

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## The Career Planning of Female Intern Doctors and Their Specialty Preference

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### ABSTRACT

Internship time is a prime time for doctors to decide on their future career planning. It should be decided based on liking, work-life balance, and other factors. This was a cross-sectional study on 92 female intern doctors at Sylhet Women's Medical College Hospital, Sylhet, Bangladesh. Information was achieved by questionnaire. Data of preferred subjects in MBBS, preferred specialty selection, influencing factor, and preferred post-graduate degree were considered variables. A western degree (37.7%) was the most preferred, followed by a fellowship (26%). The most popular specialty was general surgery (29.3%), followed by obstetrics & gynaecology (OBG). Most participants (70%) decided on their own regarding future career planning. It is important to have a well-organized future career plan during the internship. Clinical subjects were preferable to basic subjects as a specialty. Western degrees were popular over national post-graduate degrees.

### INTRODUCTION

Physicians are one of the noblest professionals in the world. In most countries, completing a bachelor's degree in medicine takes nearly 5 – 7 years. The career planning of a doctor usually starts from the first year of the studentship, which becomes more focused during the internship.

Their experience widely influenced the career planning of doctors during studentship, attitude, values, personal circumstances, and aptitude (Yang et al., 2016). The junior doctors of Europe also consider the residency or post-graduation course structure while deciding on their careers (Stilwell et al., 2000). In the last few decades, male and female doctors have considered their family lifestyle when selecting future specialties (Allen et al., 1994). General practitioners prefer lifestyle, working hours, and working environments more than doctors who work in a hospital setup (Ahmed et al., 2011).

A study on Bangladeshi medical students revealed that 50% of students preferred medicine specialties, and 48% preferred surgical specialties as career plans (Ahmed et al., 2011). More than two-thirds (67%) of Bangladeshi medical students want to do private services, followed by government jobs (25%), armed forces (5%), and non-government organisations (3%). Regarding reasons behind choosing the career plan, 38% considered a vast job option, 38% preferred to help others, and 35% felt an enjoyable lifestyle. Some (22%) wanted to deal with the patients directly, and few (13%) wanted to do the job for a fixed hour. More than half (51%) of students wanted to practice abroad, and the majority (90%) wanted to practice in big cities. This was a cross-sectional descriptive study. This study aimed to evaluate the career planning of Sylhet Women’s Medical College Hospital intern doctors.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This was a cross-sectional study to evaluate the intern doctors’ career plans and their career choices. All the participants were female. A total of 92 participants were enrolled. The study was conducted at Sylhet Women’s Medical College Hospital. Ethical approval was achieved by the institutional research board

(IRB). All the participants were invited into the college auditorium. Informed consent was taken from the participants. The objectives of the study were explained to all the participants. When all the participants were confident about self-assessment, then questionnaires were distributed. Participants documented their own career choices and future career planning. All the data from the questionnaires were transferred to an Excel master sheet. Descriptive mathematical calculations were done to find out the means and percentages.

**RESULTS**

Table 1 shows that nearly ninety per cent of the participants were Bangladeshi, and the rest were from Nepal. The mean age of the participants was 24.7 years.

**Table 1** Distribution of all participants (n = 92) according to their country of origin and their mean age.

Country	Number of participants	Percentage (%)	Mean age
Bangladesh	82	89.1%	24.7
Nepal	10	10.8%	

Table 2 illustrates participants’ career choices during the first year and internship. In the first year, Anatomy and Biochemistry was a career plan for 2.1% and 1% of participants, but eventually, those changed after becoming a doctor. Participants who selected general physicians, paediatric surgery, and pharmacology in the first year also did not show interest in those subspecialties later on. Participants grew more interested in dermatology, neurology, paediatrics, medicine, and general surgery during their study period. Pathology is the only subspecialty where nobody was interested in the first year, but 2.1% developed interest during the internship.

**Table 2** Career choice of participants in the first year and during the internship (n=92)

Subjects	1st year	1st year %	During internship	During internship %
Anatomy Biochemistry Cardiology Cardiac surgery	02	2.1%	–	–
Dermatology General physician OBG			– 02	– 2.1%
Medicine Neurology Neurosurgery Oncology	01	1.0%	02	2.1%
Paediatric surgery Paediatrics Pharmacology				
Psychiatry Radiology General surgery Thoracic surgery Not decided	12	13.0%	04	4.3%
Pathology	02	2.1%	– 20	– 21.7%
			17	18.4%
	01	1.0%		
			04	4.3%
	01	1.0%		
			01	1.0%
	21	22.8%		
			01	1.0%
	09	9.7%		
			– 08	– 8.6%
	01	1.0%	– 01	– 1.0%
			01	1.0%
	03	3.2%		
			27	29.3%
	01	1.0%		
			01	1.0%
	01	1.0%		
			01	1.0%
	04	4.3%		
			02	2.1%
	01	1.0%		
	02	2.1%		
	01	1.0%		
	15	16.3%		
	01	1.0%		
	13	14.1%		
	–	–		

Table 3 shows the expected degrees participants want to achieve in their plan. More than one-third opted to earn western country degrees; the next favourite was fellowship (26%), followed by the master (17.3%). More than one-tenth of participants wanted a PhD degree, while the rest focused on diplomas.

**Table 3** Distribution of all participants according to their aim of the degree (n=92)

Degree	Total	Percentage (%)
Diploma	09	9.7%
Fellowship	24	26%
Masters	16	17.3%
PhD	11	11.9%
Western country degree	32	37.7%

Table 4 demonstrates the subjects of the MBBS course that the participants liked more while studying. Surgery was the most popular subject (27.1%), followed by medicine (23.9%) and OBG (15.2%). Among the pre-clinical subjects, anatomy (7.6%) and pharmacology (5.4%) were liked most.

**Table 4** Distribution of all participants according to their favourite subjects (n = 92)

Subject	Total	Percentage (%)
Anatomy	07	7.6%
Biochemistry	02	2.1%
Cardiology	01	1.0%
Forensic medicine		01 1.0%
OBG	14	15.2%
Medicine	22	23.9%
Microbiology	03	3.2%
Paediatrics	09	9.7%
Pathology	03	3.2%
Pharmacology	05	5.4%
General surgery	25	27.1%

Table 5 illustrates the persons who influenced the participants in choosing their careers. More than two- third participants chose by themselves, whereas family members influenced nearly one-fourth. Other doctors advised only 5% of participants. When making decisions alone, they mostly preferred general surgery as a specialty. On the other hand, medicine was advised by the family members mostly. When suggestions were received from other doctors, it was mostly general surgery.

**Table 5** Distribution discipline preference according to influence/advice (n = 92)

	Total	Percentage (%)	Discipline advised	Percentage
By herself	64	70%	General Surgery OBG	28% 22%
Family member	21	23%	Medicine General surgery	28.5% 24%
Another doctor	05	5%	General surgery	40%
Other	02	2%	General surgery	100%

## DISCUSSIONS

This cross-sectional study was performed on 92 intern doctors at Sylhet Women’s Medical College Hospital. The career plan of the participants was evaluated. The results of this study were compared with those of international studies.

The career choice of physicians of Finland and their personalities were observed by Mullola et al. (2018) where a total of 2837

participants were enrolled. The standard three confounding factors were a medical specialty, patient contact, and employment sector in selecting a career. Other factors were gender and age. Participants with higher openness preferred working in the private sector. They also opted for psychiatry mainly as a career, enjoyed specialty switch, and did not like to practice with patients. High extraversion participants wanted paediatric as a career mostly. Low openness participants preferred ophthalmology and otorhinolaryngology

mostly. Among the participants, 1,838 were female with a mean age of 48. Nearly three-fourth female doctors chose public hospital jobs over private. General practice was preferred by almost one-fifth (21.92%) of the lady doctors, where 14.68% selected medicine subspecialties, and 9.68% opted for public health. Other preferred specialties were psychiatry (12.56%), OBG (8.43%), paediatrics (6.47%), anesthesiology and critical care (6.52%), general surgery (4.35%), pathology (3.42%), ophthalmology/ ENT (3.69%) and radiology (2.99%). In this study, the highest number of participants preferred general surgery (29.3%) as a career plan, followed by OBG (21.7%) and medicine 18.4%. The preference for paediatrics (8.6%), pathology (2.1%), and radiology (1.0%) showed similarity with the study of Mulla et al. (2018).

Mone et al. (2019) published their study on the career and work-life balance of Bangladeshi lady doctors. Data were collected from six different divisions of Bangladesh. All lady doctors thought that increasing the number of medical colleges would only be helpful if the standard was maintained. Most participants concluded that their working conditions were uncomfortable due to low salaries, hospital staff policies, and extended working hours. The lady doctors also thought that job stress was higher in the private sector hospitals. One-third of the lady doctors opined that salary was good in the medical colleges. Two-thirds of the participants found that the communication level in the private sector is satisfactory due to quality control policies. All the lady doctors found the registration fees for post-graduation degrees were very high. Workplace security was a concern before selecting the hospital for most lady doctors. Few participants had chosen basic subjects to avoid confrontation with the patient's relatives and friends.

Darkwa et al. (2015) performed their study to find out the factors influencing doctors and nurses to retain in rural areas. Most doctors

thought that big cities like Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi are rich in training facilities compared to the rural areas. The training was even difficult in the district hospitals. Doctors showed a better relationship with the community members than the nurses. Most of the rural doctors and nurses demanded more incentives as working hours were more than in cities and also after working income was less. Electricity power cuts and drinking water facilities were concerns in rural areas. In this study, more than one-third of the participant (37.7%) wished to continue their studies in Western countries.

Zia et al. revealed that more than one-third of final-year students had a doctor in their families. More than half (58%) of final-year students wanted to build a career in medicine or sub-branches. Nearly one-third (34%) opted for surgery and sub-specialties as a profession. Less (7.9%) of students chose basic subjects as a career, and Radiology was the most popular among the basic subjects. Approximately one-fourth (24.9%) of participants considered working hours and emotional attachment as influencing factors for career decision-making. In this study, (27%) of the participants had a doctor in their family. Overall, (24.9%) of participants wanted to make a career in medicine and sub-specialties, (27.1%) in surgery, and sub-specialties (22.5%) in basic / pre-clinical subjects.

## CONCLUSION

Most of the participants decided on their future careers independently, as opposed to being influenced by family members, professional colleagues, or others. Surgery and allied subjects were the most typical choice for a future career for the lady intern doctors. The aim of their professional degree for the most participants was to obtain a western post-graduation degree, followed by the second highest number of participants opting for a fellowship in their desired subjects.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no competing interests in publishing this article.

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