



CHOOSING MEDICINE AS A PROFESSIONAL CAREER: MOTIVATION OF BRAZILIAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: To determine the motivations of adolescents for choosing a professional career.

Method: Among the high school students who visited one of the University of São Paulo Profession Fair (FPUSP), 156 (46 males), whose first professional option was Medicine, replied to a questionnaire about their motivations for entering a Medical School. The replies were divided into motivations related to: a) idealism/altruism and human relations, b) social and economic position, c) family influence, d) having the skills needed to exercise the profession, and e) other options.

Age ranged from 13 to 22 years (median = 17 years) and the students were divided into two groups according to the socioeconomic status of their family: Group I – public school students (n = 41) and Group II – private school students (n = 115).

Results: The greatest motivation in both groups was idealism/altruism/aspects of human relations (Groups I:48,8%; II:53%; p=0.61), followed by the possibility of a good socioeconomic situation (Groups: I: 19%; II:23%; p=0.26). The differences between groups were not statistically significant.

Conclusion: Although the high school students interviewed intend to have a stable economic situation and to receive recognition by society, motivations related to idealism/altruism/human relations predominated.

Keywords: Career Choice; Life Style, Socio-Economic Aspects, Teenagers.

INTRODUCTION:

One of the concerns of university professors in Brazil is the extremely young age of most students entering Medical School due to the national educational structure (Brasil/MEC, 2017), which differs from that of other countries where previous college training is required (Rapport et al 2009; Wang et al, 2015).

Thus, young people must plan their professional career during a phase of life characterized by uncertainties. This planning starts with the choice of a course, which is influenced by a series of personal, family, geographic/environmental, behavioral and often financial, or social factors (Santos 2005; Almeida and Pinho 2008; Rogers and Creed, 2010; Ribeiro et al, 2011; Zampieron et al, 2012; Santos et al, 2015; Corrêa et al, 2016; Whalen et al, 2016). Previous experiences in the area, is also a factor reported in the literature (Hardinger, 2017; Paula et al, 2017).

In order to provide information to high school students about the courses available and about the professional opportunities provided by them, the Pro-Rector Office for Cultural and Community Affairs of the University of São Paulo, Brazil, promotes "Profession Fairs" (USP/PRCEU, 2016). These fairs are visited by high school students who wish to receive more information about courses that they wish to take and about other careers.

The objective of the present study was to determine the motivations of this adolescent population regarding their choice of profession.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

Approximately 10% of the 4.000 visitors of 2009 Profession Fair, interested in Health Sciences Courses, were invited to answer a questionnaire. Three hundred eight six students agreed to participate in the present survey. Of these, 62 were excluded because they still had doubts about their professional

option. Of the remaining 324, 156 stated that Medicine was their first professional option. Forty-six of these subjects were males and the age range of the entire group was 13 to 22 years (median = 17 years). In addition to responding to questions related to the characterization of the population, the adolescents were asked to establish a hierarchy of the influence on their option of motivations related to: - idealism/altruism and human relations; - b) social and economic position; - family influence; - having the skills needed to exercise the profession, and - other options.

Since most participants only stated their main motivation, this was the only one considered for the analysis of the present study. The students were divided into two groups according to the socioeconomic status of their family: Group I – public school students (n = 41) and Group II – private school students (n = 115).

RESULTS:

The greatest motivation in both groups was idealism/altruism/aspects of human relations (Group I: 48.8%; Group II: 53%; $p = 0.61$), followed by the possibility of a good socioeconomic situation (Group I: 18%; Group II: 23%; $p = 0.26$), and having specific skills (Group I: 7.3% Group II: 17%; $p = 0.09$). The differences between groups were not statistically significant, although Group II showed a tendency to value more their skills for the exercise of the profession.

DISCUSSION:

As expected, the median age of the participants was younger than that of students applying for Medical School in other countries (Cianflone 1996). If, on the one hand, the Brazilian Educational Structure favors an earlier access to the work market, on the other, the immaturity of the students may impair their learning at the beginning of medical school. Investigations such as those carried out by Rapport et al. (2009) have shown that previous work and life experience provide the students with the skills necessary to cope with the pressure and demands of the course (Cianflone, 1996; Rapport et al.2009).

The age range from 13 to 22 years is not rare in "Profession Fairs". Since the demand for a place in USP courses is high, some students enter the university only after their third or fourth entrance exam. And, even though most students visiting these fairs are in the last two years of High School and are at least 15 years old, they are sometimes accompanied by younger siblings or friends who are already concerned about entering the university.

Although the literature indicates that family and peers play a role in the choice of a profession (Santos 2005), this influence did not appear to be much valued by the present respondents. Thus, the results agree with those of other studies showing that teenagers have difficulty in appreciating the attitudes and values of their parents and of professionals whose conditions are similar to those of their parents (Slevin 1991; Slotterback & Saarnio 1996). Almeida and Pinho (2008) stated that the influence of the family may both aid and impair the choice of a profession.

The possibility of continuing to be in a good socioeconomic situation, or achieving it in the future, and the respect of society attracted an important contingent of adolescents,

corroborating the results obtained by Lara et al (2005) in another region of Brazil.

On the other hand, belonging to minorities and/or having lower incomes are well known barriers to access to Universities (Southgate et al, 2015; Soriano et al, 2016; Hardinger, 2017). It was also reported that there are students from rural areas that see this condition as obstacle to be admitted in a Medical School (Whalen et al, 2016). Thus, inclusive policies, information and support are fundamental to change this condition (Scheffer et al, 2016; Soriano et al, 2016).

It is assumed that some students with higher acquisitive power value the motivation of "using specific skills", because they are not so concerned about the socioeconomic aspects as students from families of lower income.

A study conducted in order to assess the knowledge and attitudes of medical students about the traditional attributes of the medical profession (Blue et al. 2009) observed that, even though the students enter medical school with positive attitudes towards these attributes, they do not necessarily know how all of these attributes function in practice. This knowledge will be acquired only during the medical course.

Despite their ethnic, cultural and environmental differences, the participants in the present study also showed positive attitudes towards the "altruistic aspects of the profession". Regardless of socioeconomic level, the motivations most valued by young people who intend to opt for Medicine as a career are related to idealism/altruism/human relations.

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