



LIFE IN THE MEDICAL CAREER: PERCEPTION OF PRE-UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Somsubhra De¹
Ankur Barua²
Alpana Chhetri³

ABSTRACT

Objectives: Pre-University students have to decide their career pathway. In this study the primary objective was to find out the perception of students keen on pursuing medical career. Our secondary objective was to find out the parents' response to their decision according to them. Material and Methods: Fifty one students from two colleges were given questionnaire survey. They were from the same Pre-University institution but their colleges were located in East and Peninsula Malaysia. They fulfilled the criteria for selection, which were doing "A" levels currently with Biology as one of the subjects and they were keen to pursue medical career. The perceptions were expressed in percentages and the statistical analysis, to compare the perceptions in two different locations, was done by Chi Square test using SPSS Version 16.0 Results: From 51 students, 29 were from East Malaysia and 22 were from Peninsula Malaysia. There were 61% (31) female and 39% (20) male students. The sex ratio was matched in both locations ($\chi^2 = 0.047$ and $p = 0.829$, OR 1.133 (95% CI: 0.365 – 3.519)). Occupation of the parents were mainly Skilled workers or Professionals and were matched in both locations. Forty five percent of the students perceived that medical career would be busy, hectic and challenging whereas around 20% felt that it would be an interesting career. Fifty five percent of students mentioned that their parents encouraged their decision however 20% expressed anxiety and discouragement on their decision. There were no significant difference in the perception of the students ($\chi^2 = 3.062$, $p = 0.690$) or their parents view on their decision ($\chi^2 = 2.030$, $p = 0.730$) in the two locations. Conclusions: Almost half of the students were aware that the medical career would be busy, hectic and challenging. Majority had their parents' encouragement to pursue a medical career.

Key Words: Medical career, Parents' view, Students, Perception, Professionals.

JEL CODE: I1

INTRODUCTION

During the Pre-University stage, students reach a phase in life when a decision has to be made to choose the career pathway that is most suitable for them. The decision is influenced by various factors like parents' occupation, media information (either internet or visual media) and also peer interaction through social networking. Students might not be fully aware of the expectations and

¹ Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Melaka Manipal Medical College, Melaka, Malaysia Jalan Batu Hampar, Bukit Baru, Melaka 75150, Malaysia **E-mail:** somde@yahoo.com

² Department of Community Medicine, Melaka Manipal Medical College, Melaka, Malaysia Jalan Batu Hampar, Bukit Baru, Melaka 75150, Malaysia **E-mail:** ankurbarua26@yahoo.com

³ Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Chitra Ranjan Seva Sadan, Calcutta, India **E-mail:** chhetripana@yahoo.com

demands of the career they are headed for. Therefore the role of a professional school counselor is very important.

The counselors provide guidance on academic and career goals. They also inform the students about various college accesses thereby attempting to ensure success in the student's personal and social life. Bowers, J (2005). Every school or a group of schools usually appoints a counselor who educates and guides the students from their elementary, middle and high school. There are studies where medical students have discussed that they chose the medical career because they liked biological sciences, were keen to do research, felt it was challenging and would make them venture out of their comfort zone or merely got influenced by various television programs. [NHS \(2011\)](#). There are also studies which states that they chose a particular specialty after their basic medical degree based on different beliefs towards different specialties during their preclinical and post clinical sessions. Furnham A F. (1986) & Scott I (2007). Some did not prefer a specialty because it belonged to a lower income group and due to the prevalent health care system with respect to a certain specialty. Geiger H J (1993) & Stimmel B (1992). There are no studies which addresses the students' view about the medical career before they embark into it. Hence this raises a question on how well informed a student is about the life ahead when he makes a career decision. At the beginning of the career, these students may need some financial and emotional support. Thus this warrants that we study the views and socioeconomic background of their parents or guardian.

Our study was focused on students who have already decided to pursue a career in medicine. The primary objective was to assess their perception about the life in the medical career and also their parents' view on their decision. The study was conducted on two different locations and different sets of students with the secondary objective to note the difference in perception amongst these students and their parents.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was done in a Pre-University Institution which has its colleges in Peninsula and East Malaysia. It was done as a pilot study in between the months of February – April 2011. It was done as a questionnaire survey of students chosen by stringent criteria. All the students were pursuing "A" Level with Biology as one of their subjects. Out of these, only those students, who showed keen interest in pursuing Medical studies in the future, were chosen for the survey. The survey was kept anonymous for the students to express their views freely. The demographic profile of the students also included the occupation of their parents. The occupation of the parents was included in the questionnaire to have an idea of their socioeconomic and educational background. The questionnaire mainly focused on their views of a doctor's life and their parents' perception about them becoming doctors. These data was compiled from the two colleges that were placed in different location around 1000 kilometers apart. The perceptions were expressed in proportions and further statistical analysis was carried out using SPSS Version 16.0.0 and Chi Square test was done to check for any association between the perceptions of students and their parents from the two different locations.

RESULTS

A total of 51 students were chosen from the two colleges located in Peninsula and East Malaysia of the same Pre University Institution with 22 from Peninsula Malaysia and 29 from East Malaysia. The mean age of all these students was 18.49 years (Standard Error of Mean 0.094), Peninsula Malaysia was 18.50 years (0.109) and East Malaysia was 18.46 years (0.146). There were 31 (61%) female and 20 (39%) male students in total. The sex ratio was matched in both the locations and there was no significant statistical difference in the sex ratio amongst the two locations as shown below in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Association between the Sex ratio in the different locations. $\{x^2 = 0.047$ with df of 1 and $p = 0.829$. OR 1.133 (95% CI: 0.365 – 3.519)}

The occupations of the parents were categorized into three groups Unemployed/Homemakers, Skilled workers and Professionals. The fathers of the students were mainly Skilled workers, 33 (64.7%) and Professionals, 18 (35.3%) whereas the mothers were Homemakers, 25 (49%), Skilled workers, 16 (31.4%) and Professionals, 10 (19.6%). There was no statistically significant difference in the occupational status in the parents of these students when compared in both the locations as shown below in Figure 2(a) and (b).

Figure 2(a) Association between the Father's Occupations in the different locations. $\{x^2=0.019$ with df of 1 and $p = 0.889$. OR 1.086 (95% CI: 0.341 – 3.456)}

Figure 2(b) Association between the Mother's Occupations in the different locations. $(x^2=3.668$ with df of 2 and $p = 0.160$) {HM = homemaker, SW = skilled worker, PF= professional}

When it came to comment about life during medical career, the students mainly felt that a medical career would be busy and hectic [18 (35.3%)] however they also perceived it as an interesting career [10 (19.6%)]. In the questionnaire the students were asked to comment on what their parents thought of their decision. Majority of the students mentioned that their parents encouraged them [28 (54.9%)] to pursue the medical career. Nevertheless there was another group of students who felt that their parents felt worried and/or discouraged them [11 (21.6%)] to take up the medical career.

These perceptions were compared between the two locations and it was noted that there was no statistically significant difference in the perception of the students and their parents' view, according to the students, in these locations. The data is shown in Table 1 and Table 2 respectively.

DISCUSSION

Pre-University education is a bridge to university education. It is a turning point in students' life and the decision taken at this junction paves the path to their future. Medical studies in Malaysia is a 5 years program with the first two years focusing on preclinical and paraclinical subjects and the later years being clinical subjects. A naïve pre-university student is metamorphosed into a young doctor after the 5 years of training in a medical school. The average age of starting medical school in the US is around 22 – 23 years, Anna Burkhead (2009), whereas in Malaysia it is around 20 – 21 years and it was corroborated in our study as well. It is good to note that almost half of the students are aware that a medical career was going to be busy, hectic and challenging but at the same time it reflected apprehension in the young minds. The professional education counselors should address their apprehensions by narrating simple and clear facts about the expectations from a medical student during the years of training. These sessions will alleviate the stress levels that might arise from their apprehensions. These young students need sound family support both financially and emotionally since parents also play a role in guiding and counseling their children. The majority of the students' parents were either skilled workers or professionals in our study and that is suggestive of a possibly good socio-economic and educational background.

The two colleges, involved in the study are separated by almost 1000 kilometers with differences in the racial distributions. Queries on the racial data were made optional in the questionnaire keeping in mind the sensitivities of the students. There was no statistically significant difference in the perception of the students from the two locations. It could be explained that these colleges were under the same institutional policies and hence the teaching and training pattern were also similar. However the point of concern was that almost one out of five parents either expressed anxiety or discouragement to their children when they wanted to pursue a medical career. In this situation, the counselors needed to involve the parents during their counseling sessions along with the students. The aim of the counselors should be to ascertain the cause of the parental reaction and offer them

solutions. It could be due to financial constraints, finding the right medical school or even the thought of separation from the children.

CONCLUSION

The students were aware that the medical career would be busy, hectic and challenging for them. Majority of the parents were encouraging to their children’s decision to join the medical profession. The role of professional counselor would be crucial to address all the apprehensions and offer practical solutions especially to those parents who are anxious about their children’s decision. A study with a larger group of pre-university students would be recommended to make the conclusions more robust and facilitate policy making for the education counselors.

Figure-1. Association between the Sex ratio in the different states. The chi square value is 0.047 with df of 1 and p =0.829. The Odd’s ratio is 1.133 (95% CI: 0.365 – 3.519)

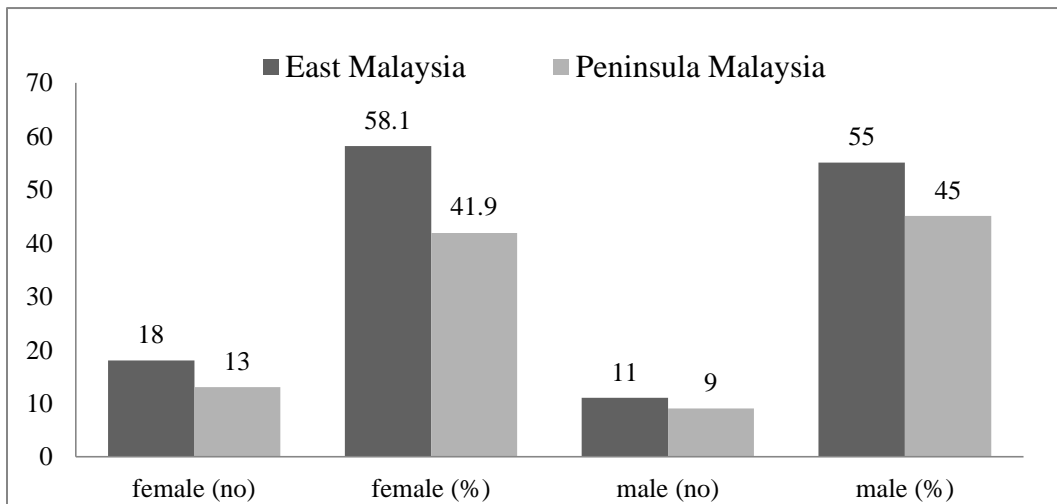


Figure-2(a). Association between the Father’s Occupations in the different states. The chi square value is 0.019 with df of 1 and p =0.889. The Odd’s ratio is 1.086 (95% CI: 0.341 – 3.456)

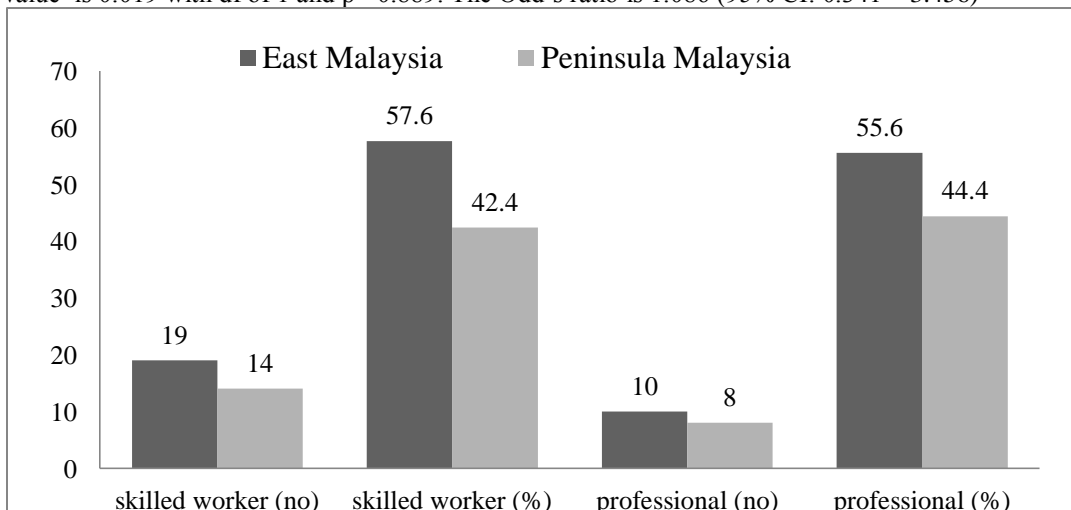


Figure-2(b). Association between the Mother’s Occupations in the different states. The chi square value is 3.668 with df of 2 and $p = 0.160$ {HM = homemaker, SW = skilled worker, PF= professional}

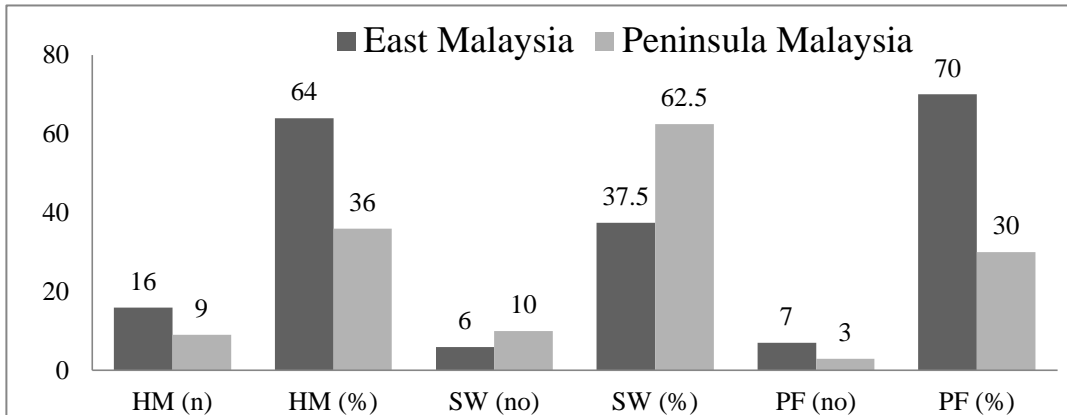


Table-1. Association between the Students’ perceptions in the different states.

Sl. No.	Students' Perception	East Malaysia		Peninsula Malaysia		Total (N = 51)	
		n ₁	%	n ₂	%	N within states	% within states
1.	Busy and hectic life	11	61.1	7	38.9	18	35.3
2.	Challenging but will have good income	7	58.3	5	41.7	12	23.5
3.	Opportunity to help others	6	75	2	25	8	15.7
4.	An interesting career option and one needs to be an expert	5	38.5	8	61.5	13	25.5
	TOTAL	29	56.8	22	43.2	51	100

Here, $\chi^2 = 3.062$, $df=5$ and $p = 0.690$

Table-2. Association between the Parents’ perceptions in the different states..

Sl. No.	Parents’ Perception	East Malaysia		Peninsula Malaysia		Total (N = 51)	
		n ₁	%	n ₂	%	N within states	% within states
1.	Discouraging and worried	8	72.7	3	27.3	11	21.6
2.	Encouraging medical career	15	53.6	13	46.4	28	54.9
3.	Feels it is a Noble profession and will have a good income	6	50	6	50	12	23.5
	TOTAL	29	56.8	22	43.2	51	100

Here, $\chi^2 = 2.030$ with df of 4 and $p = 0.730$

REFERENCES

Bowers, J (2005). American School Counselor Association: The ASCA national model: A framework for school counseling programs (2nd ed).

NHS (2011); Medical Career: Widening participation.
http://www.medicalcareers.nhs.uk/considering_medicine/case-studies.aspx

Furnham A F. (1986) Medical students' beliefs about nine different specialties; BMJ ; Issue 293; page 1607 – 1610

Scott I (2007). Why would I choose a career in family medicine?: Reflections of medical students at 3 universities. Can Fam Physician. Issue 53 Vol 11: page 1956-7.

Geiger H J (1993) Why don't medical students choose primary care? Am J Public Health; Issue83 Vol 3: page 315–316.

Stimmel B (1992). The crisis in primary care and the role of medical schools. JAMA; Issue 268: page 2060-2065.

Anna Burkhead (2009). What Is the Best Age to Start Med School? The Differential: Medscape Med Students. <http://medscape.typepad.com/>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Ms Jayasri Menon and Ms Melissa Lim for arranging the travel and coordinating the process of data collection during the visits to the colleges in Peninsula and East Malaysia. Thanks to Dr Sharmini Arumugam for formatting the article text. We would also thanks the faculty members of the respective colleges who facilitated the selection of the students.