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The influence of dentist parents on their children's career decision-making for dentistry or medicine

KEYWORDS

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The phenomenon of intergenerational career transmission is common in Taiwan society. The parents not only pass on property within the family context, but may also transfer intangible resources and even positions to their children, forming intergenerational transmission.¹ In a survey for medical students' values in Taiwan, 30.2 % of individuals studies medicine due to the requirements and expectations of their family elders, and 3.2 % of individuals choose to study medicine for family business inheritance. It shows that the expectations of parents and family members are an important factor influencing their choice to study and practice medicine.² A medical family refers to a family in which members of multiple generations have been doctors to maintain a continuous medical career. Therefore, many medical students in Taiwan have very similar backgrounds. There are many families in which both brothers and the father and sons or daughters are physicians. Besides, there is a tendency for medical families to form in Taiwan society.¹ Since Taiwan implemented the National Health Insurance (NHI) in 1995, the career of dentists has been favored by the social value system, which has accelerated the growth of the number of dentists in Taiwan.^{3,4} So far as we know, the so-called dental family is also commonly seen in our dental professional community. In this study, we attempted to explore the influence of dentist parents on their children's career decision-making for dentistry or

medicine through interview with the dentist fathers and their daughter or son.

In this study, we used purposeful sampling to select two dentists whose daughter or son was currently a medical student or a dental student, respectively. We conducted the interviews with these two dentist fathers and their daughter or son. The case background and questions for the students and dentist fathers and their answers during the interviews are shown in Table 1. The fathers in these two dental families were senior dentists practicing in the northern Taiwan and had their own dental clinics. Their daughter or son was admitted to a medical school or a dental school through domestic education system, respectively. Currently, they were a fifth-year medical student and a dental freshman, respectively. According to students' responses, the image of the father's dental work that helped others and the dental business inheritance were factors that influenced their decision to study medicine or dentistry. Both two fathers had an encouraging attitude towards their career decisions. The daughter thought that her father probably hoped her to become a physician. Besides, the television drama related to medicine and the father's resources related to dentistry attracted them to select medicine or dentistry for their future careers. Both of them used academic performance in their favor to gain the admission into a medical or a dental school. According to dentist fathers' responses, both dentist fathers thought that their children could realize the benefits of a clinical dental career from them such as a good income and a pretty good life, and thus decided to become a physician or a dentist in the future. They kept an open mind for their children's career decision, and provided as enough resources as possible for their learning. According to both students' and dentist fathers' responses, they all once discussed relevant issues regarding the choice of a major to study in their parent-child conversations. Both dentist fathers told their children that there was a surplus of dentists in Taiwan and the competition in the dental industry was

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Table 1 The case background and questions for the students and dentist fathers and their answers during the interviews in this study.

	Case 1	Case 2
Case background	This was a clinic dentist with more than 25 years of experience in practice when his daughter was admitted to a medical school through domestic education system in the 2019 academic year. Currently, she was a fifth-year medical student.	This was a clinic dentist with more than 20 years of experience in practice when his son was admitted to a dental school through domestic education system in the 2023 academic year. Currently, he was a dental freshman.
Questions for the students and their answers during the interviews		
1. How did your father's profession (dentist) influence your decision to choose a medical (dental) school?	I have always felt that my father's profession is very respectable. The older I get, the more I feel that it is a job that can balance life and help other people.	Because my father is a dentist and owns a dental clinic, I think that if I choose dentistry as a career in the future, I will not only be able to inherit his career, but also learn valuable experience from him.
2. What is your father's attitude towards your career decision? Would he want you to become a physician or a dentist as well?	He has an encouraging attitude towards any my career decision, but I think that he hopes me to become a physician.	He always has an open mind and supports any decision I make for my career.
3. When did you first decide to study medicine (dentistry)? What influenced you to make this decision?	When I was in the junior high school, I watched the American television series about internship. I was deeply attracted by the role of the doctor in the show. Although I had considered the majors related to social humanities before, later I became more interested in medicine after watching the television drama. Because my strengths are mathematics and science, I became more and more interested in the medical field.	Before my sophomore year in the high school, I wanted to choose a major in engineering, because I simply liked programming and logical thinking. However, I realized that when I become a program engineer, I may be asked to work abroad and that is not my favorable life plan. Moreover, I encountered a bottleneck in the programming competition, so I rethought the direction of my life. In addition, the advantage of studying dentistry and becoming a dentist is that I can not only use my father's resources, but also acquire a stable job and a relatively good salary, and it is more secure for my future life.
4. What admission method did you use to enroll into the medical (dental) school? Why did you choose this admission channel?	Because I got a perfect score on the General Scholastic Ability Test (GSAT), I chose the individual application admission channel and I was lucky enough to become accepted after an interview.	Since the result of the first stage of my individual application is not satisfactory, and I think that I can obtain good scores in mathematics and science tests, I chose the examination admission channel that selected students based on the scores of Advanced Subjects Test (AST) only.
5. Have you and your father ever discussed relevant issues regarding the selection of a major to study? What is his advice?	Yes, he suggested that I shall consider to study medicine because I can learn more subjects in medicine and may have more choices for my future career.	Yes, he objectively analyzed the current situation of Taiwan's dental industry and did not specifically recommend me to study dentistry.
6. Has your father ever talked to you about his work or the current dental environment in Taiwan? What is his point of view?	Yes, he believes that today's dental clinics and dentists are becoming more and more saturated, and newly-entry dentists may face more challenges than before.	Yes, he believes that competition among dentists will become more intense in the future and there are more dentists entering into the dental market including those returning from overseas and future oral hygienists. The speed of technological updates is becoming faster and faster. Therefore, he told me that if I go out to work, I still have to keep learning, do not reject any new ideas, and try to make myself not outdated.

(continued on next page)

Table 1 (continued)

	Case 1	Case 2
Questions for the dentist fathers and their answers during the interviews		
1. How did your profession (dentist) influence your child's decision to choose a medical (dental) school?	I think the possible impact is that when she sees the practice of clinic dentists, she may feel that the income of the dentist is better than those of other occupations. However, we dentists are busy and spend relatively little time with our families.	In fact, my son did not consider to study dentistry at first. Instead, he was more interested in the engineering-related field. He was even an instructor of programming training club in the high school. At that time, he also noticed that my working hours were too long and the pressure from working seemed to be very high. However, in his senior year of the high school, suddenly he felt that the life of a dentist is very good, and he decided to become a dentist in the future.
2. What is your attitude towards your child's career decisions? Would you like your child to become a physician or a dentist as well?	I kept an open mind for her career decision and did not force her to study medicine or dentistry.	I have always been open-minded and let my child develop appropriately. I just know that if he chooses to become a dentist, I, as a father, can be somewhat helpful to his future career.
3. Do you provide your children with any resources or assistance regarding further studies?	Any tutoring that she needs outside of school will be provided.	I am only responsible for paying the tuition fees, working hard, and chatting with him when I have time.
4. Have you and your child ever discussed relevant issues regarding the choice of a major to study? What is your advice? What is his or her opinions?	Yes, I respect her choice. I hope that she can choose the subject she likes.	Yes, I just analyzed the current situation and future challenges of dentistry. I did not particularly recommend him to study dentistry.
5. What is your point of view about the current dental environment in Taiwan?	I think that there is currently a surplus of dentists in Taiwan, and the dental industry is fiercely competitive and relatively profit-oriented.	I think that the current dental environment in Taiwan is extremely difficult. There is a surplus of dentists in Taiwan, and there are too many dental graduates returning from overseas and too many oral hygienists struggling for the right to work in the dental field. The manufacturers of medical aesthetics also expand into dental cosmetic services. The environment of National Health Insurance (NHI) is rigid and restrictive. With the impact of rising practice costs, the future dental career will definitely be full of challenges for newly-entry dentists.

fierce. One of them considered that there was a broader path for learning medicine, while the other pointed out that Taiwan's dental industry was faced with the dilemma of too many dental graduates returning from overseas, many graduates from oral hygiene departments struggling for the right to work in the dental field, and other competitors related to oral health industry joining the competition.

The link between the socioeconomic statuses of parents and their children has become one of the quintessential facts of economics. There is evidence that children have a certain tendency to follow their parents' career path, as supported by the role of individuals in gaining financial benefits from their parents' occupational status in adulthood. It has been proven that the children whose parents

work in dentistry are more likely to study dentistry and become a dentist.⁵ In fact, for the high-school graduates, obtaining an admission into a medical or a dental school in Taiwan is a multi-faceted competitive process.^{3,4} The students from families of a high socioeconomic status, including medical or dental families, usually have a better chance of obtaining the admission into a medical or a dental school. In this study, the academic performances of these two students were sufficient to support their entrances into a medical or a dental school. Although both dentist fathers keep an open mind for their children's career decisions, their expectations and suggestions, and the positive image of clinical dental career in them were important factors that influence their children's career decision-making for medicine or dentistry. Taiwan society's

preference for the career of a clinician has its historical and cultural roots. This creates an environment of self-discipline and emphasis on academic or social achievement in medical families, but on the contrary it also limits the scope and time of individual career exploration and gradually moves to the mainstream values of society that encourage children to pursue a career as a physician.[†] Based on the results of this study, we recommend that parents, especially those in medical families or dental families, shall adhere to the educational principle of adaptive development, provide their children with a learning environment that meets their individual characteristics and needs, and help their children to develop their personal potential. As the children grow up, parents can encourage their children to perform more self-career exploration, including characteristics, interests, strengths, values, and purposes. If the children also consider practicing medicine as their future career, these exploratory experiences will also help them become the unique clinicians who shine with their own characteristics.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest relevant to this article.

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