

Do Dental and Dental Hygiene Students Differ in Their Interests in Behavioral Science Topics? An Analysis of Survey Data from 2000-2021

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Objectives: The Commission for Dental Accreditation requires dental and dental hygiene graduates to be competent to successfully interact with patients. The objectives were (a) to assess dental and dental hygiene students' interest in taking a Behavioral Science course and learn about specific topics, (b) to compare the interest of dental vs. dental hygiene students in this material, and (c) to analyze the trends in their interest from 2000 to 2021.

Methods: Between 2000 and 2021, 1977 dental and dental hygiene students responded to a survey at the beginning of a Behavioral Science class.

Results: The students enjoyed interacting with people very much (5-point scale with 5=very much: Mean=4.57) and thought they would enjoy very much to interact 1:1 with patients in their future profession (Mean=4.78). They were very interested in taking the course (Mean=4.39). They were most interested in learning how to handle patients (3-point scale with 3=very interested: Mean=2.89) and how to establish rapport with patients (Mean=2.89), and least interested in learning how social support affects patients' oral health and oral health care utilization (Mean=2.54). Dental students thought they enjoyed more to interact 1:1 with their patients in their professional lives than dental hygiene students (4.80 vs. 4.69; $p=0.013$), while dental hygiene students were more interested in taking the Behavioral Science course (4.60 vs. 4.37; $p<0.001$). Between 2000-2020, the students became more interested in an introduction to dental health issues ($r=0.06$; $p<0.05$), but less interested to learn about dental fear ($r=-.07$; $p<0.001$), handling patients ($r=-0.09$; $p<0.001$) and learning about treatment cooperation ($r=-0.08$; $p<0.001$).

Conclusions: These findings can provide a basis for discussing how to best introduce pre-doctoral dental students and dental hygiene students to behavioral science related aspects of their future profession.