

Understanding medical students' motivation and preferences to select medical studies and work in rural areas in North India

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Valorization



Valorization

The research conducted within the scope of this PhD-trajectory has contributed in identifying the major factors which have led to the acute shortage of medical professionals in India. It highlights the motivational factors which underpin medical students' selection of medical study and also the encouraging and discouraging factors affecting interest of medical students in working in rural areas. The research has not only offered new knowledge but also developed and validated two reliable instruments. The instruments developed measure the choice of medical students to study MBBS in Indian settings and factors deterring final year MBBS students from working in rural areas, respectively. These instruments can further be used for future research. In this chapter, the relevance of this study and recommendations for the educators, policy makers and implementers are presented.

Relevance

India is facing an acute shortage of medical practitioners in rural and regional areas, especially in North India [1,2]. The situation has become more critical over the last two decades. For 70% of the Indian rural population, the doctor to population ratio is extremely low [2]. Along with the overall shortage of medical practitioners, the number of doctors working in urban compared to rural areas is widening. This leads to poor service delivery and inequities in health. Therefore, understanding the perception of medical students about challenges in relation to rural areas was important. It could help in stimulating their choice to work or stay in rural areas. The research was carried out with the aim of comprehensively understanding the motivation factors stimulating students to select medical studies and to work in rural areas. The aim was pursued through two theoretical and three empirical studies.

Target groups

The results presented in the thesis are of relevance to various groups of the society. The three main groups who can take recommendations from this research are educators,

policy makers and implementers. These groups can directly bring changes in the system and solve the crisis of shortage of medical practitioners in the country.

Educators

Educators are the ones who have the most influence on the students. They have a direct contact with students and hence are more aware about their perspectives and choices. The research revealed that the encouraging factors among medical students willing to serve in rural areas were majorly humanitarian (desire to serve poor, underprivileged and home community). The educators should keep these factors in mind while imparting education and try to instill them in all their students. This could lead to behavior change in students. The educators while making the curriculum and designing the course should keep in mind health needs of the whole country.

The curriculum can be revised looking at the present status of unequal distribution and shortage of medical practitioners. The research highlights the encouraging and discouraging factors that influence medical students' interest in working in rural areas. Using these factors as reference new courses can be designed laying emphasis on the priorities. New approaches like community-based medical education and a longer clinical apprenticeship in rural health facilities can be promoted. Early and long term clinical exposure in rural areas during medical education and training can also be increased.

Policy makers

Policy makers can bring the desired changes in the ongoing system to improve the current situation. Human resource policy for medical doctors at national and state level is the need of hour. They can take clues from the motivation factors for students to take up medical study which came across in the research. The major motivation factors that emerged out were scientific (work independence, interest in academia), societal (prestige, job and financial security) and humanitarian. Policies can be drafted to increase job security and financial security of doctors. This will lure students towards the profession. It can help in decreasing the overall dearth of doctors in India. An instrument

has also been developed and validated to measure the choice of medical students to study MBBS. This instrument is the first of its kind in India. It is a tested and reliable tool and policy makers can formulate policies based on it to motivate students to take up medical study. This study throws light upon the medical students' interest to work in rural settings and highlights discouraging and encouraging factors that deter or attract them to work in rural areas. The discouraging factors overcame encouraging factors. The discouraging factors included lack of professional challenge, social segregation, socio-cultural gap, hostile professional environment, and lack of financial incentives. These factors need to be rectified to attract the medical practitioners to work in rural areas. Policy makers can make policies to tackle these challenges. Keeping these factors in mind policies can be made to improve work environment in rural areas and to increase privileges and financial incentives of doctors serving in these areas. The MSDRI instrument developed to explore demotivation factors of medical students for working in rural areas can also be used by the policy makers. It is a validated tool and can be used in other settings and policies can be made based on the results.

Implementers

Healthcare delivery is labour-intensive where quality, effectiveness and efficiency are dependent on successful planning of the health workforce. Various strategies for attraction and retention of the health workforce have been successfully and unsuccessfully implemented by the Indian government. Numerous efforts were made by the government to address issues of financial incentives, living conditions and future career prospects of doctors working in rural areas. These strategies were not successful in all parts of India. The diversity of India with each state having its own challenges makes it difficult to implement new policies which are not pre-tested. This study provides implementers with tested and valid instruments. The strategies designed based on the results of these instruments can be easily implemented. This way the success rate of the strategies implemented would increase. The study also highlights the discouraging factors that deter medical practitioners to work in rural areas. Some of the factors were poor accommodation facilities, lack of necessary infrastructure, inadequate human

support and lesser research opportunities. Implementers can focus on these factors and implement strategies to improve them.

Thus, the present study offers important clues to all stakeholders for designing tailor-made, field-tested and cost-effective measures for attracting and retaining a workforce in rural areas.

Future Directions

The results of the research have important public health implications. Human resources are one the major factors which affects the quality of health service delivery. Poor quality services lead to poor health outcomes. Thus, human resource management is of utmost importance in the field of health and healthcare. The results of the study will help various stakeholders in taking better and more effective decisions for retention of medical professionals in rural areas. The outcomes of this research will assist in promoting and translating related policies into concrete and effective measures at local, regional and national level.

Based on the results of this study it is recommended that policy makers and implementers should prioritize the elimination of discouraging factors that deter students to take up medical study and also dissuade medical professionals from working in rural areas. All the stakeholders involved should work in coordination to come out with most suited strategies to overcome the problem. The instruments developed and validated in this study should further be used in various parts of India and also across different developing countries. There should be exchange of best practices among countries where similar strategies are being used. This gives a chance to policy makers and implementers to learn and formulate better strategies.

The current dissertation also provides direction for future research. Similar research should also be done among high school students to identify the factors that encourage or discourage them to choose the medical field. There is a need to explore that how many of those who complete their medical study wish to pursue their career in India. Similar research can be extended to various other health professionals like nurses.

Valorization

Comprehensive evaluation of various interventions conducted in different parts of the world to attract and retain health care providers, especially in low income countries, should be done. Further research will help in exploring new perspectives and identifying more factors involved in opting for medical field. This will lead to formulation of more specific and effective strategies.

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