

Pediatric Dentistry Residents’ Professional and Job Satisfaction: The Role of Personal and Educational Experiences with Pediatric Dentistry

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: During the recruitment process of pediatric dentistry residents, an interesting question is which prior experiences might result in future pediatric dentists with high job satisfaction. The objectives were to assess pediatric dentistry residents’ personal experiences prior to dental school, educational experiences during dental school and in pediatric dentistry programs, and their professional interest in treating adult patients and patients with special health care needs and their professional and job satisfaction. The relationships between personal / educational experiences and career interests and satisfaction was also explored.

Methods: Anonymous web-based survey data were collected from 119 pediatric dentistry residents who were members of the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry.

Results: 5.0% had a pediatric dentist as a family member; 57.6% had shadowed a pediatric dentist before dental school. The majority was satisfied with their exposure to pediatric dentistry faculty and their clinical and classroom-based pediatric dentistry dental school education. The majority reported that they learned a lot from pediatric dentistry instructors, residents and staff and had a high comfort level with treating pediatric patients and job satisfaction. While personal experiences prior to dental school and dental school educational experiences did not correlate with the pediatric dentistry interests and job satisfaction, educational experiences in pediatric dentistry programs correlated with level of comfort when treating challenging patients, positive attitudes towards treating patients with special healthcare needs and with job satisfaction.

Conclusions: Pediatric residents’ personal experiences prior to dental school and positive educational experiences in dental school do not correlate with their professional and career satisfaction. However, the fact that the absolute majority of pediatric dentistry residents evaluate their residency experiences quite positively and that these educational experiences are significantly correlated with professional interests, attitudes and career satisfaction is quite noteworthy.

BACKGROUND

- Research showed that faculty influence and prior dental school experiences played a role when students were deciding to pursue specialties rather than pursuing postdoctoral general dentistry (1).
- Dental students’ most important factor when deciding on a specialty was enjoyment of providing care in a specialty or field (2).
- The less time pediatric dentists spent doing administrative work and the more time they spent in the operatory, the more satisfied they were (3).

OBJECTIVES

The objectives were to assess pediatric dentistry residents’

- personal experiences prior to dental school,**
- educational experiences during dental school and in pediatric dentistry programs, and**
- professional and job satisfaction.**
- The relationships between personal / educational experiences and career interests and satisfaction were also explored.**

METHODS

This research was determined to be exempt from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight by the Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences IRB of the University of Michigan.

Respondents:

- Data were collected from 119 pediatric dentistry residents who were members of the AAPD.

Procedure:

- Data were collected with an anonymous web-based survey.

Table 1: Background and educational characteristics

Background characteristics	Frequencies N = 119	Percentages
Gender: - male - female	33 85	28% 72%
Age	Mean = 30.80	Range: 25-42
Is anybody in your family a dentist? YES	28	23.5
Educational characteristics	Frequencies	Percentages
DMD / DDS graduation year	Mean = 2018.81	SD = 3.358
Residency program is: - School-based - Hospital-based - Combined	Frequencies 7 50 62	Percentages 5.9% 42.0% 52.1%
Year in residency: - First year - Second year - Third year	Frequencies 50 54 6	Percentages 45.5% 49.1% 5.5%

RESULTS

The **first objective** was to assess pediatric dentistry residents’ personal experiences prior to dental school. **Table 2** shows that a total of 5.0% had a family member who was a pediatric dentist and 57.6% had shadowed a pediatric dentist before starting dental school.

Table 2: Personal experiences prior to dental school

PERSONAL experiences with pediatric dentistry before dental school:	Frequencies Yes	Percentages Yes
Is anybody in your family a pediatric dentist?	6	5.0%
Did you see a pediatric dentist when you grew up?	40	33.6%
Did you shadow a pediatric dentist in an office setting?	68	57.6%
Did you shadow a pediatric dentist in an operating room?	29	24.4%
Did you work in a pediatric dental practice?	24	20.2%
Sum score of personal experiences with pediatric dentistry	Mean = 1.41	Range: 0-5

The **second objective** was to assess educational experiences during dental school and in pediatric dentistry programs. **Table 3** shows that the majority was satisfied with their exposure to pediatric dentistry faculty (50.7%), their clinical (32.5%) and their classroom-based pediatric dentistry education (49.4%) during dental school.

Table 3:
Pediatric dentistry exposure during dental school education

Positive exposure to pediatric dentistry during dental school	1 ¹	2	3	4	5	Mean
- pediatric dentistry faculty members?	1.7%	16.8%	27.7%	32.8%	21.0%	3.55
- classroom-based education in pediatric dentistry?	0.8%	10.9%	38.7%	31.9%	17.6%	3.55
- clinic-based pediatric dentistry education?	1.7%	21.8%	44.5%	20.2%	11.8%	3.18
I am satisfied with my dental school clinical education about pediatric dentistry ²	4.3%	22.2%	20.5%	34.2%	18.8%	3.41
I am satisfied with my dental school classroom-based education about pediatric dentistry. ²	1.7%	14.4%	16.1%	46.6%	21.2%	3.71
“Positive dental school experiences with pediatric dentistry” Index (alpha = 0.816)	Mean = 3.49		SD = 0.787		Range: 1.60-5.00	
Motivation for more dental school education about pediatric dentistry	1 ²	2	3	4	5	Mean
During dental school, I would have liked more clinical exposure to pediatric dentistry.	0%	4.2%	16.0%	45.4%	34.5%	4.10
During dental school, I would have liked more exposure to pediatric dentistry in the dental school curriculum.	0.8%	10.1%	29.4%	39.5%	20.2%	3.68
During dental school, I would have liked an earlier clinical exposure to pediatric dentistry in the dental school curriculum.	0%	11.8%	33.6%	27.7%	26.9%	3.70
During dental school, I would have liked an earlier classroom-based pediatric dentistry education.	0%	19.3%	33.6%	30.3%	16.8%	3.45
“Motivation for more dental school education about pediatric dentistry” Index (alpha = 0.861)	Mean =3.73		SD = 0.768		Range: 2.00 - 5.00	

Legend:
1 Answers ranged from 1 = none, 2 = a little, 3 = some, 4 = much to 5 = very much.
2 Answers ranged from 1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither disagree nor agree, 4 = agree to 5 = agree strongly.

The **third objective** was to assess pediatric dentistry residents’ professional and job satisfaction. **Table 4** shows the absolute majority reported that they had learned a lot from pediatric dentistry instructors (95.8%), residents (97.4%) and staff (93.2%) and had a high comfort level with treating pediatric patients (%-point scale with 5 = highest comfort: Mean = 4.03) and job satisfaction (Mean = 4.28).

Table 4:
Satisfaction with pediatric dentistry behavior and education

Satisfaction with the pediatric dentistry related professional behavior	1 ¹	2	3	4	5	Mean
I am comfortable treating strong-willed children.	0%	1.7%	10.3%	68.1%	29.9%	4.16
I am comfortable treating anxious children	0%	0.9%	6.0%	53.8%	39.3%	4.32
I am comfortable when children cry in my chair.	0%	0.9%	10.3%	53.4%	35.3%	4.23
I am comfortable with upset patients.	0%	5.2%	12.1%	55.2%	27.6%	4.05
I am comfortable with upset parents.	1.7%	24.1%	23.3%	36.2%	14.7%	3.38
“Comfort level with treating pediatric patients” Index (Cronbach alpha = 0.810)	Mean = 4.03		SD = 0.601		Range = 2.4-5	
Satisfaction with the pediatric dentistry residency education	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
I am comfortable approaching/ working with the pediatric dentistry faculty.	0.9%	0.9%	4.3%	45.3%	48.7%	4.40
I learn a lot from the pediatric dentistry instructors in the clinics.	0.9%	3.4%	2.6%	46.6%	46.6%	4.34
I learn a lot from other pediatric dentistry residents in the clinics.	0%	2.6%	14.5%	35.9%	47.0%	4.27
I learn a lot from pediatric dentistry staff.	0.9%	6.0%	9.4%	46.2%	37.6%	4.14
“Satisfaction with pediatric dentistry residency education” Index (Cronbach alpha = 0.823)	Mean = 4.28		SD = 0.639		Range: 1.5 - 5	

Legend:
1 Answers ranged from 1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither disagree nor agree, 4 = agree to 5 = agree strongly.

The **fourth objective** was to assess pediatric dentistry residents’ relationships between personal / educational experiences and career interests and satisfaction. **Table 5** shows while personal experiences prior to dental school and dental school educational experiences did not correlate with pediatric dentistry interests and job satisfaction, educational experiences in pediatric dentistry programs correlated significantly with level of comfort when treating challenging patients, positive attitudes towards treating patients with special healthcare needs and with job satisfaction.

Table 5:
Correlations between experiences with pediatric dentistry and job satisfaction

Educational experiences with pediatric dentistry	Sum personal experiences	Sum dental school experiences	Mean dental school positive experiences	Mean residency positive experiences
Sum personal experiences	1	0.13	0.04	0.05
Sum dental school experiences	0.13	1	0.26**	0.06
Mean dental school positive experiences	0.04	0.26**	1	-0.05
Mean residency program positive experiences	-0.034	0.06	-0.05	1
Mean motivation to become a pediatric dentist	0.04	0.04	-0.44***	0.70***
Job satisfaction with pediatric dentistry	Sum personal experiences	Sum dental school experiences	Mean dental school positive experiences	Mean residency positive experiences
Mean dislike of treating adults patients	0.05	0.10	-0.13	-0.24
Mean comfort	-0.02	0.07	0.07	0.18
Mean comfort with treating patients with SHCN	0.05	0.06	-0.05	0.17
Sum job satisfaction	0.04	0.10	0.0	0.23*

Note: * = p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** = p<0.001

DISCUSSION

- The finding that personal experiences prior to dental school and dental school educational experiences did not correlate with pediatric dentistry interests and job satisfaction is noteworthy. Future research should explore how the decision to pursue pediatric dentistry relates post-residency.
- It is important to note that educational experiences during pediatric dentistry programs correlated with the level of comfort when treating challenging patients, positive attitudes towards treating patients with special healthcare needs and with job satisfaction. These findings are important for pediatric dentistry program directors because their leadership style might affect residents’ experiences in crucial ways.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that:

- Pediatric residents’ personal experiences prior to dental school and positive educational experiences during dental school are not correlate with their professional and career satisfaction.
- The majority of pediatric dentistry residents evaluates their residency experiences quite positively;
- The residency-related educational experiences are significantly associated with professional interests, attitudes and career satisfaction.

Future steps will be to collect data from residents in other dental specialties to investigate whether these findings can be generalized to other specialty programs.

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