



Career in Medicine: What factors influence medical students?

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ABSTRACT

Background: Despite high cost and competition for admission into medical schools in Nigeria, many students still pursue or choose medicine as a course of study. This study is aimed at identifying those factors influencing medical students in choosing medicine as a career. **Methods:** An anonymous questionnaire based survey of medical students (1st and 2nd year) of Ekiti University Medical School was done through a self-designed questionnaire. The first section of the questionnaire elicited information on students' socio-demographics second section required the students to rank the factors influencing them in the choice of their career. **Results:** About two-third of the students were males, with a mean age of 21.50 years (standard deviation = 2.903). Most of the students indicated personal interest as the most significant factor influencing them in the choice medicine as a career, prestige of the profession (18.6%) is the second most cited factor while desire to care ranked (12.9%). None of the students was influenced to choose medicine as a career by the teacher. **Conclusion:** This study found out that there are several factors influencing the choice of career in medicine, however, personal interest of the students appear to be the most important, though with other modifiable factors.

KEY WORDS: Career, factors, medical students, medicine

INTRODUCTION

The act of career choice is complex and unique for each individual. It depends on both the cognitive factors and the social structure of the individual [1]. It is a major area of concern for young people nearing the end of their secondary schooling [2]. It is important to both the parents and their children because this decision will affect them throughout their lives. Every student, at one time or the other, is faced with the challenge of making a choice of career. Akomolafe identified individual's vocation as one of the most important aspects of human endeavor because it determines a lot of things in human existence [3]. It could either make or mar one's joy and happiness.

The sundry factors affecting career decision making can be grouped into two. The first group includes individual personal attributes such as intellectual ability, aptitudes, interest, one's value system, motivation, gender and one's attitude toward various occupations [4,5]. Secondly, external influences such as the teacher influence, parental influences, peer group influences, sex stereo-type of career and subjects combinations while in secondary school [6,7].

Among medical students, several factors influence the career decision making. Helping people, lifestyle preferences, prestige, job opportunities, expected income, interest in science, and the intellectual challenge of the profession have been reported to be important motives underlying the wish to study medicine [8,9].

Similarly, in a study by Ko *et al.* [10] looking at factors influencing career choice made by medical students and residents, personal interest was ranked first by all the respondents, followed by previous positive experience, and job opportunities. Law and Arthur in another study, observed factors such as advice from family, friends, school career masters, practitioners, and students already enrolled in similar program(s) as major influencing factor [11]. In a comparative study by Ausman *et al.* among medical students in the beginning of their 3rd year and non-medical students at the same educational level, majority of medical students perceived their parents to have had strong influence on their career choice of medicine [12]. While more medical students chose their career along with parents, most of the non-medical groups made the choice on their own.

An understanding of these factors influencing career decisions may help in planning curriculum for medical students and also in understanding the attitudes of doctors toward their clients. This study aimed at identifying some of the factors influencing the choice of medicine as a career and to identify modifiable factors related to this decision making.

METHODS

Sampling and Procedure

An anonymous questionnaire based survey of medical students (1st and 2nd year) of Ekiti University Medical School was done.

Although the university was established over 30 years ago, the medical school came into existence 4 years ago with only two levels of students in the medical school. The questionnaire was sent to each student through their class representatives.

Research Instrument

The instrument used was a self-designed questionnaire a modification of the one used by Ko *et al.* [10]. The first section elicited information on students' demographic data such as class, sex, age, parental occupation and place of work and so on. In the second section, the students were required to rank the factors (personal interests, parental influence, influence of a counselor/mentor, influence of my teacher, lifestyle and financial rewards, future job opportunities in that field, academic ability, desire to care and prestige of the profession) that had motivated them in the choice of medicine as a course of study. The ranking of various factor was indicated as one for factor consider as most important, and nine as the least factor.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences computer software; version 16 (SPSS Chicago Inc.) for windows. Appropriate data presentations including frequency distribution, cross tabulations and inferential statistics were carried out where appropriate.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from Research and Ethics Committee of the University Teaching Hospital. A writing informed consent was also obtained from all the participants after participants were assured that data collected from the study would be kept confidential and used only for purposes of this study.

RESULTS

Socio-demographic Character of Medical Students

The ages of the respondents range from 18 to 29 years with an average of 21.50 years (standard deviation [SD]= 2.903). The mean age of the males is 22.09 (SD = 3.154) while that of the females is 20.44 (SD = 2.043 $t = 2.351$, $P = 0.211$). There was no statistical significant difference in the mean age of both genders. As shown in Table 1, majority 45 (64.3%) were males. The duration between graduation from secondary school and admission to the university varies from zero years (i.e., just immediately after graduating from secondary school) to 8 years; with a mean of 2.34 years. Among the participants, 9 (12.9%) had some form of tertiary education before gaining admission to study medicine while the rest had no previous tertiary education. Most of the fathers 62 (88.6%) do not work in the Hospital, while only 8 (11.4%) were working in the Hospital. Forty-one (58.68%) of the respondents had a medical doctor as a relation while 61 (87.1%) had a relation as a health worker.

Parental Occupations

Table 2 shows the parental occupations of the students. About a third of respondents' parents were in public service (unspecified) 24 (34.3%) for father's occupation, 23 (32.9%) for mother's occupation, others constitute 27.7%, only 2 (2.9%) of the fathers were medical practitioners and 8 (11.4%) of mothers were nurses.

Factors Influencing the Choice of Medicine as a Career

Table 3 shows factors influencing the choice of career of medical students. Most 38 (54.3%) of the respondents indicated personal interest as the most important factor influencing their choice of medicine as a career. The second most cited factor is the prestige of the profession (18.6%), followed by a desire to care (12.9%). Teacher's influence was the least important factor influencing their choice of career in medicine.

Opinion about Their Choice of Career

As shown in Table 4, almost all 69 (98.6%) of the respondents believed they have made the right decision by their choice of medicine as a career whilst 1 (1.4%) thought otherwise. However, 4.3% thought they would have preferred a change of course. All the respondents would like to pursue a postgraduate degree in

Table 1: Socio-demographic character of medical students

Variables	Frequency (%)
Gender	
Male	45 (64.3)
Female	25 (35.7)
Fathers' place of work	
Hospital	8 (11.4)
Others	62 (88.6)
Doctor as a relative	
Yes	41 (58.6)
No	29 (41.4)
Health worker as relative	
Yes	61 (87.1)
No	9 (12.9)
Previous tertiary education	
Yes	9 (12.9)
No	61 (87.1)

Table 2: Distribution of parental occupations

Parental occupations	Fathers' occupation (%)	Mothers' occupation (%)
Medical practice	2 (2.9)	0 (0)
Public service (unspecified)	24 (34.4)	23 (32.8)
Teaching	10 (14.3)	15 (21.5)
Nursing	0 (0)	8 (11.4)
Clergy	4 (5.7)	0 (0)
Engineering	5 (7.1)	0 (0)
Trading	4 (5.7)	17 (34.3)
Secretary	0 (0)	2 (2.9)
Farming	3 (4.3)	0 (0)
*Others	18 (27.7)	5 (7.1)

*Others include politician, auditor, police, accountant, tailor, architects, surveyor, legal practice, tailor

Table 3: Factors influencing the choice of medicine as a career

Variables	Frequency (%)
Personal interest	38 (54.3)
Prestige of the profession	13 (18.6)
Influence of counselor/mentor	2 (2.9)
Desire to care	9 (12.9)
Life style and financial reward	3 (4.3)
Academic ability	1 (1.4)
Future job opportunity	1 (1.4)
Parental influence	3 (4.2)
Teacher influence	0 (0)

Table 4: Opinion about respondents' career choice

Variables	Frequency (%)
Made a right decision	
Yes	69 (98.6)
No	1 (1.4)
Like a change of course	
Yes	3 (4.3)
No	67 (95.7)
Desire to pursue postgraduate	
Yes	70 (100.0)
No	0 (0)
Have a preferred specialty	
Specified	40 (57.1)
Don't know	30 (42.9)
Like to practice medicine for life	
Yes	56 (80.0)
No	14 (20.0)

medicine. However only 40 (57.1%) were able to specify the specialty they would like to pursue.

DISCUSSION

Given the increasing desire and competitiveness to study medicine in this environment, this study sought to look at factors influencing the choice of medicine as a career by Medical students of Ekiti State University. Majority of the participants in our study were males, an observation similar to that reported by Omigbodun and Omigbodun in their study of medical students at the University of Ibadan [13]. The job stereotyping effect may account for more boys preferring to study medicine. Further, core science subjects including mathematics are prerequisites for admission to study Medicine and many girls were observed not to show preference for these core subjects [14].

Most (88.6%) of the participant's parents work outside the hospital. The few participants' parents who work in a hospital are either Medical doctors or Nurses. This shows that the desire of the participants to study medicine was not majorly influenced by the parent's occupation or their place of work. However, the occurrence of majority of the participants having relations as either medical doctor or health worker may have enhanced their interest and eventual choice of medicine as a course of study at the university level.

Most cited among the factors influencing their choice of course of study is personal interest. An earlier study by Ko *et al.* reported that personal desire most cited factor by the subjects [10].

Second, profession prestige was also rank high by participants in our study. Only a few (13%) of the participant ranked "desire to care" as the most important factor influencing their choice. It is pertinent to consider re-orientating the mindset of the students by entrenching in the Medical school curriculum the need for the ultimate sense of caring for their patients.

It is notable that none of the participants in the study reported their teacher as an important influencing factor in the choice of career. This was contrary to what was reported among other groups of students where teachers were seen as a significant factor in determining the choice of career [4]. This could mean that teachers did not get closer to the students to the extent of providing the right guidance that could influence them positively with regards to their future career. This finding may be a reflection of the absence of non-intimate relationship as to giving guidance to students by their teachers.

Only 4.3% of the respondents considered parent as being the most influencing factor in the choice of their career. However, a study by Obadeji reported one form of parental influence or the other; ranging from minor to strong influences among medical students studied. Although parents may not be the most important factor in the choice of medicine as a career, parents still exert their influences in one way or the other.

Regarding the appropriateness of the respondents' choice of career, almost all (98.6%) believed they made the right decision albeit 4.3% of the students thought they would have preferred a change of course. This support the fact that most of the students chose their career on their own volition rather than through the influence of their parents or of others. The small percentages who desire a change, of course, could have done so possibly because they did not know initially what medical education entailed before choice.

CONCLUSION

This study found there are several factors influencing the choice of career in medicine, however, personal interest of the students appear to be the most important, though with other modifiable factors.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The small sample size can be considered as one limitation of the study. This study was planned as a preliminary to a further study with a larger, nationally representative sample incorporating other medical schools in the nation, therefore the sample size was considered as adequate for its specific purpose.

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