

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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ATTITUDE AND ANXIETY OF PHYSIOTHERAPY STUDENTS
TOWARDS RESEARCH: A CROSS-SECTIONAL SURVEY

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ABSTRACT:

Background: Physiotherapy research promotes optimum care for patients through evidence-based physiotherapy practice. Students' attitude towards research motivates them to engage in research, develop research skills and apply research findings in clinical settings to promote positive patients outcome. **Aim:** The aim of this study is to analyse the attitudes and anxiety of undergraduate Physiotherapy students towards research component. **Materials and Methods:** A cross-sectional survey was carried out with purposively selected students (n=150) from one physiotherapy college (Third-year BPT, final year BPT and internee). With informed voluntary consent, data on students' attitude and anxiety toward research were collected using Attitudes Toward Research (ATR) scale which was devised by Elena T. Papanastasiou in 2005. ATR consists of 32 items measured on a 7- point Likert scale. A value of 1 indicates a response of 'strongly disagree' and a value of 7 corresponds to 'strongly agree'. Analyses were performed using SPSS version 20. **Results:** Most of the participants (80%) reported that research is useful for the career. Positive attitude towards research was demonstrated by 69.33% physiotherapy students and 63.33% reported that research plays an important role in professional and personal life. However, a large proportion of students (72.67%) have anxiety towards research and 74% of students reported for research difficulty. **Conclusion:** Although many of the students have a favourable attitude towards the research and acknowledge its usefulness and benefit to physiotherapy profession, many of them perceived their research course as stressful and have anxiety towards the research.

Key words: Research, Attitude, anxiety, physiotherapy students

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INTRODUCTION

Research is the process of collecting and analyzing information to increase our understanding of the phenomenon under study.¹ The aim of the research is to contribute towards the understanding of the phenomenon and then to communicate that understanding to others. It gives rewarding learning experiences for students, producing graduates capable of high personal and professional achievement.²

In today's fast-changing world, research has become one of the most important intellectual possessions for every human being to change his way life in accordance with the needs and demands of the society. It is a key ingredient in shaping up the world that man lives in and the new experiences they see and encounter in their surroundings. It opens new frontiers to many fields like education, business, economics, medicine and science. Truly, research in itself had made a significant contribution to man's giant leap towards the future.³ The core curriculum must ensure that relevant and appropriate research expertise is attained by all graduates who are then provided with a suitable foundation from which they can develop such specialised research skills as may be required in their careers.⁴

Attitude is positive or negative affect towards a particular subject. A comprehensive definition of attitude includes emotions, beliefs, behaviours and their interaction.⁵ The attitude towards research basically means a detailed study of thinking, feeling and the person's behaviour towards research. According to Papanastasiou⁶, it is important to identify the attitudes toward research so that a positive attitude can be developed among students and hence their learning can be facilitated in turn.

Students at the undergraduate level usually tend to view research methods courses negatively.⁶ Many records could show evidence of the students' negative attitudes towards research in relation to courses in, statistics and mathematics.^{7,8}

A number of researches have been conducted to explore the attitude and anxiety towards research and the results showed that attitudes towards research are generally not positive. Students think that it is tough and dry to study the research.⁷

They do not understand the concepts of research and its importance in their professional life.⁹ Wong, & Kanji¹⁰ conducted a study on the medical students to explore their attitudes towards the research and found that though the majority of the students felt that the research would be beneficial in their career, fewer than half of the students were significantly involved in any research activity during their medical school. About one fourth of the student reported no interest in any such activity. Sabzwari, Kause-rand Khuwaja¹¹ conducted a study on junior faculty in the medical profession in Pakistan and found that though the majority of them perceive research a difficult endeavour they have a positive attitude towards the research. Sadia Shaukat et al⁹ conducted a study on the arts and science undergraduate students and found that students have a positive attitude towards research though most of them display a negative attitude on the difficulty of research. Papanastasiou⁶ found negative attitude towards research among undergraduate students. Siemens, Punnen, Wong and Kanji¹⁰ found that involvement in research was significantly enhanced in the fourth year medical students compared to the second year medical students. Zan & Martino¹² also found that the performance of postgraduate students towards the research was better compared to undergraduate students. Research is very important to advance the practice for physical therapy in order to assist physical therapists in the development and testing of knowledge which is unique to their practice.¹³

Prior research studies have found that negative as well as positive attitudes towards a course can impact the sum of attempt one is prepared to go through in acquiring knowledge or skills in that subject, which may have an effect on choosing higher level courses in analogue fields beyond those of minimum requirements.^{6,10,11,12} To date, a very few research have evaluated physiotherapists' perspective outlook on research within the physiotherapy practice in India. Therefore, evaluating the Bachelor of physiotherapy students' attitude and anxiety towards research is a need to design patient centred teaching and learning strategies that will promote favourable attitudes of learners towards research in the physiotherapy domain.

The research results will help in establishing an appropriate research environment at the undergraduate level in physiotherapy colleges.

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY:

A total sample of 150 students were purposively selected from the SPB physiotherapy college, Surat. The students who had participated in the study were all undergraduates. Two inclusion criteria were adopted: students who were studying in the third year BPT, Final year BPT and internee and students who volunteered to participate in the study. Students who had withdrawn, on drop status or sick during the period of data collection were excluded from the study. There were 17 males and 133 females. Data were collected from August to December 2018. So that each student had some exposure to a research subject and all participants had attended at least one research methodology subject class. All participants were administered the Attitudes Toward Research (ATR) Scale devised by Dr. Elena T. Papanastasiou⁶ in a classroom setting by the researcher. The administration of the test was done for a day and only those students who were absent on that day were not able to participate in the study. The participants were assured that their responses were anonymous because their names did not appear in the questionnaire. They were given instructions to complete the demographic section that included information about gender, age, year of the study and they were also asked whether they have conducted any research project or not. Respondents were also instructed to respond to each item as accurately as they can. Incomplete forms were discarded before data entry. Participation of the students was voluntary and the participants did not receive any credit for their involvement.

INSTRUMENT:

For the purpose of this study, the researcher administered the ATR scale which was devised by Elena T. Papanastasiou in 2005.⁶ ATR scale consists of 32 items measured on a 7-point Likert scale. A value of 1 indicates a response of 'strongly disagree', and a value of 7 corresponds to 'strongly agree'. The items in the ATR were subdivided into five subscales: usefulness of research in the students' profession (9 items); research anxiety (8 items); positive attitudes towards research(8 items); relevance of research in the students' personal lives(4 items); and research difficul-

ty(3 items).³ATR scale (32 items) indicated high reliability (r=0.948). The coefficient alpha reliabilities for the responses to items on each of the five subscales were relatively high. Coefficient alpha reliability for the research usefulness in the profession factor was 0.919 (9 items); for the research anxiety factor it equaled 0.918 (8 items); the reliability for the positive attitudes toward research factor equaled 0.929 (8 items). The reliability of the life relevancy factor equaled 0.767 (4 items), while the reliability for the research difficulty factor equaled 0.711 (3 items).¹⁴

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS version 20. Descriptive statistics, frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation were calculated.

RESULTS

The response of the students was 100%. All the students took an interest in the study and showed their concern. They answered all the questions in the questionnaire. A total of 150 students involved in the study. There were 133 female and 17 male students. Mean age of the students was 20.6 ± 2.3 years. Socio-demographic data of the students (N=150) is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic characteristics of students

Socio-Demographic Characteristics	
Gender (N=150)	Male: 17 Female:133
Year of Study:	Third-year BPT:66 Final year BPT:44 Internee:40
Have you studied research as a subject in the curriculum?	Yes:150 No: 00
Have you undertaken any research project at the undergraduate level?	Yes:40 No:110

Table 2 shows the frequency and mean percentages of student's attitude and anxiety towards physiotherapy research (n==150, factor wise). Most of the participants (80%) reported that research is useful for the career. Positive attitude towards research was demonstrated by 69.33% physiotherapy students and 63.33% reported that research plays an important role in professional and personal life. However, a large proportion of students (72.67%) had research anxiety and 74% of students reported for research difficulty. (Figure 1)

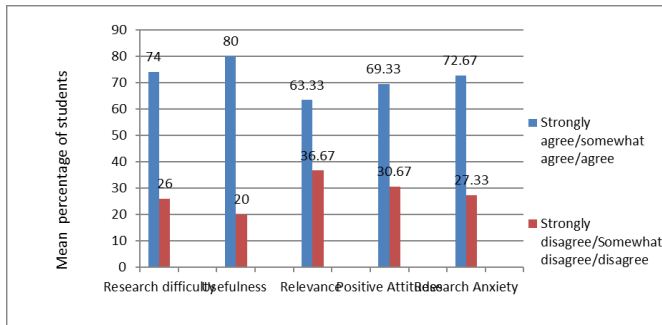


Fig. 1: Mean percentages of student's attitude and anxiety towards physiotherapy research

Table 2: Frequency and mean percentages of student's attitude and anxiety towards physiotherapy research

Attitudes Towards Research	Frequency (mean %)	
	Strongly agree/somewhat agree/agree	Strongly disagree/Somewhat disagree/disagree
Research difficulty	111(74)	39(26)
Usefulness for the profession	120(80)	34(20)
Relevance to life	95(63.33)	55(36.67)
Positive Attitudes	104(69.33)	46(30.67)
Research Anxiety	109(72.67)	41(27.33)

The average score of the students on the five ATR scales is presented in Table 3. Details of the average score of overall anxiety towards research (item wise) are shown in Table 4. The research is stressful is the factor where they got the highest rating (4.30±1.01).

Table 3: Attitudes and anxiety of the students towards Research (factor Wise)

Attitudes Towards Research	Mean ± SD
Research difficulty	4.00±1.20
Usefulness for the profession	4.60±1.27
Relevance to life	4.46±1.05
Positive Attitudes	4.25±1.12
Research Anxiety	3.69±1.40
Overall Attitudes Towards Research	4.19±1.21

Table 4: Anxiety level of Students towards Research

Anxiety Towards Research (item wise)	Mean	SD
Research makes me anxious	3.73	1.08
I feel insecure concerning the analysis of research data	3.20	1.18
Research scares me	3.43	1.25
Research is stressful	4.30	1.01
Research makes me nervous	3.68	1.18
Research is complicated	3.63	1.07
Research is difficult	3.78	1.23
Research is a complex subject	3.78	1.19
Overall Anxiety Towards Research	3.69	1.40

It can be observed from the table (Table 3) that the factor on which students have a moderate positive attitude is the difficulty of research since they had a score of 4.00±1.20 on this factor. However, the students were not as affected by the usefulness of research, because they have a high rating on this factor indicating that the students recognized the usefulness of this course in their professions (4.60±1.27). The students also responded to the relevance of research to life (4.46±1.05) with a higher score, showing their appreciation as to the goodness that research subject will bring to their life. Looking at the positive attitudes and anxiety level of students, it can be viewed from table 2, it is 4.25±1.12 and 3.69±1.40 respectively.

DISCUSSION

Research results showed that most of the participants (80%) reported that research is useful for the career. Positive attitude towards research was demonstrated by 69.33% physiotherapy students with mean and standard deviation score of 4.25±1.12 and 63.33% reported that research plays an important role in professional and personal life. However, a large proportion of students (74%) reported for research difficulty. In the present study overall 72.67% of students (n=109) have anxiety towards research with mean and standard deviation score of 3.60±1.40.

Similar findings were reported by Alghamdi et al¹⁵ who conducted a study among final year undergraduates in medicine at King Saud University, Riyadh, KSA, in which 67.4% felt that conducting research should be mandatory for all medical students in their curriculum and also by Samia Saud A et al¹⁴ who conducted research on undergraduate nursing students at the College of Nursing A, King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences, and found that that students are benefitted from studying and conducting research (n = 123, 72%), nearly 70% (n = 120) expressed their desire to study research process in detail (n = 108, 60.6%) and 73% of the students felt that research oriented thinking is suitable for professional life but not for personal life. Consistent findings were reported by Al Nashmy et al¹⁶ and Amin et al¹⁷ that Bachelor of Science graduates in medical and allied health subjects in the KSA, demonstrated a moderately positive attitude towards research with mean and standard deviation score of 4.4 ± 1.1 out of 6. Siamian et al¹⁸ and Abida Arif et al¹⁹ reported that participants had a positive attitude towards research, mainly for the activity to review the literature to keep the knowledge update and use research results to improve practice.

As the Positive attitude of physiotherapy students towards research is critical for the fruitful utilisation and implementation of the study findings in clinical practice. It is essential that the information gathered in the systematic investigation is generalizable to improve clinical decision-making and standards of patient care²⁰⁻²⁶ The better the favourable outlook of the students to the subject, the greater the practicability of them to function scholastically while acknowledging the importance and relevance of research in the physiotherapy profession.²⁶⁻²⁸ Health research activities are a cardinal component of healthcare studies, and it is extremely important to instil problem-solving skills, creative thinking and logical reasoning among healthcare students. It is also crucial to develop a conducive attitude among future healthcare practitioners towards evidence-based investigation from the inception of their primary care responsibilities.^{20,21} By identifying the learners' awareness towards research, their tutors may intensify their discussion about the value of physiotherapy research and its capacity to influence the optimal nursing services

provided to patients in various healthcare environments. Furthermore, instructors may also reform students' outlook by advising them to take part in scientific gatherings, discussions, and conferences to facilitate their interest in research and nurture a profound value of the course. This will, in turn, minimise students' unknown fear of the research subject. In truth, the information gathered from this study may form a base to devise multiple teaching and learning activities to supplement or augment and enhance physiotherapy students' point of view, perseverance and determination in pursuing scholarly physiotherapy research activities to discover.

In the present study overall, 72.67% of students (n=109) have anxiety towards research. The reason for this could be that the research subject is taught by the physiotherapy personnel who may not be an expert in the field of biostatistics.¹⁵ Similar results was found by Samia Saud A Furaikh et al¹⁴ who conducted study on undergraduate nursing students and found that highest proportion of students (71%) perceived research as a difficult, complicated, stressful subject. Meraj et al²³ who conducted a study among Pakistani medical undergraduates in order to assess their perceptions and attitudes towards research reported that majority of the students (70%) perceived research as stressful and (62.2%) complex while 41.9% felt that research is not mandatory in healthcare field curriculum, suggesting the need for necessitating teaching programmes based on individual needs. Onwuegbuzie²⁹ and Papanastasiou et al³⁰ asserted that students at the undergraduate level who find biostatistical concepts strenuous and demanding, a manifest considerable amount of statistical fear and nervousness. This research anxiety can affect students' performance in classes and cause feelings of inadequacy and low self-efficacy for research related activities.

If physiotherapy is conditioned by research generated findings, then physiotherapists should acknowledge and effectively use the evidence to provide quality care to patients. To do that, they must be knowledgeable in biostatistics.^{24, 31} Statistics anxiety has been linked to students' performance in statistics and research courses.^{32,33} Research reveals that students tend to view research and biostatistics course with negative feelings, irrespective of their discipline of study, despite its significance.

Similarly, in a series of studies performed by Wilson and his colleagues,³⁴ it has been found that the main factors that contributed to the increase of students' anxiety in a research methods course were those of the amount of work required, the amount of material covered, test taking, difficulty of the material covered in class as well as preparing individual research projects.

Since these students were new to the subject, they find themselves introduced to completely new concepts, and being confronted with new and challenging material is likely to trigger stress, uncertainty and anxiety.³⁰ Indeed, research on quantitative research methodology shows that college students have difficulties and experience anxiety.³⁵ Inculcating the passion for research among the students is vital to generate productive researchers, over a period.⁻³⁶ The selection of teaching methods and the development of content to promote student engagement can make a difference in students' attitudes towards undergraduate research and optimise learning outcomes.^{23,24,25,26,28,32,33} Griffith et al³⁷ recommend that the transformative power of a teacher should positively reinforce the students to learn statistics by emphasising its importance in their lifelong educational and career aspirations.

Limitations and future scope

The generalisation of the findings to other physiotherapy students is limited due to the homogeneous nature of the sample. The research sample was selected from only one physiotherapy college. Although this college had students who came from different cultural, socioeconomic and demographic backgrounds, the results would be more informative if more than one college had been included. Another limitation is related to data collection which was conducted one time only. Even gender determination in results was not determined. A longitudinal study would be more worthwhile to observe the process of attitude change of students over time. The study does not indicate the baseline attitudes scores. It will be more valuable to conduct a future study on the pre-test and post-test research design to determine the attitudes of the students towards the research when they commence research subject and when they complete it. Finally, future research will be carried out to find out the comprehensive details of the barriers faced by students to participate in research activities to enhance

the growth of the physical therapy profession.

CONCLUSION

Results of the present study concluded that physiotherapy students have a positive attitude towards research but many of them perceived their research course is as stressful. Most of them reported having negative feelings and anxiety towards the research process. Incorporating research course into the curriculum at the pre-university level and having a statistical expert from the research centre teach learning strategies, would yield more positive experiences for students.

It is imperative that the prospective physiotherapists develop interest and the right attitude as well as get involved in clinical physiotherapy research, to develop critical thinking skills in order to provide optimal quality care to the patients. The selection of teaching methods and the development of content to promote student engagement can make a difference in students' attitude towards undergraduate research and optimise learning outcomes. To improve students' attitude towards research and to reduce the anxiety towards research, physiotherapy faculty should incorporate research-focused content throughout the educational process. Involving students in a funded research study, improving training in research methodology, training on how to present a paper at scientific gatherings, writing up and submitting a paper for publication may be provided with scheduled classroom opportunities. Physiotherapy graduates are prospective members of the profession and for this noble profession to continue to advance, the intensive scientific inquiry must form the base for research-led clinical practice. Providing students with adequate time and student-centred teaching and learning strategies would encourage them to get involved in research activities.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest

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