

## FACTORS THAT SUPPORT FEMALE DENTISTS IN PURSUING THEIR PROFESSION IN PAKISTAN

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### ABSTRACT

*Background and Objectives:* Dentistry is a profession where due to the phenomenal growth of Pakistani population, the ratio of dentists to population has greatly decreased and is currently 1:16,426. One contributing factor in this regard is females who drop out from the profession. In this study, a qualitative method has been chosen to investigate, the reasons which enable female dentist to carry on with their profession.

*Methods:* Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were the primary method of data collection. Twelve female dentists were included in the study. The interviews that were conducted and audio recorded were transcribed verbatim. A qualitative content analysis was conducted, and the transcripts were coded. After familiarization of data, coding was employed to reach major themes emerging in the data. The internal validity was verified by taking out word cloud by using Wordle.

*Result:* In most of the cases support system was the most common factor that helped the female dentists in pursuing their career. Social support system consisted of family/husband and supervisor/peer support system. This was found to be the most dependent factor, without which the job could not be continued.

*Conclusion:* Human Resource policies, rules and regulations supporting working women should be formulated. Existing rules and regulations supporting working women should be implemented. A long-term campaign should be undertaken on social media to bring about changes in attitudes and views of the society regarding gender equality.

*Key words:* Female dentist, practice, attitude, stress, income, motivation, commitment, and support

### INTRODUCTION

Feminization of dentistry is a global phenomenon and it has its own particular challenges and issues.<sup>1-4</sup> Pakistan is a third world country with a ratio of one dentist for 1062 people (17125 dentists for 18.2 million population).<sup>5</sup> According to PMDC (Pakistan Medical and Dental Council) out of the 17125 registered dentists 11039 are females and only 6086 are males.<sup>5</sup> These recent PMDC statistics point out towards the fact that in feminization of dentistry is also taking over in Pakistan.<sup>5</sup> Keeping this in view its evident that female dentists have very important roles today in the healthcare system of Pakistan and possibly even more so in the future. According to the Annual professional results of BDS (Bachelors of Dental Surgery) conducted by University of health sciences (2015 – 2016) 85 percent of the university positions were secured by females.<sup>6</sup> It is evident that females not only outshine but outnumber the male students at the graduation level.<sup>6</sup> However this situation is reversed when we look at PMDC statistics for post-graduation (Up till 1<sup>st</sup> March 2016) where-

by the number of females is half that of males.<sup>5</sup> This data shows that despite excelling academically at the graduate level only less than 5% of all graduating females pursue their post-graduation.<sup>5</sup> Hence most of the postgraduates are male dentists and most of the leadership positions are also held by them. It is imperative that we take measures to stop this brain drain and the first step in this direction will be investigating the factors which support female dentists to continue with their profession.

This qualitative study was conducted to investigate factors which will support the female dentists to continue with their profession.

### PARTICIPANTS AND METHODS

Qualitative research with phenomenological constructivist design was chosen to investigate the factors that support female dentists to stay in the profession.

### Objective of the Study

- To highlight factors which help the female dentists

to continue their career, so that appropriate measures may be taken to facilitate them in pursuing their career.

- To provide recommendations which could help the female dentists to pursue their career.

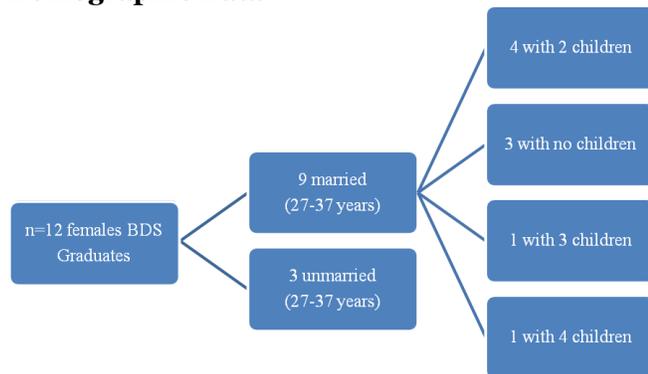
#### Inclusion Criteria

- Female dentists who were able to continue their career.

#### Exclusion Criteria

- Females who did not pursue their career.
- Those who were not willing to participate.

#### Demographic Data



#### Settings

Ten interviews were taken in an office in the Department of Operative Dentistry at Fatima Memorial College of Medicine and Dentistry (Affiliated with University of health Sciences) where as two of the interview recordings were done over the telephone through a semi-structured interview consisting of six questions

and their prompts. Their approval to give the interview was taken as informed consent to participate.

#### Duration of Study

The research project was completed within 6 months (June 2015 – Dec 2015).

#### Sample Size

The study group consisted of twelve respondents who fulfilled the inclusion criteria and were willing to participate. Having achieved the saturation point after ten interviews two additional respondents were selected in order to see whether any further themes were generated when data from more participants was included in the analysis. Also, between 5 and 15 participants are enough in phenomenological study Gray, D. 2004.<sup>7</sup> The respondents were taken from different dental colleges of Lahore.

#### Sampling Technique

Non-probability, purposive sampling was done. Only those subjects who fulfilled the inclusion criteria were interviewed.

#### Data Analysis

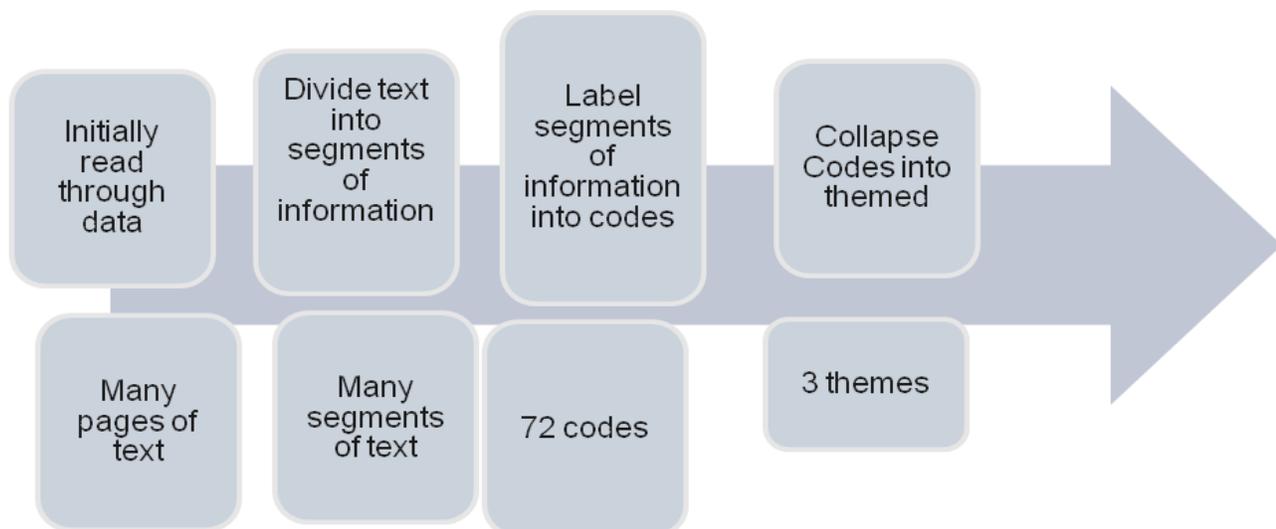
All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The data was analysed for its inherent themes. Thematic analysis was performed through the process of coding in six phases. The internal validity was also verified by making a word cloud by using Wordle.

#### RESULTS

3 main themes emerged:

1. Social support system which included family/ husband and supervisor/ peer.

#### A Visual Model of the Coding Process in Qualitative Research



2. Motivation and Passion.
3. General Issues.

### Social Support System

In most of the cases support system was found to be the most common factor that helped the female dentists in pursuing their career. Social support system consisted of family/husband and supervisor/peer support system.

Participant AB-1 was not married and she commented, *“Socially, parents and family (husband, siblings, parents, parents in law) are a big support.”*

Another respondent CD-2 who was married also mentioned that

*“If the family was supportive, there was less pressure subconsciously on the working mother, otherwise balancing work/home responsibilities became a double edged sword whereby the participant’s ended up doing double the amount of work as compared to her counterpart”.*

Support system was found to be the most dependent factor, without which the job could not be continued after the females had children, as going back to work was impossible, when the baby was small. Some sort of help in the form of the female dentist’s mother, mother-in-law, nanny or any other alternative like day care center was very important at that point in time. Husband’s support also played an instrumental role at this stage, though in eastern society it is more of emotional support only.

### Motivation and Passion

Motivation to do the job or pursue post-graduation, played a key role as continuity of job and post-graduation were the main factors through which one can progress at the workplace. Those who were strongly motivated even after marriage and children were the ones who continued their job.

Most of the participants were of the opinion that motivation played a vital role in pursuing their career. It led to planning, patience and determination to deal with difficult circumstances. Job satisfaction gave them sense of achievement and was mentioned by most of the participants. According to a participant IJ-5.

*“I always wanted to be a doctor. By nature I like to work in a challenging environment.”*

Another participant CD-2 strongly commented that,

*“Internal motivation is very important, because if you didn’t have will power than people’s support could not do anything.”*

She also added that, *“life is not a bed of roses and a lot of hard work is required in order to get a status in the society or be successful in life.”*

(In this case husband was supportive and in-laws gradually became supportive as she achieved a better social and professional status).

Whereas another participant was of the opinion that,

*“Motivation alone does not lead to success, as support system and facilities are essential for the mother, so that she can ensure that child is safe and she herself is completely relaxed to perform her duties.”*

One participant shared that job satisfaction gave the worker sense of achievement, she commented on internal motivation as,

*“There is a need for a spark inside you.”*

*“This social work environment gives you happiness; it is rewarding when a patient is relieved of pain and prays for you.”*

A participant suggested that,

*“Key to success is lot of motivation and being able to do lots of thing at same time.”*

It was explicit after conducting the interviews that women saw their professional life and careers as an integral part of their process of self-actualization. Women described feelings of challenge, accomplishment, morale boost, growth as a person, and personal satisfaction when they excel in their career.

The following statements support career in the role-identity hierarchy:

*“I am somebody who is work oriented, I don’t like to sit at home.”*

IJ-5 further added, *“I want that there should be something in life through which I can get my own recognition.”*

Participant CD-2 shared her thoughts saying that,

*“It enhances your self -identity and gives you a feeling of independence. You can make your own decisions, learn to control and manage things.”*

Those who continued the job confessed, that raising the family along with doing the job was very tough and support either from the supervisor at the workplace or help at home were a major factor in being able to continue her profession.

Thirdly, maternity leave and affordability by the husband was also a deciding factor whether the female would go back to the job or not. According to the participants maternity leave was a very important factor in their work/family balance. For mothers to join only after 40 days of the birth of a child, was a very difficult task and led to neglecting of the baby and guilt trips on part of the mother.

All the participants agreed that maternity leave should at least be of six months if not of one year as is the rule in many developed and welfare states.

The participant EF-3 mentioned:

*“Once you are married and have a baby then it is difficult to handle everything simultaneously”. She further added: “Mother is a mother after all, no one can understand and treat the child like a mother does.”*

One way a working mother can be facilitated is by

support at work place. If there is no support or child-care facility at the workplace, women who do not have a family support system also, are unable to pursue their career.

The only hope of the participants, who lived independently and did not have any help, were day-care centers.

Participant MN-7 was also of the opinion that *“one or two children can be left in the day care but if you had four children then part time job with flexible hours was a good option until the children went to school”*. However part time work options are limited in Pakistan and it is totally impossible in institutions affiliated with PMDC.

The phrase “higher the fewer” holds great importance as presence of female dentists in top positions are like role models present in the profession. When the young female dentists are striving hard to settle in the field the presence of these positive role models encourages them, and one of the participants remarked that,

*“If you people have done it, why can't I? Though I do not know how have you done it?”*

Participant UV-11 said, *“That my mother is a role model for me and I want to go back to job as soon as my youngest child goes to school.”*

### General Issues

Flexible working hours at the work place were considered very beneficial by most participants and the possibility of working for flexible hours was identified as one of the major contributing factors which could help female dentists in pursuing their profession. Along with other factors financial need and status in the society was also identified as factors which were responsible for female dentists in pursuing their profession.

Women, who chose to pursue their career, had to undergo a process of making successful and workable adjustments. If making adjustments meant to compromise, then working mothers had to compromise at the expense of their health and sentiments. Finally, the approaches being adopted by working mothers in making modifications in their work-family relations include inspiration, motivation and passion, positive outlook, family co-operation, flexibility, time organization and catharsis.

### DISCUSSION

Those women whose views are heard through these quotations have experienced complex multidimensional set of factors that were met with varying degrees of proficiency. These factors may even shift over time, but they must always be consistent with the woman's own belief-systems (if they are to provide fulfillment), only then can they ensure the woman herself believed in her 'success'. For these women it was clear that suc-

cess came from within at least as much as from any external recognition.

Personal characteristics of motivation, enthusiasm to learn and exceptional will to achieve their goals were seen as the most important trait in females who managed to pursue their career. However the most important factors that led to fulfilling their goals were external factors like support of spouse and family. These findings are in agreement with the findings of Al-Lawati and Hunsaker, 2002 who investigated the traits of gifted muslim women in United States.<sup>8</sup>

A high motivation level led to planning, patience and determination to deal with difficult circumstances. Motivation alone did not lead to success, as support system and facilities were essential for the mother, so that she could ensure that child was safe and she herself was completely relaxed to perform her duties.

Hence after motivation, the support systems were the most common factor that helped the female dentists in pursuing their career. Social support system consisted of family/husband and supervisor/peer support system. This was found to be the most dependent factor, without which the job could not be continued especially after the females had children. In this study the husbands support was considered important however it was more of emotional support and this is also in agreement with the findings of Kausar and Anwar, 2015.<sup>4,10</sup> In another study done on high achiever females from 15 countries traits like determination and motivation were identified as major contributing factors to success.<sup>11</sup> This correlated with this study also, since most of the participants echoed about the importance of the joint family system.

Job satisfaction gave female dental professionals a sense of achievement at workplace and was mentioned by most of the participants. The females in our study not only considered progress in career, as the opportunity for personal growth, but for them it also satisfied status and security needs and simultaneously provided an opportunity for “self-actualization” similar to the findings of Sultana and Watts 2008.<sup>12</sup>

Thirdly, maternity leave and affordability by the husband was also a deciding factor whether the female would go back to job or not. Maternity leave was also a very important issue, as the participants shared, that those ladies who had financial issues and joined after 40 days of the birth of baby had to go through a very tough time. Maternity leave has been identified as a major factor in a female dentists struggle to balance work and family in many studies.<sup>13,14</sup>

It was reiterated by most of the participants that, in order to help the female dentist to strike a balance between their home and job, the workplace environment should also satisfy the values and aspirations of female dentists and all healthcare professionals.

The female dentists who are married have to deal with responsibility at home and at work place, so they

constantly try to strike through a balance between their work and family so that neither of them is affected.<sup>14</sup> This is the universal problem and was reflected sharply in our study also.

Good day-care facility was another factor which enabled female dentists to concentrate on their profession. The participants in our study also thought that presence of a good day-care with adequate facilities in the premises made the mother more comfortable in her daily routine. This was also suggested by Kausar and Anwar.<sup>10</sup>

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Presence of mentors made a lot of difference, as apparently it gave a boost to the students and colleagues at the workplace. This was also found in Denise Horner Mitnick's thesis,<sup>15</sup> as he stated that the most essential feature required in a female mentor was leading a successful life after having achieved a balance between family and career.

Pakistani society has multiple approaches to woman's career pursuit depending on the mindset. Dentistry is a field where the manpower is less. The ratio of dentists to the population has greatly decreased during the last few years. So the demand for dentistry is greater than ever before. There is increased public awareness about the dental health. There is a wave of women dentists surging through health sciences. However, the future for women in dentistry seems to be promising to those who have the enthusiasm, ability, and the will power to succeed. Even after 140 years of females being in dentistry, there is still difference in employment between both the genders.

In our society, support of the husband and family matters the most in achieving success. The females need to know exactly what they want in life, do careful planning and take cautious steps to convert every chance into opportunity. This requires mastery in communication, the art of convincing others by asserting oneself.

Policies extending the period and coverage of maternity leave are thus required in order to improve women's professional growth. Maternity leave is just one factor for women to keep up with their profession and the family requirements. Interventions like part time work options and provision of proper childcare facility are also very important factors for women to resume their professional responsibilities especially in a family centered society of Pakistan.

It is **concluded** that the themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis highlighted the prevalent factors that affect the work family balance, the societal role potentials, women's career goals, the nature of the challenges and the way these challenges were met in

the crusade of managing both professional and personal lives.

Better job offers with provision of part time and flexible hours, proper maternity leave and day-care facilities can prevent major dropout. Support from government, family and society is of great importance. In order to steer Pakistan towards development it is vital that every individual becomes a useful member of the society. Also long-term campaign should be undertaken on social media to bring about changes in attitudes and views of the society regarding gender equality.

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#### Author's Contributions

ST: Principal Author, Conceived the idea and write-up. AB: Literature search and data collection. AR: Literature search and data collection. JSK: Improvement and final proof reading of the article.

**Conflict of Interest:** None.

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