

**Original Article:****Factors Influencing Medical Students in Choosing Medicine as a Career****Authors:**

**Zayapragassarazan Zayabalaradjane**, Additional Professor, Department of Medical Education,  
**Abhishekh B**, Associate Professor, Department of Transfusion Medicine,  
**Madhusudhanan Ponnusamy**, Associate Professor, Department of Nuclear Medicine,  
**Nivedita Nanda**, Associate Professor, Department of Biochemistry,  
**Kadambari Dharanipragada**, Professor, Department of Surgery and Medical Education,  
**Santosh Kumar**, Department of Medical Education,  
**Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research (JIPMER), Puducherry-605006, India.**

**Address for Correspondence****Abhishekh B**

Assistant Professor,  
 Department of Transfusion Medicine,  
 Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research (JIPMER),  
 Puducherry-605006, India.  
**E-mail:** drabhighowda@gmail.com.

**Citation**

Zayabalaradjane Z, Abhishekh B, Ponnusamy M, Nanda N, Dharanipragada K, Kumar S. Factors Influencing Medical Students in Choosing Medicine as a Career. *Online J Health Allied Scs.* 2018;17(4):5. Available at URL: <https://www.ojhas.org/issue68/2018-4-5.html>

Submitted: Dec 8, 2018; Accepted: Jan 10, 2019; Published: Jan 30, 2019

**Abstract:** Motivation is an important factor influencing important outcomes in medical education. The choice of medicine as a higher study depends upon various factors such as interest in the medical field, good job opportunities, a desire to serve others, medical background of the parents and many more. This study is aimed at identifying those factors influencing medical students in choosing medicine as a career. As part of the first day of the foundation program for first year MBBS students of a tertiary care teaching hospital, the students were asked to introduce themselves in front of faculty, parents of the students, and fellow batch mates and also to say in their own words, "Why did they choose medicine as their career?" in a few sentences. The responses from 141 students were compiled and subjected for qualitative analysis. This study found out that there are several factors influencing the choice of career in medicine, however, highly influencing factors among this group were found to be the influence by parents and the perceived respect that they would get in the society. The responses were further grouped into different themes and discussed with reference to similar studies conducted in other parts of the world.

**Key Words:** Undergraduate Medical Education, MBBS Selection, First year Medical students, Motivation, Medicine as a career.

**Introduction:**

Medical students' motivation for studying medicine have been found to have impact on multiple aspects of their learning at medical school (1,2). This is an important area of investigation because medical school students are expected to graduate with professionalism which prepares them for providing care for patients and a commitment to health care needs of the society. It also prepares them for continuous learning of skills and knowledge (3). Students are admitted into medical schools largely based on their previous academic performance (4).

The choice of medicine as a higher study depends upon various factors such as interest in the medical field, good job opportunities, a desire to serve others, medical background of the parents and many more (1,2,5). In future, increase in the number of healthcare professionals is dependent on the career interest among present undergraduate medical students. Based on their interest to pursue their specialty, the availability of medical doctors in each specialty could be done (6). The choice of a career in the medical field is a complex personal decision influenced by a multitude of factors. Career choices are influenced by both graduates' inclination before starting medical school as well as any exposure during training in medical school (7).

Understanding the factors that motivate students to choose medicine as their professional education helps the providers of medical education to understand the characteristics of the learners and their expectations when they enrol for the MBBS programme. It is essential for the teachers to be aware of their learners perception about choosing a career in medicine; thereby their learning can be facilitated effectively (7,8). The aim of this pilot study was to have an understanding about medical students' perceptions and to understand the underlying motivating factors that led them to consider a career in medicine. This article is an analysis of the responses of first year students on choosing medicine as their career during their foundation program held in an institution of national importance and also tertiary care teaching hospital.

**Results**

As part of the first day of the foundation program for first year MBBS students the students were asked to introduce themselves in front of faculty, parents of the students, and fellow batch mates and also to say in their own words, "Why did they choose medicine as their career?" in a few sentences. The responses from 141 students were compiled and subjected

for qualitative analysis. The responses could be grouped into the following 8 categories. The most commonly mentioned reasons were:

1. Interest in knowing about human body, health, and diseases - 12% (17/141)
2. Interest in health research - 5.6% (8/141)
3. Influence by parents, other family members and relatives - 40.4% (57/141)
4. Impressed by the role of doctor in society and want to serve the society - 28.3% (40/141)
5. Personal experience - 7% (10/141)
6. Consider medical profession as a noble profession - 12.76% (18/141)
7. Took it as a challenge (Challenge as motivating factor) - 2.8% (4/141)
8. Miscellaneous factors (Ambition, just got a seat not to miss the opportunity, free education, etc) - 4.2% (6/141)

Further, the above responses could be grouped into the following four themes of possible motivating factors to join medicine:

1. Humanitarian (14.2%) – serve the poor, serve the society, to fulfil doctor Vs population ratio, personal experience about disease and health
2. Scientific (14.2%) – interest in biology, human body, disinterest in other subjects like mathematics
3. Societal (17.8%) – respect from society, money, parental wish, family tradition,
4. Personal (53.9%) – free education, accepted whatever that comes in their way, use of talent to the best possible to get good higher education, challenges posed by others, doctors are considered next to God

### Discussion

This study showed that various reasons underlie the decision of students to join medical school. The factors that influenced decision-making are multiple and the process appears to be complex. 28.3% of the students were impressed by the role of doctor in society and want to serve the society and hence they opted medicine as their career. This observation corroborates with the findings of Kooshki et al. (9) who have identified the motivational factors influencing students to join medical studies in different parts of the globe. They identified enjoying a good social status and service to the community as major factors for choosing medicine as a career by medical students. Tiwari et al. (7) reported that first year MBBS students' reasons for choosing medicine as their higher education for they want to help poor, earn money, personal development and influenced by some doctor relative. These were stated as important factors for decision making in joining a medical school. These findings are in agreement with the present study where 40.4% of the participants have reported that their decision to take up medicine as their career was influenced by their parents, other family members and relatives. Ayuob et al. (8) in his study identified "to help patients, interest in medical field and being prestigious career" as the commonest causes of choosing the medical profession among the 2nd year students. This reflects the findings of the present study where 12% and 5.6% of the participants have reported that interest in knowing about human body, health and diseases and interest in health research respectively as factors that influenced their choice for medicine as their career.

Woodward et al. (4) identified six themes as the most commonly mentioned reasons for wanting to become a doctor. They are: desire to help and the influence of family and friends, via role modelling and verbal encouragement, an interest from young age, being attracted by the job prospects and having an intellectual and science capacity. Goel et al. (3) classified the main motivating factors that emerged out of his literature survey on the motivational factors influencing

students to join medical studies in different parts of the globe as scientific (interest in science / medicine, social interest and academia, flexible work hours and work independence), societal (prestige, job security, financial security) and humanitarian (serving the poor and under privileged) in high, upper-middle and lower-middle income countries, respectively. He also stated that his classification were comparable to Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory of motivation. Studies conducted by Tiwari et al. (7) reported that 91% of medical Students were satisfied with the medical school but still some of them have regrets and Pruthi et al. (10) reported that several students do not have a defined career plan and opt for a career in medicine because they are influenced by family members. Some students were dissatisfied with the curriculum and expressed that they would not like to pursue the course if given a second chance. Majority (54%) of the respondents had personal reasons for joining medicine rather than humanitarian, social or scientific reasons. Other interesting observations noted in this study is that none of the respondents had mentioned the role of their school teachers as a motivating factor to join medicine. Highly influencing factors among this group were found to be the influence by parents and the perceived respect that they would get in the society (service to the society). It also raises a query whether influence by parents could be perceived as pressure. Motivation is an important factor in medical education influencing important outcomes and is also influenced by autonomy, competence and relatedness. This study finds some evidence in support of the findings of Kusurkar et al. (1). These findings may also inform policy makers to frame proper selection strategies or procedure to identify the right candidates for their medical schools. The findings of the study can be used by the teachers for designing teaching-learning strategy and for organizing suitable learning experiences to suit the heterogeneous interest and attitude of learners towards learning medicine. Assessing the initial motivation to learn a particular discipline is a crucial step in addressing the currently existing human resource needs of healthcare. Also, it is essential that the initial motivation is sustained or improved during the course period. Hence it is pertinent to have an understanding of the perceptions and motivating factors of medical students, which influenced their career choice. However, more research is needed to identify the factors that influences the students to choose medicine as their career in a large scale. These influencing/motivating factors may vary from to country depending on the socio-cultural, politico-economical, professional and technological aspects prevailing in that country. Further, this kind of reflective writing enhances personal and professional development among the stakeholders.

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