



OBSTETRICS AND GYNAECOLOGY AS A CAREER CHOICE AMONG MEDICAL STUDENTS IN MAKURDI NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA

Maanongun M.T,* Ornguze A.A, Hembah-Hilekaan S.K, Ojabo A.O.

Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, College of Health Sciences, Benue State University, Makurdi, Nigeria.

**Corresponding Author: Dr. Maanongun MT, Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, College of Health Sciences, Benue State University, Makurdi, Nigeria.*

Published: November 23rd 2018.

Abstract

The availability of various health care professionals, including Obstetricians and Gynaecologist, is dependent on career interest of present undergraduate medical students. We sought to identify obstetrics and gynaecology and other career choices among medical students in Makurdi, Nigeria and what affect these choices. Clinical students in the College of Medicine, Benue State University, Makurdi Nigeria completed a pre-validated, self-administered questionnaire on nature and reasons of career choices, assessment and suggestions on ways of improving the training of students in obstetrics and gynaecology. A total of 185 clinical students were eligible and 182(98.4%) participated in the study. The average age of the students was 27.0 ± 3.2 years with a range of 21-40 years. There were 143(78.6%) males and 39(21.4%) females. Overall, the most preferred specialty amongst the students was surgery 51(28.0%), followed by internal medicine 29(15.9%). Obstetrics and gynaecology was the third most preferred specialty with paediatrics, having 20(11.0%) each. The commonest factors influencing their choices were natural interest and personal convenience. Others included possibility of getting a job, financial gains and personal aptitude. One hundred and fifty eight (86.8%) reported that obstetrics and gynaecology was important and interesting, others felt that it was important but either uninteresting or boring. Most students suggested that there should be improvement in the quality of teaching 71 (39%), more bedside teaching 55(30.2%) and practical sessions 48(26.4%).

Keywords: Career choice, developing country, medical students, Obstetrics and gynaecology

Introduction

The important goal of the undergraduate medical education is to train doctors and dentists who would become specialists in the various medical fields. The training of the specialist is important to raise standard of care and improve quality of medical education.¹ For many medical students, rewarding experiences during medical clerking results in attraction to particular areas of medicine and often forms the basis of subsequent career selection.²

After personal interests are identified, students often consider issues that may affect them during the training in a particular specialty.³ It has been suggested that an understanding of factors that influence career choices may help in workforce planning and avoid under or over supply of doctors in different specialties.⁴ Students select a career in Obstetrics and Gynaecology for many reasons. A

study done in a medical center in USA, surveyed graduates over a 10 year period and found that significant factors for choosing obstetrics and gynaecology included, female gender, continuity of patients, surgical opportunities, healthy patients population, female patients and financial opportunity.⁵ During their clinical experience in obstetrics and gynaecology, students often experience deeply meaningful relationships with patients at poignant life milestones including conception, birth and major surgery. In addition students recognize that the field offers the opportunity to develop continuity relationship with patients and perform surgical procedures. Primary care specialists often develop deeply rewarding relationships with patients and their families that extend over decades, but they do not perform many surgical procedures. On the other hand, procedure specialists including general and orthopedic surgeons perform hundreds of operations each year,

but seldom have the opportunity to develop relationships with patients that last decades.³ Obstetrics and gynaecology offers the combination of long term continuity relationships with patients and training in surgical procedures. For others however, the combined challenges of complex cases with unfortunate clinical outcomes, ever growing administrative burdens and the difficulty of balancing work and personal life may cause them to doubt the wisdom of choosing to train in the field of obstetrics and gynaecology.³

In an effort to allow medical educators to target and support students who are most likely to choose a career in obstetrics and gynaecology, this study was conducted to determine the rate and factors that may affect the choice of specialties including obstetrics and gynaecology as a career among clinical students of the Benue State University, Makurdi, North Central Nigeria as well as determine the ways of improving obstetrics and gynaecology as a career choice in Medicine. This is to help identify those areas that need improvement in order to attract potential Obstetricians and Gynaecologist to beef up the number of these specialists needed to tackle the increasing maternal health needs of a developing country like Nigeria.

Materials and Method

This was a cross sectional study done amongst clinical students in February, 2018 using self administered questionnaires. The questionnaires were pretested using 20 Medical students and 5 resident doctors for content validity. After reviewing their comments on relevance and ambiguity of items, the questionnaire was modified into its final form. Participation in the study was voluntary and informed consent form was administered with the questionnaire. Inclusion criteria was being a clinical medical student from 400 level and above and accepting to participate in the study. The exclusion criterion was refusal to participate in the study. The first part of the questionnaire requested socio-demographic details. Students were then asked to select their best preferred career choice out of 21 possible Medical specialties. From 34 possible reasons, the students were asked to select the best reason for making their choice of specialty. The students were then required to rate their perception of obstetrics and gynaecology on the bases of importance and interest. Lastly the students were to provide ways by which obstetrics and gynaecology as a specialty can be improved in terms of trainer-trainee interface.

Data Analysis

Statistical analysis was done using statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) version 23.0. The qualitative data were expressed as frequencies and percentages and the quantitative data were expressed as mean and standard deviation. The observed differences were subjected to chi square test and level of statistical significance was <0.05 .

Results

A total of 185 clinical students were eligible and 182(98.4%) participated in the study. The average age of the students was 27.0 ± 3.2 years with a range of 21-40 years. There were 143(78.6%) males and 39(21.4) females with a male to female ratio of 3.7:1.

Overall the most preferred specialty amongst the students was surgery 51(28.0%), followed by internal medicine 29(15.9%) with obstetrics and gynaecology and paediatrics having 20(11.0%) each. Others included pathology 18(9.9%), community medicine 17(9.3%) and then radiology 9(4.9%). As much as 18(9.9%) were undecided (figure 1).

Table 1 shows the factors that affect the choice of specialty amongst the students. The commonest factors included natural interest and personal convenience. Others included possibility of getting a job, financial gains and personal aptitude. Issues such as quality of teaching, gender issues, role models, family and friends had little effect on the choice of specialty. Three respondents had no reason for their choices. Though gender consideration for choice of specialty was not significant generally, there were 8(40%) female students out of 20 students who chose obstetrics and gynaecology as a specialty.

The rating of obstetrics and gynaecology as a specialty by the respondents is as shown in figure 2. One hundred and fifty eight (86.8%) reported that obstetrics and gynaecology was important and interesting, 17(9.3%) felt that obstetrics and gynaecology was important but not interesting, 4(2.2%) considered the specialty boring and 3(1.6%) considered it a difficult to understand specialty. There was no respondent that considered obstetrics and gynaecology an unimportant specialty.

Table 2 shows the various suggestions that were offered to improve obstetrics and gynaecology as a specialty. Seventy one (39%) respondents suggested that there should be improvement in the quality of teaching of the specialty, 55(30.2%) felt that there should be more bedside teaching, 48(26.4%)

suggested more practical sessions were needed and 7(3.8%) were of the opinion that more time (of posting) should be allotted to the specialty than is currently allotted. One (0.6%) respondent suggested that the teachers should have a more accommodating attitude towards students.

Table 1. Factors influencing career choice among medical Students of Benue State University

| Reasons for their choice | Frequency | Percent |
|------------------------------|------------|------------|
| Natural Interest | 98 | 53.9 |
| Personal Convenience | 33 | 18.1 |
| Possibility of a Job | 18 | 9.9 |
| Financial Reward | 11 | 6.0 |
| Personal Aptitude | 10 | 5.5 |
| Quality of Teaching | 5 | 2.7 |
| Family and Friends Influence | 3 | 1.7 |
| Gender Issues | 2 | 1.1 |
| Role Models | 2 | 1.1 |
| Total | 182 | 100 |

Table 2. Suggestions by Students on ways of improving Obstetrics and Gynaecology as a specialty

| Suggestions of Students | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------------------|------------|------------|
| Improve Quality of Teaching | 71 | 39 |
| More Bedside Teaching | 55 | 30.2 |
| More Practical Sessions | 48 | 26.4 |
| Allocate More Time to the Specialty | 7 | 3.8 |
| Improve Trainer's Attitude | 1 | 0.6 |
| Total | 182 | 100 |

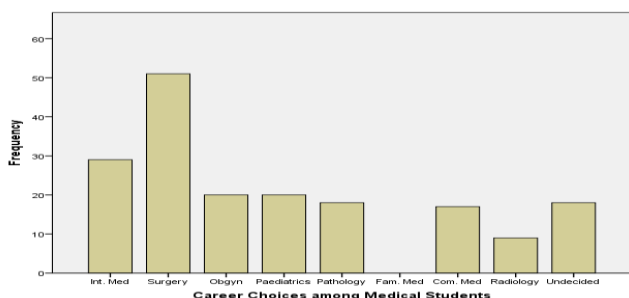


Figure 1. Career choices of medical students at Benue State University, Makurdi

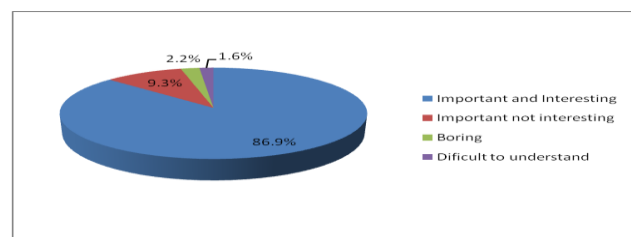


Figure 2. Perceptions of Obstetrics and Gynaecology as a specialty by medical students of Benue State University

Discussion

With Nigeria's estimated annual 40,000 maternal deaths accounting for 14% of the global total and also being the second largest contributor to maternal mortality worldwide, second to India⁶, it becomes very important to increase the number of practicing Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.

Medical students want to specialize for several reasons including better career opportunities and the belief that Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (MB,BS) degree alone does not make them to be proficient and highly skilled.⁷ In this study, the most common career choices amongst medical students were surgery and internal medicine followed by obstetrics and gynaecology and pediatrics. Previous similar works done in Makurdi and Kenya but with emphasis on internal medicine gave similar results.^{7, 8} Many other studies on career choices amongst medical students in low and middle income countries outside Africa show that the core clinical specialties of surgery, internal medicine, obstetrics and gynaecology and pediatrics were the commonest choices.^{9, 10, 11}

Our study shows that the main reason for these choices was personal interest and job satisfaction. Other important reasons were the higher possibility of getting a job, financial gains and personal aptitude. Issues such as teaching, gender, role models, family and friends had little effects on the choice of specialty. This is similar to other studies^{7, 12, 13} where personal interest and job satisfaction were the main reasons for choice of specialty. Though role model was a prominent reason for career choice in these studies, this was not the case with our study.

It was noticed in this study that an appreciable number of students 18(9.9%) and 17(9.3%) selected pathology and community medicine respectively as a specialty. This was at variance with other studies^{7,10} where lower values were obtained for choice of these specialties. Since many students chose specialties based on job availability, it can be rightly assumed that the increased choice of the noncore clinical specialties has increased due to the fact that there are more job opportunities in these specialties. This is however an incidental finding, since it is not part of the aims and objectives of this study.

For obstetrics and gynaecology as a career, it was the third popular choice together with pediatrics at 11%. This is similar to other studies.⁷⁻¹⁰ Though the reasons for the choice of obstetrics and gynaecology were not significantly different from students choosing other

specialties, it was noticed that 8 female students out of 20 chose obstetrics and gynaecology. This is 40% of the students who chose the specialty. This suggests that though the students themselves may not give gender as a reason for career choice, gender plays a role in the choice of obstetrics and gynaecology as a specialty. A study from Michigan State University (USA) investigated the role of students' gender and its effect on determining factors that influence selection of the specialty of obstetrics and gynaecology,¹¹ they found that female students felt more strongly than male students on issues that affect women's health, and this must have affected their choice. Our result and many others^{14,15} appear similar in this respect.

We sought to know the impression of students concerning obstetrics and gynaecology as a career. Most of them felt that obstetrics and gynaecology is important and interesting. Those who felt that obstetrics and gynaecology was important and interesting but did not choose it as a career did so probably because they had more interest in other contending specialties. For those who said that obstetrics and gynaecology was not interesting, was boring or difficult are those who need to be considered in efforts to make the specialty more appealing and less difficult by listening to their imputes on training in the specialty.

We then looked at students' impute concerning ways of improving the training in obstetrics and gynaecology. Up to 39% suggested that the quality of teaching should be improved. This was followed by those who felt that bedside teaching and practical sessions should be enhanced. Lastly there were those who suggested that more time of training is needed for this specialty to be appreciated better. Though it will be difficult to increase the period of training in obstetrics and gynaecology because of the contending periods of posting for other specialties, the quality of classroom and bedside teaching and practical sessions can be improved upon. This becomes very important during the curriculum development for trainers. The fact that a student suggested that the attitude of teachers should be improved upon shows the importance of attitude of teachers to the training of students especially obstetrics and gynaecology. Trainers should therefore be aware of this attribute in encouraging students to improve on the choice of obstetrics and gynaecology in terms of interest and their value of the specialty.

Conclusion

Obstetrics and gynaecology was the 3rd most popular career among students. The commonest factors for choosing specialties including obstetrics and gynaecology were natural interest and personal convenience. Though most students considered obstetrics and gynaecology as interesting a good number felt the teaching and practical sessions need improvement.

Conflict interests

Authors declare no conflict of interests.

References

1. Adebajo AA, Mabogunje OA, Pezzela AT. Residency training in the United States: what foreign students should know? *WJOM*. 2003;22:79–87.
2. Petrilli ES. Obstetrics and Gynaecology: consideration in career selection. *Western Journal of Medicine*. 1981;134(1):77-79.
3. Barbieri RL. Why is obstetrics and gynaecology a popular career choice for medical students. *OBG Management*. 2015;27(5):6-8.
4. Kumar R, Dhaliwal U. Career choices of undergraduate medical students. *Natl Med J India*. 2011;24:166-169.
5. Forgy CA, Bonebrake RG, Fleming AD, Haynatzki G. Obstetrics and Gynaecology: to be or not to be? Factors influencing ones decision. *Am J Obstet Gynecol*. 2003;189:652-654.
6. Wekesah F, Izugbara C. Maternal Health in Nigeria: facts and figures. *APHRC*. 2017; www.aphrc.org.
7. Ogiator MO, Ojo BA, Leave ET, Ogiator AB. Internal medicine as a career choice by medical undergraduates in a developing country. *AJMH*. 2017;2(4):1-6.
8. Dossajee H, Obonyo N, Ahmed SM. Career preferences of final year students at a medical school in Kenya- a cross sectional study. *BMC Med Educ*. 2016;16:5-14.
9. Khader Y, Al-Zoubi D, Amarin Z, Alkafagei A, Khasawneh M, Burgan S, et al. Factors affecting medical students in formulating their specialty preferences in Jordan. *BMC Med Educ*. 2008;8(1):32.
10. Rehman A, Rehman T, Shaikh MA, Yasmin H, Asif A, Kafil H. Pakistani medical students' specialty preference and the influencing factors. *The Journal of the Pakistan Medical Association (JPMA)*. 2011;61(7):713.
11. Schnuth RL, Vasilenko P, Mavis B, Marshall J. What influences medical students to pursue careers in obstetrics and gynecology? *Am J Obstet Gynecol* 2003; 189: 639-633.
12. Ahmed SM, Majumdar MA, Karim R, Rahman S, et al. Career choices in preventive and social medicine and other non-Clinical specialties among medical students: Bangladesh perspective. *South East Asia. J Public Health*. 2013;1(1):64-67.
13. Hauer KE, Durning SJ, Kerman WN, Fagan MJ, et al. Factors associated with medical students career choice regarding internal medicine. *JAMA*. 2008;300(10): 1154–1164.
14. Scott IM, Nasmith T, Gowans MC, Diet MN, Wright BJ, Brenneis FR. Obstetrics and Gynaecology as a Career Choice: a cohort study of Canadian medical students. *J Obstet Gynaecol Can*. 2010;32(11):1063–1069.
15. Bédard MJ, Berthiaume S, Beaulieu MD, Leclerc C. Factors influencing the decision to practise obstetrics among Quebec medical students: a survey. *J Obstet Gynaecol Can*. 2006;28:1075–82.