

# A Survey on NEET-MDS Examination among Dental Graduates in South India

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## Abstract

**Background:** In India, there are 6149 dental post-graduation seats across 254 dental colleges. The admission to these postgraduation seats is done through a common online NEET-MDS examination. The aim of the present study was to assess the quality of NEET-MDS examination among dental graduates in South India. **Materials and Methods:** Around 423 participants from five randomly selected entrance coaching centers in the states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Karnataka participated in the survey. The level of significance was set  $P < 0.05$ . Statistical analysis was done using Fisher's exact test. **Results:** The survey demonstrated that 174 (41.1%) of the participants were males and 249 (58.9%) were females. Majority (60.2%) of the participants had one attempt for the examination and only (4.9%) of the participants had three or more attempts for the examination. 58% of the respondents considered the NEET examination as a good assessment of dental graduates. **Conclusion:** The present survey reveals that most of the students preferred the computer-based NEET-MDS examination. Both male and female students should almost similar responses to the questions in the survey.

**Keywords:** Dental graduates, dentists, examination, India

## INTRODUCTION

India is the seventh largest country and the second most populous country of the world and has a universal healthcare system run by the constituent states ( $n = 29$ ) and territories ( $n = 7$ ). Oral health has been a neglected issue for a long period in India, but recently, it is being recognized as an important issue for the well-being of the society. In spite of the recent advancements and awareness in the Indian oral healthcare sector, oral diseases such as dental caries, periodontitis, and oral cancer are highly prevalent. Oral diseases are a significant public health burden in India, with 60%–65% of the general population being affected by dental caries and 50%–90% of the population being affected by periodontal diseases.<sup>[1]</sup> The frequency, incidence, severity, and disparity of oral diseases require India to have effective dental education strategies and oral healthcare delivery systems.<sup>[2,3]</sup> Workforce shortages and uneven geographic distribution of the oral health practitioners are associated with reduced access to dental care and oral health services.<sup>[4]</sup> In line with the recent focus on dental health, dental education has expanded greatly, now having the highest number of dental schools in the world.<sup>[2,5]</sup> Currently, there are around 900 dental schools globally.

Dental education in India was formally established in the 1920s, when the first dental college was started in Calcutta by Dr. R Ahmed. Until the 1960s, all dental colleges in India were government-aided colleges. After 1966, private dental colleges were established.<sup>[6]</sup> Currently, the growth of private dental colleges has far exceeded the number of government-aided colleges. The number of dental schools grew significantly in the past two decades, with a recent report indicating that, of the 313 dental schools in India (2017), a majority are private. There are 6149 postgraduation (MDS) seats across 254 dental colleges in India (2017).<sup>[7]</sup>

In India, admission to post graduation (MDS) seats was done through entrance examinations conducted by various bodies lie state governments, deemed universities, and private dental college consortiums. The entrance examinations conducted by various bodies were of different patterns. The Government of

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India established the National Board of Examinations (NBE) with the objective of improving the quality of the medical education by establishing high and uniform standards of postgraduate examinations in modern medicine on All India basis and utilizing existing healthcare infrastructure for capacity building. NBE provides a common national standard for evaluation of minimum level of attainment of the knowledge and competencies of postgraduate and postdoctoral training. The NEET-MDS examination is an eligibility-cum-ranking examination prescribed as the single entrance examination to various PG MDS Courses under Dentists Act, 1948 (amended from time to time) which is conducted by NBE, New Delhi. The computer-based test comprises of 240 Multiple Choices among 17 participants of BDS course which should be completed in 3 h duration.<sup>[8]</sup> As per current literature, there has been no research done to assess the NEET- MDS examination. Hence, the present survey was conducted to determine the quality of NEET-MDS examination among dental graduates in South India.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study was a cross-sectional descriptive study among participants from South India who had attempted the NEET-MDS examination. The online questionnaire-based survey was conducted during April–May 2018. The survey was conducted by a third party using a mobile application which consisted of 10 questions in English. The questionnaire comprised of questions pertaining to the quality of the examination, technical difficulties faced during the examination, dress code restrictions, etc., The anonymity of the participant was maintained throughout the survey. The questionnaire was pretested in a pilot study among 30 participants who were not included in the main survey. The reliability of the questionnaire was found to be kappa = 0.88. Based on the pilot survey, among the 30 participants, 5% alpha error, 95% confidence interval, and 80% power the sample size was determined to be 353. Dental graduates who had attempted the NEET-MDS examination were included in the survey. A list of 585 students was obtained from randomly selected five entrance coaching centers, one in the state of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Karnataka. The online survey mobile link was sent to all 585 mobile numbers of participants of the five selected entrance coaching centers of NEET-MDS examination. The survey responses were collected during 1 month. The survey link was resent to participants who had not responded to the survey after 2 weeks as a reminder. Four hundred and twenty-three participants had responded by participating in the survey. The response rate of the survey was 72.3%. Ethical approval of the study was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee before the start of the survey. The data were entered in Microsoft Excel software and analyzed using SPSS v 18 software (IBM, Chicago, IL, USA). The level of significance was set as  $P < 0.05$ . Statistical analysis was done using Fisher's exact test.

## RESULTS

A total of 423 participants had participated in the survey. The response rate of the survey was 72.3%. Among the participants, 174 (41.1%) were male, and 249 (58.9%) were female. The survey revealed that the majority (60.2%) of the participants had one attempt for the examination and only (4.9%) of the participants had three or more attempts for the examination [Table 1].

Most of the participants 246 (58.1%) considered the NEET examination as a good assessment of dental graduates. The difference observed was statistically significant ( $P = 0.028$ ). The survey shows that the majority of the male and female respondents considered that there should not be dress code restriction for the examination. About 51% of male and female respondents informed that they had obtained their preferred test center while 49% did not obtain their preferred test center for the examination. Most of the participants 252 (59.5%) considered that the time duration of 3 h was sufficient to answer all the questions in the examination while 171 (40.6%) felt that the time was not sufficient. A vast majority 342 (80.8%) of the respondents considered that there was no sufficient representation of questions from all participants in the examination. The survey showed that 72 (17%) of the participants had encountered technical difficulty during the examination. The study shows that there were almost similar responses by both genders throughout the survey [Table 2].

Among the participants, it was revealed that 21.3% considered the computer-based examination to be very good, 53.2% felt that it was good, 17% considered it average, and 8.5% considered it poor [Graph 1].

Among the participants who encountered technical difficulties, the majority (75%) of them encountered computer malfunction, 16.7% encountered power failure and 8.3% encountered difficulty in login during the examination [Graph 2].

## DISCUSSION

Dental education is considered to be a much coveted and demanded professional field.<sup>[9]</sup> Previously, the admission to postgraduate dental seats in the country was through various entrance examinations conducted by the state governments,

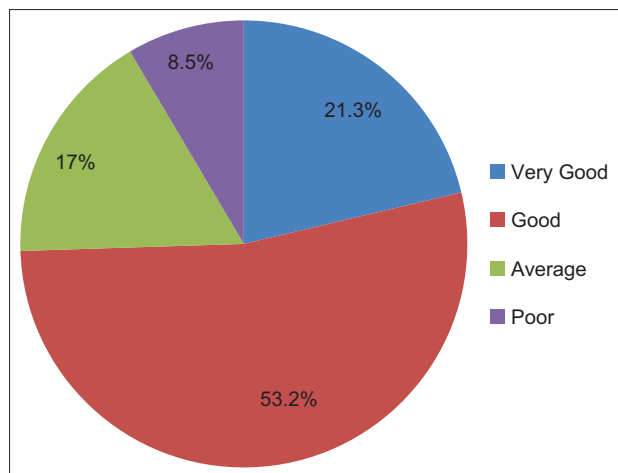
**Table 1: Frequency distribution of study participants based on gender and number of attempts**

	<i>n</i> (%)
Gender	
Male	174 (41.1)
Female	249 (58.9)
Number of attempts	
One	255 (60.3)
Two	147 (34.8)
Three or more	21 (4.9)
Total	423 (100)

**Table 2: Distribution of responses based on gender**

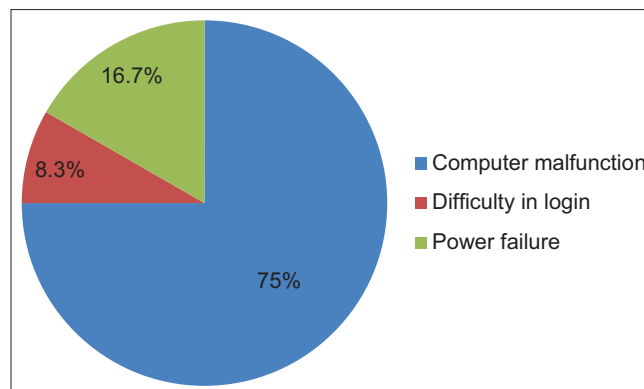
Questions	Male		Female		P*
	Yes, n (%)	No, n (%)	Yes, n (%)	No, n (%)	
Is NEET examination a good assessment test?	90 (51.7)	84 (48.3)	156 (62.7)	93 (37.3)	0.028
Do you feel dress code restriction should be there?	57 (32.8)	117 (67.2)	87 (34.9)	162 (65.1)	0.677
Did you get your preferred test center?	90 (51.7)	84 (48.3)	129 (51.8)	120 (48.2)	1
Is there sufficient time for the examination?	102 (58.6)	72 (41.4)	150 (60.2)	99 (39.8)	0.763
Is there sufficient representation of all subjects?	33 (19.0)	141 (81.0)	48 (19.3)	201 (80.7)	1
Did you encounter any technical difficulty?	27 (15.5)	147 (84.5)	45 (18.1)	204 (81.9)	0.514

\*Fisher's Exact test



**Graph 1:** Assessment of the computer-based NEET-MDS examination

associations, and deemed to be universities. Later on, in recent times, the Government of India brought about a big change in dentistry through the introduction of a common NEET-MDS examination for admission to MDS courses in all dental colleges across the country. This eliminates the entry of unqualified candidates to the postgraduate courses. To ensure quality postgraduates, it is very essential that the government does not reduce the minimum qualifying criteria of the examination. The survey shows that the majority of the respondents did not prefer the rigid dress code restriction introduced for the examination in 2017. This could attribute to the psychological stress that they undertake on the day of examination whether they would be allowed or denied to enter the examination hall during their screening process. The survey revealed that nearly 80% of the respondents considered that the examination did not have representation for all participants as per the examination criteria. The NEET-MDS examination has criteria which gives equal weightage for all the participants taught in BDS course. This should be strictly followed as students prepare for the examination accordingly. During the examination, some students had encountered technical problems. The NBE should ensure that such problems do not occur as it causes students to lose valuable time and results in decreased performance due to stress. The limitation of the study is the unavailability of literature globally pertaining to the assessment of dental PG qualifying entrance examinations.



**Graph 2:** Technical difficulty faced during NEET-MDS examination

Future studies could be conducted among students across the country to obtain an assessment of the examination on an All India basis.

## CONCLUSION

The present survey shows that most of the students preferred the computer-based NEET- MDS examination but identified certain aspects of the examination which should be improved including relaxation in dress code, providing equal representation of all participants, eliminating technical difficulties to make the examination better.

## Recommendations

As per our study, we would suggest the following recommendations;

1. The NBE should obtain a feedback from the students immediately after the examination. This would help the NBE to analyze the problems students encountered during the examination and pitfalls of the examination system
2. The examination should mandatorily include equal representation of questions from all participants of BDS course
3. The NBE should ensure that the selected test centers for the examination across India should have proper infrastructure for smooth conduct of the examination.

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## Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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