

# Evaluation of Dental Students' Sociodemographic Characteristics and Perspectives on Dentistry

## Diş Hekimliği Fakültesi Öğrencilerinin Sosyodemografik Özelliklerinin ve Mesleğe Yönelik Perspektiflerin Değerlendirilmesi

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** There are numerous factors that play a role in a student's selection of a profession, including examinations that need to be passed before being admitted into a programme such as dentistry. The aim of this study was to investigate the sociodemographic characteristics of the students admitted to the Pamukkale University Faculty of Dentistry based on their Student Selection and Placement Examination score, to determine their reasons for entering dental school and to examine their expectations from the dental profession.

**Methods:** We administered a questionnaire to the first-, second-, and third-year students of the Pamukkale University Faculty of Dentistry. The questionnaire collected the students' gender, type of high school they graduated from, the region of Turkey they were from, their reasons for selecting dental school and their expectations about dentistry.

**Results:** Overall, 69.5% of the students entered the faculty of dentistry voluntarily. In addition, 70.3% of the students stated that would still enter dental school if they were to take the placement examination again. The majority of students stated that it is important for a dentist to be helpful to people. Moreover, a significant proportion of the students planned to continue with dental specialisation after graduating from dental school.

**Conclusion:** Willingly choosing to attend dental school and to become a dentist would help students cope with the myriad challenges they will experience in their education and professional lives. In addition, the fact that students' financial gain expectations when they become dentists remain in the background will ensure that more attention is paid to professional ethics.

**Keywords:** Dentistry, Students, Specialisation

### Öz

**Amaç:** Diş hekimliği gibi bir programa kabul edilmeden önce kazanılması gereken sınavlar da dahil olmak üzere, öğrencinin meslek seçiminde rol oynayan çok sayıda faktör vardır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Pamukkale Üniversitesi Diş Hekimliği Fakültesi'ni Öğrenci Seçme ve Yerleştirme sınavında kazanan öğrencilerin sosyodemografik özelliklerini araştırmak ve öğrencilerin diş hekimliği eğitimi tercih etmelerini etkileyen nedenleri ve meslekten beklentilerini belirlemektir.

**Yöntemler:** Bu amaçla Pamukkale Üniversitesi Diş Hekimliği Fakültesindeki 1., 2. ve 3. sınıf öğrencilerine bir anket uyguladık. Anket öğrencilerin cinsiyeti, yaşadıkları bölge, mezun oldukları okul, diş hekimliği fakültesini seçim nedeni ve diş hekimliği mesleğine ilişkin beklentilerini içermektedir.

**Bulgular:** Genel olarak, öğrencilerin %69,5'inin diş hekimliği fakültesini gönüllü olarak tercih etmiştir. Ayrıca öğrencilerin %70,3'ü tekrar sınava girselerdi diş hekimliği fakültesini tercih edeceklerini belirtti. Öğrencilerin büyük bir kısmı insanlara faydalı olmanın önemli olduğunu belirtmişlerdir. Ayrıca öğrencilerin önemli bir bölümünün uzmanlık eğitimi planladığı görülmüştür.

**Sonuç:** Diş hekimliği fakültesini ve diş hekimi olmayı isteyerek seçmek, öğrencilerin eğitim ve mesleki yaşamlarında karşılaşacakları sayısız zorlukla başa çıkmalarına yardımcı olacaktır. Aynı şekilde öğrencilerin maddi kazanımla ilgili beklentilerinin arka planda olması meslek etiğine daha fazla ilgi gösterilmesine yardımcı olacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Diş Hekimliği, Öğrenciler, Uzmanlık.



## INTRODUCTION

A profession is defined as a paid occupation that requires knowledge and skills acquired by a rigorous, formal education. A professional receives respect from society and has a high place in it.<sup>1,2</sup> People prefer a job that aligns with their abilities and desires. When their job aligns with these factors, their level of happiness in their life could increase. However, when there is mismatch, or when people do not care, they might be subjected to unhappiness and excessive stress.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, willing choosing a career plays a key role in a person's life.

Dentistry is a branch of medicine that involves the diagnosis, prevention and treatment of the oral area and maxillofacial diseases.<sup>3</sup> Dentistry represents a moral contract supported by a set of values, behaviours and relationships between dentists and society.<sup>4</sup> Hence, professional responsibility and accountability are critical parts of dentistry.<sup>5</sup> Students who select dentistry as their profession have various career and business opportunities: they can be a general practitioner or receive additional training to specialise in specific areas.<sup>6</sup> In Turkey, there are eight dental specialties: periodontology; orthodontics; oral, dental and maxillofacial surgery; pedodontics; prosthodontics; endodontics; restorative dentistry; and oral, dental and maxillofacial radiology.<sup>7</sup> Dental education and practice are difficult for both dental students and professionals.<sup>3</sup> Various factors cause stress in dentistry such as the limited treatment time for each patient, non-cooperation from patients, financial matters and the highly technical and intensive nature of the profession.<sup>8</sup>

Based on the high level of stress associated with dentistry, it is crucial for students to willingly choose dentistry as their profession. Otherwise, they will be exposed to excessive stress and anxiety. In present study, we evaluated the socio-demographic characteristics of the dental students admitted to the Pamukkale University Faculty of Dentistry based on their high score on the Student Selection and Placement Examination. We also examined the reasons why students preferred to start dental education and their expectations from the dental profession.

## METHODS

We performed a cross-sectional and descriptive study. We included first-, second- and third-year students of the Pamukkale University Faculty of Dentistry (the only available classes of the Pamukkale University Faculty of Dentistry in 2019). This study was approved by Pamukkale University Non-Invasive Clinical Research Ethics Committee (22/01/2019-02). This study was approved by the University Non-Invasive Clinical Research Ethics Committee (22/01/2019-02). Note that we previously presented the results from this study as an oral presentation at 2nd International Meandros Dental Congress.

The above-mentioned classes comprised 260 students, each of whom received a questionnaire of 15 questions divided into two parts. The first part consisted of 10 social demographic questions that asked the students to provide their gender, the type of high school they attended, the region where they lived prior to entering dental school, their reasons for choosing dentistry, their expectations from dentistry after graduating from dental school and their views on dentistry. The second part asked for the student's opinions regarding the dental profession, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale.

Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Participants were informed of the aim and benefits of the survey. Before the study was started, written permissions were obtained from the students who participated in the study.

## Statistical Analysis

The results for the first part of the questionnaire (the first 10 questions) are presented as percentages. We analysed the results from the second part of the questionnaire by using the chi-square test. We considered  $P < .05$  to be statistically significant. We used SPSS Statistics for Windows Version 23 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA) for the analysis.

## RESULTS

Each student answered all the questions. Of the participants, 60% are women and 40% are men. The first-year class comprised 39.6% of the participants, the second-year class comprised 34.2% of the participants and the third-year class comprised 26.2% of the participants. Considering the high school from which the students graduated, 32.2% graduated from a science high school, 41.5% graduated from an Anatolian high school, 16.1% graduated from a private high school and 10.2% graduated from other high schools. The regions from which the students came included Aegean (52.5%), Marmara (14.4%), Central Anatolia (11%), Mediterranean (10.2%), Black Sea (4.2%), South East Anatolia (4.2%) and Eastern Anatolia (3.4%).

The majority (69.5%) of the students stated that they entered the faculty of dentistry voluntarily; on the other hand, 30.5% of the students expressed that they entered unintentionally. Additionally, 70.3% said that if they were to pass the entrance exam again, they would still choose to attend dental school. The other 29.7% said they would not attend dental school even if they passed the exam.

About three quarters of the students (74.5%) reported that they planned to take the Specialisation Education in Dentistry Entrance Examination after graduating from dental school. The remaining students stated they planned to continue their career as a general practitioner (Table 1).

In addition, the students reported a desire for an academic career (25.4%), professional satisfaction (24.6%), social status, interest in a specialty (16.9%) and financial security (10.2%) as the reasons to seek specialised education (Table 2).

**Table 1.** The expectations from the professions.

Expectations	Percentage(%)
Pass the Dentistry Entrance Exam immediately	52.5
Pass the Dentistry Entrance Exam after studying for a certain time	22.0
Gain Money immediately	11.9
Be a good researcher	6.8
Be a good general practitioner	1.7
Other	5.1
Total	100

**Table 2.** The reasons of pass the Dentistry Entrance Exam.

The reasons	Percentage(%)
Academic career request	25.4
Professional satisfaction	24.6
Social statue	16.9
An interest in a specialty	16.9
Income satisfaction	10.2
Other	5.9
Total	100

Regarding the student's opinions about dentistry (Table 3), more than three fourths of the students expressed that they care about helping people. Although more students from the first-year class thought being helpful was the most important part of the dental

profession, there was no significant difference between the classes ( $P = .272$ ). More students in the first-year class expressed that they cared about respectability more than other classes, but there was no significant difference between the classes ( $P = .263$ ). Only 0.8% of students stated that respectability was not important to them. Financial gain was very important for 42.4% of the students, with no significant difference between the classes ( $P = .214$ ). Job guarantee after completing dental school was a main factor for 61.9% of the students, without a significant difference between the classes ( $P = 0.895$ ). Half of the students stated that being able to work independently is very important to them. Although this seemed to be important to the second-year students, there was no significant difference between the classes ( $P = .224$ ).

**Table 3.** Students' thoughts about the medical profession.

Questions	Answers	First class	Second class	Third class	p value
		n(%)			
Be helpful to people	The most important	30 (75)	27 (67.5)	27 (71.1)	.272
	Important	7(17.5)	13(32.5)	10 (26.3)	
	Indecisive	2 (5)	0 (0)	0 (0)	
	Not important	1 (2.5)	0 (0)	0 (0)	
	It is nothing	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (2.6)	
Financial gain	The most important	22 (55)	17 (42.5)	11 (28.9)	.216
	Important	15 (37.5)	21 (52.5)	21 (55.3)	
	Indecisive	3 (7.5)	2 (5)	5 (13.2)	
	Not important	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (2.6)	
	It is nothing	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (2.6)	
Independent working opportunity	The most important	22 (55)	25(62.5)	12(31.6)	.224
	Important	13 (32.5)	11 (27.5)	18(47.4)	
	Indecisive	3 (7.5)	3(7.5)	6(15.8)	
	Not important	1(2.5)	1(2.5)	2(5.3)	
	It is nothing	1(2.5)	0(0)	0(0)	
Job guarantee	The most important	26 (65)	26(65)	21(55.3)	.895
	Important	12(30)	12(30)	15(39.5)	
	Indecisive	2(5.0)	2(5)	2(5.3)	
	Not important	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	
Respectability	The most important	24(60)	18(45)	19(50)	.263
	Important	13(32.5)	21(52.5)	15(39.5)	
	Indecisive	3(7.5)	0(0)	3(7.9)	
	Not important	0(0)	1(2.5)	0(0)	
	It is nothing	0(0)	0(0)	1(2.6)	

$P < .05$  was considered statistically significant

## DISCUSSION

There have been only a few studies focused on student views regarding their career choice and professional expectations.<sup>9</sup> To address this lacuna, we aimed to evaluate how Turkish dental students view their career choice and the dental profession.

In Turkey, students must pass the Higher Education Institutions Exam before entering a university. The students have to score highly to enrol in medical and dental faculties. A previous study in Turkey indicated that there was a higher ratio of students who graduated from scientific and Anatolian high schools who chose the Uludağ University Faculty of Medicine.<sup>10</sup> Köşker and Kaya<sup>1</sup> reported that students who graduated from scientific and Anatolian high schools scored higher on the university entrance exam. Moreover, according to the Assessment, Selection and Placement Centre data, students who graduate from scientific high schools are more successful on the university entrance exam than students who graduate from other high schools.<sup>11</sup> We found that the most of students admitted to the Pamukkale University Faculty of Dentistry graduated from scientific and Anatolian high schools compared with other high schools, a finding consistent with earlier reports.<sup>1,10</sup> These results indicate that scientific and Anatolian high schools provide a high-quality education that allow to perform well on

the entrance exam and to attend enter rigorous professional programmes.

There have been a few studies regarding the regions from which Turkish students come from before entering a university. Alper and Özdemir<sup>10</sup> found that the most students enrolled in the Uludağ University Faculty of Medicine came from the Marmara and Aegean regions. Likewise, Köşker and Kaya<sup>1</sup> reported that the close to half of students enrolled in the Ege University Faculty of Dentistry came from the Aegean region.<sup>1</sup> In our study, more than half of students came from the Aegean region.<sup>1,10</sup> These results suggest that students generally prefer to attend a university that is close to where they grew up.

The dental profession is the most stressful compared with the other health care professions.<sup>12</sup> Dental school puts high stress and pressure on students due to the tough curriculum. Indeed, a study showed that dental students are exposed to higher stress levels than other medical students.<sup>13</sup> Henzi et al.<sup>14</sup> indicated that fourth-year students have a higher stress level than first-year students. For these reasons, students should voluntarily choose to attend dental school and be fully aware that they will be challenged academically and subjected to a high stress level. Hallissey et al.<sup>15</sup> reported that two out of three of students voluntarily chose medicine and dentistry. In another study, Dogan et al.<sup>9</sup> reported that most medical and dental students willingly chose to attend medical and dental school. Similarly, most of the students who participated in the present study willingly chose to attend dental school, consistent with the aforementioned studies.<sup>9,15</sup> When a student voluntarily enters a high-stress situation like dental school, they are more likely to be able to deal with the stress they will face during their education and professional life.

Over the past decades, more dental students have continued with specialised education after graduating from dental school. Since 2012, Turkish dental students have to pass Specialisation Education in Dentistry Entrance Examination to continue with specialisation after graduating. Küçükeşmen and Kirzioğlu<sup>16</sup> evaluated the opinions of students about this exam and reported that the overwhelming majority of students would like to pass the exam to begin specialised education.<sup>16</sup> Consistently, the vast majority of our students expressed that they would like to continue with dental specialisation. Various factors such as academic career, professional satisfaction, social status and interest in the specialised department play a role in the students' choice. These results suggest that the dentistry specialty exam affects the students' opinions about their career options.

Several studies have investigated dental students' views about the dental profession. Dogan et al.<sup>9</sup> reported that most of the students chose the dentistry not because they wanted to be a medical doctor or dentist, but because their university entrance exam score allowed them to enrol in dental school. There are many other factors including working conditions, financial security, status in society, the nature of the occupation, working with people, the use of personal or manual skills and interest in science and research that may influence a student's career choice.<sup>17-19</sup> Toit et al.<sup>20</sup> reported that assisting people and flexible hours are motivations for dental students. Çapan et al.<sup>21</sup> found that 78.2% of dental students chose dentistry because the profession will continue to grow. Barnabea et al.<sup>22</sup> reported that economic, professional and family reasons are mostly included in choosing a profession. In our study, the vast majority of students expressed that social status, financial input, respectability, flexible working hours and job guarantee are critical for their career choice; these factors are consistent with previous reports.<sup>17-22</sup> These results suggest that dental students consider a myriad of factors when plotting their career path.

There are some limitations to this study. We were only able to evaluate three classes of students, and we have not evaluated how the students' views may change as they progress in their dental education. Therefore, additional studies are needed to evaluate whether the students opinion about dentistry change during their education.

To conclude, dentistry is a profession that has a long and difficult education process. Students who select dentistry should be very aware of its challenges so they can manage its associated stress. This study provides information the opinions of students about dentistry and the reasons for their choice career.

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