

Career Choice among Physiotherapy Students at Mangalore, India

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ABSTRACT

Context: Understanding the factors which influence the career preferences is of importance to policy makers, health care educationist and other stake holders. So, it would be interesting to know what makes the students join Physiotherapy course and their future plans.

Objectives: The aim of the present study was to explore the career choices and the intentions of a cohort of undergraduate students of physiotherapy in Mangalore, India.

Methods: An anonymous, self-administered, questionnaire-based survey was carried out among the consenting undergraduate students of physiotherapy.

Results and Conclusion: The final response rate was 98% (79/81). The mean age of the students was 22 years (SD 3,

range 18-25years). Forty-five students (57%) were females and 34 students (43%) were males. The participants were more influenced in the career choices by their own passion for the allied health sciences, followed by being inspired by a family member. A majority of the students wanted to pursue further specialization in physiotherapy in the form of post-graduation studies. A majority of the students expressed great satisfaction with career choice and had less intention of changing their profession. A majority of the students opted to work in India rather than to migrate abroad after the completion of their studies ($p= 0.0027$). Future work in multi-specialty hospitals and private-practice was highly preferred by a majority of students as compared to academic career ($p=0.011$).

Key Words : Education, career choice, physiotherapy, students; India.

KEY MESSAGES:

1. Students chose Physiotherapy due to passion for health science and inspiration from family members.
2. Most Physiotherapy students in this study want to pursue post graduate studies and that too in India.
3. Most students want to work as Physiotherapist in multispecialty hospital or set up private practice.
4. There are very few students interested in pursuing a teaching career.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, there has been an increased interest in the factors which influence the career choices of medical [1-4] and allied health science professionals [5, 6]. Most studies have looked at the future aspirations and career intentions of medical students and postgraduates. Similar studies on physiotherapy students are scarce and a literature search in PubMed, IndMED and GoogleScholar could not retrieve any study on this issue among the physiotherapists from India. Presently, there are numerous career opportunities for all the health care professionals. Understanding the factors which influence these preferences is of importance to policy makers, health care educationists and other stake holders.

In the recent past, a number of medical colleges have mushroomed in India. This has provided more opportunities for students to join the main stream medical profession than the allied health science professions. Physiotherapy is one of the major allied health science professions after nursing.

In 1990, when the first college which exclusively offered the physiotherapy degree course was started in Mangalore, the coastal city had only one medical college. The number of colleges offering the physiotherapy degree course in Mangalore gradually increased to 14 in the late nineties, with the maximum intake of students being filled in all the colleges every year. At the same

time, gradually, the number of medical colleges in Mangalore increased from one to five in the recent past. Anecdotal reports suggest that the increase in the number of main stream medical colleges has had an adverse effect on the admissions to allied health science courses, especially physiotherapy. This is reflected in the dwindling number of students who are joining the allied health science courses, especially physiotherapy. Presently, three of the colleges in Mangalore which exclusively offered the physiotherapy course have shut down and the maximum intake in other physiotherapy colleges has come down every year.

Whether this is a reflection of a decreased interest or a perception of diminished prospects for only the Bachelors degree holders amongst the aspirants, remains unclear.

So, it would be interesting to know as to what makes the students join the physiotherapy courses and their future plans. What is the motivation behind the students' choice of Physiotherapy? Is it related to the great demand that these professionals have in USA, Canada, Australia and elsewhere? Could it be a way to realize the dream or the long nurtured ambition to emigrate? Or is it related to a genuine desire to serve mankind and to alleviate suffering? Is this an alternative to the more desired medical or dental course? What lay ahead for those who choose to join the profession and what kind of set up do they aspire to work in?

To delve further into these issues and to gain an insight into the career choices and intentions of a cohort of undergraduate

students of physiotherapy, we decided to conduct this study at a private college in Mangalore, India.

METHODOLOGY

This cross sectional study was carried out at an institution in Mangalore, Karnataka, India. This institution in the private sector offers Bachelor of Physiotherapy (BPT) course of four and a half years duration which includes six months of internship. The students joining this course come from all over India. Using non random (Convenient) sampling, a total of 81 students from first year to final year BPT course were enrolled in the study.

An anonymous, semi-structured questionnaire was developed for the study by the authors after reviewing the relevant literature and by discussions with experts in physiotherapy and medical education. The questionnaire had the basic demographical details of the students, their reasons for choosing physiotherapy as a vocation and their future career intentions, including a direct question about whether they would go abroad or stay in India. The students were explained and informed regarding the purpose of the study by the investigators. The questionnaire was administered to the students after obtaining informed consent and the requisite permission from the Head of the department. They were requested to complete the questionnaires, without discussing it amongst themselves, within a maximum allotted time of 30 minutes. The data was then entered into and analysed by using SPSS version 11.5. [7] The Chi square test was used to test the association of the various factors with the career choices and p values less than 0.05 were considered as significant.

This study was carried out in accordance with the principles of research involving human subjects, according to the Declaration of Helsinki 1995 (as revised in Edinburg 2000).

RESULTS

A total of 81 BPT students were invited to participate in the study. Eighty students completed and returned the questionnaire. One questionnaire was not considered for analysis as the important responses in the questionnaire were missing, thus resulting in a total sample of 79. The overall response rate was 98%. The mean age of the respondents was 22 years (SD = 3), with an age range of 18-25 years. Forty-five students (57%) were females and 34 (43%) were males. Seventy-seven students (97.5%) had done their schooling in India whereas two students (2.5%) completed their schooling abroad before joining the physiotherapy degree course. The reasons for choosing physiotherapy are tabulated in [Table/Fig-1].

After completing their Bachelors degree, most (90%) of the students wanted to pursue post-graduation studies. Of those

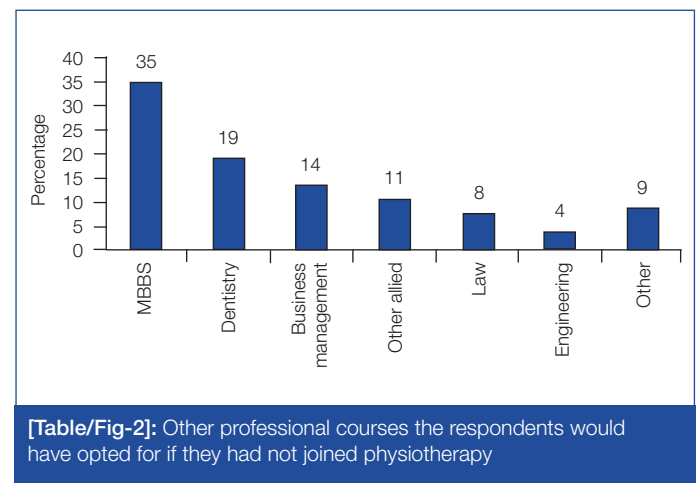
Reason for choosing physiotherapy	Number(%) of students
Passion for the subject	45 (57%)
Inspiration from a family member	16 (20.2%)
To serve the community	6 (7.6%)
Forced by their parents	3(3.8%)
Social status attached to the profession	3(3.8%)
Miscellaneous (Easy to get admission, less studies, easy to go abroad)	6(7.6%)
Total	79 (100%)

[Table/Fig-1]: Reasons for choosing Physiotherapy as a career

(n=71) who wanted to pursue post-graduation, a majority of them (n=50, 70%) preferred to do so in India, while twelve (17%) students preferred to study abroad. Another nine (13%) students preferred to change their mainstream profession from physiotherapy and to specialize in business and/or hospital administration.

When asked "If not physiotherapy, what other course would have you joined," 28 (35%) students said they would have liked to join MBBS and to become doctors. The other responses to this question are depicted in [Table/Fig-2].

Forty-seven students (59%) preferred to work in India (p= 0.0027) after the completion of their studies and, eleven students (14%) preferred to migrate abroad, whereas 21 students (27%) had not decided their preference for professional settlement at the time of responding to the questionnaire. A majority (53%) of those who preferred India as their work place wanted to be affiliated with multi-specialty hospitals, twenty five (32%) wanted to set up private-practices, and another twelve (15%) preferred to profess in physiotherapy colleges. This difference in the preference for the work place was found to be statistically significant (p=0.011). All those who preferred to migrate abroad, wanted to do so for a better quality of life in terms of both finances and job satisfaction.



[Table/Fig-2]: Other professional courses the respondents would have opted for if they had not joined physiotherapy

DISCUSSION

The students' pursuit of a career in physiotherapy seemed to be truly driven by a passion for the branch or due to being inspired by a family member in the healthcare profession. The findings of this study indicate that a majority of the students would have preferred to be in a healthcare profession, either as a doctor or a dentist, if they had not opted for physiotherapy and this, further shows their interest and inclination to serve the community. It is often assumed that parents force their career choices on their children; however, this didn't hold good for our subjects. This fact was further strengthened by the observation that a significantly high number of students wanted to pursue post graduation (PG) in the same field, thus proving that it was genuinely the students' personal choice to pursue physiotherapy.

A reform in training is required to provide more opportunities to the students to further specialize in physiotherapy. This need should be addressed by the educationists and stakeholders. We found that only a minority of the students had intentions of changing their chosen career of physiotherapy and wanted to pursue post-graduation studies in business management or hospital administration.

Most of the students who wanted to pursue post-graduation (PG) in physiotherapy seemed to be interested in doing so in India.

These findings also indicate that a majority of the students opted to work in India rather than to migrate abroad, thus discrediting the belief that physiotherapy was chosen as a career with an aim to emigrate. In fact, a significant number of our students wanted to do PG and also to practice in India. This could be related to the ample opportunities which are available here for trained and qualified physiotherapists. The increasing number of multi speciality hospitals and the emphasis on holistic care and rehabilitation has highlighted the role of physiotherapists in patient management.

As also noted elsewhere [6], physiotherapy students expressed a greater satisfaction with their career choice and had less intentions in changing their professions. In another study [5], the physiotherapy students preferred to have future careers in sports medicine clinics and fitness centers. We found, however, that the physiotherapy students preferred to have future careers in multi-specialty hospitals. In addition, as noted in a previous study [5], setting up a private-practice was highly endorsed by a majority of the students in our study too.

However, there are some limitations in this study. As was noted earlier, we could not find similar studies from India and so, a comparison was not possible. Further, this study being limited to one private college, the results could not be generalized. Though we recruited all the students in the college, the sample size was very small. However, this being the first such study, this may be considered as a pilot study and further such studies are recommended with a larger sample size and possibly at multiple centres to address this issue and to draw meaningful conclusions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all the physiotherapy students for their time which was taken to complete the questionnaires and the Head of the Department for granting permission to conduct the present study.

The present work was supported by the the Birmingham International Training and Research in Environmental and Occupational Health Program, University of Alabama, Grant Number 5 D43 TW05750, from the National Institutes of Health – Fogarty International Centre (NIH-FIC). The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of NIH-FIC.

Funding: There was no source of funding for this study.

Conflict of Interest: There are no conflicts of interest.

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DECLARATION ON COMPETING INTERESTS: No competing Interests.

Date of Submission: **Jan 17, 2011**
Date of Peer Review: **Feb 07, 2011**
Date of acceptance: **Feb 15, 2011**
Date of Publication: **Apr 11, 2011**
Date of Erratum: **Jun 21, 2011**