

Physiotherapy student's attitude towards their education and profession

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Various factors tend to affect the attitude of students towards their course and future. This study investigated the attitude and perception of physiotherapy students towards their education and profession. The study also explored the limitations in the development of the discipline in India and the suggestions to overcome it.

Study design: Cross sectional

Methodology: 266 intern and final year students of 5 different physiotherapy colleges of Mangalore were selected by random sampling and their attitude towards their education and profession was assessed using Physiotherapy Student's Attitude Questionnaire (PSAQ). The self-report questionnaire consisted of 34 items, of which 27 were close ended questions and 7 were open ended questions.

Results: All the 4 domains of the questionnaire have poor association according to the chi square test. There was no significant difference in all the four domains between the interns and final years. Gender wise differences were also not significant according to unpaired t test. Many reasons were cited by the participants for stagnation of professional growth and suggestions to overcome were given for the same.

Conclusion: It can be concluded that the students and interns are indecisive with the course and their profession. However there are many untouched long standing problem areas which need to be modified.

Key Words: Students, Attitude, Career, Satisfaction, Physiotherapy profession.

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INTRODUCTION

Physiotherapists are concerned with using their knowledge and clinical skills to eliminate functional limitations and disability, thus enabling the individuals to achieve the most optimal quality of life possible. A proper education, hard work, optimal exposure to cases during the learning years and proper guidance are a few stepping stones to the success of the therapist as well as to the profession¹.

In India, there are numerous universities which impart the knowledge of Physiotherapy. The profession is governed by Indian Association of Physiotherapists. Physiotherapy is a four to four and a half years course, with six months of internship². On completion of the course the student is expected to be familiar with a thorough idea of the condition, proper evaluation techniques, reasoning for the management, goal setting and treatment of the patient.

Strohschein J et al stated that new generations of Physiotherapists emerging from professional programs require an educational foundation that is reinforced with attitudes and skills that will enable them to build their profession as well as their own professional practice. These attitudes and skills are believed to include the desire to engage in lifelong learning and professional growth and an ability to identify and critically evaluate their own practice and the underlying theories and perceptions that exist about the practice of physical therapy. He also concluded that clinical education, in which students engage in learning in the context of clinical practice, is the best area in which such skills and attitudes can be taught and refined³.

There is growing demand of Physiotherapists in the country as well as world wide⁴. The job options available to a fresher after completion of graduation are many⁵. Also, there is a growing trend towards post graduate and doctoral study. As the discipline is getting recognition, so is the number of students joining for Physiotherapy had been growing every year, However, recently observed trend was a decline in the admissions in and around Mangalore. This decline can be

attributed to various external reasons like introduction of new colleges in other states⁶, sharp hike in fees in many colleges, option to join newer courses etc. but there could be certain internal factors that could be operational in this decline.

With the number of students/professionals decreasing, there is a prerequisite to weigh the existing needs, look for scope of improvement as well as to find out what the future professionals expect when they pass out. An attempt is being made to study the attitude of students towards the course and towards their future.

Attitude is defined as "a mental state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related". Attitude can be the intensity of positive or negative effect for or against a psychological object and it can be used to predict behavior. Attitude can be represented by affective, behavioral and cognitive components^{7, 8}.

There has seldom been a report of students' attitudes and uncertainty of their future. Moreover there is scarcity of mention of Physiotherapy students specifically. So this study attempts to find out attitude and perception of a Physiotherapy student towards the Physiotherapy education and profession. The study will help to answer the questions like:-

1. Are the students happy with the choice of their profession?
2. Do the students anticipate a good future?
3. Do they confidently involve in patient care?
4. Are the students satisfied with their learning?
5. Do the students come up with suggestions to develop the profession?
6. What suggestions do the students provide?

Attitude of Physiotherapist can make dramatic changes in the rehabilitation of the patient. Where a positive attitude of a Physiotherapist can foster patient's confidence and thus making the rehabilitation faster and easier, a negative attitude can have adverse effects on desired outcomes and can inhibit reintegration into society⁹. In this study a positive attitude of

students would show that we can expect more growth in the profession in coming time and if students have negative attitude then we may have to find out the reasons for the same. Suggestions provided by the students may be utilized to improve as well as set better standards in the field of physiotherapy.

METHODOLOGY

Research articles pertaining to the attitude and perception of students towards profession and patients¹⁰⁻¹⁴ and opinions of the interns and final year students of Physiotherapy were sought before designing the questionnaire. Students and interns were asked to give opinion regarding the course curriculum, the profession, most commonly encountered problems in the field etc. A set of 108 questions were noted down based on the research articles and feed back given by the students and interns. 14 staffs of different Physiotherapy colleges who had more than 5 years of teaching experience in field of Physiotherapy were requested to provide feed back regarding the significance of the questions. The questions were further modified to a better format according to their significance. A pilot study was conducted in one of the 11 colleges in Mangalore. 5 final year students and 5 interns were given the questionnaire which they consented to complete and return back. These students were not included in the further survey. The questionnaire was refined and streamlined to a total of 34 questions following the pilot study and it was named as Physiotherapy Student's Attitude Questionnaire (PSAQ) (Appendix).

Random sampling was used in this Cross sectional study. Out of the 14 colleges in Mangalore 5 were randomly chosen using the lottery method. In the colleges a total of 280 students and interns were selected randomly by using random number table. 280 forms were distributed, out of which 266 duly filled forms were obtained (Table-1). Response rate is 95%. Out of 266 participants, 71 were interns (26.7 %) and 195 were final year students (73.3%). Fourteen forms were excluded from the study, as 3 of them

were incompletely filled and 11 responses were not obtained.

Table 1: Distribution of the participants

Gender Distribution	Interns	Final years	Total (266)
Females	50	110	160
Males	21	85	106

Participants were supposed to meet the following inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria

1. Undergraduate students who are attending their final year classes.
2. Interns who have successfully completed their study tenure.

Exclusion criteria:

1. Students who are re-appearing the final year exams.
2. Students who have cleared their final year after more than one attempt
3. Physiotherapist assistant or trainees working for salary.

Out of the 34 questions, 27 questions were close ended questions and 7 were open ended questions. The 27 close ended questions were graded according to the five point Likert scale- Absolutely agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree and Absolutely disagree. These 27 questions were subdivided into four broad domains (Table 2). 7 open-ended opinion seeking questions were graded according to the frequency of the options entered. The purpose of the study was not revealed to the participants. It took around 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The responses were graded with the help of scoring key (Appendix). Participants were advised to go through the questionnaire thoroughly and answer the questions appropriately without being influenced by others.

Table 2: 4 Domains and their question numbers in the questionnaire

DOMAINS	QUESTION NUMBERS
.. Are the students happy with their profession	1,3,4,5,9,10,26.
. Do they anticipate a good future in this profession	2,6,7,8,25,27.
. Do they actively participate in patient care	11,12,13,14,15,16,17.
l. Are they happy with the quality of teaching they receive	18,19,20,21,22,23,24,25.

DATA ANALYSIS

all tests.

RESULT

The statistical package SPSS (windows 12.01) was used in the analysis of the data. Chi square test was used to investigate the strength of association for categorical variables of different domains. Differences between the groups were analyzed by using unpaired t tests (male interns, female interns, male final years and female final years). The open ended data from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive analysis. A Significance level of 0.05 was used in

All the 4 domains of the questionnaire have poor association according to the chi square test (Table-3). There was no significant difference in all the four domains between the interns and final years. Gender wise differences were also not significant (Table- 4).

Table 3: Mean, standard deviation and p value of different domains of the uestionnaire

Domains	Groups	Number	Mean ± Standard deviation	p value
A	Interns	71	17.04 ± 3.84	0.23
	Final years	195	17.71 ± 4.13	
B	Interns	71	14.07 ± 2.65	0.48
	Final years	195	14.31 ± 2.45	
C	Interns	71	18.22 ± 2.43	0.85
	Final years	195	18.15 ± 2.69	
D	Interns	71	18.18 ± 4.01	0.25
	Final years	195	18.82 ± 4.07	

Table 4: Mean scores for the interns and final years

Group	Domains	Gender	N	Mean ± SD	p value
Interns	A	M	21	16.47 ± 3.95	0.42
		F	50	17.28 ± 3.81	
	B	M	21	13.85 ± 2.51	0.66
		F	50	14.16 ± 2.73	
	C	M	21	17.38 ± 3.20	0.12
		F	50	18.58 ± 1.97	
	D	M	21	18.00 ± 4.54	0.80
		F	50	18.26 ± 3.82	
Final years	A	M	85	17.74 ± 4.14	0.94
		F	110	17.70 ± 4.14	
	B	M	85	14.02 ± 2.79	0.14
		F	110	14.53 ± 2.13	
	C	M	85	17.95 ± 2.85	0.35
		F	110	18.31 ± 2.57	
	D	M	85	18.47 ± 4.53	0.29
		F	110	19.09 ± 3.67	

Fig. 1: Joined Physiotherapy under Influence of

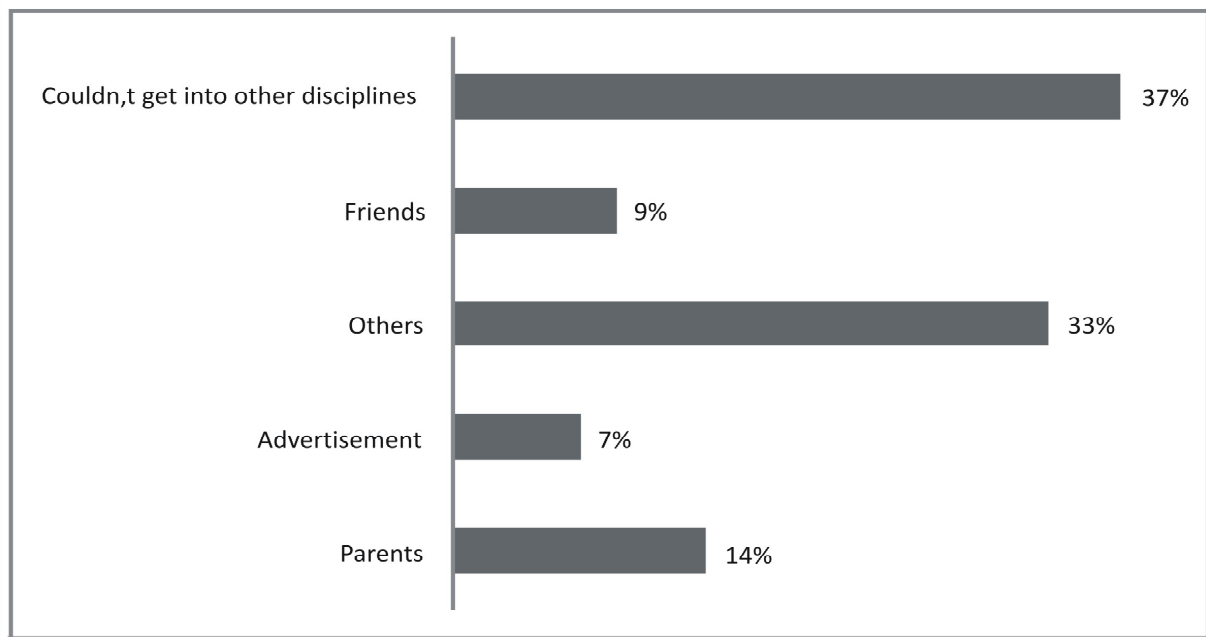


Fig. 2: Reasons for Increasing Dropouts from the Profession

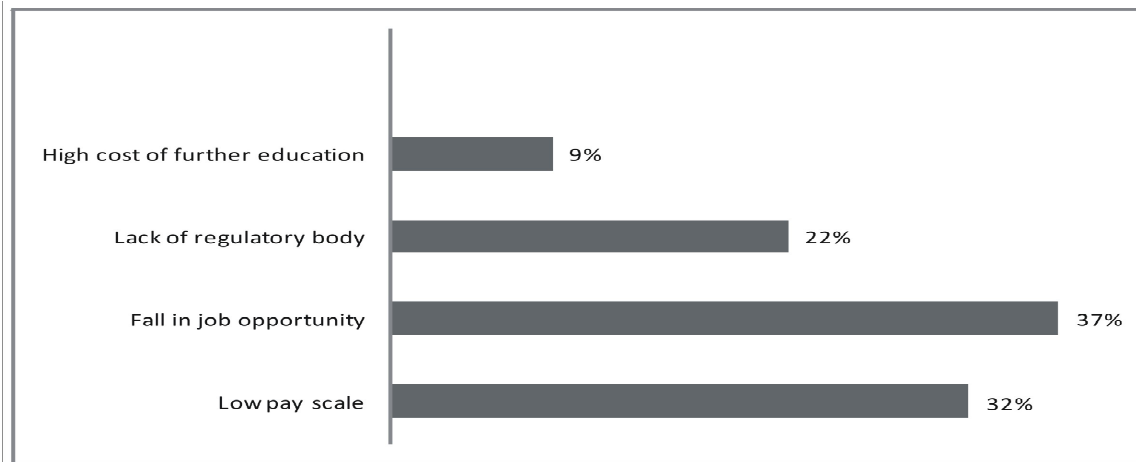


Figure 3: Most Preferred Reference

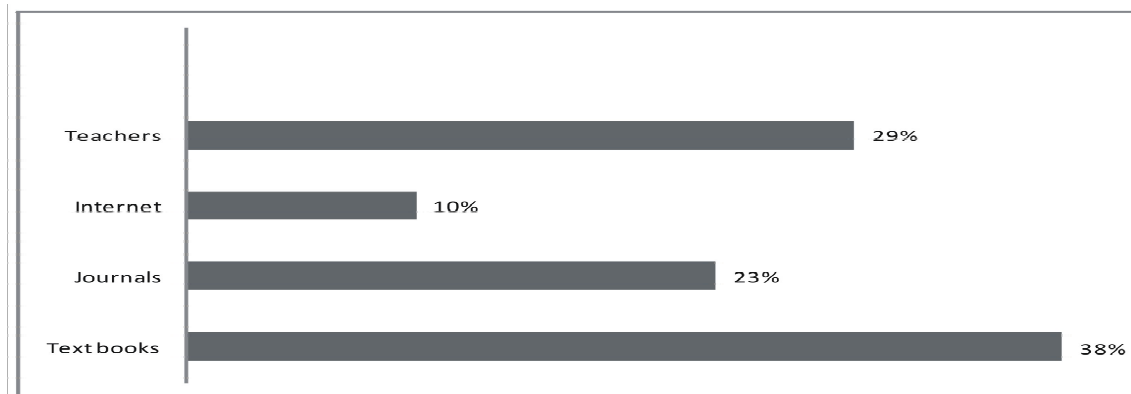


Figure 4: Subjects Which Can Be Obliterated from the Syllabi

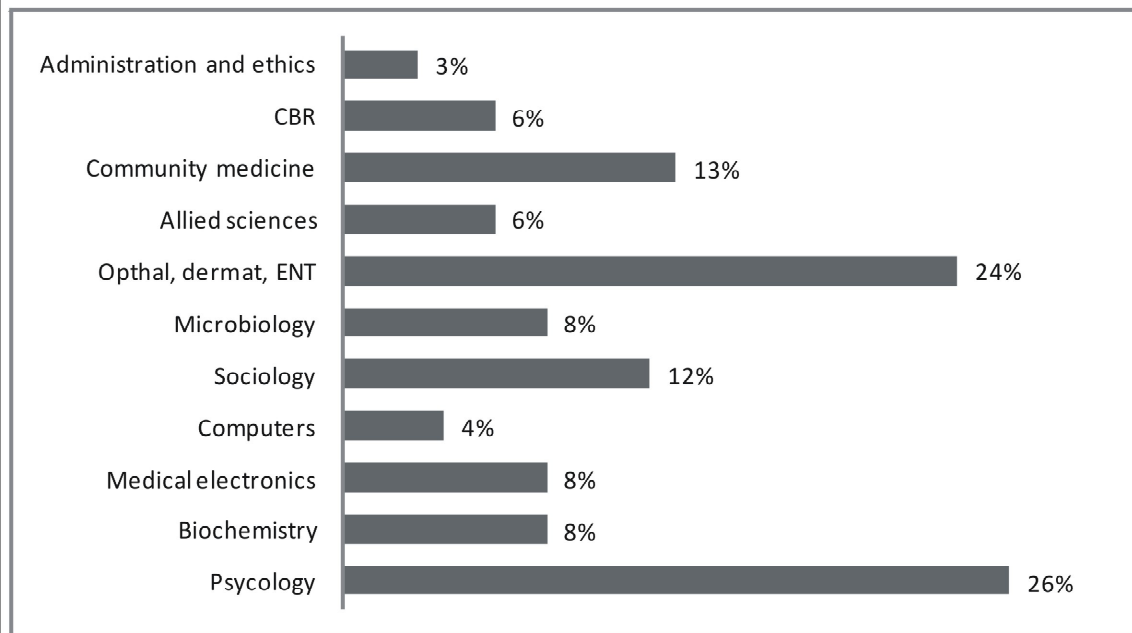


Fig. 5: Easiest or More Preferred Job Placement

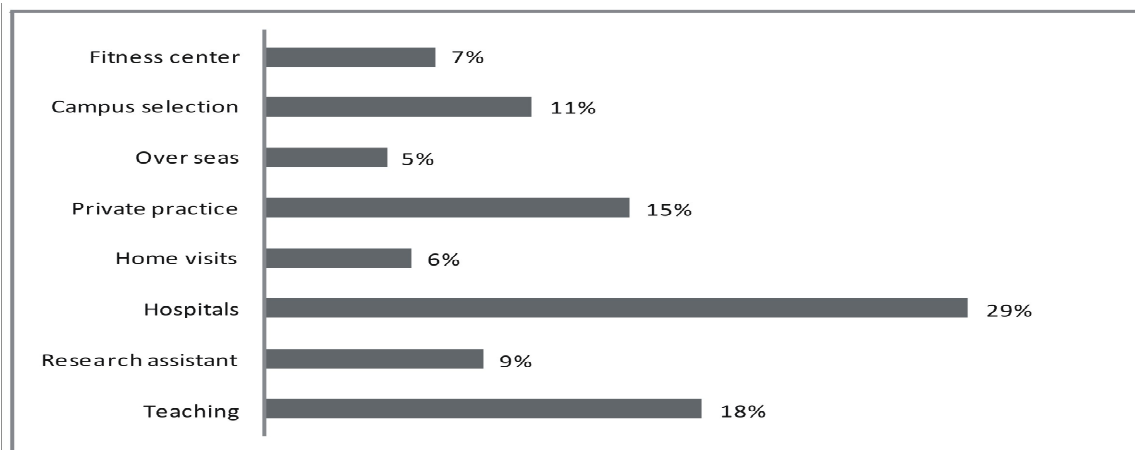


Fig. 6: Most Important Problem Areas in the Field of Physiotherapy

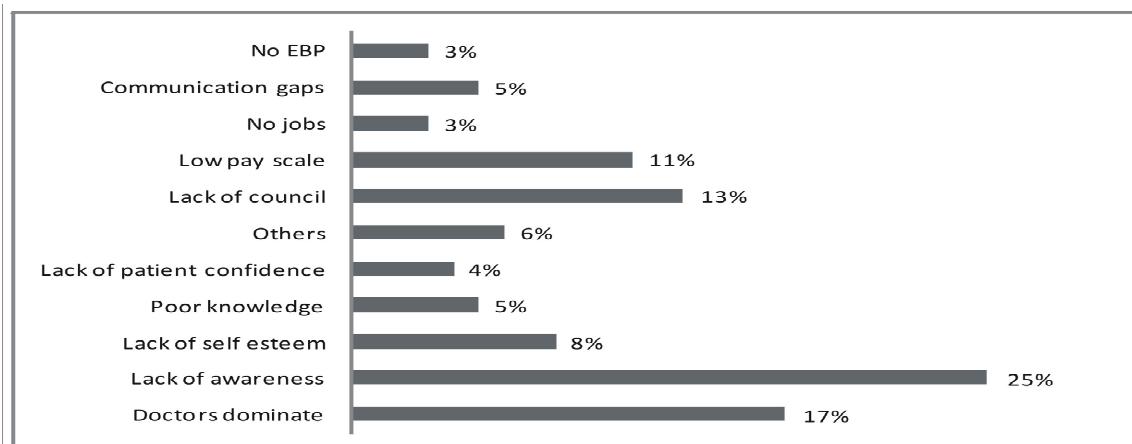
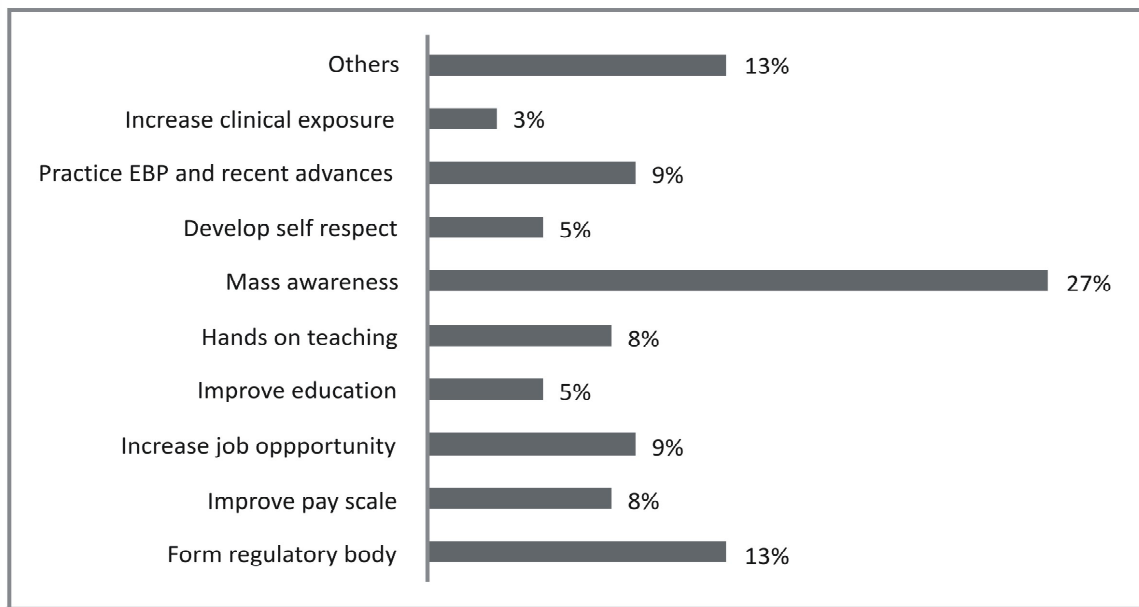


Fig. 7: Suggestions to improve the profession



Group	Domains	Gender	N	Mean ± SD	p value
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DISCUSSION

The questionnaire was aimed at getting an insight into the students' attitude towards their education and profession. It was found that the students were pleased with their education and profession though the values could not reach a significant level. Table 4 compares the mean values of attitude scores in all four domains among interns and final years and also between the genders. It was evident that there was no significant difference between the groups.

The first domain A assessed the student's happiness with their choice of profession. There was an above average score available for the happiness. The male and female students as well as interns showed no significant difference in the scores. The plausible reasons for an above average response could be figured out with help of figure 1 and 6. Figure 1 explains that many students joined Physiotherapy as they couldn't get into other disciplines (37%), due to parents' wish (14%), friends influence (9%), or due to some other unspecified reasons(33%), only (7%) claimed to have joined after reading the advertisement. This

clearly shows that for most of the students, Physiotherapy was not the first choice of profession. On referring to figure 6 it can be concluded that, lack of public awareness about the field leads to hurdles in approaching patients as well as medicos (25%), doctors were more dominant on the work scene leaving very less decision making power to Physiotherapists (17%), and absence of a governing body (13%) adds on to dissatisfaction towards the profession. Thus students felt that in the present scenario where most of the Physiotherapy references come from the medical practitioner the prospects of independent Physiotherapy practice is reduced .The lack of awareness among the public is a leading factor causing dissatisfaction towards the profession.

Domain B assessed students' anticipation towards good future. The students' attitudes were average. There was no significant difference between interns and final years. Gender wise comparison was also not significantly different. The likely reasons for average results could be that the job arena is getting saturated as days pass by. The saturation of physiotherapy field in turn leads to decreased job prospects (37%), thus compelling the students to pursue their post-graduation. The higher cost for pursuing post graduation and the

low remuneration (32%) adds on to the grievance. A regulatory body, if persisted, would have framed the basic standards for education as well as the pay scale. Since the regulatory body is not formed yet, the scenario remains obscure. Newer job opportunities or improving the patient-therapist ratio will solve the job saturation to a greater extent (figure 2). The students also felt that hospitals provide with maximum jobs (29%), followed by overseas placement (18%), private practice or clinics (15%), teaching colleges (9%). The students also pointed out to the possibility of introducing campus selection (11%) (Figure 5).

Domain C assessed whether students confidently involve in patient care? Response for this domain was average. There was no significant difference between interns and final years and gender wise analysis showed no significant difference. Figure 6 and 7 explains the reasons for the same. The students claim that doctors are dominant in the field (17%). They also complained of poor case exposure (13%) and less hands on teaching (8%). This leaves them with poor knowledge (5%). Internal factors like poor self esteem (8%) and Communication gap (5%) acts as major factors affecting Physiotherapists' confidence in patient care. The above said results emphasize the fact that as clinical exposure increases; the student confidently participates in patient care. Hands on techniques have to be given more importance in Indian curriculum. Local language has to be taught to bridge the communication gap between patient and therapist.

Domain D assessed student's satisfaction with their learning? The students' satisfaction regarding their learning was just above average. There were no significant differences between interns and final years and gender wise analysis also showed no significant difference. Figure 6 and 7 helped to explain these results. 9% respondents felt that the present curriculum is not well modified or up to date with the recent advances. They also felt that Evidence based practice is neither practiced nor taught. Clinical teaching time is less compared with theoretical teaching (3%). Hands on techniques have to be emphasized. Newer treatment techniques need to be developed.

Skilled and qualified lecturers facilitate efficient learning. Lack of adequate equipments for practice and library facilities interfere with efficient learning. 13% respondents pointed out that no strict quality policy was ensured while giving authorization/permission for new colleges.

On being asked their preferred way of learning new things and reference, 38% of the students preferred text book as reference. 23% students opted for searching journals, 29% liked to clear their doubts with teachers. 10% opted for internet as the preferred source of reference (Figure 3). They also pointed out to vast curriculum and felt that certain subjects can be dropped out of curriculum. The subjects listed were psychology (26%), community medicine (13%), sociology (12%), microbiology, biochemistry, electronics, ophthalmology, dermatology and ENT (8% each) (figure 4).

The students were finally asked for their suggestions to improve the profession/discipline. Five most important points provided by them were as follows:

1. Creating awareness among people (27%),
2. Form a regulatory body (13%),
3. Increase job opportunity and practice evidence based practice (9% each),
4. Improve pay scale and increase hands on teaching (8% each),
5. Improve education and develop self respect amongst the physiotherapists (5% each).

And 13% quoted miscellaneous opinions (Figure 7).

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the students and interns are indecisive with the course and their profession. However there are many untouched long standing problem areas which need to be modified. The students also provided suggestions to improve the field. This proves that the students and the interns are concerned with development of the profession.

Appendix
Physiotherapy Student's Attitude Questionnaire (PSAQ)

Questions	Absolutely agree	Agree	Don't know	Don't agree	Absolutely disagree
Physiotherapy is my choice of profession?	5	4	3	2	1
I was aware of the course before joining?	5	4	3	2	1
I joined physiotherapy because I wanted to be a physiotherapist.	5	4	3	2	1
I feel that my potentials have been rightly utilized in this course.	5	4	3	2	1
I receive good respect and regards from people who know that I have chosen this field.	5	4	3	2	1
You were aware of the job prospects before joining the course?	5	4	3	2	1
Some times I feel like changing my profession.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel that other professionals are well aware of the scope and work nature of the physiotherapists.	5	4	3	2	1
I am satisfied with the education and to work as a physiotherapist.	5	4	3	2	1
I would recommend many others to join this course.	5	4	3	2	1
Kind patients cooperate with me during exercises.	5	4	3	2	1
I like to treat already assessed case with treatment indication.	1	2	3	4	5
I like to assess my case and plan accordingly.	5	4	3	2	1
I like only to treat cases and not to assess them.	1	2	3	4	5
I don't think assessing case is as important as treating.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel documentation of assessment and treatment is very necessary.	5	4	3	2	1
I would find newer treatment strategies if the present treatment fails.	5	4	3	2	1
I feel the profession is developing fast whatever we are learning are very old concepts.	1	2	3	4	5
Continued medical education and workshops helps in learning.	5	4	3	2	1
I feel more of class room teaching helps to gain knowledge.	5	4	3	2	1
Self learning enhances learning	1	2	3	4	5
I think this four year course is apt for me to apply whatever I have learnt.	5	4	3	2	1

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15. you joined Physiotherapy under influence of a)Parents b)Friends studying physiotherapy c)Peer d)News paper advertisement e)Because I could not get into medicine or dental f)Others
16. Answer this question only if you have answered agree or absolutely agree to question number 7, what according to you is the reason for the above: Low pay scale b) Fall in job opportunity in India c) Lack of regulatory body d) High cost of further education d) State if reasons are not in above. You can also choose more than one of the above.
17. Answer this if you have answered question number 17 as agree or absolutely agree, I prefer referring a)Textbook b)Journals c)Internet d)My teachers for the same. If you any other options please specify them.
18. Please mention the subjects from your syllabus/ curriculum which you feel is unnecessary.
19. What according to you will be an easier job placement after completion of course?
 - a. Teaching b. Home visits c. Campus selection d. Research assistant e. Private practice f. Fitness centre g. Hospitals
 - h. Overseas i. Others (please specify)
20. Mention five most commonly encountered problems in Physiotherapy field. (List down according to priority)
21. Mention five ways by which you feel the field of Physiotherapy can be improved. (List down as per your priority)