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# Attitude of Female Undergraduate Dental Students Regarding Their Future Study: Study from an South Indian Dental College

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Dentistry is one of the most prestigious professions in India. Among the total dental undergraduate students a very high proportion is female. The present study was conducted to find out the attitude of female dental students regarding their further study and to find out different factors affecting the decision to do post-graduation and subject of choice.

**Methodology:** The study was carried out in a dental college in South India among the undergraduate female dental students from first year to final year. Data were collected using a pre-designed, pre-tested semi-structured questionnaire. Collected data was compiled, tabulated and analyzed using SPSS version 16.0.

**Results:** 25% students did not want to do post-graduation and wanted to work as general dentist. Wish to be general dentist was significantly higher among students of higher age group and students of final year. Oral and maxillofacial surgery was the most favorite discipline to do post-graduation for students of all years except final year. No student wanted to work as oral pathologist, oral anatomist, public health dentist or period on to logist. Majority of the students liked to study dentistry. However, proportion of students who did not like to study dentistry was significantly higher among third year students.

**Conclusion:** Attitude of students regarding future career varied widely according to age of the students and year of study. Practice of early age of marriage among female as compared to male may be a reason of change of their attitude regarding future study. Huge stress involved in studying dentistry can be another reason for this.

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## Introduction

Bachelor of Dental Science is one of the most prestigious courses in India as well as throughout the world. Most popular reason for student's entry in this course is interest in medicine and to get a prestigious position in the society<sup>1</sup> (Baharvand M, Moghaddam EJ, Pouretemad H, 2011). The students who are in this study will be future dentists of the society and the dental health of the society depends on them. A good amount of studies have been carried throughout the world about the factors of the dental students motivating them to enter in this stream of study<sup>2-6</sup> With the advancement of the society, the attitude of the parents towards female education has changed and even in developing countries like India a large proportion of parents look after their sons and daughters in equal way. This is reflected by the fact of increasing the proportion of female in higher education recently. But, still our society is patriarchal. Many a times it is seen that after getting higher education also a large proportion of girls are not able to do work in their future due to looking after of their family members. Beside this factor the average age of marriage of female is less than male and after marriage a large proportion of girls finds it difficult to continue their study. This often results in pre-mature termination of their dream to study higher. With the increase in age, they find it more difficult to continue their study. Many studies have revealed that due to consideration of the burden of house work, a large proportion of female students have to change their subject of choice for specialization in medical and dental stream. India is a country where still a large proportion of parents give less importance to daughter's education than the education of their son. It is considered often that male members have to do work to earn money, but female members may spend their life well without earning money themselves. In this background the present

study was conducted among undergraduate female dental students in a private dental college in South India to find out their attitude regarding their future study and to finding out different associated factors affecting the decision to do post-graduation and subject of choice.

## Materials and Methods

### Study area

The study was conducted in Saveetha Dental College in Chennai, Tamilnadu, India. This is a private dental college which is 25 years old and running BDS course as well as MDS course in different disciplines. Annually 100 students take admission in BDS course in this college. Total annual intake for BDS students in this college is 100. So, total number of students from 1<sup>st</sup> year to 4<sup>th</sup> year is 400.

### Study population

The study was conducted among undergraduate (BDS) female students. Among the 400 students majority were female. They were approached to take part in the study. Data were collected from the students who agreed to take part in the present study.

### Study period

The study was conducted from September, 2013 to November, 2013.

### Study tools and technique

Data were collected from the students by individual interview method and using a pre-designed pre-tested semi-structured questionnaire.

### Inclusion and exclusion criteria

All female BDS students who agreed to take part in this study were included in the study. Male students were excluded in the study.

### Statistical methods

After collection of data these were entered in SPSS sheet (version 16.0). The analysis was done using SPSS software (version 16.0). For testing statistical significance Chi square test was used.

### Results

In the present study the majority of participants belonged to 18 years (37.4%) and 19 years (30.1%). Minimum age was 17 years and maximum age was 24 years. So, the participants were either late adolescents or young adults. Figure 1 represents the age distribution of the study participants. 26.4% of the study participants were studying in first year in the college; 37.4% of the study participants were studying in second years; 23.3% were in third year and remaining 12.9% were in final (fourth) year. This distribution is represented in Figure 2.

Majority of the students wanted to do post-graduation (Master of Dental Surgery or MDS). Only 41 participants (25%) were not willing to do post-graduation. Among others oral surgery was the most favorite choice to do post-graduation among students (31%). 15% students were interested in doing MDS in prosthodontics and 12% were interested in conservative dentistry. 9% students wanted to do MDS in pedodontics, 6% students were more interested in orthodontics. Only 3 students (2%) were interested in oral medicine. Esthetics dentistry was liked by only 1 student.

Table 1 highlights the willingness to do post-graduation according to the age of the student. It was found that 48% students aged 20 years and above were not willing to do post-graduation in comparison to 21% of the younger students (aged up to 20 years). This difference is found to be statistically significant ( $p=0.004$ ).

Table 2 highlights the relationship of willingness to do post-graduation according to the year of study. It has been found that a

large proportion of students in 1<sup>st</sup> year and in final year were not willing to do post-graduation unlike the students from 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year. This difference is found to be significant statistically ( $p=0.029$ ).

Table 3 represents the willingness to do post-graduation in different disciplines according to the year of the students. It is found that for all years except final year, oral surgery was most popular discipline. No student in final year was interested to do MDS in oral surgery. For final year students the popular disciplines were prosthodontics (45.5%) and conservative dentistry (36.4%). Oral medicine was liked by only three students and all of them belonged to 3<sup>rd</sup> year. Except extreme popularity of oral surgery by all years (except final year) conservative dentistry and prosthodontics were popular streams for a good proportion of students in all years. Orthodontics was very popular in 2<sup>nd</sup> year students but not so popular among student of other years. Pedodontics was 2<sup>nd</sup> most popular streams among 2<sup>nd</sup> year student (27.5%) after oral surgery; but surprisingly no student from any other year wanted to do post-graduation in this discipline. Esthetic dentistry was found to be very unpopular stream. Only 1 student from final year wanted to do MDS in it. No student from any year was interested to do MDS in oral anatomy, oral pathology or public health dentistry.

Students were asked about whether they liked studying Bachelor of Dental Science (BDS) or not. Overall 148 students (90.8%) liked studying BDS. 26.3% students from 3<sup>rd</sup> year did not like studying BDS as compared to 0% students of 1<sup>st</sup> year, 6.6% students of 2<sup>nd</sup> year and 4.8% of final year. This exceptional high proportion of dislike among the students of 3<sup>rd</sup> year was found to be statistically significant ( $p<0.001$ ).

### Discussion

The present study has found out the attitude of female students towards their

future study. It was found that willingness to do further study after completion of BDS course decreased significantly with increase in age. This may be due to the fact that girls face more and more problems to continue study with the increase in their age. Not only parents but other members of the family members, relatives, neighbors and friends sometimes ask questions about the marriage of the girls. According to some students they also were tired due to extreme stress for the study of the study. Dental and medical courses are very tough course and depression is very common among students of these courses and this changes attitude of students towards further study. Usually students enter in dental and medical course with a great dream in their eyes. But as the courses are very tough many of them find it difficult to cope up with the stress. So, fail rates of these streams are high and this further increases their stress. So, many students just want to complete the course anyhow and do not want to enter in another course after completion of bachelor degree as they do not want to take similar stress any more. So, the proportion of students who do not want to do post-graduation is highest in final year students. However the proportion of the students wanted to do specialization was found to be much higher than some other studies. In a study by Karibe H et al, they have found 64% Japanese and 47% Swedish students wanted to practice as general dentists<sup>7</sup>. In other study 51.6% Canadian students, 61.2% Japanese students and 24.6% of Thai students wanted to be general dentists in future<sup>8</sup>. However, in a study from United Arab Emirates the proportion of dental students wanted to do specialization was 92% which is higher than the present study<sup>9</sup>.

A large proportion of dental students suffer from huge stress<sup>10</sup>. To cope up with the huge stress involved in studying tough course like BDS, the study and the course should be liked by the students. It was found in the

present study that the course was disliked most commonly by students of 3<sup>rd</sup> year. In the BDS course the subjects taught in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year are General Medicine, General Surgery and Oral Medicine. Among these General Medicine and general Surgery are more medical subjects than dental subjects. It may be the fact that many students do not like to read medical subjects in their dental curriculum as they find it less scope to apply this knowledge to their future career.

Oral and maxillofacial surgery was found to be most favorite subject for building career for the students belonging to 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> years but no student from final year wanted to do MDS in oral and maxillofacial surgery. Usually this subject seems to be very prestigious at the beginning to the students but according to the students of final year, they found it to be of less use in their future practicing career as a dentist. Beside they also opined that oral and maxillofacial surgery as well as orthodontics are better suitable for male students and not for female as the occupational hazards in these subjects are higher and the work is also more hectic than other disciplines. However, overall the most favorite choice of students was oral and maxillofacial surgery. In contrast to this finding, in other study oral surgery was found to be very unpopular<sup>8</sup>. Surprisingly no student wanted to do MDS in periodontics; no explanation can be given regarding this at present. In a study by Hawley NJ et al, periodontics was the choice for doing MDS by 1.5% pre-dental students only<sup>11</sup>.

Finally it can be said that the career related attitude of the female students included in the present study varied widely in different age groups and students of different years of study in dentistry. So, after completion of final year, during the time of internship, the attitude may change further and ultimately there may be a gross imbalance between expectations and happenings. But, these are out of the

framework of the present study. So, further multi-centric study is needed with larger sample size and also involving the interns to confirm the trend of change of behavior among female students with age and with years of study of dentistry. But, in absence of any baseline data regarding the attitude of female dental students regarding their career in India, the result of the present study can be taken as a reference value based on which further studies can be conducted on this topic.

### Conclusion

Career and further study related attitude of the female dental students varied widely in the present study. Often without proper career guidance students do not find the right way to choose their future plan. In this scenario, proper career guidance is necessary as dentists are holding one of the prestigious positions of the society and they are important resource of the society also. So, it is the duty of the teachers and the parents as well as the society as a whole to guide them in proper way, so that female dentists would be considered as a great resource of the society. Proper importance should be given to their choice and their ability to do different works as well as their interests in different disciplines of the dental science. Then only it would be better for the community as a whole.

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**Table 1.** Relationship of willingness to do post-graduation with age

Age	Willingness to do post-graduation		Total
	Yes	No	
Up to 20 years	109 (79%)	29 (21%)	138 (100%)
Above 20 years	13 (52%)	12 (48%)	25 (100%)
Chi square= 8.187, d.f.=1, p=0.004			

**Table 2.** Relationship of willingness to do post-graduation with year of study

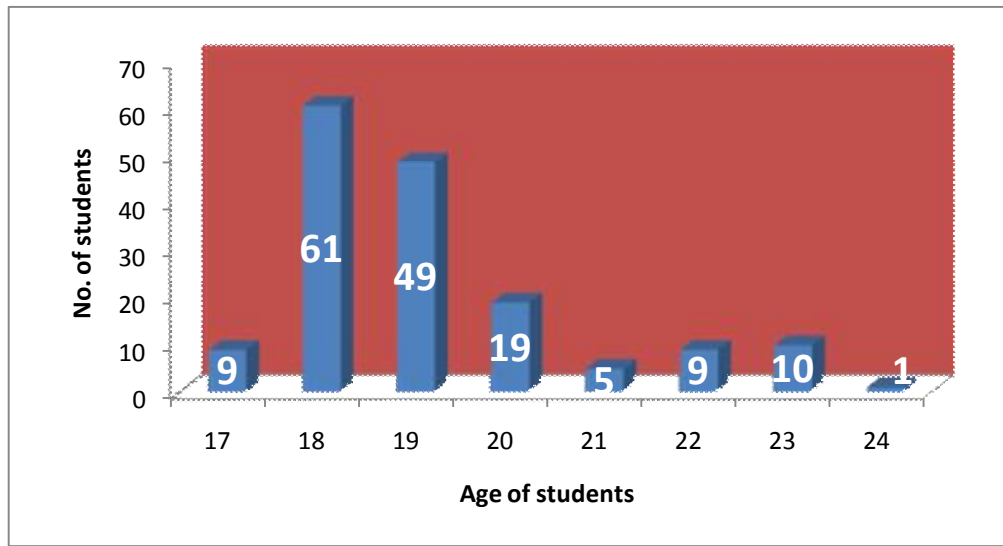
Year	Willingness to do post-graduation		Total
	Yes	No	
1 <sup>st</sup> year	30 (69.8%)	13 (30.2%)	43 (100%)
2 <sup>nd</sup> year	51 (83.6%)	10 (16.4%)	61 (100%)
3 <sup>rd</sup> year	30 (78.9%)	8 (21.1%)	38 (100%)
4 <sup>th</sup> year	11 (52.4%)	10 (47.6%)	21 (100%)
Chi square= 8.187, d.f.=1, p=0.004			

**Table 3.** Relationship to do post-graduation in different disciplines with years of study

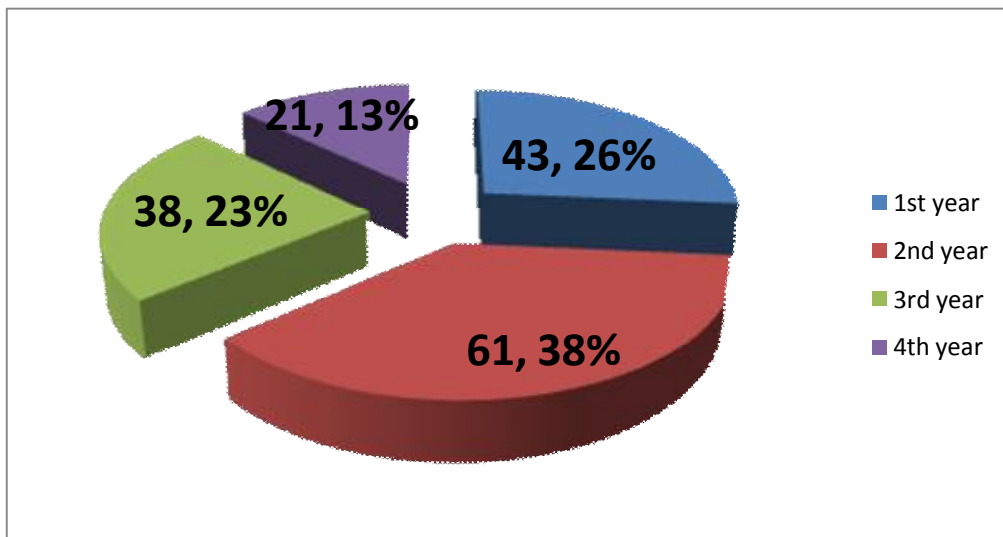
Disciplines	Year			
	1 <sup>st</sup> year	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	4 <sup>th</sup> year
Oral surgery	16 (53.3%)	18 (35.3%)	17 (56.7%)	0 (0%)
Oral medicine	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (10%)	0 (0%)
Conservative dentistry	8 (26.7%)	3 (5.9%)	4 (13.3%)	4 (36.4%)
Prosthodontics	5 (16.7%)	8 (15.7%)	6 (20%)	5 (45.5%)
Orthodontics	1 (3.3%)	8 (15.7%)	0 (0%)	1 (8.2%)
Pedodontics	0 (0%)	14 (27.5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Esthetic dentistry	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (9.1%)
Total	30 (100%)	51 (100%)	30 (100%)	11 (100%)

**Table 4.** Relationship of liking of dentistry according to year

Year	Liking of dentistry		Total
	Yes	No	
1 <sup>st</sup> year	43 (100%)	0 (0%)	43 (100%)
2 <sup>nd</sup> year	57 (93.4%)	4 (6.6%)	61 (100%)
3 <sup>rd</sup> year	28 (73.7%)	10 (26.3%)	38 (100%)
4 <sup>th</sup> year	20 (95.2%)	1 (4.8%)	21 (100%)
Chi square= 18.684, d.f.= 3, p<0.001			



**Figure 1.** Distribution of study participants according to age



**Figure 2.** Distribution of study participants according to the year in which they study

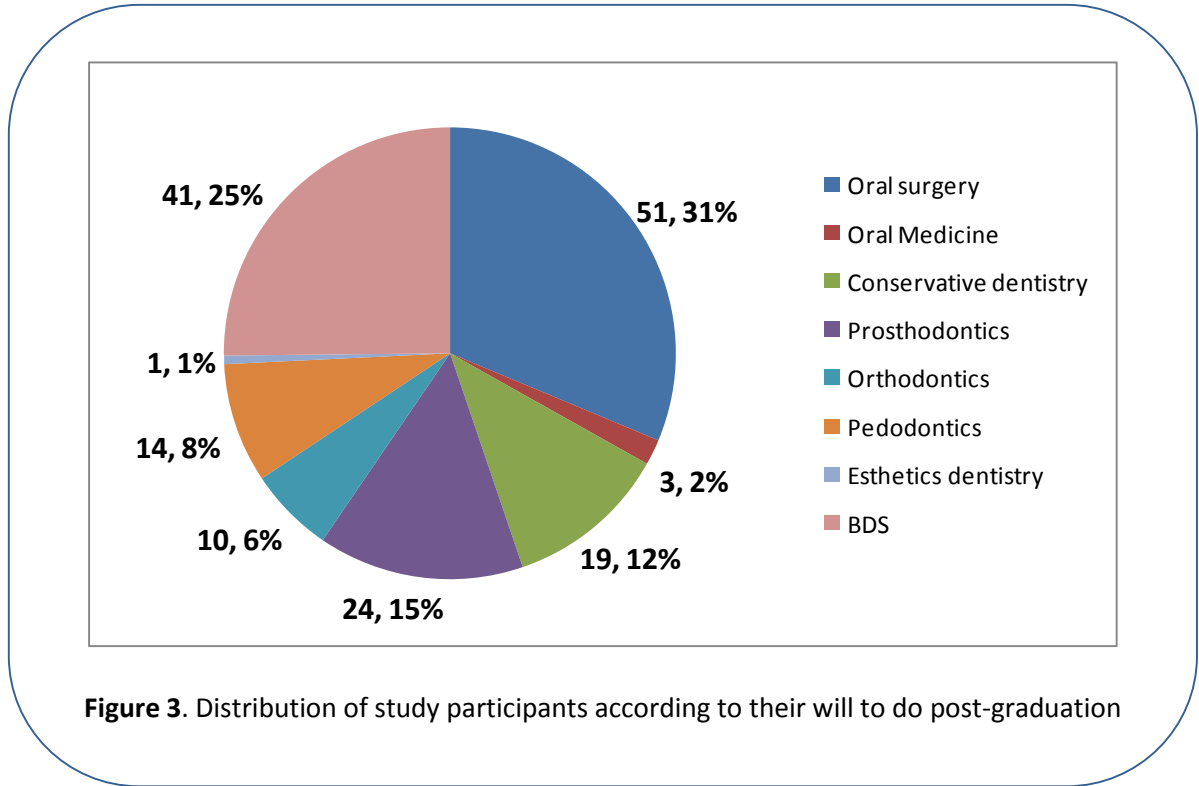


Figure 3. Distribution of study participants according to their will to do post-graduation