

Factors Considered by Pediatric Dentists in Determining their Career Choice, A Pilot Study



Joseph Gasser¹, Andrea Lochan²

¹PGY-2 Dental Resident, ²Senior Associate Director

NYU Langone Hospitals-Advanced Education in Pediatric Dentistry, Brooklyn, NY

Hansjorg Wyss Department of Plastic Surgery, Division of Dental Medicine, NYU Grossman School of Medicine

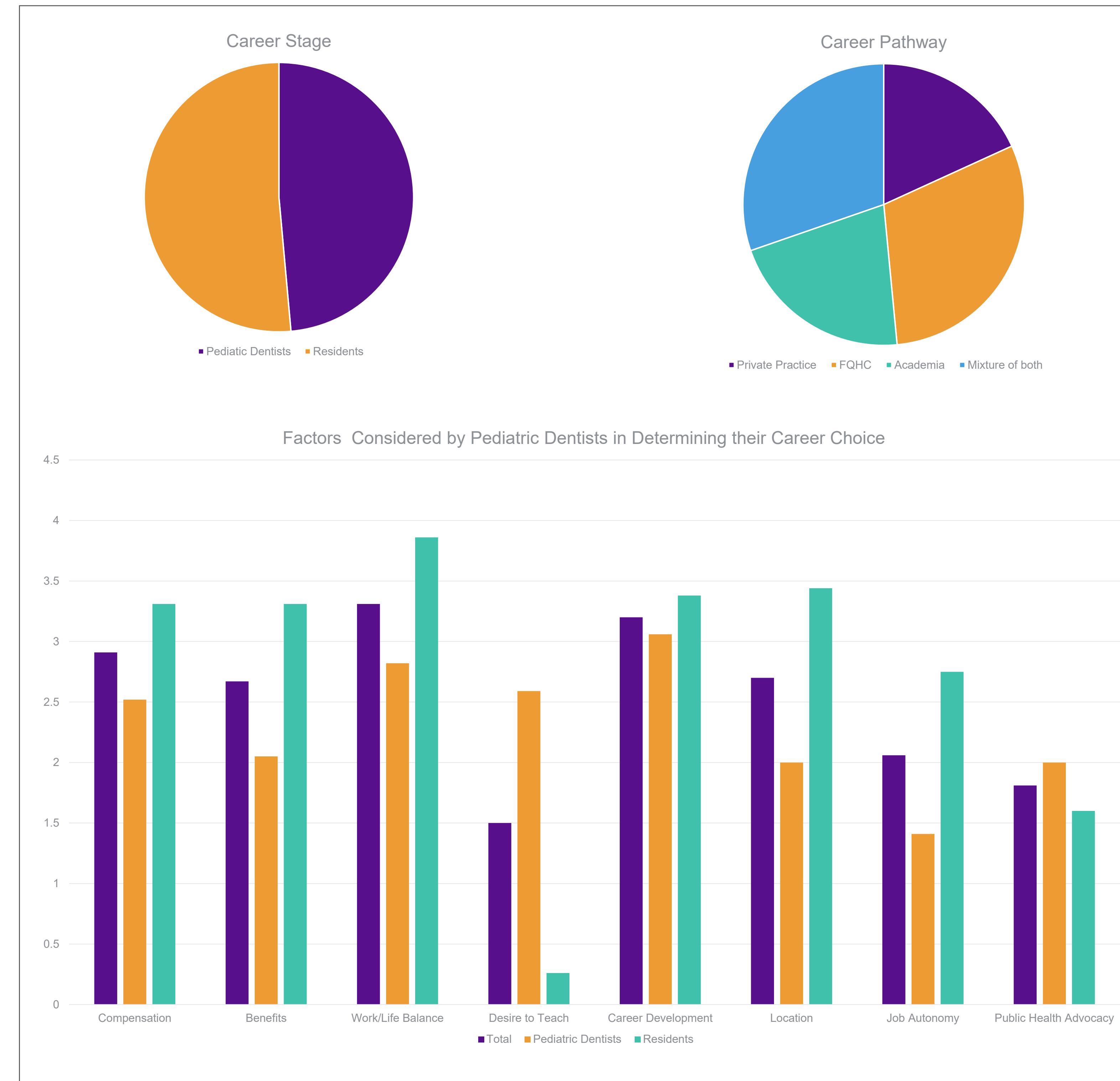
NYU Langone Dental Postdoctoral Residency Programs

ABSTRACT

There is a well understood, nationwide shortage of faculty present in pediatric dental residency programs. This shortage has worsened over time leading to strain in residency programs and a decay in the quality of the education residents receive. The aim of this study is to examine which factors contribute more to the career choice pediatric dentists make and whether these factors have a positive or negative influence. The hope is that residency programs can use this information to make their programs more enticing to potential faculty members. In a pilot study, a brief questionnaire was sent via email to members of the NYU Langone Pediatric Residency asking them to identify their career path and weigh eight factors on how importantly they contribute to that career choice in either a positive or negative manner. Responses were assigned numerical values and scrutinized for differences between response groups. Responses showed work life balance was the most significant factor for all groups. The largest disparity between groups involved autonomy, and the most negative influencing factor for non-academics was the desire to teach. The results suggest further research into what aspects of teaching make it undesirable to hopefully amend these issues and make careers in academia more appealing.

METHOD

A survey was emailed to faculty and residents in NYU Langone Pediatric Residency programs. In the survey respondents indicated their year of graduation for both dental school and pediatric dental residency. They then indicated their career pathway choice between private practice, academia, federally qualified health center, or a mixture of the above. Participants rated eight different criteria on a scale from one to four on how significant of a factor it played in their career choice. Respondents then indicated if the factor had a positive or negative influence on them when making their career choice. Surveys were then divided into two groups by those that completed residency and current residents. Responses were scored and averaged. Responses that were indicated as a negative influence were given a negative score. Scores were scrutinized for differences and trends.



RESULTS

A total of 33 participants filled out surveys. None were excluded as all responded to the indicated information. Of the respondents, 17 were pediatric dentists and 16 were residents indicating an even split. Out of the participants' career choices six indicated they chose private practice, ten chose FQHC, seven chose academia and ten stated they were in a mixture of the categories. Of those in a combination of career categories, all but one indicated being in academia to some extent. Amongst the pediatric dentist responses, all but two were involved in academia, and amongst the residents only one indicated they planned on pursuing academia. For the residents, work life balance scored highest, followed by location, development, compensation, and benefits. Autonomy and advocacy scored lower with the desire to teach scoring the lowest. For the pediatric dentists, career development scored highest followed by balance, teaching, and compensation. Benefits, advocacy, and location scored lower, and autonomy scored the lowest.

DISCUSSION

The scope of the pilot study did not recruit enough participants to have statistically significant results. However, some interesting trends developed from the responses. For the purposes of this study the respondents can be grouped into mostly pediatric dentists that are faculty members and pediatric dental residents that are planning on pursuing a career in private practice. Generally, the residents planning on pursuing private practice valued the criteria higher across the board with the biggest discrepancies being in autonomy and location. Unfortunately, location is something impossible to change in existing residency programs; however, it clearly should be an important consideration for opening new programs. On autonomy, it would seem like a general perception of a lack of independence in academia compared to private practice has made academia less attractive as a career choice. Examining pediatric dentists, the biggest discrepancy for which they valued higher involved a desire to teach. Residents scored this factor lower than any other category. This suggests residencies should value making teaching appear more desirable at residency programs. Further research into which aspects of teaching make it undesirable would help understand the issue better.

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