Reviewer's report

Title: Short and long-term career plans of final year dental students in the United Arab Emirates

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Reviewer: Kimon Divaris

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The present manuscript reports results of a cross sectional study of “short and long-term career” plans of senior dental students in one dental school in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The authors surveyed 71 final year dental students and investigated factors such as willingness to specialize, correlates and motives of future career plans. The authors’ conclusion was that “students aspire to make a long-term contribution to the profession…” and “a strong interest in specialization”. This is an article of limited interest, pertaining essentially to one new dental school in UAE. This reviewer finds that several issues further limit the manuscript’s scientific validity and potential for contribution. I elaborate below for the authors’ consideration.

MAJOR ISSUES

A major issue in this investigation is the reporting is the reporting of stratified results by Ethnicity, wherein numbers of students is characteristically small, with the extreme case of a stratum of one student: i.e. page 8 lines 5 and 6 “9% (n=1) of Persians and 3 Indians that “selected the government training center”. The fact that the school, graduation year and gender/ethnicities of these students are reported, a reader with knowledge of local affairs can practically identify individual students and responses. In my opinion, this should be avoided.

The reporting of results is not efficient; figures and bar charts are employed with percentages repeated in the narrative part. The authors could employ tables that also include their statistical analysis results and revise the narrative part of the results to provide a more concise overview of cardinal findings.

The authors have based their reporting on bivariate analyses alone- this is an obvious limitation of the study, because the “mixing” of multiple influences on the examined analytical endpoints cannot be alleviated; this should be acknowledged or addressed via stratified or multivariate analyses (i.e. adjust for or stratify by sex/ethnicity).

Further, the use of chi-square test for ordinal Likert-type items is not optimal. Statistical tests that are best suited to account for the inherent ordinality of responses such as Kruskal-Wallis and Wilcoxon should be employed for the examination of such items.

The study lacks some basic information that would place the findings in context—the authors should briefly describe the educational curriculum of the
specific school (lecture-based vs. PBL, clinical training, externships, research exposure, etc.) and the distribution of dental professionals (specialists vs. general practitioners) in UAE.

MINOR ISSUES

The authors refer to “unpublished observations” as “reported in a previous study”; I would recommend keeping the former descriptor, but not the latter and it appears as a contradictory statement.

In the introduction the authors refers to previous findings from quantitative and qualitative studies in the UK; are there other relevant data from other countries that they could be cited?

It is unclear why the authors being the results section with a statement “only significant results are reported”. In this small study of 71 students, it will be informative to present all results since the study was clearly under-powered to detect significant differences to begin with.

The authors should report what statistical significance testing threshold they used in the methods section.

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.