

**UNDERGRADUATES' VIEW OF THE VETERINARY PROFESSION:  
A STUDY OF AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA – NIGERIA**

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**SUMMARY**

A study of undergraduates' view of the veterinary profession was conducted in all the 12 academic faculties of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria – Nigeria in May, 1999. Three hundred and fifteen questionnaires were randomly administered, out of which 306 were found usable. Only 21.6% of respondents have an idea of what the veterinary profession is about. Awareness level was lowest in the faculties of arts and education. Low awareness level of the profession was blamed on veterinarians by 187 (61.0%) respondents. Sixty-eight percent of respondents had prior idea of the veterinary profession before entry into the university, however only 33.7% believed that they obtain veterinary services directly or indirectly. Two hundred and nineteen (71.6%) respondents do not include meat, fish, eggs or milk up to 10 times/week in their diet. Majority (60.1%) of the respondents suggested a lower entry point on salary scale for veterinarians than human doctors despite the fact that 53.3% of respondents were of the opinion that both veterinary and medical students study similar courses. However 80.7% believed that veterinarians should be addressed as "Doctor". When compared with eleven other disciplines, veterinary medicine was ranked most difficult to gain admission, highest in terms of academic work load (average 31.5 hours/week), highest along with human medicine in terms of duration of training (6-9 years) and first in terms of social prestige. Only 155 (50.7%) respondents indicated pleasure in their relation becoming a veterinarian despite the fact that 75.5% of respondents believed that there is a shortage of veterinarians in the country and 63.4% of respondents advocated the need for the federal government to create a separate ministry for livestock. Surprisingly only 46.7% (14 out of 30) of veterinary students indicated interest in relation becoming veterinarian, even though, 40% did not indicate veterinary medicine as first choice in their university entry forms, however 60% of these respondents would rather continue with the course. Fifty-four percent of respondents have an idea of available job opportunities for veterinarians which in order of favourable ranking include Veterinary Clinics, Government Ministries, Animal Production Industries, Biomedical Research Food, Drug and Law Enforcement Agency, Customs, World Bank, Army Police Air Force, And Lastly Petrochemical Industries. Majority of respondents (81.0%) demonstrated awareness of the interrelationship of veterinary medicine with other disciplines such as Agriculture, Pharmacy and Human Medicine, thus the respondents opined that veterinarians and agriculturist together can work towards the realization of FAO standards on food sufficiency which Nigeria is yet to attain. The respondents also believed that veterinarians, pharmacists and physicians can work together in the Food and Drug Administration department to stamp out drug abuse in our society. It is suggested that public relation work of the profession should be directed towards the development of entertaining fictional or nonfunctional television/radio/newspaper series based on veterinary medicine.

**KEYS WORDS:** Undergraduates, views, veterinary profession, Zaria, Nigeria

**INTRODUCTION**

The Veterinary profession in Nigeria dates back to 1914 with the creation of the

Veterinary Department (Ezebuoro, 1979; Aire, 1987). Yet not much appears to be known by the Nigerian Society about the profession. The only data available on the

study of the public image of veterinarians and how such image compares with other professions was conducted by Oboegbulem in 1985. Since then not much has been done. This study was, therefore, conducted to assess undergraduates' view of the veterinary profession in Nigeria using Ahmadu Bello University students for the study.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

This survey was conducted by administering 315 questionnaires to students in all the 12 faculties of Ahmadu Bello University (A.B.U.) Zaria, Nigeria from 10<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> of May 1999. Twenty five questionnaires were administered per faculty except faculties of Human Medicine, Science and Veterinary Medicine where 30 questionnaires were administered per faculty.

Questionnaires were designed and analysed in accordance with the protocol of Oboegbulem, (1985). Most of the questions were in the form of statements demanding "yes" or "no" and some in the form of fill in the blank spaces. Part one of the questionnaire required information on personal data such as faculty, department, year of study (Level), nationality and academic workload. The second part of the questionnaire was on veterinarians and the veterinary profession. The respondents were asked questions some of which make comparative score with 11 other professions: have any idea of the veterinary profession; whether they obtain veterinary services; ease of entering the veterinary profession; academic workload and duration of training; job opportunities for veterinarians; need for more members of the profession, salary for veterinarians, appellation of "Doctor" for veterinarians,

social prestige, pleasure if relation joined the profession and relationship with other profession.

### RESULTS

Three hundred and fifteen questionnaires were randomly administered out of which 306 were found usable. The results are summarized in Table I – IV. Only 21.6% of respondents have an idea of what the veterinary profession is about. Awareness level was lowest in the faculties of arts and education. Low awareness level was blamed on veterinarians by 187 (61.0%) respondents. Sixty – eight percent of respondents had prior knowledge of the veterinary profession before entry into the university. About 33.7% of respondents stated that they obtain veterinary services directly or indirectly. Two hundred and nineteen (71.6%) respondents do not include meat, fish, eggs or milk up to 10 times/week in their diet.

Majority (60.1%) of the respondents suggested a lower salary for veterinarians than human doctors despite the fact that 53.3% of respondents were of the opinion that both veterinary and medical students study similar courses. Also 80.7% stated that veterinarians should be addressed as "Doctor". When compared with administration, agriculture, arts, education, engineering, environmental design, human medicine, law, pharmaceutical science, sciences and social sciences, veterinary medicine was ranked most difficult to gain admission, highest in terms of academic work load (average 31.5 hours/week), highest along with human medicine in terms of duration of training (6-9 years) (Tables II and III), ranked first in terms of social prestige (Table IV).

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TABLE I: Mean score of favourable response given by 306 undergraduate respondents in Ahmadu Bello University to 8 characteristics

Characteristics	Admin	Agric.	Arts	Educ.	Eng.	Env. D.	H/Med.	Law	Pharm.	Sciences	Social Sci.	Vet. Med.	Total
a) Have idea of Vet. Profession	1.31	0.98	0.33	0.33	2.94	2.61	1.96	1.31	2.28	1.31	0.98	5.23	21.6
b) Receive Vet. Services	1.96	1.32	3.92	3.92	3.27	3.27	3.27	1.96	1.96	2.61	3.27	2.94	33.7
c) Include animal protein in diet.	3.27	0.98	2.94	2.61	2.61	4.90	2.29	0.98	3.27	1.31	1.63	1.63	28.4
d) Vet. and human medical students study same courses	3.92	3.27	4.25	4.25	2.29	4.90	3.27	4.58	3.92	5.23	3.92	9.48	53.3
e) High academic work load	5.48	8.69	6.42	7.37	9.07	8.31	10.96	8.31	9.82	7.75	5.86	11.90	99.9
f) Vets. Should be addressed as "Doctor"	6.86	5.88	6.54	5.56	5.88	6.54	6.54	6.86	5.88	8.17	6.21	9.80	80.7
g) Vet. And Physician should earn same salary.	3.37	2.94	3.92	3.27	4.25	3.92	0	2.94	3.27	2.29	2.94	6.86	39.9
h) Pleasure if relation becomes a Vet.	4.58	3.27	3.27	6.86	3.59	2.94	5.56	5.88	1.31	6.21	2.61	4.58	50.7
i) Need for more vets.	7.19	4.58	4.25	6.54	8.17	6.54	8.17	6.54	4.58	6.54	4.90	7.52	75.5

TABLE II: Duration of training and academic workload (hours/week/semester) of Undergraduates in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria – Nigeria

Faculty	Duration of Training (years)	Average No. of hours/week/semester				Total
		Lectures	Practical	Tutorial		
Administration	4-6	12.0	0	2.5	14.5	
Agriculture	5-8	16.0	4.0	3.0	23.0	
Arts	4-6	10.5	4.5	3.0	17.0	
Education	4-6	12.5	4.0	2.0	19.5	
Engineering	5-8	15.0	7.0	2.0	24.0	
Environmental design	4-6	12.5	7.5	2.0	22.0	
Human Medicine	6-9	15.0	12.0	5.0	29.0	
Law	5-8	12.0	5.0	2.0	22.0	
Pharmacy	5-8	16.0	8.0	3.0	26.0	
Sciences	4-6	12.5	5.0	3.0	20.5	
Social Sciences	4-6	12.5	0	3.0	15.5	
Veterinary Medicine	6-9	15.2	13.9	2.4	31.5	

Only 155 (50.7%) respondents indicated interest in their relation becoming a veterinarian despite the fact that 75.5% of respondents believed that there is a shortage of veterinarians in the country and 63.4% of respondents advocated the need for the federal government to create a separate

ministry for livestock. Interest in a relation becoming a veterinarian was in the following order of magnitude: Son/daughter 23.5%, sister/brother, cousin 14.7%, adopted child 6.9% and spouse 5.5% respectively. Surprisingly only 46.7% (14 out of 30) of veterinary students indicated

interest in their relations becoming veterinarians even though 40% did not indicate veterinary medicine as first choice in their university entry form; however 60% of these respondents would rather continue with the course.

**TABLE III:** Average academic workload\* of undergraduate veterinary students in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria - Nigeria

Years of study	Lectures	Practical	Tutorial	Total
1 (100 level)	17.5	4.5	0	22.0
2 (200 level)	14.0	13.5	0	27.5
3 (300 level)	15.5	18.0	0	33.5
4 (400 level)	14.5	15.0	0	29.5
5 (500 level)	21.5	9.0	1.0	31.5
6 (600 level)	8.0	23.5	13.5	45.0
Total	91.0	83.5	14.5	189.0

\* hours/week/semester

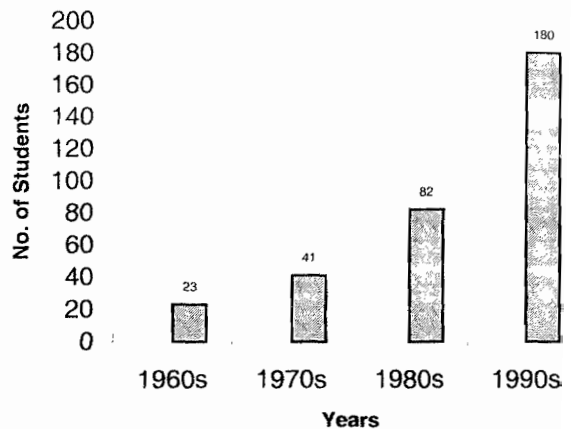
**TABLE: IV** Ranking of the veterinary medical profession with 11 other profession by 219 undergraduates from 12 faculties of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria - Nigeria

Faculty	No. of respondents	Mean score	Rank
Administration	15	6.85	5 <sup>th</sup>
Agriculture	20	9.13	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Arts	17	7.76	6 <sup>th</sup>
Education	16	7.31	5 <sup>th</sup>
Engineering	19	8.68	5 <sup>th</sup>
Environmental design	20	9.13	5 <sup>th</sup>
Human Medicine	23	10.50	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Law	17	7.76	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Pharmacy	14	6.39	5 <sup>th</sup>
Sciences	15	6.85	4 <sup>th</sup>
Social Sciences	13	5.94	4 <sup>th</sup>
Veterinary Medicine	30	13.70	1 <sup>st</sup>

Fifty-four percent of respondents have an idea of job opportunities for veterinarians which were ranked in the following order; Veterinary Clinics, Government Ministries, Animal Production Industries, Biomedical Research, Food, Drug and Law Enforcement Agency, Custom, World Bank, Army, Police, Air Force and lastly

Petrochemical Industries. Majority of respondents (81.0%) demonstrated awareness of the inter-relationship of veterinary medicine with other disciplines such as agriculture, pharmacy and human medicine and opined that veterinarians and agriculturists together can work towards the realization of FAO standard of food sufficiency, which Nigeria is yet to attain. The respondents also agree that veterinarians, pharmacist and physicians can work together in the food and drug administration department to stop drug abuse in our society.

**Fig. 1:** Trend in student enrolment into the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (Sanni and Kwanashie, 1996)



## DISCUSSION

A great percentage of people are still ignorant about the veterinary profession (Thomas, 1974) and its importance to the health of the people (Ugwueze, 1988) as indicated by this study. Only 21.6% of the respondents have an idea of what the veterinary profession is all about despite the role of veterinarians in ensuring safe and wholesome livestock and poultry products (David-west, 1987) through curative and

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preventive measure. The society receives veterinary services directly or indirectly on a daily basis. However, it is the farmer or pet owner whose animal is treated by a veterinarian that best appreciates the direct benefit he receives from the veterinary profession. The low awareness of the roles of veterinarians may be rooted in the culture of the people which pays little attention to animal welfare and would slaughter the animal especially food animals rather than cure the sick animal. However the respondents blamed the low awareness on the veterinarians themselves and the government.

It is encouraging to observe that majority (81.0%) of respondents stated that the veterinary profession is related to other disciplines such as agriculture, pharmacy and human medicine as observed by Oboegbulem, (1985). The inter disciplinary relationship they believed will pave way for food sufficiency, and eradication of drug abuse in Nigeria as advocated by Olukoya, (1987).

It is difficult to deduce from this study why majority (60.1%) of respondents suggested in lower salary for veterinarians than human doctors despite the fact that they believed that veterinary and medical students study similar subjects and 80.7% of respondents including medical students stated that a veterinarian should be addressed as "Doctor". This agrees with the finding of Thomas, (1974). In contrast, the findings of Oboegbulem, (1985) indicated that less than 40% of responding physicians agreed to the use of "Doctor" for veterinarians. He opined that this might be due to the professional designation generally used in the countries the physicians received their own training. In the United Kingdom and until recently, in

many other commonwealth countries, veterinary colleges awarded the degree B.V.Sc or B.V.M & S (Bachelor of Veterinary Science or Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine and Surgery). In these countries Oboegbulem (1985) noted that a graduate of veterinary college is more likely to be addressed as "Mr" or "Veterinary Surgeon". Hence the suggestion of the use of the term "Veterinarian" by Milne, (1973). However in Nigerian universities the degree DVM (Doctor of Veterinary Medicine) is awarded and the designation "Doctor" is applied to all qualified veterinarians. This system is however American-oriented since they spear headed the establishment of the veterinary profession in Nigeria (Newsletter 1983).

In our study, the high rating for a veterinarian to be referred to as "Doctor" can also be attributed to an increased awareness of the veterinary profession from interaction in the last 15 years among undergraduates as a result of increase in average annual student enrollment in the veterinary course in Ahmadu Bello University from 23 in 1960s, 41 in 1970s, 82 in 1980s to 180 in 1990s (Sanni and Kwanashie, 1996, 1998). (Figure 1)

Fifty-four percent of respondents agreed that it is difficult to gain admission into the veterinary course as observed by Thomas, (1974) and Neil, (1999). They also stated that veterinary and human medical students study similar courses as observed by Oboegbulem, (1985), however they rated the academic workload too high and duration of training too long, when compared with 11 other professions. This would probably explain the reason why only 155 (50.7%) respondents indicated interest in their relation becoming a

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veterinarian despite the fact that 75.5% of respondents believed there is a shortage of veterinarians in the country. The interest for spouse becoming a veterinarian was ranked lowest. It is best imaged than experienced to have a spouse away for 6-9 years! The long duration of training consequently means it is an expensive venture for the sponsor in terms of school fees and maintenance (food, health, books, transportation, accommodation etc), through the years of study.

Surprisingly veterinary students indicated low interest in their relation becoming a veterinarian despite rating the veterinary profession highest in terms of social prestige. This could be due to the rigors of academic workload and long duration of study. Perhaps, more interesting is that these responding veterinary students acknowledged the shortage of registered veterinarians in Nigeria whose number stands at 3,037 (VCN, 2000) in relation to a national animal population of over 186 million (FDLPCS, 1991). Another contributing factor to the low level of interest is the high level of unemployment of veterinarians which was estimated at about 15% by former President, Lagos State branch of Nigerian Veterinary Medical Association (NVMA), Dr. Dipo Olopade in his address to the 24<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the NVMA in 1987. Sad enough this trend has improved only slightly with more veterinarians venturing into private practice.

In a pioneer study conducted by Hartman, (1936), 250 Pennsylvania residents in the United State of America were asked to rank 24 medical and paramedical professions in terms of social prestige. Veterinarians were ranked 22<sup>nd</sup>, highest only than midwives and manicurists and one rank below

chiropractors. Thomas, (1974) in a later study reported that veterinarians were rated 4<sup>th</sup> in terms of social prestige and 5<sup>th</sup> in terms of civil contribution outside professional duties.

In this study veterinarians were ranked 1<sup>st</sup> among twelve discipline. This is a very significant improvement on the ranking of veterinarians since the study of Oboegbulem, (1985) where veterinarians were ranked 6<sup>th</sup> among seven professions. This may be due to a better awareness of the profession on the part of students in Ahmadu Bello University.

According to Thomas, (1974) veterinarians are more frequently compared with physicians than other professions, and one component of every professions public image is the image projected by the mass media. Several television series such as "Medical Center", "Emergency", "The making of a Surgeon", movies, novels and commercial advertisements constantly expose the American public to an account of the virtue, prestige and tremendous importance of the American physician. In contrast to this the media in its projections to the lay public rarely mentions veterinarians, and when it does the projection is often far from flattering, therefore, there can be little doubt that these differences in media – projected image are responsible at least in part for the different public images of the two professions. It is therefore suggested that public relation work of the profession in Nigeria should be directed towards the development of entertaining fictional or non-fictional television/radio/newspaper series based on the veterinarian and his role in the society, in the new millennium.

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### CONCLUSION

This study conducted on undergraduates of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria has some limitations. The views given by the students might not be the general view of Nigerian students or the society at large in Nigeria. However, from this study it was observed that there is a low level of awareness of the veterinary profession. It is therefore recommended that public enlightenment campaign be embarked upon by veterinarians and their organs to correct possible erroneous views by the society and positively address the problem of low status of the veterinary profession in Nigeria.

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