

AWARENESS, PERCEPTION AND BELIEFS ABOUT PHYSICAL THERAPY AMONG PAKISTANI PHYSICIANS

Aleezay Fatima¹, Farrkuh Murtaza^{1*}

^{1*}Physical Therapy Department, Mayo Hospital, Lahore

HIGHLIGHTS:

- This cross-sectional study was performed among 191 physicians. A self-administrated questionnaire is used and it consists of three parts: demographic data sheet, knowledge and perception about physical therapy.
- The mean age of physicians was 33.52 ± 6.494 while 42.9% were female and 57.1% were male physicians.
- There is moderate awareness, perception and beliefs about physical therapy and a significant association between physician awareness and patient referral rate to physical therapy.

ABSTRACT

Health professionals play a fundamental role in ensuring that the public receives a high-quality and better healthcare system. They provide essential health-promoting, disease-prevention and healthcare services to individuals, their families and their communities.

OBJECTIVE: To determine the level of awareness, perception and beliefs regarding physical therapy held by Pakistani physicians.

MATERIAL AND METHODS: The study was designed as a cross-sectional study conducted six months after the approval of the synopsis. A sample size of 191 was recruited using convenient sampling. Data was collected from different hospitals in Lahore including the University of Lahore Teaching hospital, Bahria hospital, General Hospital and Services hospital Lahore. Healthcare practitioners with working experience of a minimum of one year in the healthcare field.⁵ Interns, academicians, and Admin personnel working in a healthcare field with no direct contact or influence in the management of patient treatment were included. A self-administrated

questionnaire was used which consisted of three parts: demographics, knowledge and perception of physical therapy. The primary outcome is to access the level of awareness, perception and beliefs regarding physical therapy held by Pakistani physicians. Statistical package for social sciences; version 22 was used to analyze data. Percentages and frequencies were reported for categorical variables and mean \pm S.D was reported for continuous data. Chi-square was applied to access the association between awareness and patient referral rate for physical therapy held by Pakistani physicians.

RESULTS: The mean age of physicians was 33.52 ± 6.494 and the minimum age limit for the physicians was 25 years and the maximum limit was 45 years. There were about 42.9% female and 57.1% male physicians. In the current study, 45% attended lectures about physical therapy, and 51.3% received exceptional training on cases that benefit from physiotherapy.

CONCLUSION: There is a moderate level of awareness, perception and beliefs about physical therapy and a significant association between physician awareness and patient referral rate to physiotherapy. Physicians have awareness and knowledge about physical therapy services required for patients in hospital settings for their betterment.

KEYWORDS: awareness; beliefs; perception; physical therapy; physicians

Corresponding Author: Farrkuh Murtaza, Mayo Hospital, Lahore

Email: farrukhmurtaza@gmail.com

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INTRODUCTION

A profession is now a compensated career, particularly one which requires extensive teaching and a formal degree. At the same time, a professional is involved in certain activities as they paid for work fairly than as a hobby.¹ The public's knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of a profession are based on the public's information, attitudes, and perceptions. These characteristics are typically established via professional exposure to practices. Physical therapy (PT) is still fighting to attain status and be regarded as an essential service within health care, despite the expansion of the evidence base and scope of practice via research, and is in a clear need for services.²

Health professionals play an essential and significant role in the improvement and to access and quality health care for the population. They provide chief services that promote health, cause prevention of diseases and bring health care services to individuals, their families and their societies.¹ Physical therapy is one of the oldest components of the closely integrated group referred to as allied health professionals.³ It's a dynamic profession that employs a variety of therapeutic methods to help the body regain mobility and function.⁴ It entails screening patients, creating and implementing a therapy plan, reviewing the evaluation results, and then modifying the treatment plan based on the findings.³

Physical therapy, as a health care profession, was previously recognized in the second decade of the 20th century, after World War I (1914-1918) however the profession was approved due to various emerging rise in cases of poliomyelitis after World War I. American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) provides a representation of more than 80,000 PTs, assistants, and students. U.S. Physical Therapy is ranked fifth among the top healthcare jobs and eighth among the 100 most exceptional jobs in 2013. World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT)

defines Physical Therapy as "A profession which is associated with identifying and maximizing quality of life and movement potential with the spheres of promotion, intervention, prevention, habilitation and rehabilitation. This encloses social, psychological, emotional and physical welfare."¹

Physiotherapy has been known as a means of treatment over the years and is rapidly increasing as a profession, more specifically in developing countries.⁵ The practice has evolved and developed from common forms of physical therapy to specialized physiotherapy services in healthcare settings.⁶ According to the US Department of Labor, physical therapists are important healthcare professionals who make a diagnosis and provide treatment to patients of all ages. Numerous subspecialties of PT have been recognized including cardiovascular and pulmonary, orthopedics, neurology, sports, etc. which treat a diverse number of patients to decrease disability and dependency.⁵

Over 20 years ago, physicians dominated interactions between doctors and physical therapists. The referring physician was in charge of evaluating, diagnosing, and determining particular therapy strategies and modalities. The PT was seen as a technician rather than a professional partner by the majority of physicians. Physicians said the PT lacked the most demanding medical professionalism criteria: examination and evaluation abilities, as well as the autonomy of judgment. However, in the last 5 to 10 years, the role of physical therapy has evolved quickly. APTA established vision 2020 in 2000, intending to make physical therapy a more independent profession by 2020. These important areas include professionalism, direct access, the doctor of physical therapy degree, evidence-based practice, and PT as the practitioner of choice.⁷

According to Levine and Kliebhan, a physician must comprehend the ideas and procedures used

by therapists to treat physically challenged children. With this information, a physician can integrate therapy services as well as extensive diagnosis and treatment planning as needed. Having this knowledge is insufficient. Therapists and physicians must communicate clearly and often.⁸

Physiotherapy practice scope is not only confined to patient care but involves aspects such as public health care strategies, teaching, conducting research and developing and implementing health policies at both national and international levels. Thus creating consciousness about the role of physical therapy can be the finest antidote to the elevated misconceptions about the profession itself.⁹ Although physiotherapy has the greatest role to play in society, it seems to lack a clear identification with the public who demonstrate limited awareness and understanding of the scope of the profession's role and have difficulty differentiating it from alternate practitioners.⁴ The purpose of this study was to determine the level of awareness, perception and beliefs regarding physical therapy held by Pakistani physicians.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was designed as a cross-sectional study conducted six months after the approval of the synopsis. A sample size of 191 was recruited using convenient sampling. Data was collected from different hospitals in Lahore including the University of Lahore Teaching hospital, Bahria hospital, General Hospital and Services hospital Lahore. The medical specialties included were general practice, internal medicine, neurology, pediatrics, general, orthopedic, thoracic and neurosurgery, and health care professionals the age of 25 to 50 years. Healthcare practitioners with working experience of a minimum of one year in the healthcare field.⁵ Interns, academicians, and Admin personnel working in a healthcare field with no direct contact or influence in the management of patient treatment were included. A self-administrated questionnaire was used which consisted of three parts: demographics,

knowledge and perception of physical therapy. The primary outcome is to access the level of awareness, perception and beliefs regarding physical therapy held by Pakistani physicians.

Statistical package for social sciences; version 22 was used to analyze data. Percentages and frequencies were reported for categorical variables and mean \pm S.D was reported for continuous data. Chi-square was applied to access the association between awareness and patient referral rate for physical therapy held by Pakistani physicians.

RESULTS

The mean age of physicians was 33.52 ± 6.494 . The minimum age for physicians was 25 and the maximum age was 45 years. (Figure 1)

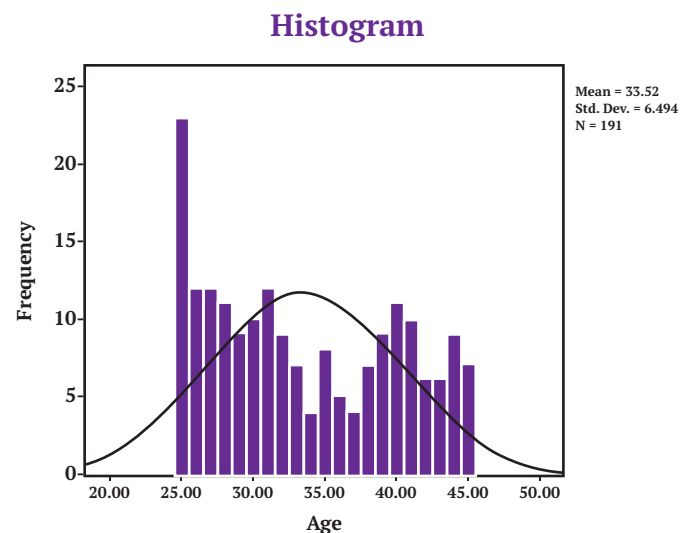


Figure 1: Age of participants (n=191)

Out of 191, 82 (42.9%) females and 109 (57.1%) male physicians participated in this study. On asking about the workplace 48 (25.1%) were working in the government sector, 63 (33.0%) were working in the private, 46 (24.1%) in educational and 34 (17.1%) in primary care. Out of 191 physicians, 70 (36.6%) have 1-5 years work experience, 40 (20.9%) have 6-10 years of work experience, 31 (16.2%) have 11-15 years and 50

(26.2%) had 16-20 years' job experience. Out of 191 physicians, 32 (16.2%) were orthopedic, 11 (5.8%) were pediatric, 25 (13.1%) gynecology, 25 (13.1%) surgery, 22 (11.5%) were emergency, 20 (10.5%) neuro, 20 (10.5%) medicine, 6 (3.1%) radiology and 30 (15.7%) were general practitioner. (Table 1)

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variables		Frequency	%
Gender	Female	82	42.9%
	Male	109	57.1%
Workplace	Government	48	25.1%
	Private	63	33.0%
	Educational	46	24.1%
	Primary care	34	17.8%
Work Experience	1-5 years	70	36.6%
	6-10 years	40	20.9%
	11-15 years	31	16.2%
	16-20 years	50	26.2%
Specialties	Orthopedic	32	16.8%
	Pediatric	11	5.8%
	Gynecology	25	13.1%
	Surgery	25	13.1%
	Emergency	22	11.5%
	Neuro	20	10.5%
	Medicine	20	10.5%
	Radiology	6	3.1%
	General practitioner	30	15.7%

On asking about the physiotherapy facilities in medical school, 81 (42.4%) had facilities in medical school, 48 (25.1%) had no facilities and 62 (32.5%) were not sure about these facilities. On asking about the patients referred to the physiotherapy department, 48 (25.1%) were not refer patients to the physiotherapy, 45 (23.6%) were referred rarely and 51 (26.7%) refer occasionally. Only 47 (24.6%) referred patients regularly to the physiotherapy department. Out of 191 physicians, 129 (67.5%) were refer the patient to physiotherapy with a prescription and 62 (32.5%) were refer the patient to physiotherapy without a prescription. (Table 2)

Table 2: Frequency percentages of knowledge variables of physicians about physiotherapy

Variables		Frequency	%
Attended lectures on physical therapy	Yes	86	45.0%
	No	105	55.0%
Physiotherapy facilities in medical school	Yes	81	42.4%
	No	48	25.1%
	Not Sure	62	32.5%
Referral the patients to a physiotherapy department	Don't refer at all	48	25.1%
	Refer rarely	45	23.6%
	Refer occasionally	51	26.7%
	Refer regularly	47	24.6%
Refer the patient to physiotherapy with prescription	Yes	129	67.5%
	No	62	32.5%

Out of 191 physicians, 28 (14.7%) had a skeptical perception of physiotherapy, 10 (5.2%) had a bad experience, 59 (30.9%) had no negative perception, 60 (31.4%) had a complimentary, 28 (14.7%) had unfavorable interactions. Upon being asked about the reason for their negative perception of physical therapy, 51 (26.7%) were not known much about the PT training and 57 (29.8%). Because physiotherapy is complementary to medicine, 26 (13.6%), were because physiotherapy does not have enough scientific basis and 57 (29.8%) were because of the ability of PT to deduce treatment of patients. Out of 191 physicians, 37 (19.4%) had a mild level of awareness about physiotherapy and 115 (60.2%) physicians had a moderate level of awareness about physiotherapy and 39 (20.4%) had a high level of awareness about physiotherapy. Out of 191 physicians, 42 (22.4%) had a mild level of perception of physiotherapy and 128 (67.0%) physicians had a moderate level of perception of physiotherapy and 21 (11.0%) had a high level of perception of physiotherapy. Out of 191 physicians, 110 (57.6%) had a positive belief about physiotherapy and 81 (42.4%) physicians had a negative belief about physiotherapy. (Table 3)

Table 3: Frequency Percentages of Perception Variables of Physicians About Physiotherapy

Variables		Frequency	%
Perception about Physiotherapy	Skeptical of Physiotherapy	28	14.7
	Bad experience	10	5.2
	No negative perception	59	30.9
	Only complimentary	60	31.4
	Unfavorable interactions	28	14.7
	Others	6	3.1
Negative perception about physiotherapy	I do not know much about physiotherapy training	51	26.7
	Physiotherapy is complimentary to medicine	57	29.8
	Physiotherapy doesn't have enough scientific basis	26	13.6
	The ability of physiotherapists to deduce the treatment of patients	57	29.8
Level of awareness about physical therapy in physicians	Mild	37	19.4
	Moderate	115	60.2
	High	39	20.4
Level of perception (refer rate) about physical therapy	Mild	42	22.0
	Moderate	128	67.0
	High	21	11.0
Level of beliefs about physical therapy	Positive	110	57.6
	Negative	81	42.4

In this study, the physicians who had a moderate level of awareness were referring the patient regularly to the physiotherapy department. There is a significant association between physicians' awareness and patient referral rate, As the awareness about physiotherapy increases in physicians greater the reference rate ($p \leq 0.05$) in Table 4.

Table 4: Cross-tabulation of Level of awareness about physical therapy and their referral rate to physiotherapy in physicians

Level of awareness about physical therapy in physicians	Do you refer the patients to a physiotherapy department				Total	P-Value
	Don't refer at all	Refer rarely	Refer occasionally	Refer regularly		
Mild	36	0	1	0	37	.000
Moderate	8	25	37	45	115	
High	4	20	13	2	39	
Total	48	45	51	47	191	

DISCUSSION

Physiotherapy has been recognized as a mode of treatment over the years and is rapidly growing as a profession, especially in developing countries.⁵ The physiotherapy practice has evolved and grown from general forms to specialized physiotherapy services in healthcare settings.⁶

The mean age of physicians was 33.52 ± 6.494 in this study. About 42.9% were females and 57.1% were male physicians in this study. In the current study the level of awareness, perception and beliefs about physical therapy held by Pakistani physicians. Work setting, total experience, specialty, and knowledge and education level of a physician about physical therapy. It also included the physician's perception and beliefs about the patients' referrals to physiotherapy.

The result showed that 25.1% were working in the government sector, 33.0% were working in the private, 24.1% in education and 17.1% in primary care. 16.2% were orthopedic, 5.8% pediatric, 13.1% gynecology, 13.1% surgery, 11.5% emergency, 10.5% neuro, 20 (10.5%) medicine, 3.1% radiology and 15.7% were general practitioners. The majority of them 36.6% have 1-5 years' work experience.

In the current study, 45.0% had attended lectures about physical therapy and 51.3% received

special training on cases that benefit from physiotherapy. 70.2% had a positive perception of physiotherapy as they refer the patient to physiotherapy without a prescription. In contrast, the other study stated, that 51% of physicians knew of physiotherapy respondents who said they have attended PT awareness lectures or particular training on instances that may benefit from PT appeared to be more aware than others. About 17% of those polled said they had attended PT awareness talks. 15 percent of them said they routinely send patients to physical therapy departments.⁵

The result showed that 14.7% had a skeptical perception of physiotherapy, 5.2% had a bad experience, 30.9% had no negative perception, 31.4% had a complimentary, and 14.7% had unfavorable interactions. 55% of physicians reported negative perceptions about physical therapy. In contrast to other studies, participants' perceptions and attitudes regarding physical therapy as a profession: Of the 280 respondents, 44% said that PT is a professional course, while the rest either didn't know or care. PT was seen negatively by 58 percent of those respondents.^{4,5}

The result showed that 57.6% had a positive belief about PT and 42.4% of physicians had a negative belief about physiotherapy. In comparison to previous studies conducted throughout the world referral rate in South Africa is low.^{3,10-12} This demonstrated that respondents' understanding of the need for PT therapy is insufficient to persuade them to refer patients to PT when necessary. Respondents who received some training or attended lectures regarding PT awareness, on the other hand, reported recommending more patients than their peers. This emphasizes the need of holding periodical workshops and presentations for physicians regarding the effects of PT on various illnesses to keep physicians up to speed on evidence-based therapy.¹³ This, in turn, would boost physicians' trust in PT and drive recommendations to the PT department.^{11,14}

The result showed that there was a significant association between physician awareness and referring patients to physiotherapy with a p-value is <0.05. Another study stated that there is a lack of awareness and knowledge among medical interns about physical therapy.¹⁵

CONCLUSION

There is a moderate level of awareness, perception and beliefs about physical therapy and a significant association between physician awareness and patient referral rate to physiotherapy. Physicians have awareness and knowledge about physical therapy services required for patients in hospital settings for their betterment.

Declarations

Consent to participate: Written consent had been taken from patients. All methods were performed following the relevant guidelines and regulations.

Availability of data and materials: Data will be available on request. The corresponding author will submit all dataset files.

Competing interests: None

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