



## Public Health Dentistry as a Career Option: Perceptions of Dental Interns in Bangalore City – A Qualitative Study

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Received: December 14, 2018; Published: February 13, 2019

### Abstract

The postgraduate course in the field of public health dentistry is offered in few states across India and only 294 Public Health Dentists are there in India and dental students are more inclined toward clinical specialties. The aspirations and reasons for foraying in to a particular specialty by an aspiring candidate in turn contribute a lot for the future of the particular specialty. Therefore, the aim of the present study is to determine the motives and perception about public health dentistry among dental interns, attending Dental Colleges in Bangalore city.

**Materials and Methods:** Focus group discussions were conducted among interns in English language in dental colleges in Bangalore. Participants individually answered the facilitator's questions. The focus group discussions were audiotaped and lasted approximately 60 minutes. Audio recordings and focus group notes from the sessions were transcribed and analysed.

**Results:** Two focus groups were conducted by the authors among interns. After verbatim, the transcript was coded into six different themes. The participants agreed they don't have much knowledge about Public Health Dentistry and opportunities in it.

**Conclusion:** Many students are not aware of the future prospects of the subject. There is a need to create awareness and inculcate interest among the students during their graduation.

**Keywords:** Career; Dental Interns; Public Health Dentistry; Perceptions

### Abbreviations

FGD: Focus Group Discussion; P.H.D: Public Health Dentistry

### Introduction

Dentists occupy an important position in society as professional health care workers. The opportunity to participate in dental education in many countries, especially in the developing ones, is limited to a small percentage of the community [1]. Approximately 300 colleges across India offers undergraduate course in dentistry [2] and Postgraduate course in various clinical branches is offered in almost all the colleges in India. After graduation, a dental surgeon faces a choice to go ahead with either clinical practice or pursue a

postgraduate study to obtain a master's degree (MDS) in one of the many specialties of dentistry. In India, for example, postgraduate masters' training is offered for a minimum of 3 years for any of the specialties. The ultimate decision of choosing a specialty for Post-graduation depends on various factors. Only a few studies have focused on the factors that affect one's choice of postgraduate training in the various disciplines. Results from various studies suggest that dental students are more inclined toward clinical specialties such as Conservative Dentistry and Endodontics, Orthodontics, Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, Pedodontics and Periodontics while Oral Medicine Diagnosis and Radiology, Oral Pathology and Public Health Dentistry were not favourably considered specialties for postgraduate training [3].

Hence this study was conducted to determine the motives and perceptions of dental interns, attending Dental Colleges in Bangalore city.

**Material and Methods**

- **Subjects and Methods:** The study was a qualitative research which was done to analyse the perceptions of dental interns about public health dentistry as a career option.
- **Study sampling technique:** Purposive sampling technique was used to identify individuals i.e dental interns with characteristics relevant to the study.
- **Inclusion criteria:** Interns who have finished their postings in the Department of Public Health Dentistry.
- **Consent:** Verbal consent was obtained from each participant who were willing to participate in the study.
- **Grounded theory:** The term grounded theory is often used in the research literature to refer to a variety of processes by which theory is derived from empirical data. Grounded theory methodology, however, as conceptualized by founders Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967), refers to a highly systematic set of procedures used to develop substantive theories of psychosocial phenomena (Schwandt, 2001) [4].
- **Focus group question guide:** A focus group discussion was conducted with the help of a question guide. Verbal data was collected using a tape recorder. Specially prepared open ended, semi structured questions were used for recording all the relevant data. The questions guide included the following contents depicted in table 1.
- **Pilot study:** One focus group interview consisting of six members was conducted as a part of a pilot study in order to check the feasibility and relevance of the prepared question guide in the oxford dental college. The population was not included in the main study.
- **Study design:** 2 focus group discussions were held, 6 members in each group so total study participants were 12. Each focus group discussion was guided by a moderator, who encouraged all participants to share their experiences and share their views freely and ensured the interview was not dominated by any single participant and every participant has equal chance to share their views. The discussions were conducted in the closed room of their respective colleges and were audio recorded. Both focus groups were audiotaped (primary method) and lasted approximately 60 min. One co-facilitator took field notes and recorded the tone of the focus group, the nature of the discussion, and nonverbal communication among focus groups participants. Data saturation was obtained after two FGD sessions so further sessions were not conducted.

- **Data analysis:** The focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim. The data was familiarized through multiple readings before analysis. The analysis was done using classic grounded theory method described by Glaser B.G., Strauss A.L. (1967). Initial open coding was done after reading through the data several times. Axial coding was done to identify relationships among the open codes followed by selective coding to finalize the themes and codes are depicted in table 2.

S.I.NO.	FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS
1.	Plans after B.D.S
2.	The choice of branch in M.D.S
3.	Motivation for that particular branch
4.	Preference of giving Public health dentistry as a first choice
5.	Heard of P.H.D/ COMMUNITY DENTISTRY before joining B.D.S.
6.	Your thinking about future prospects of the Public health dentistry
7.	Which part of the subject you like the most
8.	As a Public health dentist do you think will you be able to serve the community better
9.	Anyone would have inspired/ encouraged in taking Public health dentistry
10.	Your expectations from your career in any other branch you are aspiring about

**Table 1:** Depicts Focus group question guide.

CODES	THEME
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack clinical practice</li> <li>• Doesn't deal with patients</li> <li>• Emerging branch</li> </ul>	PERCEPTION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not considered as a specialist</li> <li>• Not much of inspiration</li> <li>• No money and fame</li> </ul>	CONCERNS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• India needs more of public health dentist to make aware of oral health</li> </ul>	AWARENESS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What role public health dentist on daily basis</li> <li>• Study about public or treat public</li> </ul>	CURIOSITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Serve to community better</li> <li>• Camps</li> </ul>	SOCIAL SERVICE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nobody tells about the opportunities</li> <li>• Nobody Inculcate interest in the subject</li> </ul>	GUIDANCE ABOUT SUBJECT

**Table 2:** Depicts codes and respective themes.

## Result

The six main themes derived from the study were as follows:

### Perceptions

Participants considered it as a non-clinical subject and thought they will forget their hand work and most of them were not aware about the subject itself.

One of the Intern said: "I don't have any knowledge about public health dentist. In my view it lacks clinical practice. I will lose my clinical work. Here in India go record, see and come back. In this department post graduates don't know R.C.T".

Another participant said "We don't know actually what is there in public health".

### Concerns

Participants were not clear where public health dentistry will be useful or not and as a public health dentist they won't be called as specialists.

One of the Intern said "It will be useful but don't know till what extent it will be useful".

Another Intern "I would rather be called as specialist than community dentist".

Most of the participants were also concerned about there is no one to inspire or make them aware about the subject. Participants also expressed their concerns regarding financial stability.

One of the Intern said "I don't know whose fault may be teachers or ours we were never interested. Probably teachers don't teach probably. If anybody could have shown the opportunities in P.H.D we might have shown the interest".

Another Intern said "There is not much of inspiration I feel".

As one of the Intern said "Money and fame are more in clinical branch".

### Awareness

Participants agreed there is a general lack of awareness among people about oral health and public health dentist.

One of the Intern said "I feel India needs more of public health dentist more than other developed countries".

Another Intern "One patient came to me and he had cervical abrasions asked to me why this has happened so I told him not to brush hard. He was just 45 years old. He asked am I not suppose to brush hard." can be an answer to it.

### Curiosity

Some of the participants were curious and aspire to become public health dentist.

One of the Intern said "On daily basis what role public health dentist will have? I will study about public or treat public".

### Social service

Some Participants considered it as a way to serve community better.

One of the Intern said "I will be able to serve community better if I become a Public Health Dentist".

### Guidance about subject

This was major concerns amongst the participants regarding no one to guide them about the scope and opportunities as public health dentist.

Participant stated that "may be anybody tells us about the opportunities, it will create a spark among us".

Other participant also stated that "If anybody could have shown the opportunities in P.H.D we might have shown the interest".

## Discussion

Among the various disciplines in dentistry, Public Health Dentistry forms the basis for dental health care services and it holds the key for developing awareness on the social aspects of the profession and the responsibility towards community, amidst all those who are engaged in the profession [5]. This study explored the perceptions of dental interns about the public health dentistry as a career option. Their current interest and future aspirations of the candidates pertaining to the Public Health Dentistry.

In our study participants stated that they were not aware about what the subject deals about and most of them were not aware about

future prospects of the particular branch. This findings were similar to study done by Singh G., *et al.* in 2011 who stated that the participants were not aware of the future prospects of the subject [6].

In the present study Participants considered it as a non-clinical subject and thought they will forget their hand work. This findings were similar to study done by Naidu GM., *et al.* where students considered it as a nonclinical speciality [5].

In our study only few participants were interested or curious about the speciality. Similar to the findings of the study done by Singh G., *et al.* in 2011 where when year wise comparison was done among students there was a slightly declining trend towards decrease in interest regarding the subject [6].

In this current study Participants also expressed their concerns regarding financial stability and they won't be called specialists. Similar to the findings in the study done by Gallagher J., *et al.* in 2008 where participants emphasized on having a career providing, professional status, financial benefits, job security, flexibility and independence and good quality of life [7].

In the current study participants also expressed their concerns about there is no one to inspire or make them aware about the subject similar to findings of the study done by Gallagher J., *et al.* in 2008 where students' initial motivation is being tempered by their experiences during their undergraduate degree programme [7].

In the present study Participants agreed there is a general lack of awareness among people about oral health and public health dentist can be a answer to it. Similar to findings by Tandon S in 2004, where only 2 percent of the specialists are being trained in community dentistry, whereas in a country like India where the majority of the population resides in the rural areas, there is greater need for these specialists [8].

## Conclusion

The findings from our study helps in better understanding of Interns' motivation, career expectations and difficulties in choosing public health dentistry as a career option.

Proper orientation on the subject (Public Health Dentistry) from the under graduation level is the need of the hour. Prior counselling of the students who are not aware of the future prospects of the subject should be done. It is necessary to broaden the limits of the subject spectrum from just being a lucrative teaching option in terms of financial interests, to a specialty which is much useful

to the people of the country [5] Research in the field of dentistry is progressing at mightier speed worldwide. The situation of dental research in India is still in the nascent stage even though we have more than 300 dental colleges in India, which are more than any number as compared to other countries. However, the representation of India toward Dental Public Health(DPH) research on the international platform is negligible. The newer opportunities in DPH research are epidemiological studies for the development of vaccines to prevent oral diseases, salivary proteomics in screening of oral cancers, epigenetics, oral health literacy, role of dentists in disaster management, and problem-based learning [9].

## Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the Interns of Dayanand Sagar Dental college, V.S Dental College, Oxford Dental College and Staff and my Post Graduate colleagues of Department of Public Health Dentistry.

## Conflict of Interest

None declared.

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**Volume 3 Issue 3 March 2019**

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