

WHY ARE MORE WOMEN CHOOSING A CAREER IN DENTISTRY IN NEPAL?

Rajeshwar Reddy Kasarla,¹ Ganga Neupane,² Priyanka Anand,³ Anupa Wagle,⁴ Sabita Kandel,⁵ Laxmi Pathak⁶

ABSTRACT

Dentistry is a very compassionate field, making it perfect for anybody who wishes to assist others. Dentistry has always been a male-dominated field, but in the last two to three decades more and more women have started going to dental college, and the percentage of women in dentistry has been gradually increasing. There are now more women dentists than ever, and at present women graduates in dentistry outnumber men. Female dentists may find it difficult to strike a healthy work-life balance, but many of them do it with success. Given their intelligence, creativity, and resourcefulness, women are all powerful forces to be reckoned with. They serve as role models and aid others in successfully pursuing careers in dentistry. The behavioral mechanisms behind the choice of career differ between men and women, and the inclination to care for others is thought by some to be more present in women than it is in men. This article discusses the reasons that lead more and more women to choose dentistry as a profession in Nepal.

KEYWORDS

Career, Dentistry, Women.

1. Department of Microbiology, Universal College of Medical Sciences, Bhairahawa, Nepal
2. Resident, Department of Conservative Dentistry & Endodontics, Universal College of Medical Sciences, Bhairahawa, Nepal
3. Intern Doctor, Kantipur Dental College, Kathmandu, Nepal
4. Intern Doctor, Gandaki Dental College, Pokhara, Nepal
5. BDS 4th Year, Institute of Medicine, Kathmandu, Nepal
6. Department of Anaesthesiology & Critical Care Medicine, Universal College of Medical Sciences, Bhairahawa, Nepal

<https://doi.org/10.3126/jucms.v11i03.61615>

For Correspondence

Dr. K. Rajeshwar Reddy
Department of Microbiology
Universal College of Medical Sciences
Bhairahawa, Nepal
Email: reddysir4861@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

When the dentistry profession started to be standardized in the late 1800s, no more than one percent of dental students were women. Today studies show that in the majority of countries with available data, women graduates outnumber their male counterparts in dental colleges. Of course, the number of female dental graduates varies across the globe. In European countries in 2016, 70% of dental school graduates were women, 55% in France, 56% in the UK, while in the USA the gender ratio was almost equal.^{1,2}

As dentistry developed over the years, pioneering women broke traditional barriers for their gender and set the standards for the women who followed in their path as dental professionals. As early as 1859, the first woman dentist, Emeline Roberts Jones, established a regular dental practice in the United States.³ Lucy Beaman Hobbs Taylor in 1866 became the first woman in the world to graduate from a recognized dental college. In 1892, Dr Mary Stillwell-Kuedsel founded the Women's Dental Association, which was followed by the creation of the Federation of American Women Dentists (now the American Association of Women Dentists) in 1921. The first pediatric dentist in the USA, M. Evangeline Jordon, published the first book on pediatric dentistry, 'Dentistry Dental Book: Operative Dentistry for Children' in 1927.^{1,4}

In Nepal, in 2008, 60% of registered dentists were female.^{5,6} A study by Knevel RJM, in a dental college at Kathmandu, Nepal in September 2013, shows that 80% of the enrolled students were female.⁷ In Universal College of Medical Sciences, Bhairawah, Nepal, 67% in 2023, 86% in 2022, 76% in 2020, 70% in 2019 and 80% in 2018 of the enrolled students were female, which is consistent with global trends of greater numbers of female students in choosing dental profession.⁸

In a survey conducted during July-October, 2023, on 1st year and 2nd year BDS students, at College of Dental Sciences of Universal College of Medical Sciences, Bhairawah, Nepal, majority of students (89%) chosen dentistry because of their innate interest and passion and love to make people smile and improving oral health. They felt that dentistry is not only about creating and making smile but also a field of artistry and engineering. These observations were similar to other studies conducted across the globe.^{8,9}

Why more women are choosing dentistry?

The number of women in the pipeline for a career in dentistry has grown dramatically over the last two to three decades; more women than ever are joining the profession and changing it for the better.⁹⁻¹¹

1. Combining science and art dentistry offers a unique opportunity to combine technical skills with creative flair:

Dentistry often appeals to women because it mixes both science and art due to the growing emphasis on the aesthetics of the teeth, particularly in cosmetic dentistry operations like dental implants and veneers. The artistic side of the profession, where you get to shape and sculpt teeth is enjoyable, challenging and rewarding.^{9,12}

2. Flexibility and adaptability of working hours-juggling motherhood and a career in dentistry:

Why more women are choosing dentistry can probably of

flexibility and can set their own working hours.

Dentistry offers a variety of family-friendly work options that are a good fit for many women. The dental profession perfectly suits the modern lives of women juggling motherhood and a full-time career in dentistry; generating income and looking after kids and family. Dentistry is a very flexible occupation where one can work part-time or full-time.^{9,12,13}

3. Women bring a friendliness, compassion, nurturing, and consideration to their dental practice:

Women bring a friendliness, compassion, nurturing, and consideration to their dental practice. A key talent in dentistry is the ability to mix professionalism with a soothing, caring attitude, which is often shown more strongly by women. It is not that male dentists don't have these traits, but we tend to raise women to show these gentle, caring qualities more openly and easily. Being a good dentist is all about establishing relationships and women do that very effectively. Female dentists are generally very good at verbal communication and explaining procedures. Female dentists may also pay a little more attention to the fine details of the practice to create a less clinical atmosphere. They certainly create a calm and familiar environment for patients to help manage their anxiety and make their visit as relaxing as possible.^{14,15}

DISCUSSION

As more women are now studying dentistry, in the future dental practices with all female practitioners will become more common. Women involved in dentistry are as capable as men. However, some patients prefer a male practitioner.¹⁶ The idea that male dentists are more skilled is far less common now. Female dentists are generally now being treated as equal by patients and peers and by their male counterparts when they perform the same clinical tasks. Female dentists are generally very good at verbal communication and explaining procedures. Many patients, now prefer female dentists, some even observe that they have smaller hands that help dental procedures more comfortable.^{17,18} In addition, more women are engaging in the political side of dentistry. They are becoming involved in organizations like dental associations, committees and making a very positive contribution.^{19,20}

Both women and men found the financial aspects of a dental career equally important as a motive for attending dental school. The perceived flexibility of a dental career was also equally important to both men and women. On the other hand, male students rated business-related motives as being more important in their decision to pursue dental school than did female students. Conversely, female students rated caring or helping motives as more important than did their male counterparts.^{21,22}

CONCLUSION

More and more women are entering into dentistry and changing the face of dentistry because they feel they can make a difference and especially for patients who are nervous about seeing a dentist. Also dentistry combines artistry with science, and any dentist will tell you there's nothing more rewarding than seeing someone smile after their dental health is restored. Creating a good work life balance can also

be challenging for female dentists, but any women successfully combine a career with a rewarding personal life. Though the number of women in leadership roles in dental education has increased significantly over the past two to three decades, most of the top leadership positions in professional dental associations are still held by men, and stark gender inequalities persist in dental research and academics.

REFERENCES

1. Newton JT, Thorogood N, Gibbons DE. A study of the career development of male and female dental practitioners: *Br Dent J*. 2000;188:90-4.
2. Tiwari T. Gender Inequalities in the Dental Workforce: Global Perspectives. *Advances in Dental Research*. 2019;30(3):60-68.
3. Hyson J M. Women Dentists: The Origins. *Journal of the Californian Dental Association*. 2002;30(6):444-451.
4. Loevy HT, Kowitz AA. How the Middle West was won: women enter dentistry. *International Dental Journal*. 1998;48:89-95.
5. Dixit LP. Oral health needs and challenges of Nepalese children. *Dev Dent*. 2008;9(1):11-4.
6. Dixit H, Marahatta S. Medical education and training in Nepal: SWOT analysis. *Kathmandu Univ Med J*. 2008;6(3):412-20.
7. Knevel RJM, Gussy MG, Farmer J, Karimi L. Nepalese dental hygiene and dental students' career choice motivation and plans after graduation: a descriptive cross-sectional comparison. *BMC Med Educ*. 2015;15:219.
8. Adams TL. Feminization of professions: the case of women in dentistry. *Can J Sociology*. 2005;30(1):71-94.
9. Prasanna JS, Karunakar P, Sumadhura C, Aishwarya MD, Monica P, Sayed AS. Women dentists: Changing the face of dentistry. *J Oral Res Rev*. 2015;7:69-73.
10. Sinkford JC, Valachovic RW, Harrison S. Advancement of women in dental education: Trends and strategies. *J Dent Educ* 2003;67:79-83.
11. Bernabe E, Icaza JL, Delgado-Angulo EK. Reasons for choosing dentistry as a career: a study involving male and female first-year students in Peru. *Eur J Dent Educ*. 2006;10:236-241.
12. Stewart FM, Drummond JR. Women and the world of dentistry. *Br Dent J*. 2000;188:7-8.
13. Ayers KM, Thomson WM, Rich AM, Newton JT. Gender differences in dentists' working practices and job satisfaction. *J Dent*. 2008;36:343-50.
14. Pallavi S, Rajkumar G. Professional practice among woman dentist. *Journal of International Society of Preventive and Community Dentistry*. 2011;1(1):14-19.
15. McKay JC, Quiñonez CR. The feminization of dentistry: implications for the profession. *J Can Dent Assoc*. 2012;78:c1.
16. Smith MK, Dundes L. The implications of gender stereotypes for the dentist-patient relationship. *J Dent Educ*. 2008;72(5):562-70.
17. Gallagher JE, Morison S. Women in academic leadership: A chance to shape the future. *Journal of Dentistry*. 2019;87:45-48.
18. Kfoury MG, Moyses SJ, Moyses ST. Women's motivation to become dentists in Brazil. *J Dent Educ*. 2013 Jun;77(6):810-6.
19. Palepu A, Herbert CP. Medical women in academia: the silences we keep. *CMAJ*. 2002;167(8):877-9.
20. Zarkowski P. Advancement of women in academic and research careers: A working group report. *J Dent Educ*. 2006;70:47-8.
21. Reed MJ. The Role of Women in Dental Education: Monitoring the Pipeline to Leadership. *Journal of Dental Education*. 2012;76(11):1427-1436.
22. Rostami F, Ahmed AE, Best AM, Laskin DM. The changing personal and professional characteristics of women in oral and maxillofacial surgery. *J Oral Maxillofac Surg*. 2010;68(2):381-5.