

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Career Choice in a Secondary School Wide Survey

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: This survey aims to investigate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on career choices amongst high school students.

Methods: This is a school authorized electronic survey of students in years 10–13 in our boys and girls campuses of the independent schools of the King Edward VI Foundation, Birmingham. Comparison of proportion was statistically assessed using online Chi-square test with a significance level of $p < 0.05$.

Results: 235 of 859 students (27%) responded. A healthcare career is definitely considered by 21% and possibly by 22%. Over the course of the pandemic, 31% (72/235) of responders changed their career aspirations: 16% (8/49) of those certain of healthcare, 57% (29/51) of those considering healthcare and 26% (35/135) of those considering non-healthcare careers (Chi square statistic 41.3, $p < 0.001$).

Conclusions: Our survey highlights that the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced career choices amongst secondary school students and is most pronounced amongst those considering healthcare.

Keywords: Careers, High-school, Survey, Covid-19 pandemic, Healthcare

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WHAT WE DID

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted school education and has brought unprecedented challenges to students and education systems. It has also shone light on the relative importance of some career options over others, with the healthcare industry in particular gaining well-deserved recognition. In a secondary-school-wide survey of students in years 10–13 of two independent schools within the King Edward’s Foundation, England, we aimed to investigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the students’ career choices and in particular whether the proportion considering a career in the healthcare industry changed over the course of the pandemic. To the best of our knowledge, there has not been any research on this topic within high school students, although a similar survey amongst undergraduate medical students did highlight the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on career preference, perspective and ideal workplace (Wang et al, 2022).

HOW WE DID IT

A structured survey (Baskar A, 2022) was created and agreed with the school to be rolled out to all students in years 10–13 in our boys and girls campuses for voluntary completion. It captured basic demographics in addition to preferred field of study as a career and whether this had changed from the previous year (before the COVID-19 pandemic). The survey was live for 2 weeks in June 2021. The anonymised responses were analysed using Microsoft Excel.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED

Of the 859 number of electronic surveys sent (493 boys and 366 girls), 235/859 responses (27%) were obtained for detailed analysis (109/235 (46%) were boys and 126/235 (54%) were girls). The breakdown of responders based on the current year of study (years 10–13 respectively) were 21% (49/235; Year 10), 32% (75/235; Year 11), 25% (59/235; Year 12) and 22% (52/235; Year 13). Table 1 outlines the proportion of

Table 1. Proportion (%) of students who are considering a career in healthcare

	Healthcare as a definite career choice	Healthcare as possible career choice	Healthcare not as a career choice
Overall (n=235)	21% (49/235)	22% (51/235)	57% (135/235)
Boys (n=109)	16% (17/109)	19% (21/109)	65% (71/109)
Girls (n=126)	25% (32/126)	24% (30/126)	51% (64/126)

students who are currently considering a career in healthcare (definite or possible) versus other fields (i.e. not healthcare).

With regards to the potential influence of the pandemic on career choice, 31% (72/235) of all respondents felt their original choice had changed over the course of the pandemic (41/126 (33%) girls and 31/109 (28%) boys). Figure 1 highlights the proportion of students that changed their original career choice based on whether their current choice was in healthcare or not.

Change in career choice over the course of the pandemic is apparent irrespective of the field of choice. However, this is most evident in

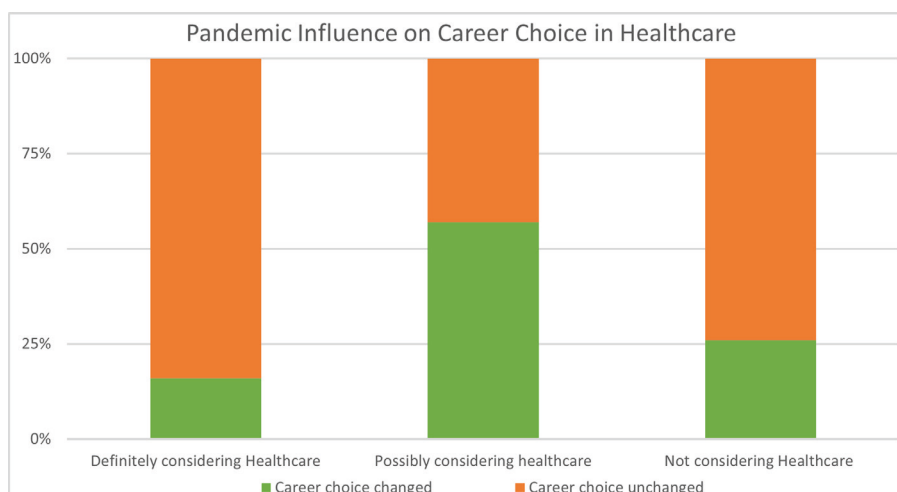


Figure 1. Proportion (%) of respondents who changed their career choice during the pandemic.

healthcare aspirants: 16% (8/49) of those certain of a career in healthcare and 57% (29/51) of those that are considering a career in healthcare were considering a non-healthcare career prior to the pandemic. Thus 37% (37/100 students) who are certain or considering a career in healthcare at the time of completing the survey had considered a non-healthcare career prior to the pandemic. This compares to 26% (35/135) of those that are currently considering a non-healthcare career who had changed their choice from the year before (Chi square statistic 41.3, $p < 0.001$).

Factors that were frequently quoted as possible influencers of change of career choice (multiple responses accepted) were, greater ability to serve community 26% (58/225) increased demand for the field 21% (47/225) and increased recognition from society 18% (40/225). The survey also captured the students' greatest concerns as a result of the pandemic (multiple responses accepted), mental health 59% (132/225), lack of socialising (58%) 130/225 and lack of in-person work experience opportunities 42% (94/225) were identified as the most frequently cited concerns.

TAKE HOME POINTS

Our survey highlights that the COVID-19 pandemic has had an influence on career choices amongst secondary school students. This influence is most pronounced amongst those considering healthcare. Previous research has shown that high schooler's career decision-making skills increases as they progress in the years, with group interventions and early exposure to paid work experience significantly increasing confidence in making career choices (Chiesa et al., 2016; Creed et al., 2007; Germaijs et al., 2006). Our survey demonstrating change of career choice over the course of a year is not entirely unexpected although the significantly greater proportion moving towards a career in healthcare is speculated to be a direct consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. This in conjunction with the increased societal recognition healthcare workers received during the early waves of the pandemic could have contributed to this change. Our findings are of relevance to medical schools and the

healthcare industry to capitalise on the increased interest by engaging with high schools and reopening physical work experience opportunities to consolidate their choices.

We accept that this survey only covered two independent schools within our Foundation and whether our findings can be reproduced in other independent and state schools, including of the wider King Edward's Foundation is not known and we welcome further research in this area. We also did not break down healthcare career to sub-divisions of medical, dental, nursing and allied health although our findings are significant enough to support our conclusions. This increased interest in healthcare career amongst high-schoolers needs to be harnessed from an early stage by key stakeholders, including medical schools and health service providers.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Aditi Baskar conceptualised, created and analysed the survey findings to write the paper

Laura Quigley as head of careers for the school provided support and contributed to data analysis

Kam Sangha as director of enrichment helped with distribution of the survey and with data analysis

Consent to Participate: The survey was authorised by the school with all responses being voluntary and anonymously recorded.

Competing interest: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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