

## **PERIODONTICS AS A CAREER OPTION? PERCEPTION AND INCLINATION AMONGST DENTAL INTERNS – A PILOT STUDY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Background:** Need to be constantly updated for professional and economic stability in today's competitive world has rendered specialization in dentistry very essential. The intentions or reasons for choosing a particular speciality for post-graduation contribute a lot towards the future of that particular stream. The purpose of this study was to assess the approach of interns towards pursuing Periodontics as a career option. **Material and Method:** A questionnaire based cross-sectional survey was conducted amongst 60 interns of the college. A 16-item close-ended questionnaire extracted information on the awareness and opinion regarding Periodontology as a subject at undergraduate level and their opinion regarding Periodontics as a career from clinical stand point was noted. **Results:** It was observed that most of them had an average attitude towards the field and the participants agreed that they did not have much knowledge regarding the scope and opportunity in that stream. **Conclusion:** Present study concluded that lack of awareness could be a reason behind the dilemma for choosing Periodontics as a career option. Also, inculcating interest regarding the field at under graduation level itself is the need for the hour.

**KEYWORDS:** Periodontics, career option, interns, survey.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In India, prior to 1980, there were only 39 dental colleges which provided facilities for graduation in dentistry with very few dentists being available for service, but this scenario changed after 1980, wherein a rapid increase in the number of dental colleges was noted, reaching up to around 300 dental colleges in the country.<sup>[1,2]</sup>

Over time, an increase in the number of dental colleges lead to an overall increase in the intake capacity which resulted in a really high number of dental surgeons graduating every year in our country. This drastic raise has inculcated a sense of anxiety amongst the minds of budding dentist because of the increasing saturation. This feeling is even more intense amongst the interns, especially because they are at a peak and are unable to decide so as to how to take up a future in dentistry to establish themselves.<sup>[1]</sup>

In today's generation, the choice of career is a critical decision that has an obvious impact on the future of an

individual as well as the family as a whole.<sup>[3]</sup> Dentists occupy an important role in the society as being a part of the professional health care workers.<sup>[2]</sup> Several reasons have been tracked down that majorly motivate choosing dentistry as a career option. To name a few, helping people, contributing to the community, regular yet flexible working hours, a field similar to medicine, financial security, prestige, scope for working abroad, etc.<sup>[3]</sup>

After graduation, a dental surgeon is broadly left with two choices, either to go ahead with clinical practice or pursue higher education via post-graduation or via diploma courses, that are available in several specialties of dentistry, to upgrade and refine their clinical skills.<sup>[1,2]</sup> Continuing professional development has become the goal in almost every profession, and dental profession is no different to that. Pertaining the saturation in the field the need to be constantly updated for professional and economic stability in today's competitive world has made specialization in dentistry very essential. In India, post-graduation is three-year course, available in nine

specialty branches of dentistry, at almost all the dental colleges in India.<sup>[2,3]</sup>

There are several factors that influence the selection of a particular stream for post-graduation. It has been noted that, dental surgeons are more inclined towards a clinical branch over a non-clinical branch and even amongst the clinical branches, a higher preference is given to conservative dentistry and endodontics, Orthodontics, Oral and maxillofacial surgery, Prosthodontics followed by Periodontics.<sup>[2]</sup> So, the aim of this pilot study was to explore the attitude and inclination amongst dental interns at Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay Dental College and Hospital, Solapur, Maharashtra, to perceive Periodontics as a career option.

## MATERIALS AND METHOD

This questionnaire based cross-sectional survey was conducted at an institutional level. Written permission was obtained from the dean of the institution prior to carrying out of the survey. 60 interns participated in the study. All subjects were assured that their information would be held confidential. Also revealing their identify was absolutely optional while participating in the study.

A 16-item close ended questionnaire was given to each participant. A copy of questionnaire is attached underneath. The questionnaire began with obtaining demographic details of the subject such as name, age, gender and their designation. Following the demographic data, a set of close ended questions were put forth to the subjects. The questions were sequentially guided to assess their interest, awareness and inclination towards periodontics.

The subjects were assessed about their basic interest pursuing dentistry as a career followed by which they were assessed on their opinion about the need for MDS and their inclination towards several streams. They were also questioned about their views on periodontics as a subject and as a clinical branch and its exposure at

undergraduate level. All the questionnaires were collected back from the subjects and data was statistically analyzed.

## RESULTS

A total of 60 interns participated in the study. Amongst them, 14 (23%) were males and 46 (77%) were females. Questions in the study were mainly directed towards answering 7 main themes; including interest towards dentistry, perception towards periodontics, importance of MDS, awareness about the stream, concerns regarding consultation, curiosity and guidance about the subject and future of the stream.<sup>[2]</sup>

### • Interest

Participants were asked questions assessing their interest towards dentistry. It was found that, when the participants were asked whether pursuing BDS was your 1<sup>st</sup> option, only 23% of the participants agreed confirming that BDS was their first choice; rest stated that they pursued BDS either because they could not get through MBBS and next best option was BDS, or they had some kind of familial background in that field. In correlation, it was found that, off the participants 21.6% of them had either parents or some family member, who was a dentist. Having a family member as a dentist, could be one of the factors that influences the decision while making a career choice.

### • Importance of MDS

Of the two broadly available options after BDS, interns are the ones who come across maximum dilemma so as to do or not to do MDS. Amongst the participants; 63% of them agreed to the option that MDS is a must for securing a good future, whereas 27% of them stood by the opinion that clinical practice was the way to go. Based on their knowledge at undergraduate level regarding the various streams, when asked about their field of choice, it was reported as under:

| Field of Specialization                | % of Participants |
|--|-------------------|
| Prosthodontics                         | 20                |
| Endodontics and Conservative Dentistry | 23                |
| Orthodontics                           | 5                 |
| Periodontics                           | 15                |
| Oral Surgery                           | 21.6              |
| Pedodontics                            | 6.6               |
| Oral Medicine and Radiology            | 3.3               |
| Public Health Dentistry                | 3.3               |
| Oral Pathology                         | 1.6               |

### • Perception towards Periodontics

At undergraduate level, 80% of the participants agreed that they liked Periodontics as a subject. This reflected a positive attitude towards the stream when considered at an undergraduate level. But when the similar was assessed from post-graduation point of view, Periodontics as a stream for pursuing masters was

considered at rank no. 4 amongst the 9 available dental specialties. One of the reasons behind that could be the gender perception regarding the stream. 61.6% of the participants agreed that Periodontics was a female dominant branch of dentistry. Only 15 % of participants stated that they would pursue MDS in periodontics by choice. Whereas, when participants were assessed about

their willing towards MDS in periodontics if they were granted a seat; 58.3% agreed to it, whereas 32% of them still stood by a no for this stream.

- **Awareness**

The degree of awareness regarding a subject is directly proportional to its growth and flourishing. 75% of the participants agreed that, there is lack of awareness in the field of periodontics. They believed that they were not much aware about the stream that would make them want to pursue it in future.

- **Concerns regarding Consultation**

Although not a lot of participants were inclined towards the stream, but they did realize its importance; since 81.6% of the participants agreed that presence of a Periodontist on a consulting panel is of prime importance. Since periodontium deals with the attachment apparatus surrounding the tooth, it is believed that a periodontist's opinion should be considered while implant planning or while dealing with any orthodontically or prosthodontically involved

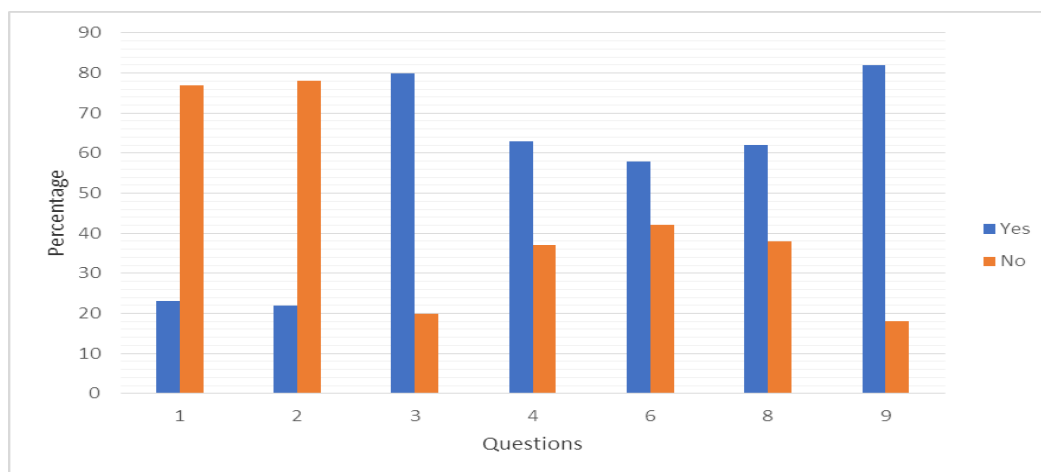
multidisciplinary cases. Around 55% of the participants gave affirmation for the same.

- **Curiosity and Guidance about the subject**

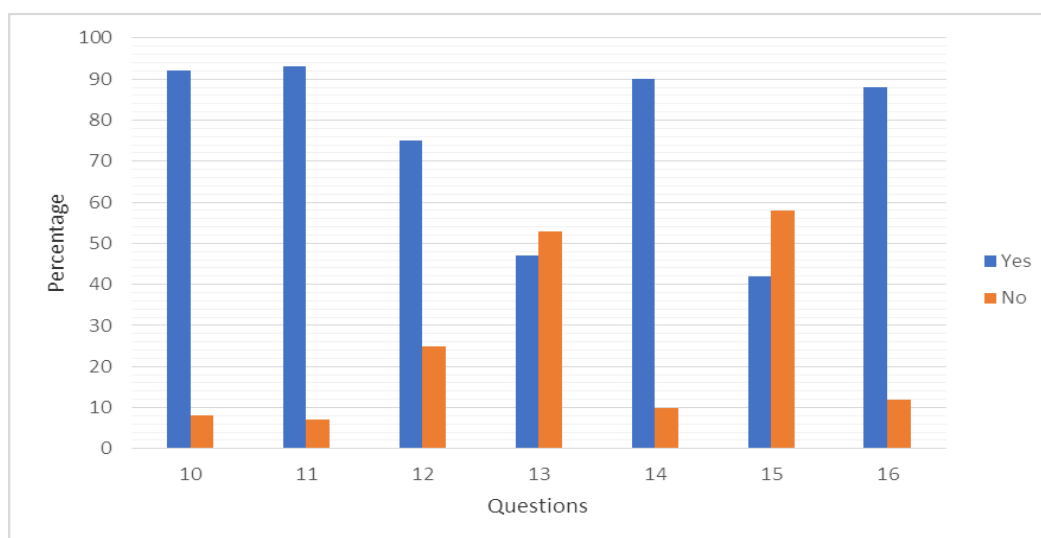
Periodontics is a vast stream comprising of a lot of opportunities. At an undergraduate level, not all the available opportunities or sides of periodontics are put forth. A lot remains unexplored. More than 54% of the participants agreed that, the gist of what periodontics actually comprises of is not sufficiently covered at undergraduate level. 90% of the participants agreed to the fact that from a clinical point of view, they should be exposed more to the surgical, regenerative and aesthetic aspect of periodontics to inculcate more inquisitiveness regarding the subject.

- **Future**

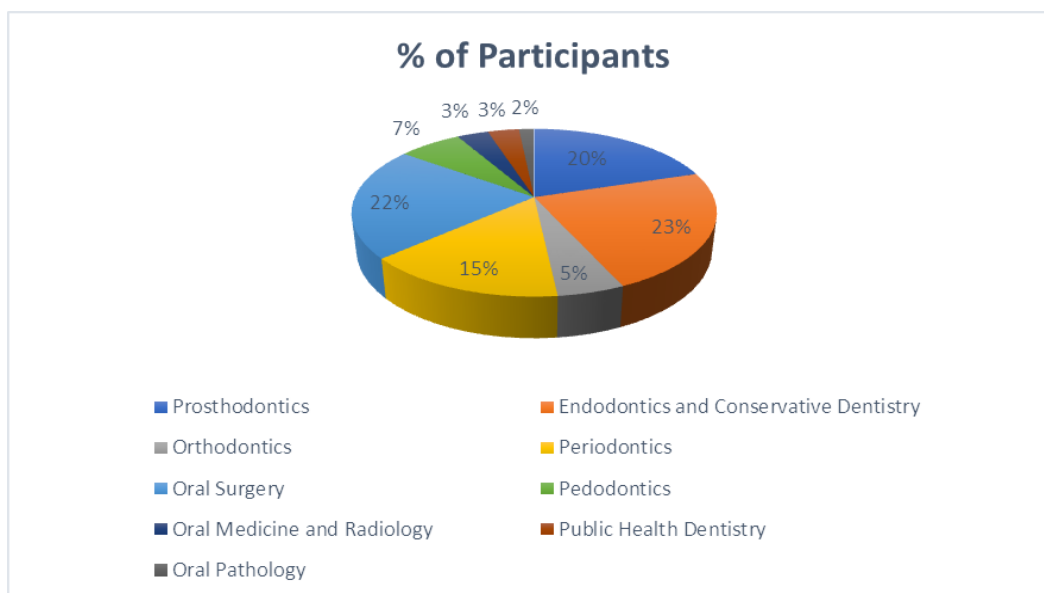
59% of participants believe that, the curriculum of Periodontics needs an absolute upgradation at undergraduate level academically as well as clinically. Also, 88% do believe that Periodontics has a good scope in future provided they receive the right guidance at the right time.



Graph I



Graph II



Graph III

## DISCUSSION

Among the various disciplines in dentistry, Periodontics accounts for one of the important streams. The word periodontium itself means around the tooth, i.e., it refers to the anatomical structure involved in resisting forces applied to the teeth especially the gingiva, periodontal ligament, cementum and alveolar bone. Periodontics broadly involves the supporting tissues which in turn holds the hard tissue in its place. So, the importance of the stream should be accounted at the very basic level. Considering this into account, the current study was conducted to assess the approach of students towards pursuing periodontics as a career option.

The present study reported a higher number of female participants when compared to the number of male participants. This finding was in affirmation with several other related studies quoted in the literature.<sup>[1,4-7]</sup> Also, the overall attitude of the participants towards the stream was found to be a female dominant one; the reason being that most of the participants considered periodontics as a branch not involving a lot of clinical work and they feared that they would lose their clinical hand over practice.

As per the DCI guidelines which forms the basis of dental education in India, every dental student has to complete 1 year of rotating internship including all departments after completing their 4 years of education.<sup>[3]</sup> It is during this phase of internship that the students are exposed to the clinical aspect of several streams; which in turn accounts as a major modifying factor which influences their choice while selecting a particular stream for specialization. Considering this aspect, in our study when the participants were asked so as to where would they rank the stream of periodontics; based on the results periodontics was ranked at no. 4. This finding receives its literature support from yet another study conducted by Nupur Sharma and Kittu Jain

(2016) which assessed preference of specialty and the factors affecting the choice of specialty areas among dental graduates in a dental institution in Bhubaneswar, India and found that periodontics was ranked no.6; last amongst all the clinical specialties.<sup>[3]</sup>

The field of periodontics is flourishing in all aspects, ranging from newer advances in diagnostic aids, to use of several growth factors for regeneration, to newer minimally invasive aesthetic surgical procedures. These evidence-based advances give a level of predictability of success like never before. These advances are gradually being adopted by the dental institutes all over the country.<sup>[8]</sup> In the near future, the branch of periodontics has been envisioned to reach newer heights and having a very bright future awaiting in front of us.

Due to lack in the number of such studies conducted in the literature, which are concerned regarding this aspect; no extensive comparison could be made with other studies.

## LIMITATIONS

A major drawback of the present study was the low number of participants because of this limitation result of this study should be considered preliminary. Further studies with larger sample sizes should be conducted. Also being confined to the interns from a single dental college, the result may not be applicable to other institute of the state. Studies that involve interns from the entire state or country need to be carried out to assess the attitude of the student towards choosing periodontics as a career option.

## CONCLUSION

The findings from this study helps in better understanding of intern's motivation, perception, inclination and difficulties in choosing periodontics as a career option proper orientation and awareness regarding

the subject from the under-graduation level is the need of the hour. Prior counseling of the students who are not aware of the future aspects of the stream should be done. It is necessary to widen the horizons of the undergraduate students towards the subject from it being just a clinical posting consisting of scaling; to being a beautiful branch of dentistry involving sculpting the pink soft tissues which in turn holds the white hard tissues of the oral cavity.

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