



## Oral pathology as a career: A questionnaire based study

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### Abstract

**Background:** The ambitions of an aspiring candidate in a particular specialty in turn contribute a lot for the future of that specialty especially in oral pathology which has the responsibility of diagnosing and eradicating precancerous and cancerous lesions. Study aimed to determine the factors that lead to the choice of oral pathology as a career among post graduate students in private and government dental colleges in India.

**Material and Methods:** A cross-sectional survey was carried out wherein 114 dental students responded back using closed ended questionnaires. The questionnaire consisted of eight items which included demographic (age and gender) and career choice-related questions. Data was collected and presented as frequency distribution.

**Results:** Overall majority of students choose oral pathology as their choice about 59.6.5% and 40.3% were those who got into the oral pathology field by chance. 18.4% students had a family role in getting MDS admission in oral pathology.

**Conclusion:** Students mostly have chosen oral pathology as a professional career due to their personal interest and influence of family and those who by chance opted oral pathology developed interest in the subject with time. There is also a need to broaden the scope of the specialty and to make it more practical

**Keywords:** oral pathology; dental students; career

### Introduction

In India, prior to 1980, there were only 39 dental colleges with few dentists being available for services, but the scenario changed after 1980, with a rapid increase in the number of dental colleges, which reached around 240 in 2007. Correspondingly, the number of Dental Surgeons in the country has also increased from a few hundreds to almost 80,000. There is about a 3.5 times increase in the population since then and the number of dentists has increased more than 3,000 times<sup>[1]</sup>. Everything is destined and nothing can be rewritten. There is not an iota of doubt in it. Nevertheless, Almighty has gifted us with the brain and wisdom to think and decide as to what is right and what is wrong. One such situation arises when we as students have to choose our post graduate career after completing bachelor in dental surgery (BDS). This often becomes difficult due to many reasons such as family influence, less seats in choice branches, high fee structure etc. This enormous increase has led to a feeling of anxiety due to saturation in the minds of budding dentists. This feeling is intense, especially among interns and many are not able to decide as to what future course they should take up to establish themselves.

Student's motivations for choosing post-graduation in the dental college are of great interest for educators and admission committees. Also parents, relatives, friends and teachers affect the student decision<sup>[2]</sup>. The problem becomes even more intense particularly when one is choosing a career in a specialty, which is growing such as Oral pathology and microbiology. It is a subject in which the student usually develops a little interest during his/her graduation perhaps due to reasons such as the subject is taught more theoretically and less practically<sup>[3]</sup>.

Today, oral pathology as a subject has distinctly developed as a specialty of dentistry which impregnates other

specialties, like pathology, molecular biology and genetics. It has been christened now as oral and maxillofacial pathology and is an integral part of the dental curriculum providing the crucial link between basic sciences and clinical dentistry<sup>[4]</sup>. This specialty is also special because it is the unique meeting point of research and clinical dental practice<sup>[5]</sup>. Oral pathologists unlike their colleagues in other dental specialties cannot only observe and identify the gross manifestations of disease in the oral cavity but also have the capability to appreciate and understand its microscopic manifestations at the cellular level.

Students entering in the field of oral pathology can be divided into two categories. One who chose oral pathology by choice due to their interest and the other who chose oral pathology by chance due to reasons other than their interest. There are many factors which are taken into consideration before deciding any profession such as financial rewards, status in future thereof, nature of profession, peaceful life and interest factor in particular branch<sup>[2]</sup>. Various studies have been subjected to surveys, conducted for studying motives for choosing dentistry as a career and other specialties after completing graduation. These studies include those done at University of Toronto<sup>[6]</sup>, and Israel<sup>[7]</sup>, etc. The prime motive for choosing future career options among dental students as found in various studies ranges from financial security, independent, specialized professional, job satisfaction, status and interest to service to common man<sup>[8]</sup>. But no study has been conducted previously to know the reasons for choosing oral pathology as a career option in M.D.S. among the students pursuing Masters in oral pathology and microbiology in India. Thus the aim of our study was to find out reasons for choosing oral pathology and microbiology as a career option in M.D.S in India.

**Materials and Methods**

A cross-sectional questionnaire study was conducted among the dental students in the department of dentistry. Questionnaire was distributed among 250 dental students. Out of 250 only 114 reported back with questionnaires. All the students were informed about nitty-gritty of the study. All the students who were present on the day of study were included. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Ethical Committee. A self-administered, pretested, structured questionnaire was employed to record the data. The questionnaire consisted of a total of eight close ended questions and questions which included demographic data. To check the reliability and internal consistency of the questionnaire Cronbach’s alpha was used and it was found satisfactory.

**Statistical Analysis**

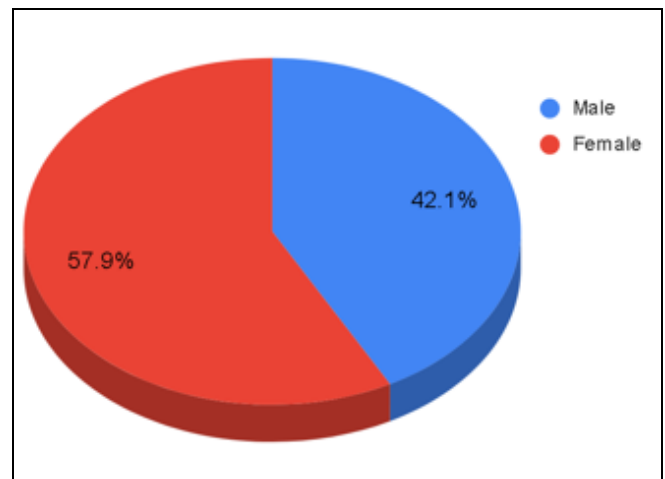
It was done using IBM SPSS. Statistics Windows, Version 20.0. (Armonk, NY: IBM Corp) was used for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics like mean and percentages were used for analysis.

**Results**

A total of 114 students with mean age 25 years comprised the study group, which constituted 42.1% (48/114) males and 57.8% (66/114) females (figure 1).

In response to the question why students had chosen oral pathology as a career option in M.D.S. 50% males and 33.3% females responded to the reason as chance and 50% males and 66.6% females have interest in the subject. Overall majority (59.6%:68/114) of students choose oral pathology as choice and 40.3% (46/114) were those who got into the oral pathology field by chance. About 48.2% (55/114) were those who were interested in oral pathology, 25.5% (29/114) were those who were not able to get admission in other branches and 18.4% (21/114) students had family roles in getting MDS admission in oral pathology. About 30.3% female students and 25% males thought that oral pathology as a profession can help them in making money for future as well as settled life; 34.8% females and 39.5% males thought that it can give reputation in society; 29.1% males and 33.3% females thought that getting into this specialty, they can help patients. Females

(45.4%) were also more interested in oral pathology due to the reason that mostly there is no direct interaction with patients while 29.1% males had the same reason. 39.3% females also choose oral pathology as they were not good in clinical work while only 10.4% males were. Lab work was more fond in case of males (52.08%) than those of females. (10.6%). Overall 50.8% students thought that oral pathology includes histopathological diagnosis, clinical pathology and microbiology. Surprisingly, it was observed that regarding awareness about career and future prospectus of MDS in Oral Pathology during BDS, only 35.9%(41/114) students had awareness about oral pathology as a career and 64.03% (73/114) students were unaware about oral pathology being future career. Most of the postgraduate students about 42.1% were planning to join academics after completion while 19.2% were planning to go for private histopathological diagnosis practice only whereas 20.1% might pursue both general dentistry and histopathological practice. Only 18.4% (21/114) students were planning for further research projects. 53.5% (61/114) students found oral pathology as very interesting subject after getting admission in oral pathology, 35.08% (40/114) found the subject as good and only 11.4%(13/114) students found oral pathology as a boring subject(table 1).



**Fig 1:** Gender Distribution

**Table 1:** Questionnaire response

Questions	Male	Female	Total
<b>Q1: Oral Pathology as a Career in MDS by</b>			
a. Chance	24(50%)	22(33.3%)	46(40.3%)
b. Choice	24(50%)	44(66.6%)	68(59.6%)
<b>Q2: What were the reasons for choosing oral pathology as your career:</b>			
a. Unable to get admission in other branches	21(43.7%)	8(12.1%)	29(25.5%)
b. Family role/influence	6(12.5%)	15(22.7%)	21(18.4%)
c. Interested in Oral pathology	16(33.3%)	39(59.09%)	55(48.2%)
d. Others reasons	5(10.4%)	4(6.06%)	9(7.8%)
<b>Q3: Oral pathology as a profession can</b>			
a. help me in making money and well settled life.	12(25%)	20(30.3%)	32(28.07%)
b. reputation in society	19(39.5%)	23(34.8%)	42(36.8%)
c. help people/patients	14(29.1%)	22(33.3%)	36(31.5%)
d. others	3(6.25%)	1(1.5%)	4(3.5%)
<b>Q4: Oral pathology suits me because:</b>			
a. No direct interaction with patients	14(29.1%)	30(45.4%)	44(38.5%)
b. Not good in clinics	5(10.4%)	26(39.3%)	31(27.1%)
c. I like oral pathology/lab work	25(52.08%)	7(10.6%)	32(28.07%)
d. Others.	4(8.3%)	3(4.5%)	7(6.14%)
<b>Q5: Oral pathology is confined to:</b>			

a. Histopathological diagnosis	13(27.08%)	20(30.3%)	33(28.9%)
b. Clinical Pathology	5(10.4%)	10(15.1%)	15(13.1%)
c. Microbiology	5(10.4%)	3(4.5%)	8(7.01%)
d. All	25(52.08%)	33(50%)	58(50.8%)
Q6: Were you aware about career and future prospects of Oral Pathology during BDS:			
a. Yes	20(41.6%)	21(31.8%)	41(35.9%)
b. No	28(58.3%)	45(68.1%)	73(64.03%)
Q7: After completing your P.G would you like to			
a. Join academics	20(41.6%)	28(42.2%)	48(42.1%)
b. Private histopathological practice	7(14.5%)	15(22.7%)	22(19.2%)
c. Pursue general dentistry clinic and histopathological practice	15(31.2%)	8(12.1%)	23(20.1%)
d. Joining a research institute	6(12.5%)	15(22.7%)	21(18.4%)
Q8: How are you finding the subject right now?			
a. It is good	15(31.2%)	25(37.8%)	40(35.08%)
b. It is very interesting	27(56.2%)	34(51.5%)	61(53.5%)
c. It is boring	6(12.5%)	7(10.6%)	13(11.4%)
d. Any other	0	0	0

## Discussion

The participants present in the study have a mean age of 25 years. The participants of the study comprised 48 males and 66 females. Considering the response to the question as to why oral pathology was chosen as a career option in M.D.S, there seems to be an encouraging trend in having interest, as the maximum number of students have the prior interest in the subject, among which majority are females. This shows the trend of a female dominated professional factor in post-graduation in oral pathology nowadays. The reason for the less number of males in post-graduate courses in oral pathology may be responsible for the fact that males are interested in surgery oriented clinical subjects since the beginning of their career. Psychologically speaking, males suffer from superiority complexes while they choose clinical subjects in post-graduation. Interest in the oral pathology stands as the second reason for choosing the subject highlighted by the fact that oral pathology and microbiology subjects are liked by most of the students. This trend is good in the perspective of there being still a dearth of oral pathologists across India in professional dental colleges due to increasing oral cancer menace day by day.

Coming to the awareness regarding career and future prospects of the students before post- graduation, a whopping percentage of students were not aware of the future prospects of the subject before counseling highlighting the reason that during graduation (BDS) students are not given the opportunity to diagnose simple lesions. If given the opportunity, maximum students might develop interest in oral pathology during their BDS course only. Academics and teaching remains on the forefront as 42.1% (48/114) are interested in joining academics. This was dominated by females as females were interested in joining colleges. The reason may be females in India do not have upper hand in clinics due to social and cultural reasons. Overall attitude towards the specialty was significantly less among male students as compared to females, which may be due to their delusion about oral pathology as a non- clinical specialty and not including clinical training and so "loss of hands" on dental practice. Other reasons regarding less interest towards oral pathology among male students may be lower income and more dependency on the job as compared to other specialties of dentistry<sup>[9]</sup>.

## Conclusion

The pioneers of this branch of dentistry, oral pathology,

took tremendous efforts to get it recognized as a distinct specialty. Several learned individuals and professionals contributed to make this specialty one of the most enriched out of all the specialties of dentistry. The future lies on how oral pathologists today conceptualize and develop this branch in time to come.

The findings of the present study suggest that most of the student's opted oral pathology as choice and those who by chance opted oral pathology by chance as their future career also developed interest in the subject. During the formative years (BDS); the student should be given a chance to get involved into histopathological diagnosis of the lesions, be it the simpler ones; so that students get acquainted with the histopathological world of diagnosis and develop their keen interest in the same. There is also a need to broaden the scope of the specialty and to make it more practical such as laser biopsy/treatment courses can be added as super specialty disciplines.

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