

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Extent and Pattern of Physiotherapy Profession: A pilot Study

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ABSTRACT

Question: What is the level of awareness and understanding of the Physiotherapy profession among the general population of Delhi National Capital Region (NCR), India? **Objective:** To evaluate the general awareness of the physiotherapy profession among the general population of Delhi National Capital Region (NCR). **Design:** A cross-sectional survey and qualitative analysis of multiple-choice responses. **Participants and Methods:** In this pilot study total responses 250 and participants were randomly selected from the general public in areas of Delhi NCR were collected using an investigator-administered questionnaire. Data were analysed with MS office and SPSS. **Results:** In this study there were 250 respondents, out of them 121 (48%) were males and 129 (52%) were females. Out of total participants only 1% were illiterate and 99% were literate. 88% of the respondents were aware of the term 'physiotherapy' and 12% had never heard about it. 52% had the knowledge of a physiotherapist's qualifications and 49% had knowledge of various physiotherapy services. Lack of awareness and knowledge was thought to be the main cause behind why people do not access physical therapy services, followed by the perception that it is all about massage and lastly that it is just for the elderly population, with figures 67%, 22% and 11%, respectively. **Conclusion:** The study's participants had moderate level of awareness and positive belief regarding physiotherapy. The findings suggested that there is still a need to increase the awareness of the role of a physiotherapist among the general population so that its maximum potential can be tapped.

KEYWORDS

Physiotherapy, Awareness, Profession, Pilot Study

INTRODUCTION

Physiotherapy is one of oldest professions in healthcare practised since 460 BC by great physicians such as Hippocrates and Galen. Events such as the First World War, Polio-outbreak, increasing disabilities lead to rapid progression and modernization of

physiotherapy from the 18th century. The foundation of Physiotherapy was laid in India in 1952 following a major epidemic of poliomyelitis in Mumbai & soon in 1953 the first school & centre for Physiotherapy was established in Mumbai as a joint collaborative project of Government of India, State

Government, & the then Bombay Municipal Corporation (BMC) with technical support by World Health Organization (WHO). (1)

World Confederation of Physical Therapy (WCPT) defines Physical Therapy as “A health care profession which deals with human function & movement and helps patients in maximising physical potential. It helps patients in improvising his quality of life by use of physical approaches in promotion, prevention, treatment/intervention and rehabilitation.” (2) “This encompasses physical, psychological, emotional, and social wellbeing. Physical therapy involves the interaction between the physical therapist, patients/ clients, other health professionals, families, caregivers and communities in a process where movement potential is assessed and goals are agreed upon, using knowledge and skills unique to physical therapists.” (3)

According to World Physiotherapy, physiotherapists provide services that develop, maintain and restore people’s maximum movement and functional ability. They can help people at any stage of life when movement and function are threatened by ageing, injury, diseases, disorders, conditions or environmental factors. (4) They help people maximise their quality of life, in terms of physical, psychological, emotional, and social wellbeing. They work in the health spheres of promotion, prevention, treatment/intervention, and rehabilitation. (5) They are also called physical therapists. They practise independently and within interdisciplinary rehabilitation setups. Physiotherapy has multiple specialties like cardiovascular and pulmonary, neurology, orthopaedics, paediatrics, sports, oncology, intensive care unit, and geriatric.

It is crucial for a profession to have a distinct public identity and a high level of social awareness given the significant roles it plays in the society.(6) The public’s perceptions may be influenced by general knowledge about the physiotherapy profession and its role in healthcare, which will not just have an impact on the utilisation of physiotherapy services,

but also the efficiency with which healthcare is provided. (7)

The practice of physiotherapy as a first contact profession is not common in India. Physiotherapists often mainly depend on referrals from physicians from the different fields of practice of medicine. The practice of ‘prescribing physiotherapy’ by most physicians has been of great concern to physiotherapists’ worldwide. (6) Due to lack of awareness, people usually resort to self-medication for instant pain relief and come to physiotherapist late when orthopaedics or other doctors refer them to physiotherapist.(7)

Despite playing a significant role in society, physiotherapy lacks a distinct recognition among the general population, who present little knowledge of or understanding of the profession's function, the value of its contributions to the health sector, or their ability to distinguish it from other areas of health care.(8) Despite the recognition and advances gained worldwide in physiotherapy, yet there are few researches done in India to evaluate the awareness of physiotherapy in India. Thus, it is important to increase the awareness of the role of a physiotherapist among the general population. Therefore, the research question for this study was: What is the level of awareness and understanding of Physiotherapy among the general population of India?

MATERIAL & METHODS

Design

The study proposed for observational study design. A survey was conducted with a closed ended questionnaire. It is a pilot study.

Procedure

A cross-sectional survey was conducted amongst the general public in areas of Delhi NCR, India. Data collection was done using a semi- structured well-organised questionnaire. The respondents were residents of Delhi NCR areas like Mayur Vihar, Noida, Greater Noida, Ghaziabad and so on. The questionnaire was administered via the investigator using pen and paper, who explained the questions and options in local or English language and clarified doubts regarding the same to avoid any misinterpretations. Then the investigator

recorded the responses on hard copies of the questionnaire. The authors tried to understand the level of awareness of basic knowledge and perceptions regarding Physiotherapy in the study area.

Initially, the study was designed to collect data with appropriate statistical methodology like study design, study setting, study population, sample size and sampling method. In this study sample size was calculated with high percent of significance and 95 % of confidence interval and sample size was estimated to be 385. But because of the duration of the study, authors were able to target only 250 respondents. So, the authors focused on a pilot study. The survey questionnaire consisted of three parts: PART 1: Informed consent, PART 2: Demographic profile and PART 3: 20 Multiple-choice questions. Written informed consent was taken from willing subjects before data collection. Demographic variables included gender, level of education and profession. Out of 20 variables, 15 were awareness related and 5 were pertaining to the perceptions and beliefs regarding physiotherapy.

Data analysis

The cross-sectional data was collected through close ended questionnaire. Total sample size of this study was 250. This study as a pilot study and it is the part of undergraduate dissertation. All the surveyed data verified and managed it in MS Excel and validated it with the individual questions. After that data was imported to SPSS software for the analysis. Initially, frequency and percentage were calculated for each variable with its categories and graphical presentation.

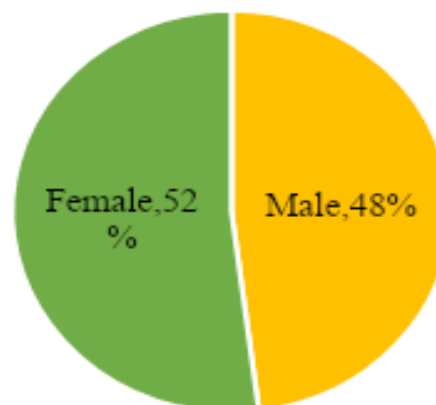
RESULTS

Characteristics of Participants

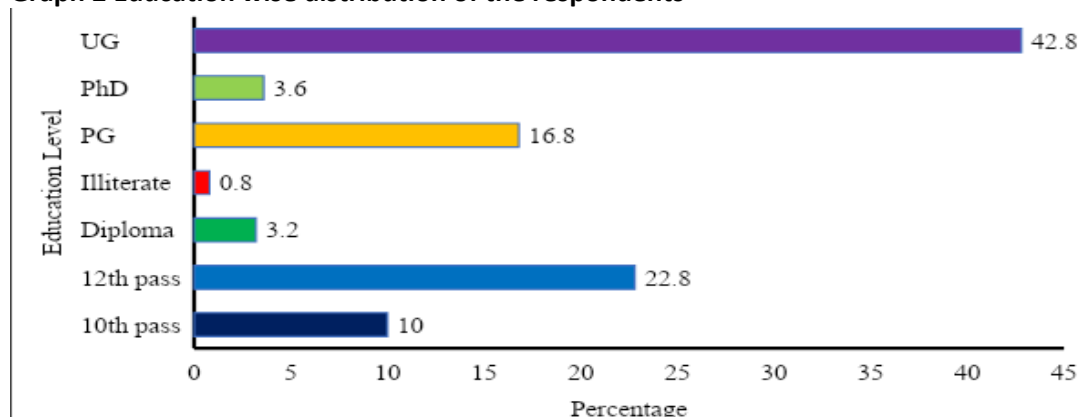
As shown in Figure 1, Figure 2 and Figure 3. In this study there were 250 respondents, out of them 121 (48%) were males and 129 (52%) were females. Out of total participants only 2 (0.8%) were illiterate and 248 (92.2%) were literate, wherein 25 (10%) were 10th pass, 57 (23%) were 12th pass, 107 (42%) were undergraduates, 42 (17%) were post-graduates, 9 (4%) had completed PhD and 8 (3%) were diploma holders. In continuation, the profession of the respondents was also reported which consisted of around 19 (8%) government officials, 26 (10%) homemakers, 11 (5%) retirees, 38 (5%) salaried people and 113 (45%) students.

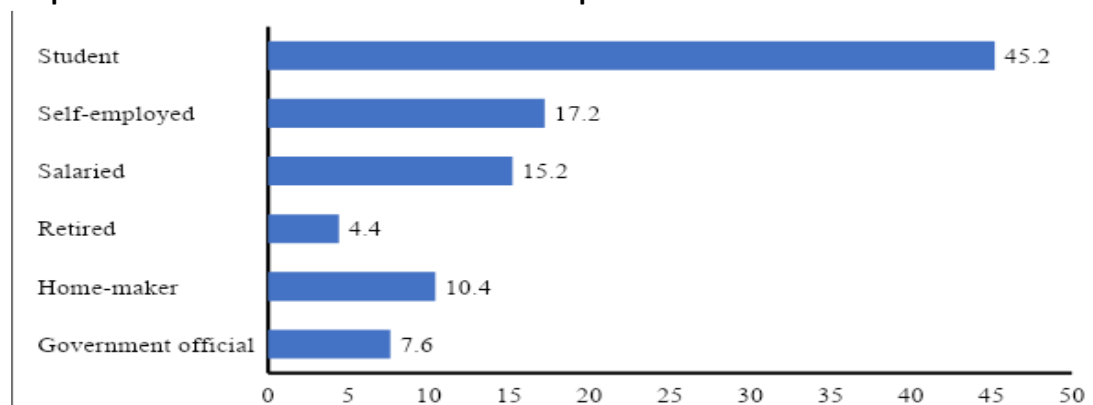
Graphs: The graphical presentation shows the distribution of the respondents with different demographic categories.

Graph 1 Gender wise Distribution of the respondents



Graph 2 Education wise distribution of the respondents



Graph 3 Profession wise distribution of the Respondents**Table-1: Shows the Insight, Perception, and Awareness of Physiotherapy Profession among the Delhi National Capital Region (NCR)**

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Are you aware of the term 'physiotherapy'?		
No	30	12
Yes	220	88
How did you first get to know about physiotherapy?		
Internet	55	22
Not aware	31	12
Printed media (newspaper, magazine, posters)	25	10
Radio	2	1
Television	4	2
Through family or friend	133	53
Do you know any physiotherapist or is there any physiotherapy clinic in your locality?		
No	46	18
Yes, I know a physiotherapist in my locality	58	23
Yes, I know a physiotherapist and there is a physiotherapy clinic in my locality,	2	0.5
Yes, there is a physiotherapy clinic in my locality	42	17
Yes, I know a physiotherapist in my family or friend circle.	100	40
Yes, I know a physiotherapist in my family or friend circle and I don't know about any physiotherapist or physiotherapy clinic in my locality.	2	1
Yes, I know a physiotherapist in my family or friend circle and in my locality as well.	1	0.5
Have you ever visited a physiotherapist?		
No	129	52
Yes	121	48
Which kind of setup did you visit?		
Never visited	129	52
Clinic	79	31
Hospital	42	17
Are you aware of the qualifications of a physiotherapist?		
No	119	48
Yes	131	52
What kind of a professional is a physiotherapist?		
I don't know	41	16
Not sure	40	16
Medical	87	35
Allied health	82	33
Did you know that physiotherapists are referred to as doctors?		
No	54	22
Yes	196	78

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Do you know about various specialisations in Physiotherapy? / Did you know that there are specialisations in Physiotherapy?		
No	123	49
Yes	127	51
Can physiotherapists prescribe medicines and perform surgery?		
No, they can't do both	103	41
Not aware	22	9
Yes, they can do both	22	9
Yes, they can perform surgery but can't prescribe medicines.	9	4
Yes, they can prescribe medicines but can't perform surgery	94	37
What do you think are the limitations / reasons why people do not access physiotherapy?		
Lack of awareness and knowledge	168	67
Perception that it is all about massage	55	22
Perception that it is for old aged people only	27	11
Do you need a medical doctor's referral before seeing the physiotherapist?		
No	58	23
Note sure/ I don't know	95	38
Yes	97	39
Are you aware of various services provided by physiotherapists?		
No	128	51
Yes	122	49
Did you know that hospitals have an entire department for Physiotherapy?		
No	81	32
Yes	169	68
Did you know that Physiotherapy sessions can be given at home?		
No	71	28
Yes	179	72
Do you think Physiotherapy is costly / physiotherapists over charge for their services?		
I don't know	32	13
No, it is worth it	127	51
Yes	91	36
What age group of patients do physiotherapists treat?		
Young	11	4
Middle	12	5
Old	49	20
All of the above	178	71
Would you prefer physiotherapy over the conventional treatment methods at most times?		
No	101	40
Yes	149	60
Is there any difference between a physiotherapist and a masseuse?		
No	91	36
Yes	159	64
Do you think Physiotherapy is beneficial for?		
Improving general health	34	14
Improving your lifestyle	28	11
Pregnancy	5	2
Treating disease	57	23
All of the above	126	50
Total	250	100

Among the Delhi NCR residents around 220 (88%) were aware of the term 'physiotherapy'

and only 30 (12%) had never heard about it. The three main first sources from which the

respondents got to know about physiotherapy were their family or friends, internet and print media with figures 133 (53%), 55 (22%) and 25 (10%), respectively. Majority of the respondents knew about the physiotherapy profession as they had a friend or family member who was a physiotherapist and /or were aware of a local clinical setup and/or a physical therapist. On the other hand, 46 (18%) of the respondents were completely oblivious of any local setup or therapist. More than half never went to a physiotherapist and 48% had exposure to physical therapy, out of which 17% and about double visited hospital and clinical setup, respectively.

The number of respondents who had the knowledge of a physiotherapist's qualifications was approximately 5% more than (48%) the ones who did not. 16% participants had no idea about what kind of health professional is a physiotherapist and similar number were not sure about it. On the other hand, those who thought of it as a medical profession and those who knew physical therapists as allied health professionals were about twice the former figure (32%). While the majority of the respondents thought that physiotherapists are referred to as doctors, 22% thought the opposite. Number of participants who had knowledge of various specialisations in the field of physical therapy were the same as those who did not know about it.

When asked about the kind of treatment offered by the physical therapist for resolving the ailment, 41% of the respondents knew that physiotherapists cannot perform surgeries and prescribe medicines. On the other hand, 9% said that they can do both and the same number of respondents were not aware about it at all. While 4% said that they can perform surgeries but cannot prescribe medicines, those who answered the other way around made up 94 (37%) out of total.

Lack of awareness and knowledge was thought to be the main cause behind why people do not access physical therapy services with figure 3 times to that of latter, followed by the perception that it is all about massage (22%)

and lastly that it is just for the elderly population, this response accounted for figure that was half of the former. The number of respondents who had no idea was similar to those who responded that one needs referral from a medical doctor before consulting a physiotherapist (39%), whereas just 23% chose the opposite. When asked about whether they had knowledge of various physiotherapy services, about similar numbers answered, 'yes' and 'no'. Most of the respondents who knew that hospitals have an entire department assigned for physiotherapy was just above the double of the responders were unaware regarding the same (32%).

36% participants believed that physiotherapists overcharge for the services that they provide. Contrastingly, 51% found the fees to be worth the therapy and 13% respondents were clueless. Majority of questionee (71%) had the knowledge that physical therapists can treat patients of any age group. But the reminder thought it could be given to only a particular age group. Physiotherapy was found to be the preferred treatment method over traditional methods of 60% of the participants, but still a significant number (40%) chose the latter. Respondents who believed that masseuse and physiotherapist are the same, were half to those who said that they are different from each other (70%).

DISCUSSION

This study's major goal was to determine how well-informed Delhi NCR residents were about physiotherapy and what they believed it to be. It also sought to determine how they felt about using it.

In the study sample, a significant number of those surveyed were knowledgeable of physiotherapy and were familiar with its existence even without ever visiting a physical therapist. This could be attributed to the fact that almost all participants were educated, and Delhi NCR mostly consists of urbanised areas. A similar study stated that majority of people in India who use physiotherapy services are urban community residents.(9) Similarly, high

awareness levels were reported in an urban community in Accra Ghana.(10) On the other hand, General population from villages around Delhi and high school students in rural areas of Anand and Nagpur city had a low degree of knowledge about physiotherapy.(11, 12, 13) Only 16.8% of Nigerians living in rural communities were found to be well aware in a survey by Mbada et al.(14), wherein a large number of participants had education below secondary level. Thus, one of the key predictors for identifying the scope of physical therapy may be the degree of schooling and extent of exposure to services related to physiotherapy. Kacie and Yvonne (15) reported comparable findings in which individuals with a higher educational degree were inclined to know more about physical therapy. Thus, education was discovered to be a major determinant of physiotherapy utilisation among the socioeconomic status parameters. Numerous researches have suggested that demographic factors have a substantial impact on people's decisions to seek out healthcare. (16, 17)

In line with the findings of this study, about half of a survey's participants were oblivious of physiotherapy treatment methods and services available to them. (18) Also, there was little knowledge about the most current developments in rehabilitation, and physicians think that a therapist's major intervention is to prescribe exercises. (19)

The results demonstrated that human resources and media play a key role in spreading public awareness of physiotherapy knowledge. Similar findings were reported by Maruf et. al and Harikrishnan et al. (20, 21) Majority of the participants did not visit a physiotherapist. This might be because first-contact services in our country yet not commonly include physical therapy, unlike what is practised in Australia, leading to high awareness and familiarity level.(22, 23) The results were in accordance with studies done by Pallavi et al.(24) and Radha et al.(25), that significant percentage of the people did not know that they can approach physiotherapist directly and additionally, more than a quarter

were unaware that hospitals have an entire department of physiotherapy. In agreement, Rob Goodwia et al. (26) identified that general practitioners tended to be the patient's default first point of contact and the poor understanding of physiotherapy may improve by better marketing of physiotherapy in general and first contact of physiotherapy in particular. Transformation in public perception is necessary to fully realise the potential of first point of contact physiotherapy. In a survey of referring doctors, more than half disagreed with the idea of physiotherapists having initial contact with patients, even if they agreed with physiotherapists that they should be able to manage and make decisions on patient care. (27, 28)

According to this study's responses, a high percentage of respondents said that they would be open to using physiotherapy services should the necessity ever arise and believed that physiotherapy is worth the price paid by them. Furthermore, most people found it to be beneficial not only for improving diseased but also health in general. This could be because many of the individuals in our survey were acquainted with and well-informed regarding physiotherapy facilities or had received treatment from a physiotherapist. Numerous investigations have determined that a physical therapist serves a crucial role in enhancing the patient's quality of life, showing a favourable societal view regarding physiotherapy. (1,15,29, 30) In contrast, Igwesi-Chidobe revealed that most subjects believed physiotherapy was unnecessary and that they didn't require it.(31)

This study found that people thought that lack of awareness and knowledge regarding the subject is one of the major limitations to availment of physical therapy services. Furthermore, another hindrance is posed by its identity being frequently confused with that of masseuses or medical doctors. Some authors have observed the same. (21,32)

Even though the sample had less than 1% illiterate people, approximately half of the respondents had not visited a physiotherapist

with 12 % had no clue regarding the same. On top of this parallel to the results by Shubham Menaria et al. (33), 36% of our study's respondents equated physiotherapy with massage therapy while over 50% had misconceptions that physiotherapists can perform surgeries and/or prescribe medicines. Moreover, 19.6% is only for geriatric patients. This confirms that despite the majority being educated and belonging from metropolitan regions there is still a dearth of understanding and knowledge concerning the physiotherapy profession. This is in congruence with the findings of Paul et al. (34) which revealed even nations with High Development Index had lack of insight. Although, as noted by numerous authors from various locations, even though since 2015 significant shifts have been noted in India's urban areas, the issue persists till date, and it is essential to address it on an immediate basis because it is a matter of concern pertaining to the health and well-being of the citizens.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings from this study it can be concluded that participants had moderate level of awareness and positive belief regarding physiotherapy. But the results also suggest that even after there has been so much advancement, there is still a considerable proportion of the population that is unaware and/or has misconceptions. Thus, there is a need to increase the awareness of the role of a physiotherapist among the general population so that its maximum potential can be tapped.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

All authors have contributed equally.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of interest.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

The authors haven't used any generative AI/AI assisted technologies in the writing process

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