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Original Research Article

Perception of obstetrics and gynaecology as a future career specialty among medical graduates: A cross-sectional study

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Abstract

Background: Obstetrics and Gynaecology (OG) is an essential specialty within the medical profession that combines both surgical and medical care, focusing primarily on women's reproductive health. Despite its fulfilling nature and importance to public health, OG often struggles to attract interest from medical graduates, particularly males, due to its challenging demands and concerns about lifestyle.

Aim and Objective: To assess the perceptions, attitudes, and factors influencing Compulsory Rotating Medical Interns (CRMI) in selecting OG as a future career specialty.

Materials and Methods: A cross-sectional study was carried out in Tamil Nadu from October 2023 to July 2024. A total of 166 CRMIs participated by completing a structured questionnaire designed to gauge their knowledge, attitudes, and interest in pursuing a career in OG. The data were analyzed using Chi-square tests to identify significant relationships.

Results: Out of 166 respondents, 82 (54.7%) expressed interest in a career in OG. Awareness was high, with 96% recognizing it encompasses both surgical and medical aspects, and 81.3% viewing it as a continuously relevant specialty. Key obstacles included physical stress (74.7%), emotional fatigue during clerkship (74.7%), perceived low financial compensation (40%), and the need for better skill-based training (76.4%). Also, health issues, concerns about overtime, effects on family time, and disruption of circadian rhythms significantly influenced career choices ($p < 0.01$). Participants who found OG fulfilling or had positive experiences were more likely to consider it ($p < 0.01$). However, factors like a distressing environment, ineffective communication, and lack of mentorship did not significantly affect decision-making.

Conclusion: Although OG is acknowledged for its significance and opportunities, several modifiable obstacles - particularly those related to workload, emotional burden, work-life balance, and inadequate support deter graduates from selecting it as a career. Addressing these issues through structured counselling, enhanced training programs, and departmental reforms may increase interest in OG among future medical professionals.

Keywords: Obstetrics and gynaecology, Medical interns, Clerkship experience, Medical education.

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1. Introduction

In the current era of rapid advancements in medical science, the process of selecting a medical specialty has become increasingly complex for medical graduates.¹ The increasing competition among various specialties, paired with the necessity to keep pace with advancing biomedical technologies, has rendered career decision-making particularly difficult.² Breakthroughs in diagnostic and therapeutic techniques, the digital transformation of healthcare systems, and progress in medical education have

changed the landscape, providing graduates with numerous choices while also introducing elements of uncertainty and indecisiveness. The modern medical educational environment, which prioritizes ongoing innovation and flexibility, requires clear career objectives, which not all students attain by the conclusion of their undergraduate studies.³ Compounding this challenge is the demographic shift in healthcare demands.

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India has experienced a steady decline in birth rates, marked by a 1.17% decrease in 2024 compared to 2023, a 1.25% reduction in 2023 from the previous year, and a 1.23% decline in 2022 from 2021.⁴ Interestingly, as the demand for obstetric care continues, the influx of healthcare professionals entering this field especially obstetricians is also decreasing.⁴ Obstetrics, a crucial aspect of the Obstetrics and Gynecology (OG) specialty, deals with the management of the natural processes of pregnancy and childbirth. Despite its vital role in promoting maternal and neonatal health, OG is frequently overlooked by graduates when selecting a specialty. Over the last few decades, the percentage of medical graduates choosing OG as their primary specialty has been steadily declining.⁵ While OG is acknowledged as a fulfilling and intellectually stimulating field, it is commonly regarded as physically and emotionally demanding. Female graduates typically exhibit greater interest in OG compared to their male peers, who are often discouraged by factors such as long working hours, medico-legal concerns, erratic schedules, and the emotionally intense nature of the job.⁶ Additionally, various studies have indicated that a notable number of OG residents contemplate switching specialties or dropping out due to issues like burnout, high stress levels, fear of legal repercussions, and inadequate work-life balance.^{7,8} Recognizing the factors that impact this career choice is crucial for medical educators, program directors, and policymakers.^{9,10} The current study aims to investigate the perceptions, attitudes, and major deterrents influencing the inclination of medical interns to pursue OG as a future specialty. By pinpointing these factors, targeted strategies can be formulated to support students throughout their decision-making journey and to nurture sustained interest in OG, particularly among those who exhibit an aptitude for women's health and surgical care.

2. Methodology

This observational cross-sectional study was carried out over a ten-month timeframe, from October 2023 to July 2024, in a tertiary care hospital, Tamil Nadu, India. The aim of the study was to assess the level of knowledge regarding Obstetrics and Gynaecology (OG) among Compulsory Rotating Medical Interns (CRMI), as well as their interest in pursuing OG as a potential career path.

A total of 166 CRMIs participated, recruited through a convenient sampling method. This method was selected for its practicality, given the fixed number of interns assigned to various departments during the study duration. All eligible CRMIs present during data collection who provided informed consent were included. Interns who were absent, opted out, or provided incomplete responses were not included in the analysis. It was noted that prolonging the study duration would not have led to a significant increase in sample size, considering the academic structure and rotation schedule of the internship program.

Data collection was conducted using a pre-tested, structured, self-administered questionnaire created by the research team. The questionnaire aimed to cover two primary areas: (1) knowledge about the field of OG, encompassing its scope, training, and career prospects, and (2) attitude and willingness to pursue OG as a postgraduate specialty. The instrument underwent content validation by a panel of three experts in OG and medical education to guarantee its relevance, clarity, and alignment with the study's objectives. Revisions were made based on their feedback to enhance face and content validity. A pilot test was conducted with 15 interns who were not part of the final sample, leading to necessary adjustments that improved comprehensibility and accuracy of responses.

The anonymity and confidentiality of participants were rigorously upheld throughout the study. Participation was completely voluntary, and written informed consent was collected from all respondents before inclusion. The research study protocol was granted approval by the Institutional Ethics Committee [SRMIEC-ST0124-992] and strictly adhered to the established ethical guidelines governing biomedical research that involves human participants.

Data were entered and compiled using Microsoft Excel and analysed with SPSS version 16. Descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, and percentages were utilized to summarize the characteristics of participants and distributions of responses. The student's t-test was employed for inferential analysis to compare mean scores across subgroups. A p-value of less than <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

3. Results

A total of 166 Compulsory Rotating Medical Interns (CRMIs) participated in the study. **Table 1** summarizes the responses to knowledge-based questions regarding Obstetrics and Gynaecology (OG) and their statistical significance in influencing specialty choice. A vast majority (144; 96%) correctly identified OG as comprising both surgical and medical components, with a statistically significant association ($\chi^2 = 126.96$, $p < 0.01$). Similarly, 91.3% (137 participants) perceived OG as an evergreen field ($p < 0.01$), indicating a strong positive perception of its career longevity. While 66 participants (44%) felt that physical violence from patients or attendants could discourage them from selecting OG, this factor did not show a statistically significant association ($p = 0.14$). However, the perception that limited surgical exposure deters students from choosing OG was significant ($\chi^2 = 21.28$, $p = 0.02$), with 52% (78 participants) agreeing to this.

A large proportion (138; 92%) agreed or strongly agreed that OG entails significant physical stress, with this factor showing a highly significant association with career preference ($\chi^2 = 46.56$, $p < 0.01$). Likewise, 112 participants (74.7%) reported that the clerkship period in OG made them

emotionally weak ($p < 0.01$). Regarding financial perceptions, 107 (71.3%) respondents believed that OG professionals are underpaid, and this factor was significantly associated with specialty disinterest ($\chi^2 = 8.76$, $p = 0.02$). Additionally, 112 (74.7%) participants emphasized the need for simulation and skill-based training in OG to help identify their field of choice ($p < 0.01$).

Gender-based bias was another relevant concern, with 58% reporting that gender could negatively impact clerkship experiences. This association was statistically significant (p

< 0.05). The majority did not find OG repetitive ($p = 0.74$; not significant), but concerns about poor work-life balance were significantly prevalent, with 49% (74 participants) expressing concern, and this was significantly associated ($\chi^2 = 41.44$, $p < 0.01$). Sensitivity of the OG department also played a role in decision-making, with 63.3% (95 participants) stating that they would not choose OG due to its sensitive nature, a statistically significant finding ($\chi^2 = 6.04$, $p = 0.04$). Furthermore, 73.3% (110 participants) viewed OG as a high-risk specialty and preferred not to choose it for that reason ($p < 0.01$).

Table 1: Knowledge-based questions related to OG that were asked to the participants

Knowledge-based questions	Answer choices	Frequency	Chi-square	p-value	Significance
Does OG have both surgical and medical fields?	Yes	144 (96%)	126.96	<0.01	significant
	No	6 (4%)			
Do you think it's an Evergreen field?	Yes	137 (91.3%)	102.51	<0.01	significant
	No	13 (8.7%)			
Physical violence from the patient side makes you to not choose OG as your career?	Yes	66 (44%)	2.16	0.14	not significant
	No	84 (56%)			
Does limited super-specialities in OG make you think about not choosing OG as your career?	Strongly Agree	26 (17.3%)	21.28	0.02	significant
	Agree	52 (34.7%)			
	Disagree	72 (48%)			
Do you think OG has its own Physical stress?	Strongly Agree	78 (52%)	46.56	<0.01	significant
	Agree	60 (40%)			
	Disagree	12 (8%)			
Does the OG clerkship period make you nutritionally weak?	Yes	112 (74.7%)	36.51	<0.01	significant
	No	38 (25.3%)			
Do you think OGcian gets low pay compared to their work?	Strongly Agree	40 (26.7%)	8.76	0.02	significant
	Agree	67 (44.7%)			
	Disagree	43 (28.7%)			
Do you need simulation and skill-based conferences in the OG department to identify your field of choice?	Yes	112(74.7%)	36.51	<0.01	significant
	No	38 (25.3%)			
Will gender negatively impact your clerkship experience?	Yes	87 (58%)	3.84	<0.05	significant
	No	63 (42%)			
Do you think OG is repetitive?	Yes	73 (48.7%)	0.11	0.74	not significant
	No	77 (51.3%)			
Do you think you will have a work-life balance in OG?	Strongly Agree	14 (9.3%)	41.44	<0.01	significant
	Agree	60 (39.7%)			
	Disagree	76 (51%)			
You won't choose OG as your career because it is more sensitive than other departments?	Strongly Agree	36 (24%)	6.04	0.04	significant
	Agree	59 (39.3%)			
	Disagree	55 (36.7%)			
Will you choose OG as your career as it is a more high-risk challenging field?	Strongly Agree	38 (25.3%)	14.56	<0.01	significant
	Agree	72 (48%)			
	Disagree	40 (26.7%)			

Table 2 illustrates the willingness of participants to consider a career in Obstetrics and Gynaecology (OG) based on their attitudes and practice. Among the 150 respondents, 82 (54.7%) indicated a desire to pursue OG as a long-term career; however, this aspect did not demonstrate statistical significance ($p = 0.25$). Conversely, health-related issues significantly impacted career choices, with 82 participants (54.7%) strongly agreeing and 63 (42%) agreeing that health is a crucial factor in opting for OG as a specialty ($\chi^2 = 64.36$, $p < 0.01$). A major segment of respondents (59; 39.3%) strongly agreed and 78 (52%) agreed that working overtime would significantly deter them from selecting OG, revealing a highly significant association ($\chi^2 = 44.68$, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, the perception that OG might be an appealing career if seen as fulfilling rather than burdensome was statistically significant, as 28 (18.7%) strongly agreed and 81 (54%) agreed with this perspective ($\chi^2 = 30.52$, $p < 0.01$). Additionally, the interest in joining the OG department was significantly correlated with future career preferences ($\chi^2 = 12.91$, $p = 0.03$), with 35.3% showing interest. Family influence also played a significant role, as 44 participants (29.3%) stated they would contemplate a career in OG under familial pressure ($\chi^2 = 95.08$, $p = 0.01$). Lastly, previous exposure to OG during their training significantly affected their decisions, with 87 participants (58%) mentioning that insights gained during clinical postings shaped their willingness to choose OG ($\chi^2 = 3.84$, $p < 0.05$).

Further examination of participants' attitudes toward OG revealed additional influential factors. Although 74% (111 participants) regarded OG as a stressful environment, this was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 3.88$, $p = 0.14$). Similarly, concerns about seniors possibly overwhelming interns with their workload echoed among 88.7% (105 participants), but this aspect also did not show statistical significance ($\chi^2 = 1.96$, $p = 0.37$).

In contrast, the issue of family time surfaced as a significant concern. A considerable number of participants (75; 50%) strongly agreed and 58 (38.7%) agreed that selecting OG as a career might result in less time spent with family. This association was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 35.56$, $p < 0.01$). The disturbance of circadian rhythm also emerged as a major concern. 77 (51.3%) strongly agreed and 57 (38%) agreed that working in OG might adversely affect their sleep-wake cycle, and this concern was significantly linked to reluctance in choosing the specialty ($\chi^2 = 38.68$, $p < 0.01$). Lastly, emotional frustration was evaluated, with 76.7% (115 participants) indicating that the OG department often leads to feelings of frustration. This aspect showed a statistically significant association ($\chi^2 = 7.96$, $p = 0.02$), emphasizing the emotional and mental strain perceived by medical interns in this specialty.

Table 2: Questions related to willingness of the participants based on their attitude and practice for choosing OG as their career option

Willingness based questions	Answer choices	Frequency	Chi-square	p-value	Significance
Do you desire to pursue OG as your lifetime career?	Yes	82 (54.7%)	1.31	0.25	Not significant
	No	68 (45.3%)			
Do you think factors like health play a major role in choosing OG as a career?	Strongly agree	82 (54.7%)	64.36	<0.01	Significant
	Agree	63 (42%)			
	Disagree	5 (3.3%)			
Will overtime work be a cause for you not to choose OG as your career?	Strongly agree	59 (39.3%)	44.68	<0.01	Significant
	Agree	78 (52%)			
	Disagree	13 (8.7%)			
Will you choose OG as your career if it's soul-satisfying instead of its cons?	Strongly agree	28 (18.7%)	30.52	<0.01	Significant
	Agree	81 (54%)			
	Disagree	41 (27.3%)			
Whether you are willing to join the OG department?	Yes	53 (35.3%)	12.91	0.03	Significant
	No	97 (64.7%)			
Will you choose OG as your career due to family pressure?	Strongly agree	17 (11.3%)	95.08	<0.01	Significant
	Agree	27 (18%)			
	Disagree	106 (70.7%)			
Did you learn OG up to decide to choose it as a career?	Yes	87 (58%)	3.84	<0.05	Significant
	No	63 (42%)			
Does OG have a traumatizing environment?	Strongly agree	53 (35.3%)	3.88	0.14	Not significant
	Agree	58 (38.7%)			
	Disagree	39 (26%)			
Do you think seniors will overburden you with work?	Strongly agree	47 (31.3%)	1.96	0.37	Not significant
	Agree	58 (38.7%)			
	Disagree	45 (30%)			

Do you think family time will be decreased if you choose OG?	Strongly agree	75 (50%)	35.56	<0.01	Significant
	Agree	58 (38.7%)			
	Disagree	17 (11.3%)			
Do you think your circadian rhythm may affect your career if you choose OG?	Strongly agree	77 (51.3%)	38.68	<0.01	Significant
	Agree	57 (38%)			
	Disagree	16 (10.7%)			
Does the OG department make you frustrated frequently?	Strongly agree	52 (34.7%)	7.96	0.02	Significant
	Agree	63 (42%)			
	Disagree	35 (23.3%)			
Do you feel that you are treated as a part of the OG team?	Yes	114 (76%)	40.56	<0.01	Significant
	No	36 (24%)			
Do you think poor interprofessional relationships in OG?	Strongly agree	38 (25.3%)	4.96	<0.05	Significant
	Agree	52 (34.7%)			
	Disagree	60 (40%)			
Do you think intercommunication in OG is poor?	Strongly agree	40 (26.7%)	3.16	0.21	Not significant
	Agree	53 (35.3%)			
	Disagree	57 (38%)			
Do you think you don't have a good mentor in OG department?	Yes	61 (40.7%)	5.28	0.21	Not significant
	No	89 (59.3%)			

Further exploration of interpersonal and emotional factors within the OG department showcased several significant associations. A considerable percentage of participants 115 (76.7%) reported experiencing frequent frustration while working in the OG department. This was significantly associated with hesitance to choose OG as a specialty ($\chi^2 = 7.96$, $p = 0.02$). Team dynamics also affected perceptions, as 114 participants (76%) felt they were regarded as part of the OG team during their rotation, which was significantly associated with their willingness to consider OG as a career ($\chi^2 = 40.56$, $p < 0.01$). Additionally, 60% of participants (38 strongly agreeing, 52 agreeing) perceived deficiencies in interprofessional relationships within the OG department. This belief was significantly associated with career preferences ($\chi^2 = 4.96$, $p = 0.05$). However, when specifically examining communication, 57 participants (38%) disagreed that OG suffers from poor intercommunication, a parameter that did not reach statistical significance ($\chi^2 = 3.16$, $p = 0.21$). The role of mentorship within the OG department was also evaluated as a potential influencing factor. When asked about feeling a lack of a good mentor during their OG rotation, 61 participants (40.7%) replied affirmatively, while 89 (59.3%) disagreed. However, this element did not achieve statistical significance ($\chi^2 = 5.28$, $p = 0.21$), suggesting that the presence or absence of mentorship alone was not a determinant factor in the specialty choice for most participants.

4. Discussion

As the number of practicing obstetricians in India declines, medical schools must either provide more OG residency programs or support expanded responsibilities for other delivery providers (family physicians, midwives, and nurses).¹¹ If the choice is taken to increase training opportunities, admission to medical schools with a sufficient

supply of students passionate about this field is critical.¹² We also discovered that students were anxious about the projected stressful environment of OG and the overburdening of work by the seniors. However, according to our findings, both were non-significant.

In our study, most of the participants expressed an interest in considering OG speciality as a career choice. Although more in numbers, we have not found a statistically insignificant change in the proportions of students considering a career in OG in our research which contrasts with previous findings by Sein et al., which was found to be significant although fewer students chose OG as their career choice.¹³ Sein et al. also highlighted the concern of disruption of work-life balance and overtime work claiming it to be a sensitive speciality, all of which coincide with our findings and are significant.¹³ Participants in our study also showed concern regarding gender negativity which was found to be significant and the results were similar to the findings by Iqbal et al. and Craig et al.^{14,15} Contrasting to the results by Iqbal et al. and Salehi et al., participants in our study group refused to take OG because of family pressure and will take OG if it is soul-satisfying to them and having proper knowledge about OG for choosing it.^{15,16} In their study, Salehi et al. also found the participants to be concerned about the level of stress that the OG residents face which coincides with our findings and is also seen to be statistically significant.¹⁶ Contrasting to our study results, where the study participants showed their concern about low pay in OG whereas Salehi et al. found majority of the study participants claimed OG to open up good financial opportunities to them.¹⁶ Obstetrics and Gynecology (OB-GYN) encompasses several subspecialties, including Fetal Medicine, Urogynecology, Reproductive Medicine, and Minimally Invasive Gynaecologic Surgery. Among these, students

seeking a better work-life balance and reduced stress levels may find Fetal Medicine and Reproductive Medicine to be particularly appealing options. These fields offer opportunities for specialized practice while allowing for a more manageable lifestyle compared to other subspecialties.

The manner in which that particular field of medical care is delivered and the overall composition of the medical workforce are significantly influenced by the career decisions made by medical students. Since OG may provide students with experience in both surgery and medicine, it ought to be required for all interns in the internship program. Since OG is a more delicate subject than other fields, it is also necessary to give students more opportunities and to encourage them to attend conferences that focus on simulation and skill-building. This will help them gain the confidence they need to pursue OG as a career in the future. Specialists and the media should collaborate to educate the public about the relevance of OG and urge more students to pursue this specialization.

5. Conclusion

This study indicates the complex interplay of knowledge, attitudes, and perceived barriers influencing medical interns' willingness to choose Obstetrics and Gynaecology (OG) as a future career. Despite OG being acknowledged as an essential and enduring specialty, various deterrents including physical and emotional strain, disrupted sleep patterns, extended working hours, diminished family time, and inadequate support significantly impact career choices. Positive experiences during clerkships, integration within the department, and viewing OG as a fulfilling field were linked to a higher likelihood of pursuing it. Interestingly, issues related to mentorship and communication, while notable, did not demonstrate a significant impact. These results highlight the necessity for focused initiatives like mentorship programs, enhanced clinical training, emotional support systems, and policies that encourage work-life balance. Tackling these adjustable factors can increase the attractiveness of OG and aid in retaining skilled and enthusiastic graduates in this essential specialty, ultimately leading to improved maternal and reproductive healthcare.

6. Source of Funding

None.

7. Conflict of Interest

None.

8. Ethical Approval

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