

# Factors Influencing Physical Therapy Students Decision To work With Elderly People

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**Abstract**— Older people are usually defined according to variety of characteristics: chronological aging, modification in social role and useful in activities. In low- resourced circumstances with shorter life span, older people are defined as over age of 50. **Objective:** The objective of this study is to find factors that influence physical therapy students' decision to work with elderly people. **Methodology** -A cross-sectional study was conducted to find biographical and experiential factor. Data was collected from 100 students of first year, second and third year of DPT program who were engaged in clinical rotation. A questionnaire was distributed along with consent form to collect data. **Results-** Study results shows that biographical data proved highly influencing in making decision regarding working with elderly people. **Conclusions-** It is concluded that biographical factor highly influence on students decision to work with elderly people. Students' intention to work with elderly people is high but they lack proper training regarding older people and their problems.

**Index Terms**— Factors, Biographical Factors, Experiential factors, Physical Therapy Students, Elderly people, Physical Therapy

## INTRODUCTION

Older people are usually defined according to variety of characteristics including; chronological aging, modification in social role and in useful activities. In developed countries old age is normally defined as period from leaving of salaried services and getting of an annuity at the age of 60 to 65 years of age [1]. For old age different terms are used in different areas; old people (worldwide), seniors (American), senior citizen (British and American) and older adults (social sciences) [2].

Elderly people are divided into groups; young-old, middle-old and older old [3]. In present time there has been sharp increase in number of older population worldwide [4]. In earlier twentieth century only one percent population was over 65 years of age. It is estimated that it will increase up by 20% by the year 2050. This rise in population is due to better availability of health care facilities in both developing and developed countries [5].

Pakistan is considered as sixth most crowded country in the world, with an expected population of 166 million in the year 2006. Pakistan's current population is 191.71 million that comprises 12 million elderly populations over aged 60 or above. The elderly population uses a greater part of health care facilities available.

As said by US department of health and human services (1990) person over age 65 have as many disabilities and functional limitations as people under age of 65 years. This re-

habilitation of older people [6].

Older people are considered as an unimportant segment of population that's why they are not provided with better health care facilities. In Pakistan this condition is worst where older people are considered as second citizen. The government of Pakistan had planned a national health policy for health betterment of older people, that policy incorporated education of primary care doctors in geriatrics, provision of home health care services, dentistry services, physical therapy and social services for older people but accomplishment of this plan has not done yet [7]. Being elderly is state of biological, sociological and chronological aging; these three are interconnected. All healthcare providers including physical therapist are concerned with biological aging. According to health profession council (HPC), standards of proficiency for physical therapist, a physical therapist must understand the development of aging process (physiologically, functionally and behaviorally) and their effects on functional ability [8].

Research shows that health care providers are less interested towards older people, which results poor and improper treatment and rehabilitation of older people. There is deficiency of training of health care providers regarding special health care issues faced by older people. In old age a person faces many challenges like cognitive challenges, hearing challenges and visual challenges [9], these challenges are not for that particular age group but it gives a strong challenge to health care providers.

Physical therapist plays a vital role in managing certain disorders in older people, like arthritis, cardiac problems, and respiratory issues, diabetes associated problems, nervous system related disorders, Alzheimer's disease, repetitive strain injuries, osteoporosis, incontinence, cancer, prevent fall and fracture and hospital stay[10]. Most of the older people are admitted in hospitals, many of the individual could be benefited from rehabilitative services either in their inpatient stay or after being discharged. And if they are referred to rehabilitative services early in their course of treatment, some of effects of disuse may be prevented and their functional abilities

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markable increase in aging population will challenge the abilities and educational background of health care providers, specifically physical therapist who are strictly involved in re-

could be maintained [11].

Physical therapist uses different technique to help older people and for their rehabilitation purpose like gait training, balance and coordination exercise, transfer training with work floor, in bed training and bed mobility activities, individualized exercise program like strengthening, mobilizing, balancing, functional and endurance activities, circuit training and group exercise programs[12]. There are so many factors which influence physical therapist to make their career in geriatrics, these factors influence either negatively or positively. These factors are biographical and experiential, when a person has experience of living with elderly people, he easily can understand their needs and problems.

68% students said that they had clinical affiliation working with older people while 32% students said no, 72% said they had job entailed providing services to older people and 28% students said they have not done such a job.

TABLE-1: STATISTICS OF GENDER

Gender	Percent
Male	19
Female	81

## METHOD

100 DPT students of third year, fourth year and final year were included in the study. Both male and female were included in the study. Practicing physical therapist and post graduate physical therapy students were excluded from the study. Data was collected from different Institutes of Sindh; Institute of physiotherapy and Rehabilitation Sciences LUMHS Jamshoro, ISRA Institute of Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation Sciences Karachi, ISRA University Hyderabad and Pupils University of Medical and Health Sciences Nawabshah. A validated questionnaire was distributed along with consent form to collect data. Questionnaire contained biographical factor and experiential factor. Non probability sampling technique was used. Statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 20 was used for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics frequency and percentages were used.

TABLE-2: BIOGRAPHICAL FACTOR

S.no	Questions	Percent	
		Yes	No
1.	Intention to work with elderly people	84	16
2.	Interacted socially at least once a month for period of six month or longer with an elderly family member or friend whose activity was not constrained by health problems	67	33
3.	Close friendship with elderly person	70	30
4.	Lived with relatives for a period of at least six months.	64	36

## RESULT

100 questionnaires were distributed among different physical therapy institute to collect data. 100 physical therapist students give their response. There were 19 male and 81 female students. According to results biographical factor proved highly positive to influence physical therapy students towards older people. 84% students had intention to work with elderly people, 67% students said that they have interacted with older people, 70% students said they have close friendship with older person and 64% students said they have lived with their older relatives. Students' response towards biographical factor was positively high that proves that biographical factors put a great impact on students' decision to work with elderly people.

Results revealed that experiential factor also puts a positive impact on students' decision. In response of question having an instructor enthusiastic about working with older people 67% students said yes while 16% was no. 45% students said that they have taken geriatrics course while 55% students said they have not taken such course. And when they were asked about taking gerontology course 48% said yes and 52% Stu-

TABLE-3: EXPERIENTIAL FACTOR

S.no	Questions	Yes	No
1.	Have you ever had an instructor who was enthusiastic about working with elderly people?	67	33
2.	Course taken that primarily dealt with geriatrics (health care of elderly)	45	55
3.	Course taken that dealt primarily with gerontology (process of aging)	48	52
4.	Course taken that incorporated topics of geriatrics	59	41
5.	Course taken that incorporated the topics of gerontology	61	39
6.	Clinical affiliation that involved working with older patients at least 75% of time.	68	32
7.	Job that entailed providing a service for elderly people at least 75% of time.	72	28

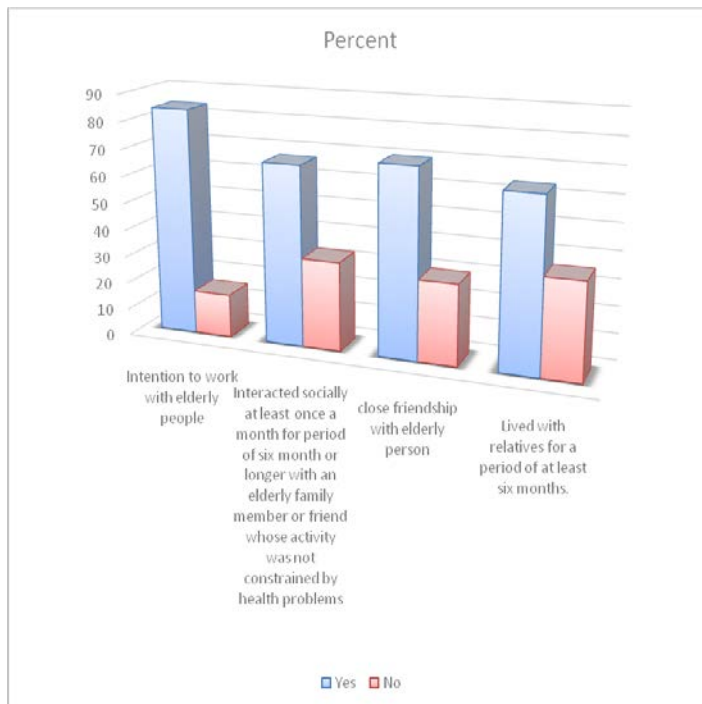


Figure 1: Biographical Factors

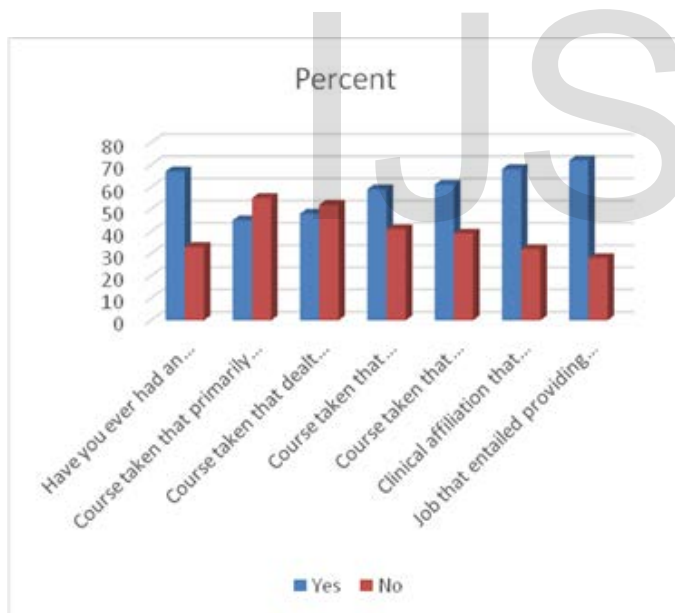


Figure 2: Experiential Factors

## DISCUSSION

This study focuses on an important issue regarding older people. In this study hundred third, fourth and fifth year students enrolled in doctor of physical therapy program were included because they started their clinical rotation from third year and have little bit experience to deal with patients. Both male and female genders were included in study. Ratio of female (81%) was high than male ratio (19%). Research shows that 84% students have intention to work with elderly people.

There are so many factors which greatly influence on

students decision to work with elderly people. For that reason our older population is being neglected by health care providers. This study revealed that biographical and experiential factors are influencing in students' decision to work with elderly people.

Many researchers have done work on these factors. The study results shows that biographical factors greatly influence on students' decision to work with elderly people, 67% students interacted socially with older people, 70% person has close friendship with older people and 64% said they have lived with older people. These results were supported by study conducted by Coren et al. in 1987 regarding factors related to students' decision to work with elderly people. They find in their study that personal experience of living with elderly people highly influence on their decision to work with elderly people [13].

Experience is another factor that greatly impact on students' decision to work with elderly. In this study 45% students stated that they had taken geriatric course while 45% they did not. And 48% students stated that they had taken gerontology course and 52% stated that they had not taken such type of course. On other hand M.Doherty et al. study results revealed that 83% of healthcare assistant had taken geriatrics course that aid in their experience and knowledge about older people [14]. Which is high ratio than this study and it clearly proves that taking geriatrics course is very important to increase knowledge and interest towards older people.

According to this study 67% students said that they had instructor enthusiastic about working with elderly people, 68% said they had clinical affiliation and 72% said they job providing services to older people. These results are supported by study conducted by James et al. in 2002, determining medical students' interest toward geriatrics. Their study results showed that prior experience with older adults and having positive attitude towards older develops interest in geriatrics [15].

Meg Morris and Victor Minichiello conducted a study in 1992 regarding factor which influence physical therapy students' decision to work with elderly people. They find factor which influence physical therapy students decision to work with elderly people were lack of experience, employment conditions and clinical perception [16].

## CONCLUSION

Physical therapy plays a major role in rehabilitation of older people. They are a part of health care team that provides health care services to older people. Geriatric physical therapists are highly demanded in growing population of elderly. It has been concluded from the study that physical therapy students of Sindh are highly intended to work with older people. But they lack geriatric knowledge and never had a course related to geriatrics in spite of that they are highly interested to work with elderly people, this may be due to their closeness to older people and they had lived with older ones. They had enough experience to work with older people and instructor enthusiastic about working in geriatrics field. In this study biographical factor was positively high and proved intensely

influencing physical therapy students' decision to work with elderly people.

## RECOMMENDATION

Geriatric population is increasing at alarming rate all over the world. In Pakistan living and health care conditions of older population are not favorable. So it is necessary to conduct further researches to investigate other factors that impede physical therapy professional and students to provide proper physical therapy facilities to older patients and making geriatrics as their specialty area. So it is highly recommended that all institutes should emphasize geriatrics in their curriculum. They should arrange medical education programs, workshops and seminars to provide awareness about older age and problems related to older age. Students should be given geriatric related task and provided with best geriatric instructor that can help students to deal with geriatric problem and make them interested towards older people.

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