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A qualitative study on the career plans of intern veterinarians and their approaches to academic career-making

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study was conducted to determine career plans of intern veterinarians and their approaches to academic career-making. The data of the study were collected from the homework assignment files of 90 intern veterinarians participating in Turkish and English intern rotation programmes of the Department of Veterinary History and Deontology, Veterinary Faculty, Ankara University in the Fall Semester of the 2020-2021 Academic Year. In the research, under the theme of career plan, four categories were created as “private sector”, “public sector”, “academic career” and “other”, and these categories were divided into codes among themselves. The data were evaluated by the content analysis method. As a result of the research, it was determined that 39 interns wanted to work in the field of pet medicine in the first place, while 13 interns wanted to pursue academic careers in the first place. 26 interns had a positive attitude toward pursuing an academic career. For those who did not think about an academic career but wanted to get a graduate degree, the most preferred field was clinical sciences. 62 participants, who did not consider pursuing an academic career, stated that being an academic is a difficult and tiring profession as the primary reason. The study showed that many parameters play a role in determining the career plans of intern veterinarians and academic career is not preferred by them due to some disadvantages.

İntörn veteriner hekimlerin kariyer planları ve akademik kariyere yaklaşımları üzerine nitel bir çalışma

ÖZET

Nitel nitelikli bu araştırma, veteriner fakültesi son sınıf öğrencilerinin mezuniyet sonrası kariyer planlarını ve akademik yaşama yaklaşımlarını belirlemek amacıyla gerçekleştirildi. Çalışmanın verileri, Ankara Üniversitesi Veteriner Fakültesi Veteriner Hekimliği Tarihi ve Deontoloji Anabilim Dalı'nda 2020-2021 Eğitim-Öğretim Yılı Güz Yarıyılında Türkçe ve İngilizce intörn programlarında öğrenim gören 90 intörn veteriner hekimin ödev dosyalarından toplandı. Araştırmada kariyer planı teması altında “özel sektör”, “kamu sektörü”, “akademik kariyer” ve “diğer” olmak üzere dört kategori oluşturuldu, bu kategoriler kendi aralarında kodlara ayrıldı. Elde edilen veriler içerik analizi ile değerlendirildi. Araştırma sonucunda 39 intörnün ilk sırada pet hekimliği alanında çalışmak istediği, 13 intörnün ise ilk sırada akademik kariyer yapmak istediği belirlendi. 26 intörnün akademik kariyer yapmaya yönelik olumlu tutum sergilediği görüldü. Akademik kariyer düşünmeyip lisansüstü öğrenim görmek isteyenlerin en çok klinik bilimleri tercih ettikleri saptandı. Akademik kariyer yapmayı düşünmeyen 62 katılımcı birincil neden olarak akademisyenliğin zor ve yorucu bir meslek olduğunu belirtti. Çalışma, intern veteriner hekimlerin kariyer planlarının belirlenmesinde birçok parametrenin rol oynadığını ve bazı dezavantajlar nedeniyle akademik kariyeri tercih etmediklerini gösterdi.

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1. Introduction

A career is defined as a process that is directly related to personal and organizational goals and is about the work experience and activities of the person throughout life (1,2). Career planning, on the other hand, is the process of determining the most appropriate path for the aimed goals in professional life (3). In other words, it is the planning of an employee's progress or promotion in the organization he/she works with by developing knowledge, skills and abilities (4). Career planning starts at an early age and has a very important place in life (5,6). Career (7,8), which is a lifelong purpose and occupation, provides significant ease to individuals in terms of directing people to certain professions or business areas starting from being a student. It is very important for university students to determine which sectors they want to work in after completing their programs and to take steps towards their goals. Many studies (1-10), have been conducted on the career plans and approaches to academic careers of this group.

Career planning has become one of the important components of the process of becoming a veterinarian, as veterinary medicine offers the opportunity to work in many different sectors as a profession with a wide range of work areas. There are various international studies (11-14) on the career planning of veterinary students and national studies (15-20) that indirectly address this issue. However, there is no qualitative study directly on this subject. In this study, it was aimed to contribute to the existing literature by determining the graduate career plans and approaches to academic career-making of intern veterinarians in the sample of Ankara University Faculty of Veterinary Medicine (AUFVM) students.

2. Material and Methods

This study was approved by the Ankara University Ethics Committee (Date: 28.06.2021, Approval Nr: 128). The data were collected from the homework assignment files of 90 intern veterinarians participating in Turkish and English intern rotation programmes of the Department of Veterinary History and Deontology, Veterinary Faculty, Ankara University in the Fall Semester of the 2020-2021 Academic Year. In these files, there were homework assignments written in free text format about the career preferences and approaches to academic career of a total of 90 students who participated in the intern practices of the Department in the period in question. The content analysis method was used in the study. For this process, the homework assignment files were carefully read and then the data were coded and categorized. In order to ensure the reliability of the study, the analysis was repeated three months after the first analysis. After this repetition, the analysis was reviewed with the help of an expert, then the coding and categories were finalized. Thus, the frequency was calculated for each response after internal consistency was achieved. Research findings were presented in tables and some of the participants' sentences were quoted. In the last step, the data were discussed with reference to related literature.

3. Results

The theme of the research was chosen as the graduation career plans of the interns. Under this theme, four categories were created: "private sector", "public sector", "academic career" and "other". The private sector category was divided into four codes, the other categories were divided into two codes and the frequencies for these codes were determined. Themes, categories, and codes created in qualitative data analysis were shown in Table 1.

Among the interns, 38 of them are male, 49 are female and 3 interns did not report their gender. Participants reported multiple alternatives for graduate working fields rather than a single option. Table 1 shows the fields of work preferred by intern veterinarians after graduation. Accordingly, most of the participants (n=39) stated that they wanted to do pet medicine in the first place. It was determined that, after pet medicine, intern veterinarians want to work in bovine and ovine medicine (n=13) and to pursue academic career (n=13) in the second place.

According to the qualitative data of the research, the interns who want to be clinicians in the category of private sector, 13 of 54 stated that they want to open their own clinics in the future; 3 of 13 interns who want to become bovine and ovine veterinarians stated that they have grown up with farm animals since they were born. Only 2 of all interns (n=90) emphasized that they do not want to be a clinician while giving information about their intended field of work. The statements of some interns who want to be clinicians are given below. The male intern with the code P86 expressed

his desire to open a clinic as follows: *“When I have sufficient knowledge and experience in time, I want to open my own clinic.”*

Some participants reported that they have ethical challenges and that the ethical and deontological problems encountered in the clinic affect their career plans. The male intern with the code P33 explained why he prefers pet medicine instead of being a bovine, ovine or other farm animals veterinarian as follows: *“I think that farm medicine based on exploitation is a hypocritical branch for us - veterinarians. Our aim to heal animals there and to get more out of them and exploit them as much as possible does not seem compatible to me with either ethics or the notion of medicine.”* The intern with the code P54 said: *“Especially financial concerns pushed both clinic owners and veterinarians to disregard ethical principles. Even though our friends who are still students and work for free with the promise of gaining experience in the clinics, veterinarians who do not even defend their legal rights and colleagues who trample our ethical values for financial gain have made it difficult for us to do this job, I still try to look at the situation with optimism.”*

A female intern with the code of P81 expressed the dilemma she experienced in choosing a career stating that she wants to be a clinician but also pointing out that there are some difficulties in this field: *“Although I accepted the difficulty of livestock, I gave up on this desire after I realized that my gender would prevent me from being promoted in this sector.”* Again, the P10 coded male intern's statement about the negative aspects of being a clinician as follows: *“Unfortunately, the number of clinics that match the veterinarian salary determined by the chamber is very few.”* The P63 coded, one of the two female interns who emphasized that she definitely does not want to be a clinician said: *“I feel too emotional to work in a clinic, on the other hand, I think that my strength will be insufficient for bovine and ovine farms.”* The male intern with the code P25, who plans to work as a public veterinarian gave information about the field he wants to work in: *“My primary goal will be to start my career in the provincial organizations of the ministry and try to pay for the material and moral support I have received from the state so far by serving the public.”* The female intern with the code P13 stated that she wants to be employed in the public sector: *“My top concerns for the future are financial inadequacy and not being able to stand on my own.”* According to some of the participants, the fields they want to specialize in are cancer therapy, pharmacogenetics, behavioral sciences, public health, orthopedics, dermatology, ophthalmology, cardiology, biomechanical modeling, artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, biotechnology, molecular genetics, cage birds, neurology, wildlife medicine, emergency medicine, pig farm and neurosurgery. The male intern with the code P59 said: *“Artificial intelligence, machine learning, nanotechnology and cybernetics studies continue to transform our lives and therefore professions in every field. Today, in the diagnosis and treatment development of medicine, artificial intelligence supported systems have already started to be more sensitive than humans. There is no need to be a soothsayer to see that this transformation will accelerate and render many professions dysfunctional in the near future.”* The female intern with the code P89 expressed her thoughts on veterinary medicine and artificial intelligence: *“I aim to do a Ph.D in artificial intelligence in the veterinary pharmaceutical industry in the department of pharmacology.”* Only 5 of the 90 interns included in the study stated that they want to work abroad. Among these, the female intern with the code P40 stated that she wants to work abroad as follows: *“I do not want to work as an academic because of the conditions of Türkiye”.*

The distribution of intern veterinarians' approaches to academic career by gender is presented in Table 2. Accordingly, 18 female and 8 male interns stated that they want to pursue an academic career, 29 female and 18 male stated that they did not want to pursue an academic career, and 2 emphasized that they were undecided about an academic career.

Table 1: Fields of work preferred by intern veterinarians in the first place after graduation**Tablo 1:** İntörn veteriner hekimlerin mezuniyet sonrası ilk tercih ettikleri çalışma alanları

Theme	Category	Code: Field of work	N	%
Fields of work preferred by intern veterinarians in the first place after graduation	Private sector	Pet medicine	39	43.3
		Bovine-ovine medicine	13	14.4
		Equine medicine	2	2.2
		Food sector	4	4.4
		Pharmaceutical industry	3	3.3
	Public sector	Laboratory	3	3.3
		Official veterinarian	8	8.8
	Academic career	Academy	13	14.4
		Other	Shelter veterinarian	2
	Zoo veterinarian		1	1.1
Undecided	2		2.2	

Table 2: The distribution of intern veterinarians' approaches to academic career by gender**Tablo 2:** İntörn veteriner hekimlerin akademik kariyere yaklaşımlarının cinsiyete göre dağılımı

	Yes		No		Undecided	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Female	18	20	29	32.2	2	2.2
Male	8	8.8	30	33.3	-	-
Unspecified	-	-	3	3.3	-	-
Total	26	28.8	62	68.8	2	2.2

In Table 3, the reasons for the intern veterinarians who did not choose an academic career were shown. Accordingly, the largest number of participants (7) indicated difficult and tiring living conditions as the reason, while the least number of participants (2) stated that they did not prefer academic career due to the difficulties of academy entrance exams.

Table 3: The reasons why intern veterinarians do not prefer academic career**Tablo 3:** İntörn veteriner hekimlerin akademik kariyeri tercih etmeme nedenleri

Reasons	N	%
Difficult and tiring living conditions	7	21.87
Financial problems	6	18.75
Teaching difficulties	5	15.62
Psychological pressures-hierarchical order	5	15.62
Finding available positions	4	12.5
Time-age problem	3	9.37
Difficulties of academy entrance exams	2	6.25

The female intern with the code P13 talked about the difficulties of academic life by saying: "I can't even think of going into academia because of injustices and therefore concerns." The female intern with the code P63 said, "For me, I think I see my lecturers competing at a fast and tiring pace, I wouldn't want to be like this." Another female intern

with the code P53 said: *“I often have difficulties in transferring what I have learned to others, so I do not want to abuse anyone's right to learn.”* The male intern with the code P21 clearly stated why he does not want to choose the academy: *“Being an academic is a condition that requires versatile skills (such as reading articles in English, doing research, etc.) and especially time. I definitely do not feel ready for this, both financially and psychologically.”* As can be seen in Table 1, although 13 intern veterinarians stated that their first choice after graduation is graduate education, it was determined that 57 interns add graduate education to their other preferences. It was noted that the interns who want to pursue specialization or graduate education without thinking of being an academician desire to work in pet, bovine, ovine, equine, shelter, food, pharmaceuticals and feed production, etc. sectors. The P58 coded intern clearly stated that he would prefer graduate education, but he does not aim for an academic career: *“I don't want to become an academic even if I prefer to do a Ph.D.”*

The departments that the veterinary candidates, who did not think about academic career but wanted to get graduate degree are listed in Table 4 in preference order.

As can be seen in Table 4, the most preferred field for graduate degree was clinical sciences. On the subject, the female intern with the code P22 said: *“I think that a Ph.D is quite necessary for me now, since we will be away from school and clinical applications during this pandemic we are in, and maybe we will graduate with very little practice.”* The female intern with the code P41, who is planning to do her graduate education in the department of surgery, said: *“There are many fields that make me happy and excited. Chief among these are clinical fields, primarily surgery. Clinical sciences offer me the reason why I chose this profession, that is, a life that will allow me to be in direct contact with animals.”*

Table 4: Preferred departments for graduate degree

Tablo 4: Lisansüstü eğitim için tercih edilen alanlar

Division	Department	N	%
Clinical Sciences	Surgery	17	29.82
	Internal Diseases	8	14.03
	Obstetrics and Gynecology	1	1.75
	Reproduction and Artificial Insemination	1	1.75
Preclinical Sciences	Pharmacology and Toxicology	7	12.28
	Virology	3	5.26
	Microbiology	2	3.5
Food Hygiene and Technology	Food Hygiene and Technology	3	5.26
	Genetics	3	5.26
Animal Husbandry and Animal Nutrition	Animal Science	2	3.5
	Animal Health Economics and Management	2	3.5
	Animal Nutrition and Nutritional Diseases	1	1.75
Basic Veterinary Sciences	Biochemistry	3	5.26
	Physiology	2	3.5
	Histology-Embryology	1	1.75
	Veterinary History and Deontology	1	1.75

4. Discussion and Conclusion

In the study, the career plans of the interns at AUFVM were divided into 4 groups as private sector, public sector, academic career and other, and these categories were evaluated by separating them among themselves. Accordingly, 64 out of 90 intern veterinarians stated that they preferred to work in the private sector after graduation, and 39 of this group informed that they want to work in the field of pet medicine (see Table 1). This result is consistent with various publications (13-14). A study by Özen et al. (21) revealed that veterinarians working in public sector wait

longer to find permanent employment compared to those working in private sector. It was also observed in this study that veterinarians thought that the private sector was more advantageous than the public sector in terms of employment opportunities. Indeed, flexibility in working hours and high income opportunities (14) are very important advantageous that come to mind first. In addition, the private sector offers more options in terms of working areas. Moreover, the bureaucratic procedure required to work in public sector (22) may be more challenging. Considering all these conditions, it should be considered understandable that the participants who want to work in private sector are more than half of all participants. On the other hand, the fact that most of the participants (n=39) who prefer to work in private sector point to the pet medicine as the field of work, coincides with some publications (21,23) that foresee the development potential of this field. The most important reason for this potential is thought to be the changing status of pets. As a matter of fact, in some publications (24, 25), it was pointed out that since the second half of the 20th century, pets have taken the position of friends in human life for social and recreational reasons, and in parallel with this changing, the practices for pet medicine have become increasingly widespread among veterinary services.

It is an important data that 54 of the 90 participants in the research wanted to work in the fields of pet, cattle, ovine or equine medicine, while only 13 stated that they would like to open their own clinics in the future. This may be due to the interns wanting to gain sufficient knowledge and experience before opening clinic, as stated by the intern with the code P86, or it may be due to the difficulties of establishing a clinic or working in a clinic. According to the relevant legislation*, it is necessary to fulfill many legal procedures and to use a large amount of money (24) to open a veterinary clinic in Türkiye. On the other hand, it was one of the expected data of this study that the difficulties encountered by veterinarians working in clinics affected the career plans of the veterinary candidates. In clinical veterinary practice in Türkiye, some problems arising from the uncontrolled increase in the number of veterinary clinics, the lack of inspection and legal sanction, the nature of the profession, the relations with colleagues or animal owners and gender differences have been discussed in various publications (15, 21, 26). Therefore, it was not surprising that the deontological-ethical problems (P33, P52, P54), financial problems (P4, P13, P36, P54) and problems relevant to gender differences (P63, P81) were expressed by some participants of this research.

In this study, it is noteworthy that women approaches to academic career more positively than men (see Table 2). Gender studies (27, 28, 29, 30) focusing on women in the academic life emphasize that women are more disadvantaged than their male counterparts and these researches evaluate the difficulties of being female academics in Türkiye in the light of national and international literature. Although these difficulties discussed in these publications are thought to be valid for women who want to pursue an academic career in veterinary medicine, the reasons why many women say “yes” for academic career could be interesting but were not questioned in this research. Therefore, the study focused on the number of participants (62) who said “no” to academic career rather than the number of women (18) who said “yes” to it.

When the reasons why intern veterinarians do not prefer academic career were examined, it was seen that they focused on the difficulties of academic life in general rather than the academic career difficulties that can be associated with the nature of veterinary medicine (see Table 3). In various studies (31, 32) dealing with the problems of higher education institutions in Türkiye, the problems of supply, demand and imbalance in higher education, problems of faculty members, problems related to autonomy and accountability, and internationalization problems were comprehensively addressed. From this point of view, the results of this research are in line with the mentioned publications. Some participants (P4, P13, P49, P62) who expressed the difficulty of academic life stated that they do not want to pursue an academic career due to mobbing. In the “*Survey on the Definition of Academician*” published by the Faculty Instructors Association in 2014 (33), 37% of 1987 academicians reported that they were subjected to mobbing, while 28% reported that they were partially exposed. The number of studies (34, 35, 36, 37) showing that

* Veteriner Hekim Muaynehane ve Poliklinik Yönetmeliği, The Official Gazette of the Republic of Türkiye (October 15, 2011, Nr: 28085); Hayvan Hastaneleri Yönetmeliği, The Official Gazette of the Republic of Türkiye (December 21, 2011, Nr: 28149)

workplace mobbing is a critical problem for academicians in the universities is increasing day by day. The findings of these studies indicated that levels of awareness of mobbing have increased among academicians. It is noteworthy that this research revealed that mobbing in academic atmosphere was not only noticed by academicians but also noticed by the senior students (intern veterinarians) of the AUFVM and affected their career plans negatively.

It is known that the deontological-ethical problems in private veterinary practices in Türkiye were discussed in a thesis (26) and in some publications (24, 38). Some participants (P28, P41, P52) of this research stated that professional ethics and legislation problems encountered in clinical practices affect their career plans. Although it is not known whether the deontological-ethical problems mentioned in previous studies (24, 26, 38) and the problems meant by the interns in this study are exactly the same, the interns' aforementioned statements show their awareness on this issue.

The findings of this study revealed that the first preferred fields of interns who do not aim for an academic career but want to pursue a graduate degree were surgery and internal diseases (see Table 4). This situation can be accepted as an expression of the desire of graduates to gain experience in clinical branches and to be better equipped. For this interns, graduate education may have been thought of as a preliminary to a career plan to become a clinician in the future. A special case to consider is that this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although veterinary faculties are among the faculties that provide practice-oriented education (24), education and training were carried out online within the scope of the measures taken during the pandemic era. The fact that the interns who continued their education during this period could not have enough applied education may have caused them to have a deficiency in that sense and to turn to graduate education in applied fields to make up for this deficiency. In addition, one of the factors that paved the way for the graduate education demands of intern veterinarians can be seen as the increasing importance given to having knowledge and equipment in specific fields in addition to general veterinary services in recent years. The fact that specific fields like stomatology, eye diseases, metabolic diseases, oncology, brain and nerve surgery, etc. have begun to take their place in private clinical veterinary services can be considered as an indicator of this demand. In the study, the fields of science in which some participants want to gain knowledge apart from clinical sciences were also found remarkable. As one of these fields, artificial intelligence technology has become a very popular subject in veterinary medicine (39). It can be thought that artificial intelligence can be used in veterinary services in the future to monitor animal health and to make treatments more effective. Indeed, some participants want to study on artificial intelligence in the field of veterinary medicine shows that veterinary candidates are aware of the importance of artificial intelligence.

In conclusion, with this research it was determined that 39 interns wanted to work in the field of pet medicine in the first place, while 13 interns wanted to pursue academic career in the first place. 26 interns had a positive attitude towards pursuing an academic career. For those who did not think about academic career but wanted to get graduate degree, the most preferred field was clinical sciences. 62 participants, who did not consider pursuing an academic career, stated that being an academic is a difficult and tiring profession as the primary reason. The study showed that many parameters play a role in determining the career plans of intern veterinarians and academic career is not preferred by them due to some disadvantages. In order to confirm the findings of the research that affect the career choices of the intern veterinarians and to better understand the effective parameters in this regard, it is necessary to conduct extensive research involving different university students across the country. It is thought that this study can serve as a guide in terms of contributing to other studies on the subject.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest

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Ethical Approval

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