

Reason for joining the medical profession: Passion or parental pressure

Rohma Malik¹, Urwa Ashfaq², Beshair Aziz³, Allahdad Khan⁴, Ayesha Zafar⁵, Muhammad Farhan Jamil⁶

Abstract

Objective: To determine the factors that influence medical students' decision to pursue a career in medicine, and to assess their level of satisfaction with their decision.

Method: The descriptive, cross-sectional study was conducted at the Nishtar Medical University, Multan, Pakistan, from July to October 2023, and comprised first year medical students of the 2023-24 academic session. Data was collected using a questionnaire-based survey form. Data was analysed using SPSS 23.

Results: Of the 174 students with mean age 20.1±1.4 years, 93(53.4%) were males with mean age 19.9±1.5 years, and 81(46.6%) were females with mean age 20.3±1.2 years ($p>0.05$). For 121(69.5%) students, 'parental pressure' was the primary factor, followed by 'passion' for 41(23.6%), 'inspired by others' 3(1.7%), 'noble profession' 2(1.1%), 'monetary gains' 3(1.7%) and 'just by chance' 4(2.3%). There were 26(14.9%) subjects who had conducted thorough research before deciding to pursue the profession. For 85(48.9%) students, personal interest played a minor role in career selection. Overall, 88(50.6%) students were completely satisfied with the decision, 12(6.9%) had concerns, and 74(42.5%) were dissatisfied.

Conclusion: A significant number of students entered the medical profession under parental pressure. Only about half of the students were satisfied with their decision.

Keywords: Students, Medicine, Career choice, Medical students, Motivation. (JPMA 74: 525; 2024)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47391/JPMA.20903>

Introduction

Career selection is one of the most important decisions that people make in life. Medicine is no doubt one of the most revered and the noblest professions among various career choices.¹

Medicine is regarded as the best career choice in developing countries like Pakistan. Many young Pakistani students nurture the dream of becoming doctors, driven by the noble aspiration of contributing positively to society.

Some individuals are drawn towards the profession due to a genuine affinity for the field, their innate curiosity about the human body, and because of their enthusiasm to alleviate human suffering.² Others find themselves on this path due to parental expectations, striving to honour their family's legacy³ or upholding a family tradition of academic excellence. This pressure leads to undue stress, burnout and lack of motivation among medical students.

Also, for some, the prospect of financial stability and

^{x1-3,5}2nd Year MBBS Student, Nishtar Medical University, Multan, Pakistan;

⁴Final Year MBBS Student, Nishtar Medical University, Multan, Pakistan;

⁶Department of Community Medicine, Nishtar Medical University, Multan, Pakistan.

Correspondence: Rohma Malik. e-mail: mrohma567@gmail.com

ORCID ID: 0009-0008-3366-9735

Submission completed: 03-06-2024 **1st Revision received:** 09-07-2024

Acceptance: 14-12-2024 **2nd Revision received:** 13-12-2024

prosperity forms a compelling incentive, prompting them to envision medicine as a lucrative avenue. They aspire to become doctors for a better lifestyle and high social status.⁴

Chances and opportunities also play a crucial role in career choices. Some find themselves in the world of medicine due to a fortunate alignment of circumstances — an unforeseen twist of fate that steers them onto this path.

There is a relative literature gap about the motivational factors responsible for career decisions of medical students in Pakistan. The current study was planned to fill the gap by determining the factors influencing medical students' decisions to pursue a career in medicine, and to assess their level of satisfaction with their decision.

Subjects and Methods

The descriptive, cross-sectional study was conducted at the Nishtar Medical University (NMU), Multan, Pakistan, from July to October 2023. Institutional Ethical Review Board (IERB) Nishtar Medical University, Multan, Pakistan approved this study in the meeting held on 08-06-2023, letter reference number 8479/NMU. The sample size was calculated with 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error using the formula:⁵

$$n = Z^2 \times p \times (1-p) / E^2$$

where n was the sample size, Z was the confidence level, p was the estimated prevalence derived from a pilot study that was conducted ahead of the main survey, and E was

the margin of error. The sample was raised using non-probability convenience sampling technique. Those included were 1st year medical students of the 2023-24 academic session who furnished informed consent to participate. Those not willing to participate were excluded.

Data was collected using a semi-structured, self-administered questionnaire based on similar studies.^{6,7} It was pilot-tested on a group of 15 students to validate its effectiveness. The participants were asked for their opinion regarding the clarity and accuracy of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was revised based on the feedback, but the responses were not included in the final study. A structured questionnaire was then designed and subsequently utilised for the final study. Other than demographic data, the questionnaire explored the factors that motivated the students to choose the medical profession as a career, and their satisfaction with their decision.

Data was stored in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, and analysed using SPSS 23. Data was expressed as frequencies and percentages, or as mean±standard deviation, as appropriate. Unpaired independent sample t-test was used where appropriate. $P < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

Results

Of the 174 students with mean age 20.1 ± 1.4 years, 93(53.4%) were males with mean age 19.9 ± 1.5 years, and 81(46.6%) were females with mean age 20.3 ± 1.2 years ($p = 0.068$). For 121(69.5%) students, 'parental pressure' was the primary factor, followed by 'passion' for 41(23.6%), 'inspired by others' 3(1.7%), 'noble profession' 2(1.1%), 'monetary gains' 3(1.7%) and 'just by chance' 4(2.3%) (Figure).

There were 26(14.9%) subjects who had conducted thorough research before deciding to pursue the profession. For 85(48.9%) students, personal interest played a minor role in career selection. Overall, 88(50.6%) students were completely satisfied with the decision, 12(6.9%) had concerns, and 74(42.5%) were dissatisfied (Table).

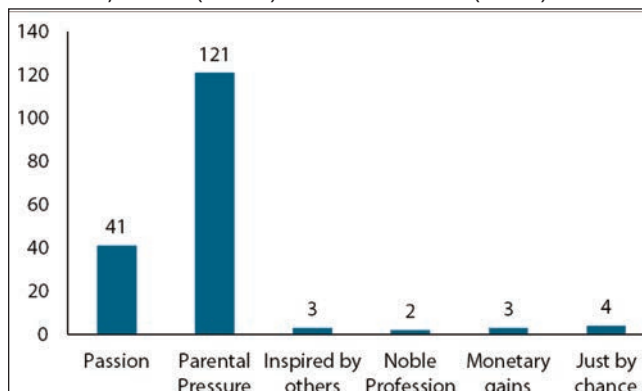


Figure: Reasons for joining the medical profession.

Open Access

Table-1: Demographic data of the participants and their responses to the survey questionnaire.

Variable	n (%)
Gender	
Male	93 (53.4)
Female	81 (46.6)
Reasons for joining medical profession	
Passion	41 (23.6)
Parental Pressure	121 (69.5)
Inspired by others	3 (1.7)
Noble Profession	2 (1.1)
Monetary gains	3 (1.7)
Just by chance	4 (2.3)
Influence of personal interests on career choice	
Primary driving force	40 (23.0)
Have a minor role	85 (48.9)
No impact	49 (28.2)
Family or Parental Pressure	
Significant pressure	58 (33.3)
There was pressure but not overwhelming	54 (31.0)
No pressure	62 (35.6)
How important was it for you to fulfil the desire of your parents?	
Extremely important	105 (60.3)
Somewhat important	63 (36.2)
Not important	6 (3.4)
Did you independently research before pursuing medical field?	
Thoroughly researched	26 (14.9)
Briefly researched	67 (38.5)
No	81 (46.6)
How satisfied are you with your decision?	
Completely satisfied	88 (50.6)
There are some concerns	12 (6.9)
Not satisfied	74 (42.5)
Do you believe that passion is crucial for success?	
Yes	89 (51.1)
Passion is important but not the sole determinant of success	80 (46.0)
No	5 (2.9)

Discussion

The current study was conducted at NMU, Multan, which is one of the largest public-sector universities in Pakistan, and caters to students from all across the Punjab province, including those from minority groups for whom there is a reserved quota of seats.

In the study, 121(69.5%) students said they had been compelled by their parents to enter the field of medicine. The reason for such a large number of students joining medicine just because of parental pressure is an indication of cultural forces at play. Children are generally not given the freedom by their parents in Pakistan to choose the profession of their interest. An earlier study conducted in Rawalpindi reported that 31.7% of its sample of medical students had joined the medical profession under parental pressure⁶. The corresponding number in a study done in Islamabad was 17%.⁷

Moreover, in the study, only 23.6% students had joined the field of medicine because of their passion. A study in Iraq reported 61.8%.⁸

In the current study 1.7% students had entered the field because of financial prospects compared to 3.2% reported by a study in India.⁹ In a study in Poland, the principal motivation factor was the desire to serve the humanity and interest in the field, followed by prestige and monetary gains.¹⁰

According to a cross-sectional study India, 41% students were influenced by their family members, and 17% chose the field to fulfil their parents' wishes. More than 30% of the students said they would not choose medicine as a career if given another chance.¹¹

In the study, 42.5% students were not satisfied with their decision to join the medical field. Students are usually dissatisfied when they have to give their full potential to a highly demanding field in which they lack motivation and interest. Moreover, long study hours and sleep deprivation can also account for dissatisfaction. A study in Egypt reported that only 26% students were dissatisfied with their decision.¹²

Only 50.6% of the current students were satisfied with their decision, while 6.9% showed some concerns. A study in India reported a satisfaction rate of 91.34% medical students.¹³

To enhance students' satisfaction, they must be allowed and encouraged to make an informed decision about choosing medicine as a career. Otherwise, they will experience burnout due to a lack of interest. A study in India showed that students who chose medicine because of parental pressure had higher stress levels (69.0%).¹⁴ The culture of parents forcing their children to choose medicine must be discouraged. Only individuals compassionate about the profession should pursue medicine as a career. These individuals are more likely to be competent and satisfied, and this will ultimately lead to better patient outcomes and a more fulfilling career.

Career counselling must be provided to students interested in medicine to ensure they are fully aware of the realities of the field. They must be informed about the educational requirements, the work environment, and the potential challenges and rewards of working in the field. This will help students make informed decisions about their career path, and prevent them from being misled by misconceptions or unrealistic expectations.

The current study has limitations owing to its single-centre orientation. This was owing to financial constraints that did not permit a multicentre approach. Additionally, the findings cannot be generalised due to a potential selection

bias in the study design.

Conclusion

Most of the students had been compelled by their parents to pursue a career in medicine due to its esteemed status and societal pressure. There is a need to address the issue. If neglected, this pressure can lead to demotivation and a lack of empathy among medical students. Educational seminars and career counselling sessions should be designed to motivate and encourage young individuals to pursue the fields of their interest.

Disclaimer: None.

Conflict of Interest: None.

Source of Funding: None.

References

1. Zaheer A. The Lost Doctors. *Pak J Med Sci* 2022;38:2053-5. doi: 10.12669/pjms.38.8.7022
2. Saad SM, Fatima SS, Faruqi AA. Students' views regarding selecting medicine as a profession. *J Pak Med Assoc* 2011;61:832-6.
3. Shahab F, Hussain H, Inayat A, Shahab A. Attitudes of medical students towards their career—perspective from Khyber-Pukhtunkhwa. *J Pak Med Assoc* 2013;63:1017-20.
4. Kooshki A, Akbarzadeh R, Rivandi M. Medicine Students Reasons for Choosing Medicine as a Career and Changes in Their Motivation During the Course. *J Biomed* 2016;1:e5987. doi: 10.17795/jmb-5987.
5. Pourhoseingholi MA, Vahedi M, Rahimzadeh M. Sample size calculation in medical studies. *Gastroenterol Hepatol Bed Bench* 2013;6:14-7.
6. Zeb S. Reasons for Joining the Medical Field. *J Rawalpindi Med Coll* 2014;18:151-2.
7. Waseem S, Romann R, Davies BM, Rawal J, Hull P, Carrothers A, et al. Major trauma care at a regional trauma centre during the COVID-19 lockdown in England. *Ann R Coll Surg Engl* 2022;104:594-9. doi: 10.1308/rcsann.2021.0262
8. Al-Hemiyari N, Al-Nuaimi AS, Al-Saffar H, Randall I. Why People Apply to Medical School in Iraq? *J Med Educ Curric Dev* 2017;4: 2382120517726997. doi: 10.1177/2382120517726997
9. Rani NA, Nusrath A, Dhanalakshmi TA. Medical profession as career—Pressure or passion: A cross sectional survey among undergraduate medical student. *Int J Med Sci Educ* 2016;3:322-7.
10. Gąsiorowski J, Rudowicz E, Safranow K. Motivation towards medical career choice and future career plans of Polish medical students. *Adv Health Sci Educ Theory Pract* 2015;20:709-25. doi: 10.1007/s10459-014-9560-2
11. Pruthi S, Pandey R, Singh S, Aggarwal A, Ramavat A, Goel A. Why does an undergraduate student choose medicine as a career. *Natl Med J India* 2013;26:147-9.
12. Kabil NS, Allam GG, Abd El-Geleel OM. Motivational reasons for choosing dentistry as a professional career & factors affecting specialty choice among final year dental students. *Future Dental Journal* 2018;4:308-13. Doi: 10.1016/j.fdj.2018.04.002
13. Tiwari R, Jain V, Arya R, Dwivedi S, Shrivastava D, Tiwari S. A study to assess the perceptions of first year medical students for choosing medical school as a career. *Int J Res Med Sci* 2016;4:2649-55. Doi: 10.18203/2320-6012.ijrms20161926
14. Tangade PS, Mathur A, Gupta R, Chaudhary S. Assessment of Stress Level among Dental School Students: An Indian Outlook. *Dent Res J (Isfahan)* 2011;8:95-10.

Author Contribution:

RM: Concept, drafting, writing, review, editing and investigation.

UA: Drafting, writing, review, editing and investigation.

BA: Drafting, writing, review and editing.

AK: Methodology, data curation, software, validation, formal analysis and visualisation.

AZ: Investigation, resources and drafting.

MFJ: Supervision and project administration.