

# Assessing the factors influencing medical students' career choices: a national survey

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## Background

The current trend of uneven distribution of physicians across different specialties and the subsequent challenge of providing easy access to the needed care, especially in gynecology, emergency medicine, and neurosurgery has been a major concern for Iranian health policymakers. Identification of factors affecting medical students' interest in different specialties would be helpful in encouraging students to pursue less favorable specialties and achieving the right mix of specialists to meet societal needs. In this study, by means of a nation-wide multi-centric survey, we aimed to investigate the factors that influence Iranian medical students' career choices and its trend across the continuum of their professional development.

## Methods and Materials:

A multi-site cross-sectional survey of medical students was conducted using a valid questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of three parts including demographic data, students' interests, and influencing factors which quantified the role of 30 different factors in 6 categories using a 5-point Likert scale. Face validity of the questionnaire was conducted by a nominal group of 76 medical students and the content validity was examined by 12 residents in different specialties. Reliability of the questionnaire was calculated by Cronbach's alpha coefficient (0.88). Finally, the web-based version of the questionnaire was sent to medical students across the country.

## Results

Overall 2357 responses were gathered from 34 medical schools, 45% of them from male and 65.2% from pre-clinical students. Results indicated that “perceived personality fit to the specialty”, rated critical by 84.05% of students was considered the most important factor when choosing a specialty. This was followed by “individual competencies regarding certain specialty”, “autonomy (to have freedom, independence, and control over work style, schedule lives)”, and “life-style after training (stress&...)”. On the other end of the spectrum, “length of the training required” and work hours during residency” were rated least important and only 22.57% of students decided based on these factors. It is interesting to note that “financial rewards after training” was not mentioned in the top five critical factors by students. Our study also revealed that only 6.2% of students had the experience of participating in a career planning course.

## Conclusion

Iranian medical students consider “perceived personality fit to the specialty” and “individual competencies regarding certain specialty” the most important factors affecting their career choices. Designing career planning courses for medical students and guiding their interest into less favored specialties may be helpful for achieving the right mix of specialists.