

Abstract 17:

Career choices and associated factors among medical undergraduates of University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka

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Background and objective: The medical career path starts broadly and narrows into specific specialties, but this transition is often poorly understood. Choosing a specialty is multifactorial. Understanding the factors that influence career choices is crucial for effective healthcare system design and addressing specialty imbalances. This study aims to describe career choices and associated factors among medical students of the University of Jaffna.

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 427 medical students from the 40th to 45th batches at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna. Data were collected using self-administered questionnaires via Google Forms. Data were entered and analysed using SPSS (version 26) software. Chi-squared test was used to assess associations at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results: Among 398 respondents, 79.6% had already decided their specialties. Most preferred specialties were general surgery, general medicine, paediatrics, dermatology and obstetrics/gynaecology; rheumatology, venereology, transfusion medicine, haematology, histopathology and radiology were least preferred. Gender significantly influenced choices; males preferred surgery ($p < 0.001$), while females favoured paediatrics ($p < 0.001$) and medicine ($p = 0.045$). Medicine-related specialties and obstetrics/gynaecology were preferred mostly by paraclinical students, while preclinical students favoured surgery-related specialties. Preference for paediatrics increased with academic phase. A desire to serve humanity was associated with the career choice of paediatrics ($p = 0.001$) and surgery-related fields ($p = 0.010$). Parental wishes ($p = 0.001$) and experience with patients ($p = 0.037$) were associated with a preference for obstetrics and gynaecology. Working conditions and working hours were associated with paediatrics and surgical fields. Job satisfaction ($p = 0.020$) and sense of personal fitness ($p = 0.011$) were significantly associated with surgical choices.

Conclusions and recommendations: A majority of medical students had already decided on their specialties, with a strong preference for clinical and high-demand fields. The associating factors highlights, importance of personal fulfilment, academic phase, gender and work-related factors in career selection. Promoting flexible rotation schedules that accommodate diverse student interests, ensuring gender equity in choices through career guidance, policy changes, and encouraging community-focused medical education may help to broaden specialty options and align academic goals with societal needs.

Keywords: Career choices, Specialisation, Medical undergraduates, Sri Lanka