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Letter to the Editor

Why candidates choose MHPE: Between limited opportunities and the perception of an easy program

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Dear Editor,

We would like to commend the authors for their insightful research on the characteristics and motivational factors of candidates applying to the Master in Health Professions Education (MHPE) program at Jinnah Sindh Medical University (JSMU).¹ The study provides a much-needed analysis of the profiles of these applicants, offering valuable insights into the field of health professions education. In this letter, we would like to further explore and reflect on several key findings, which are critical for enhancing the program's structure and attracting motivated candidates globally.

Firstly, the demographic characteristics of the candidates offer an interesting perspective on the type of professionals drawn to the MHPE program. With an average age of 35.8 years, the majority of applicants (81.3 %) were male, and a

similar percentage (81.3 %) were married. The predominance of candidates from the medical and dental fields indicates that this program primarily attracts mid-career professionals, likely seeking to enhance their teaching competencies within their current fields. However, this raises a crucial question: why are women underrepresented, even though female graduates dominate many medical and dental programs in Pakistan? This gender disparity warrants further exploration, as it may reflect broader socio-cultural barriers or perceptions about career progression in medical education.^{2–4}

Moving to the motivational factors, it is clear that the desire to improve teaching skills, particularly in psychomotor aspects, was a primary driving force for most candidates (96 %). This is encouraging, as it suggests that the program is attracting individuals with a genuine interest in refining practical teaching abilities. Additionally, a substantial number of candidates (90 %) expressed interest in conducting educational research. However, the study also revealed a disconnect between this expressed interest and the actual intent to pursue research careers in medical education post-graduation, as shown by lower scores in subsequent responses regarding long-term research goals. This disconnect highlights a potential area for program improvement, particularly in terms of encouraging sustained engagement with educational research.^{5–7}

An intriguing finding pertains to the motivation for applying to the program. A significant portion of the applicants applied to the MHPE program at JSMU due to their inability to secure admission in other programs. Furthermore, many perceived the MHPE program as requiring minimal effort to complete. These motivations raise important concerns about the perceptions surrounding the rigor and value of the MHPE program. If candidates view the

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program as a less challenging alternative, there is a risk that the program may not fully engage those who are genuinely committed to advancing medical education.^{8,9} This perception gap calls for immediate attention. Strengthening the program's structure, promoting its true academic rigor, and implementing a more selective admission process could help mitigate these concerns and attract more motivated individuals.

In conclusion, the study presents both opportunities and challenges for the future development of MHPE programs. While it is promising that many applicants are motivated by the desire to improve their teaching skills, the gender disparity and the perception of the program's ease of completion must be addressed. By fostering a more rigorous admission process and enhancing program marketing to better reflect the academic demands and long-term benefits, JSMU and other institutions can ensure that they are attracting the best candidates to drive the future of health professions education.

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