

Background

- Canadian medical students differ significantly from the general population¹
 - More likely to come from urban and high income areas
 - More likely to have well-educated, professional parents
- This skew may influence access to care in under-served regions of Canada
 - Rural physicians are 4 to 5 times more likely to come from rural backgrounds²
- To serve the health care needs of patients from many geographic and socioeconomic backgrounds, it has been suggested that medical students should reflect this diversity³
- Our previous survey of high school students in rural Southwestern Ontario demonstrated an association between the perception of affordability as a barrier to attending medical school, and the respondents' parental level of education

Objectives

- To identify whether socioeconomic status affects high school students' views on accessibility to medical education.
- To gain a better understanding of parental perception of medical school, accessibility for their children, and knowledge of options for financial assistance.

Methods

Study Populations:

- High school students attending the Southwestern Ontario Medical Education Network (SWOMEN) MedQUEST program
 - MedQUEST is a 5-day camp for high school students interested in health care
 - Programs were located in Walkerton, Leamington, Sarnia, Mount Elgin, Seaford, Chippewa First Nations and Chatham
- One parent of each high school student

Questionnaire:

- Student survey included information regarding:
 - Perceived barriers to attending medical school, including affordability
 - Anticipated financing for post-secondary and medical school
- Parent survey included information regarding:
 - Household income
 - Parental occupation and education level
 - Anticipated methods of paying for their child's post-secondary education
- Student surveys were matched to parent surveys using the last four digits of their home phone number

Results

Respondent Demographics:

- 121 respondents from the seven MedQUEST locations
 - Female: 76.0% (n=92)
 - Male: 23.1% (n=28)
- 75.2% (n=91) were interested in becoming a physician
- 99 parent respondents (89 reported family income information)

Family Income:

- 51.7% (n=46) were from **high-income families** (annual family income >\$100,000)
- 29.2% (n=26) were from **middle income families** (annual family income \$60,000-100,000)
- 20.2% (n=18) were from **low-income families** (annual family income <\$60,000)

Discouragement:

- 30.1% (n=25) of parents stated expense of medical school as a potential reason for discouragement
- 100% of parents would support their child's interest in medical school

Parental View on Anticipated Sources of Funding

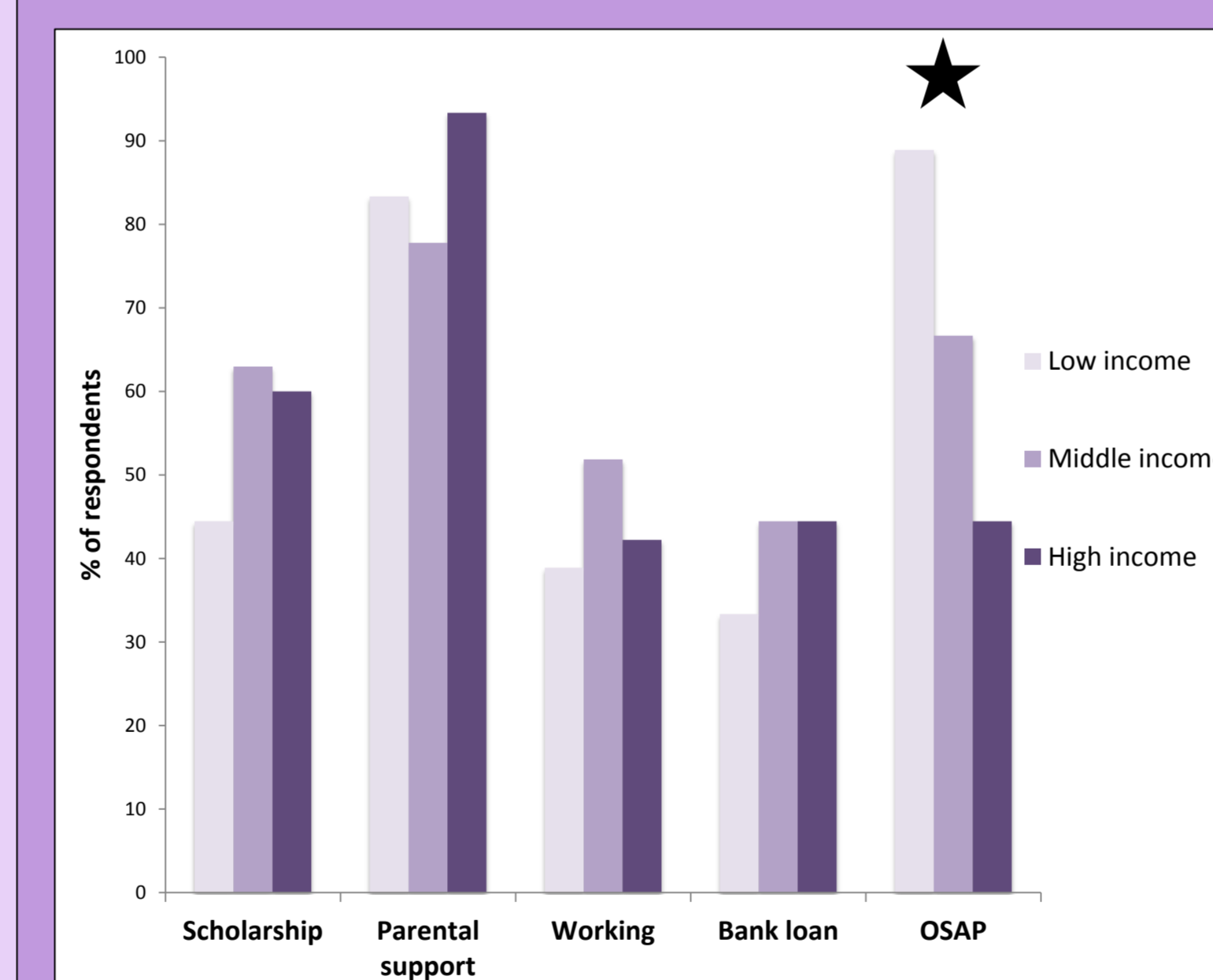


Fig 1a. Funding for post-secondary education

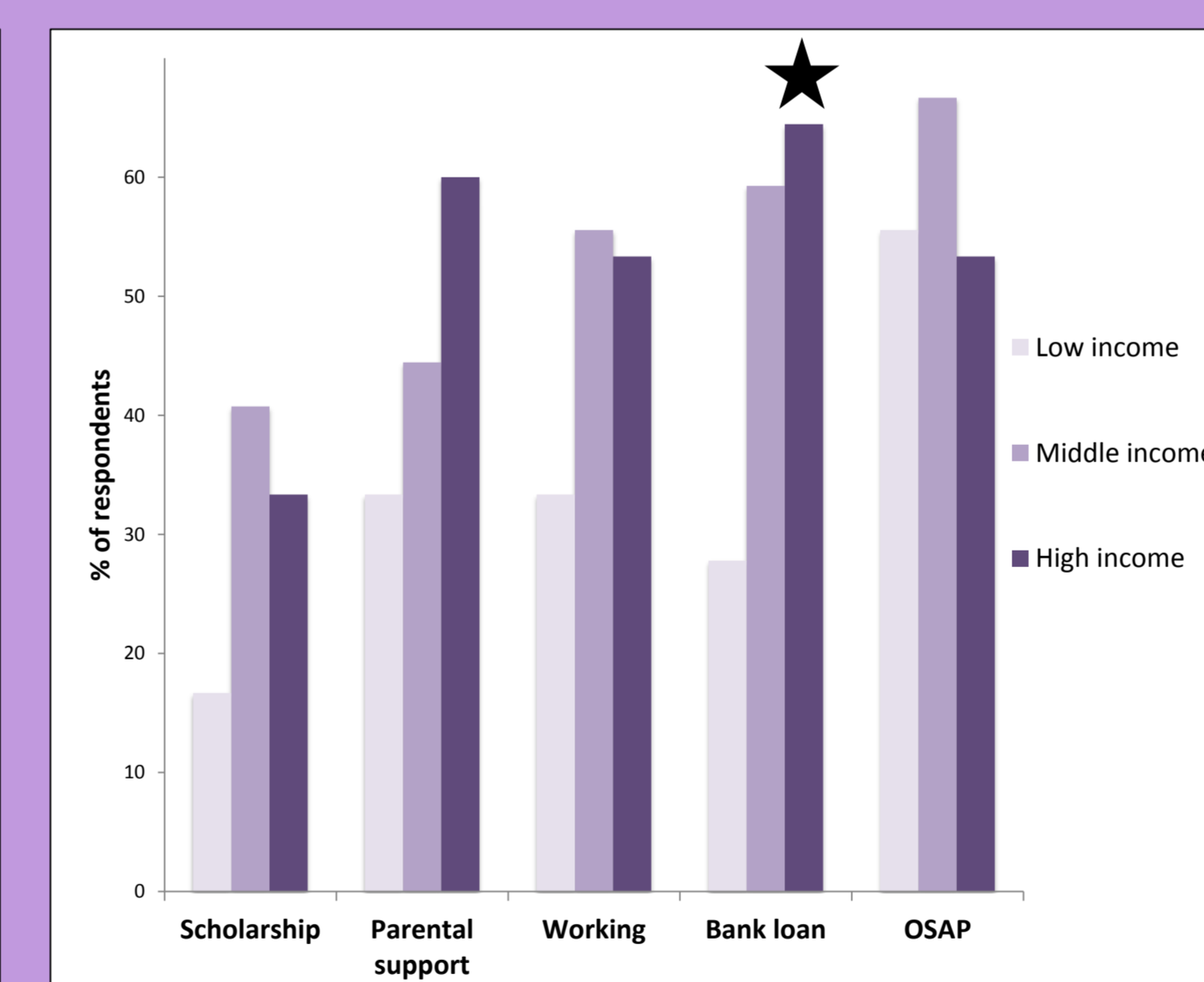


Fig 1b. Funding for medical education

- More parents in the low-income group anticipated using Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) to fund post-secondary education (88.9%, n=16) compared to those in the high-income group (44.4%, n=20)
- More parents in the high-income group anticipated using a bank loan to fund medical education (64.4%, n=29) compared to those in the low-income group (27.8%, n=5)

Perceived Barriers:

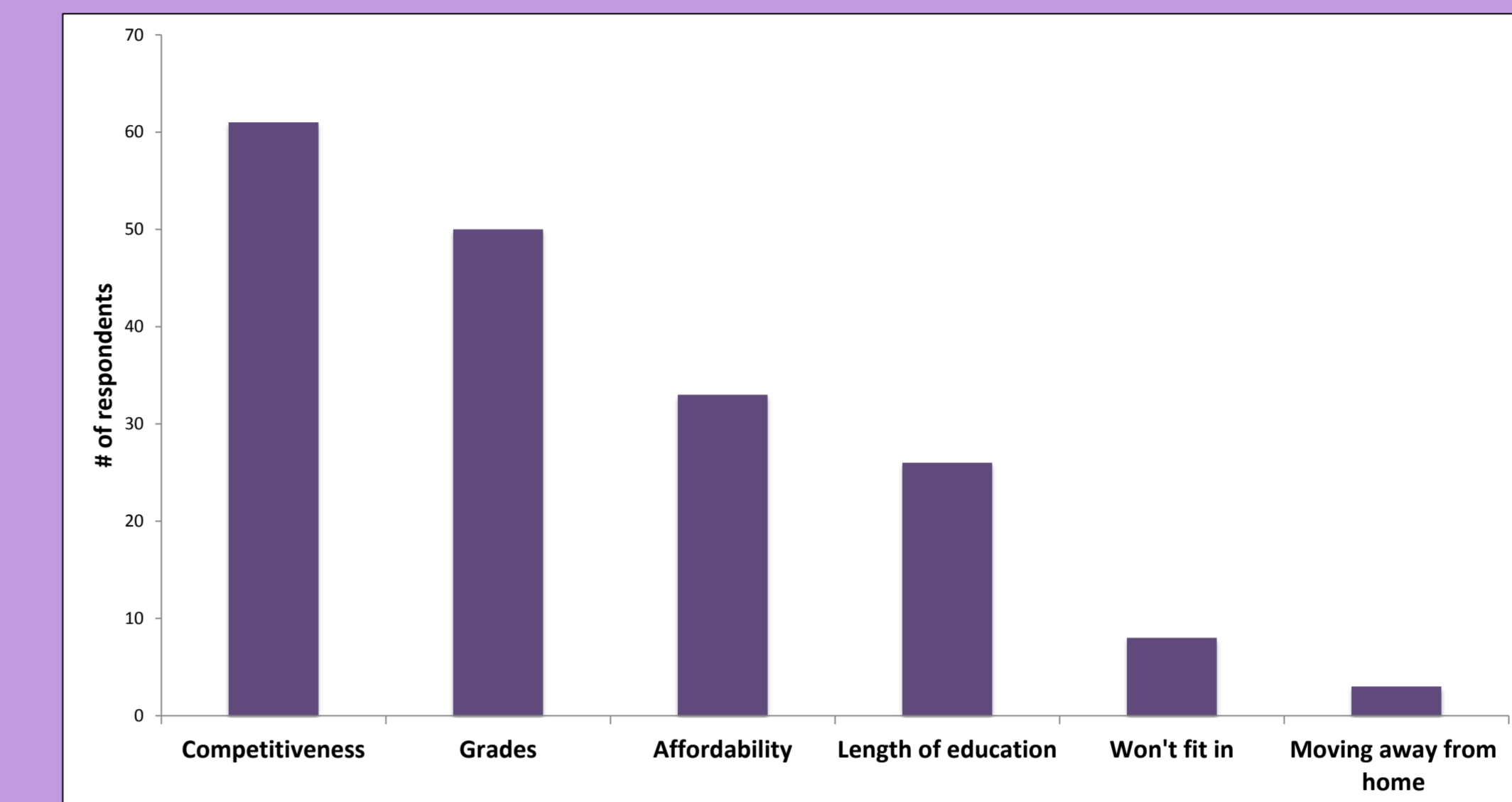


Fig 2. Students' perceived barriers to attending medical school

- Students' perception of affordability as a barrier was not affected by parental income, but was affected by parental education level. Those whose parents both had a high school education or less were more likely to cite affordability as a barrier (p=0.049).

Financial Considerations:

- Perception of cost of medical school tuition ranged from \$500 - \$120,000 per year
 - 37.0% (n=30) of students responded within a reasonably correct range of cost
 - 48.3% (n=42) of parents responded within a reasonably correct range of cost

Conclusion

- In accordance with our previous study, the top three student-perceived barriers to attending medical school were competitiveness, grades, and affordability
- Parental views of anticipated sources of funding for education differed based on family income:
 - High income families were more likely to anticipate using bank loans for post-secondary education
 - Low income families were more likely to anticipate using OSAP for medical school
- Family income does not appear to affect student or parental perception of accessibility to medical school, including affordability

References

- Dhalla IA, Kwong JC, Streiner DL, Baddour RE, Waddell AE, Johnson IL. Characteristics of first-year students in Canadian medical schools. CMAJ 2002; 166(8):1029
- Hensel JM, Shandling M, Rendelmeier D. Rural medical students at urban medical schools: Too few and far between? Open Med 2007; 1(1):e13-e17.
- AFMC Project: The Future of Medical Education in Canada (FMEC): A Collective Vision for MD Education. Available online at www.afmc.ca/fmec/pdf/collective_vision.pdf