

A Review on the Perceptions and Motivating Factors on the Choice of a Medical Career amongst School Students

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Abstract

Medical science is a profession that harbingers the individual to develop clinical and academic skills with a demeanor adept for the profession. As the intrinsic interest for most vocations begins at a young age in most individuals, perceptions regarding the same profession might vary from person to person. Formation of perceptions could either motivate the child in gravitating towards the vocation or hold apprehensions regarding the same. With respect to a career like medical science which requires the professional to be proficient in his or her intellect and skills and work in extreme situations regarding matters of life and death, the motivation towards this noble profession ought to be genuine. An exhaustive survey of literature pertaining to the perceptions, attitudes, apprehensions and motivating factors of school students towards the profession of medical science was carried out. This paper reviews five studies conducted on school students regarding their perception and motivating factors in joining the profession of medical science. These factors have also corroborated into reflecting the disposition of these school students towards the profession.

Keywords: *Perceptions; Motivating Factors; Medical Career; School Students*

Introduction

Medicine is a profession that most individuals would have aspired at one point of time in their lives-owing to their recurrent acquaintance with medical professionals such as doctors and nurses in their childhood. For the treatment of illness, these frequent visits would have established a fearsome image of the doctor in the minds of the child. Parents and family are partly responsible for this perception by the child. As the child progresses through adolescence, the skills of observation, cognition and abstract thinking develop, and the adolescent begins to understand the nuances and functioning of the profession, as that which is responsible for safeguarding life. Such analyses and comprehension develops in the high school adolescent, both an appreciation and awe for the profession and the professionals, where they tend to imagine themselves in their shoes in dealing with life and death situations to serve the sick. It is this inspiration that motivates the higher secondary adolescent in the long run in order to join the profession. The paper reviews five studies conducted on school students regarding their perception and motivating factors in joining the profession of medical science. These factors have also corroborated into reflecting the disposition of these school students towards the profession.

Methods

A literature review was undertaken from January 2015 to September 2018 using JSTOR, ProQuest, Google Scholar and PubMed. Key words such as 'reasons for joining the medical profession', 'motivations for a medical career', 'perception of the medical profession' and

'school students and the medical profession' were searched for, which was presented with a plethora of research papers and publications. A few research studies were rejected as they were non-empirical. Several research conducted on medical students' attitude and motivating factors for medical science were found. However, as the focus of the study was on school students perceptions and motivating factors, the other reviews were discarded. It came to the investigator's awareness that research conducted on school students with respect to their perceptions of the medical profession was limited. With those available too, studies that were empirical in nature were scarce. Hence, with the available reviews it was narrowed down to five empirical papers which were conducted specifically on school students. The investigators categorized these five papers, after their content analysis into two areas: one regarding the motivation of school students towards medical science and the other regarding their perceptions of the profession.

Perceptions of school students regarding the medical profession

An insight and observation into a person's way of thinking or attitude towards an object would define their perception towards it. An individual could perceive a vocation with respect to his or her personal acquaintance with the members of the vocation or by observing the way such members conduct themselves. As a school goer, a child gets exposed to people from different walks of life- in their school, home, neighborhood and community. Such exposure allows the child to meet people from variant careers and the curiosity in the child would entail him or her to discuss by default about such professionals with their family- as a school going child considers family to be the foremost source of authentic information. The opinions and perspectives of the family members would also influence the school going child in envisaging or disregarding his or her life in that ambition.

Despite possessing a genuine passion towards the profession, when it comes to medical science, apprehensions regarding the same exist even in the minds of students- at a tender age. Wouters, Croiset and Isik analyzed how prospective high school medical aspirants decide on the choice of medicine as a career and their motivational reasons for the same [1]. The results revealed that adolescents were found to be intrinsically motivated owing to genuine interest for medicine, knowledge about the functioning of the human body along with a desire to help the sick- the last reason being more prominent among females than males. The interest to study medicine was also highlighted due to the value and acknowledgement of the significance of this profession and the course of studies. Another dominant factor cited by students included acquaintance with the profession of medical science. This was observed when adolescents themselves or their near and dear ones had the experience in being patients and had come in contact with medical professionals. It could also be owing to the presence of one or more medical professionals in the family, which would have kindled their liking towards the profession. Learning of subjects related to medicine and understanding their correlation in the functioning of the human body further accentuated their interest. However, the professional hierarchy, work culture, onus of life and death of patients with strenuous working conditions were certain vocational apprehensions that these students expressed.

Juma, Tamkin and Banu in a communication letter have marvelled that the transition from school to medical university is a tedious one for students as it demands them to dabble with several changes in learning styles and develop self-dependence [2]. This struggle could influence students experience by preventing them from progressing and cause them to discontinue their studies. The communicators suggest the involvement of school teachers in the preparation of the transition phase for high school students by providing a suitable bridge course for the same. Activities such as organising career orientation sessions on the medical profession, pep-talks by medical students on the reality of the profession and means to manage the transition phase could be suggestive measures organised to bridge the gap. This insight could give them a realisation of their 'fitness' for the profession.

Socio-economic status across students is yet another factor affecting the choice of a medical career. This thought has been substantiated by Greenhalgh, Seyan and Boynton [3]. They conducted a study-cum-survey on the perceptions of high school pupil towards the profession of medical science across their socio-economic status, sex differences and ethnic backgrounds of high school pupil. The results revealed fewer differences across sex and ethnicity but striking differences across the social status. Pupil from higher socioeconomic groups perceived the profession to contribute immensely to the personal fulfilment and achievement, despite being a challenging career option. Such pupil had personally researched the nature of the profession and had a definite approach chalked out to pursue their goal. Pupil

from working-class force perceived the medical course of study to be an unknown territory for them to land on. They also underestimated their chances of successful entry into medical studies. The groups from the lower socioeconomic strata held stereotypical views of the profession, often derived from those portrayed by media. They undervalued their chances of qualifying into the profession and held the view that medical studies were meant for the elite and uber class of students. Financial rewards were a prominent factor associated with the profession as cited by them. They also opined that an individual pursuing this vocation ought to make several personal adjustments and sacrifices for the same. Irrespective of the social class, all pupil expressed their concern about the cost of medical studies. However, it was those from the humble backgrounds who saw it as an impediment to their choice of vocation.

Motivating factors of school students for the choice of a medical career

When it comes to choosing a career, several factors are most likely to influence an individual such as family, friends, peers and society- apart from their intrinsic interest towards it. The choice of a career like medical science has also its shares of having factors that intrinsically and extrinsically influence the concerned individual. Shaikh, Babar and Cross examined the influence that Mini-Medical Schools had on suburban and rural high school students from a South Eastern region of Ireland [4]. Mini-Medical Schools are career orientation programmes organised for high school students with the intention of promoting awareness about healthcare professionals and the practice of medicine. A survey was also conducted at the end of the programme and several factors affecting high school student's opinion of medicine as a career was highlighted. While majority of the students indicated a strong desire to pursue medical science after leaving school, personal choice and interest was the most prominent reason for the same. Opportunity to help people were one of the other influential factors listed. While women were more likely to cite advice from family as a factor, men were more likely to opt for monetary benefits, past experience with doctors and personality fit associated with the profession. The presence of family members in the healthcare sector was also cited as a reason for the same.

McHugh, MA and A carried out a study to assess the factors influencing school-going students considering medical careers in Ireland [5]. Until 2009, the entry into Irish medical schools was solely based on the qualifying school leaving certificate examination. Then, the Health Professions Admission Test (HPAT) exam was introduced for entry assessment into medical school clubbed with the results of the school-leaving exam to qualify for the medical school admission programme. The HPAT is constructed and administered based on the UMAT (The Undergraduate Medicine and Health Sciences Admission Test) in Australia testing non-verbal reasoning, logical reasoning and people understanding. The Royal Colleges of Surgeons, Ireland, conducted a week-long "Introduction to Medicine" programme for 128 school leaving students as a career formulation orientation into medicine, aged 15 - 18. This included exposing students to interactive sessions and tutorials with medical professionals. A live video of an ongoing laparoscopic surgery was also screened to students. At the end of the week-long orientation programme-cum-bridge course into medicine, students were given a Likert scale questionnaire to fill the extent of the influence of the programme and to mention factors motivating them to choose medicine as a vocation for life. T-tables were constructed for statistical analysis using X analysis to generate p-values. Ninety six per cent of the participants had expressed their desire to study medicine after school. The most important reason cited by students to choose the medical profession was to help others (97.7%), followed by financial rewards (85.9%). Ability to adapt to a medical career on introspection was yet another influential factor (84.4%), followed by advice from friends and family (64.1%); past experience of medical professionals (60.2%) and cognitive ability for choosing the profession.

Conclusion

The review has highlighted poignant findings with respect to the disposition of school students towards the profession of medical science. Students who intend to pursue this profession have acknowledged that passion and a genuine interest with a desire to help the sick were the main reasons for the same. The ability for them to adapt to a medical career was also highlighted as an introspection of their 'fitness' with the profession, while another has shown that socio-economic status causes a difference in the analysis of the pupils' 'fitness' for a medical career, where school students underestimated their ability to qualify into the profession. It is this underestimation of their ability which makes them develop a perspective of the profession as one being tough to qualify into. Prior acquaintance with the profes-

sion and past experience with medical professionals were common factors cited that school students have stated as being motivational reasons. School students cited their apprehensions regarding the profession being a challenging one along with the need to make several personal sacrifices and the exorbitant cost of medical studies. This is in tandem with the thought that transition from school to medical college can dampen the spirits of students owing to the large differences in pedagogy and the vast curriculum. It is here where the need of career orientation and counselling sessions for prospective medical aspirants in schools arise. Such sessions can psychologically prepare school students to face the demands and challenges of their impending medical career and help develop a favourable disposition towards medical science.

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