

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Tiny Teeth, Big Responsibility: Knowledge, Practice and Future Perception of Undergraduate Dental Students Toward Pediatric Dentistry

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ABSTRACT

Background: Pediatric dentistry is a specialized branch of dental science that focuses on the oral health of infants, children, and adolescents. It encompasses preventive, diagnostic, and therapeutic care tailored to the unique needs of young patients. For undergraduate dental students, exposure to pediatric dentistry is an essential component of their training. Their knowledge, clinical practice experiences, and perceptions toward this specialty influence both their competence in managing pediatric patients and their willingness to pursue pediatric dentistry as a career. However, challenges such as limitations in delivering best treatment to child patient, afraid to treat young patient may affect the student's perception towards pediatric dentistry.

Objective: To assess undergraduate dental students' knowledge, clinical exposure, and future perception towards pediatric dentistry, and to understand how they view its importance, challenges and careers prospects.

Methodology: A cross-sectional questionnaire-based survey will be conducted among undergraduate dental students. It has 3 domain which will assess theoretical knowledge, practice and future perception of students. Then data will be analysed to identify trends and association between knowledge, practice and perception of students.

Result: Result of the study showed that both final year and interns have moderate level of knowledge, while interns are more interested in clinical practice than final year students.

Conclusion: Study concluded that preoccupation of pediatric dentistry is questionable. Students are not sure about preferring pediatric dentistry as a post graduate subject which is may be due to less awareness about the subject, vastness of the subject or may be due to less awareness of subject by the society.

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KEYWORDS

- Pediatric Dentistry • Undergraduate Dental Students • Future Perception
- Pedodontics • BDS Students

INTRODUCTION

After completing under graduation most important decision is to do post-graduation or not. Most of the students choose post-graduation because of enhanced quality of life, salaries, influence by parents, teacher and friends etc. Inspiration for deciding the post graduate subject is influenced by lot of factors such as family, teacher, interest in the subject, seats in interesting branch, expense fees, future scope, etc. As we know, Pediatric dentistry plays a very crucial role in the oral health of the patient, ensuring the lifelong oral health.

Pediatric dentistry provides primary, therapeutic, comprehensive as well as preventive treatment along with behaviour management for the children. Undergraduate dental students serve as future healthcare providers, and their preparedness in pediatric dentistry directly impacts pediatric oral health outcomes. The perception of pediatric dentistry among students is influenced by multiple factors, including academic curriculum, clinical exposure, and personal interest. Research has shown that pediatric dentistry is often perceived as a demanding specialty due to the need for young patient handling and communication skills. It is very important to assess that how under graduate dental students assess the pediatric dentistry as a course.

Hence the topic of the study is to assess the knowledge, clinical practice, and future

perceptions of undergraduate dental students toward pediatric dentistry. And the objectives are, to evaluate the level of knowledge of undergraduate dental students regarding pediatric dentistry. To assess the clinical practices and experiences of students in managing pediatric patients. To determine students' perceptions, interests, and career preferences related to pediatric dentistry.

METHODOLOGY

A study was carried in the department of Pediatric and Preventive Dentistry, SDM College of Dental Sciences and Hospital, Dharwad, India. A 17 self-administered questionnaire was prepared and validated and it consist of 4 different sections. The 1st section was of demographic data, 2nd section consists of knowledge related questions, 3rd section consists of practice related questions and 4th section consists of future perception related questions. A structured google form was prepared and distributed among the final BDS students and interns. Participants were asked several questions regarding the knowledge about the primary teeth, materials used to treat primary teeth, their confidence in treating pediatric patients and questions related to the Pediatric Dentistry. Total sample size for this study was 170 undergraduate dental students. Study design for this study is cross-sectional questionnaire-based survey. Responses were statistically analysed.

RESULT

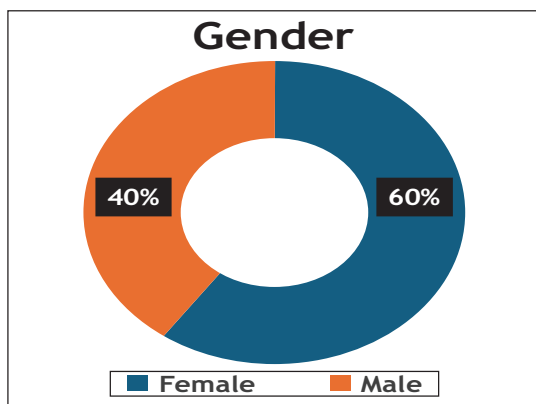


Figure 1: Gender

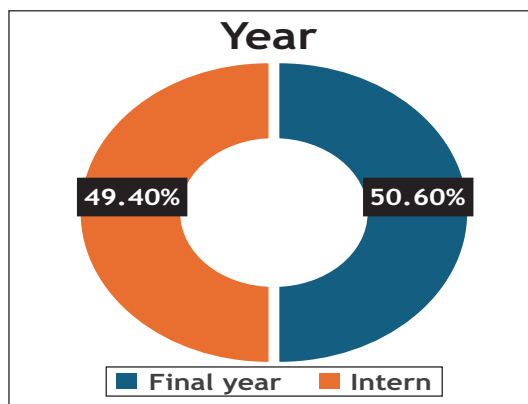


Figure 2: Year

The study consists of total 176 students. The result of the study showed the highest proportion of the female participants (60%) than the male (40%) participants (Figure 1). It has also showed that final year students (50.60%) responded in higher proportion than the interns (49.40%) (Figure 2).

The second section is of knowledge, which consist of 5 set of questions which showed that interns have more knowledge than final year in all 5 questions but it is statistically insignificant (p value is). The third section is set of questions related to practice, which showed that interns are more confident in treating young patient, performing procedures than final year students. Third section consist of questions related to future perception, which showed that final year students (43.8%) are more interested in pursuing post-graduation than interns (33.3%). When it comes to choosing pediatric dentistry as a subject for post-graduation final years (21.8%) shown more interest than interns (2.2%).

Table 1: Questions related to knowledge

Questions	Final Year	Interns
Q 1	42.5 %	48.3%
Q 2	19.1%	39.1%
Q 3	5.6%	31.0%
Q 4	83.1%	88.1%
Q 5	33.7%	41.4%

Table 2: Questions related to practice

Questions	Final Year	Interns
Q 1	31.0%	56.2%
Q 2	21.8%	24.7%
Q 3	15.7%	23.0%
Q 4	28.7%	52.8%
Q 5	34.5%	52.8%

Table 3: Questions related to future perception

Questions	Final Year	Interns
Q 1	43.8%	33.3%
Q 2	21.8%	2.2%
Q 3	49.4%	25.3%
Q 4	31.0%	64.0%
Q 5	26.4%	48.3%

DISCUSSION

Pediatric and preventive dentistry is one of the most important branch of dentistry but it is also most neglected among the all

the branches of dentistry. The third national review of health and nutrition (1988 - 1994) survey found that 1 in 5 children aged between 2 to 5 years of age have decayed teeth. That is why the study was designed to assess the knowledge, clinical practice, and future perceptions of undergraduate dental students toward pediatric dentistry. A questionnaire was prepared and divided into 4 different sections. First section consists of questions related to demographic data i.e. gender and the year of the students. Second section consist of questions related to knowledge about the subject. Each question has been given four options i.e. definitely yes, possibly, not sure and definitely no. Section three consist of practice related questions for that students have been given options like yes regularly, yes occasionally, rarely and never. The last section consists of questions related to future perception and options for that are definitely yes, possibly, not sure and definitely no. In the present study, female students have contributed more than the male students and final year students have also been contributed more than the interns.

In the knowledge related set of questions, in all the 5 questions interns have shown more knowledge than the final year students. It may be because interns are studying more for the preparation of entrance exam for the master's degree.

In the practice related section, interns have shown more interest and positive attitude in treating young patients, performing extractions, managing young patients than the final year students. This may be because of increased exposure of interns to the clinics and patients than the final year students. In the last section i.e. questions related to the future perception every question has shown variations in the responses. Final year students are more interested in pursuing post-graduation than the interns, as well as for choosing pediatric dentistry as a topic for the post-graduation. It may be because interns have more clinical exposure than the interns not only of pediatric dentistry but also of all the other departments. Many factors influence the students to decide whether to do post-graduation or not, which

branch to be taken for the post-graduation. Interest of the students, scope of that branch in the future, influence of teacher, parents and friends, vastness of the subject, expenditure of the fees for that branch, availability of seats in the interested branch, etc influence students in deciding which branch to be taken for the post-graduation.

This study has a few limitations that should be considered. Since the information was collected through self-reported responses, there is a possibility of response bias. Additionally, the participants were drawn from a single institution, which may affect the wider applicability of the results. Further multicentred research involving larger and more diverse student populations is recommended to gain a more comprehensive understanding of undergraduate dental students' perceptions of pediatric dentistry.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that both final year and interns have moderate level of knowledge, interns are more interested in treating the young patients than the final years but final years are more interested in choosing pediatric dentistry as a subject for post-graduation than interns. It may be because interns are more interested in other departments, vastness of the subject, future scope for the branch or may be due to financial conditions i.e. are parents willing to pay for the child's treatment or not, etc.

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