the 40% of the male doctors are of the opinion that they need 4–6 years to establish their clinic and 17% of the male doctors believe that it may take them 10–15 years for establishing their clinic. On the perception of challenges perceived, the respondents have given a 4.1 rating to securing financing, in which they deem to be the biggest challenge before establishing a clinic. An overall representation of the various rankings given by the respondents on the challenges faced before establishing a private clinic shows in Diagram 1. About 40% of respondents with a single career choice have preferred a metro city for establishing their practice, whereas 50% of

respondents with multiple career choices have preferred their residential town for establishing their clinic. About 53% of the respondents would prefer contact numbers as their constant mode of communication with different medical organizations. Respondents with single career choice prefer personal email ids as their constant mode of communication, whereas people with multiple career choices have chosen contact numbers as their primary mode of communication. Equipment and facilities have received the highest in weightage in terms of the type of assistance that a doctor would require from different medical organizations when establishing a clinic. An overall view of the rankings given by respondents with single as well as multiple career choices shows that equipment and facilities always fall within the top five rankings unlike other requirements (Diagram 2).

DISCUSSION

The objectives of our study were to explore the area on the perception of doctors about their career, the support they desire from other organizations and the challenges they face during their career. Results from our study revealed that career decision-making among doctors was a dynamic, ongoing process which conformed to the prior studies.^{6,8,16-18} Our results showed junior and senior doctors having different attitudes toward planning for career which is significantly influenced by different factors.

In this study, we found a number of factors that influenced the career decision of doctors and the urge to establish their clinic. We found that securing financing was the most common and biggest challenge before establishing a clinic faced by both millennial as well as senior doctors having postgraduate or undergraduate degree. That's why, 48% of post graduate doctors were not self-employed, but were working in a corporate/government hospital or pursuing training under senior doctors. Whereas, 45% of the undergraduate respondents chose preparation for postgraduation as their 1st choice to pursue their career followed by training under a senior doctor for a certain period of time as their 2nd choice. This is because majority of undergraduate respondents are below the age of 25 years. Most of them want to complete the postgraduation before starting practice or entering into a job. Without postgraduation, they need 10–15 years to fully establish their clinic. Income and career prospect imply huge influence in Indian scenario that was reflected in prior studies as well.^{16,17}

It takes 2–4 years to establish a clinic by 43% of the millennials and 30% of the senior doctors having postgraduate degree, whereas undergraduate doctors

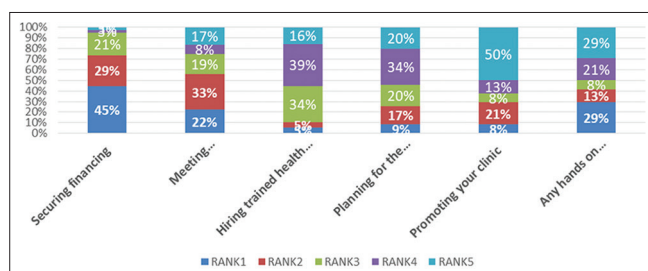


Diagram 1: Career choices and challenges perceived

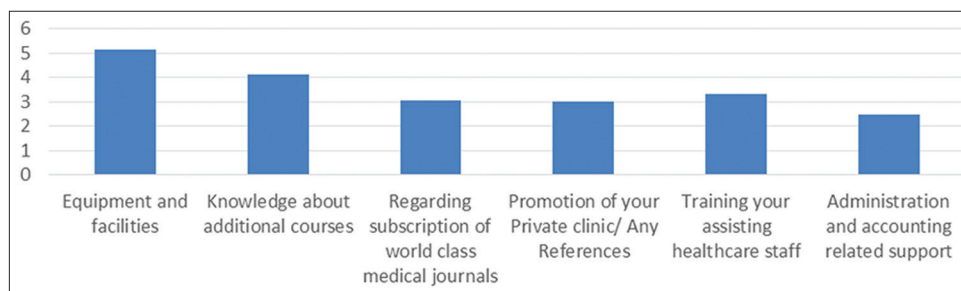


Diagram 2: Assistant requirement as perceived

require more time to establish their own clinic. Equipment and facilities have received the highest in weightage in terms of the type of assistance that a doctor would require to establishing a clinic in case of both undergraduate and post graduate doctors. This is also due to problem of securing financing. In this situation, personal and professional growth sometimes takes upper-hand among the motivational factors.^{9,18}

Limitations of the study

Among the limitations of the study, less sample size constitutes a prominent one. Furthermore, the cross-sectional nature of the study kept aside the dynamicity of different factors that could affect the choice of the doctors at different phases of their life. Larger study with a prospective course is needed to enlighten the topic in a more comprehensive way.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed the many factors such as securing post-graduation, finance, and equipment that influence the career decision and establishment of clinic. However, we cannot generalize our findings as it was done on restricted respondents due to current COVID-19 pandemic situation. Nevertheless, this study was able find out the factors faced by respondent doctors for decision-making process throughout their career. Future studies are needed based on the finding of the present study.

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MM- Concept and design of the study, First draft of the manuscript Statistical analysis; **PKR** - Design of the study, Co-ordination, Result interpretation; **SRB-** Data collection, Clinical Examination, Revision of the manuscript; **PM-** Statistical analysis and data interpretation, Review of literature; **AKL-** Revision of the manuscript, Co-ordination, Result interpretation

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