Identifying COVID-19's Impact on General Dentists' Workforce Confidence

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The COVID-19 crisis has put many small businesses, including dental practices, in precarious financial situations. However, little is known about how dental workforce has been impacted. This study adapted an existing LinkedIn survey to investigate workforce sentiment among practice dentists. We aim to explore general dentists' perspective on their personal financial future and prospects for career advancement.

METHODS

Online surveys were nationally distributed to a subset of the American Dental Association membership (ADA, N=9,000). The survey was adapted from a validated LinkedIn survey and additional questions were vetted with The Odum Institute. Data were evaluated using descriptive and bivariate statistics.

RESULTS

91% of respondents are actively practicing general dentists and 9% are specialists. Data were collected from 2/15/21 to 4/5/21. The majority of practicing general dentists are sole owners (81%) and work in a general dentistry practice with 1 office (87%). The distribution of survey responders by age are roughly equal among 40-70 year olds (mean: 57.5), with those younger than 40 and older than 70 making up a smaller portion.

Table 1. Top three concerns regarding operating in a changed business environment

RESPONSE	PERCENT (%)
All general dentists (n=415)	
Increased costs of providing dental treatment	60.1
A new wave of COVID-19 infections resulting in another shutdown	32.5
Your personal financial situation	29.7

Table 2. Top three new safety products incorporated into clinical practice

RESPONSE	PERCENT (%)
All general dentists (n=592)	
Thermometers	90.8
Plexiglass barriers	67.3
Air filtration	66.0

RESULTS

- Around 50% of general dentists, regardless of ownership status, believe their personal financial status will largely stay the same in the short term.
- A large minority believe their personal financial status will decrease.

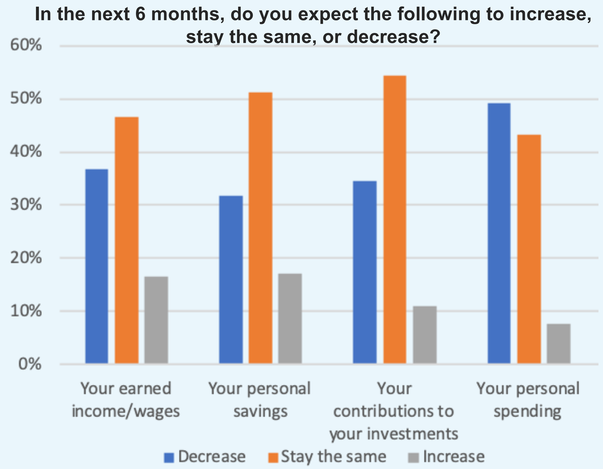

Figure 1. 6 month personal financial predictions of dentists working in a general dentistry practice with 1 or more offices.

- In the long term, about 50% of general dentists, regardless of ownership status, are optimistic that their practice gross revenue and take-home income will increase without increasing their hours worked per week.

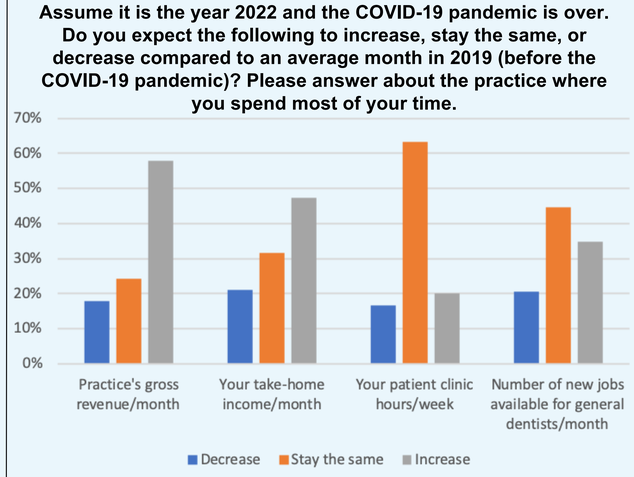

Figure 2. 2 year practice growth predictions of dentists working in a general dentistry practice with 1 or more offices.

CONCLUSIONS

- Despite financial concerns and the threat of another shutdown, the majority of survey responders do not expect their personal finances or private practice performance to be negatively affected during the remainder, and after the end, of the pandemic.