



Knowledge and social opinions about physiotherapists

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Abstract	
Background:	Physiotherapy is an integral part of medicine, both in terms of prevention and treatment. Despite the long history of healing with movement and other physical factors, physiotherapy is considered to be a young field of medicine, and the occupation of the physiotherapist in the social consciousness is in the building phase. The aim of the study was to investigate the interest in physiotherapist
Material/Methods:	The study involved 199 people, including 117 women (58.79%) and 82 men (41.21%), residents of the Silesian Voivodship. Age of respondents: 16-81 years (x = 46.22, SD = 13.45). The research tool was an original questionnaire. Closed questions concerned the interest in physiotherapist profession, self-assessment of knowledge and its sources, opinions on the availability and quality of services, and the social prestige and profitability of the physiotherapist profession.
Results:	Respondents most often declared that their interest in the profession is poor or average, but they evaluate their level of knowledge of the profession as high. The prevailing opinions are that the availability of physiotherapist services is large, but at patients own expense, and the cost-effectiveness of the profession is average. Women revealed greater interest and declared more knowledge of the profession than men. Differences also concerned the opinions on the profitability of the profession.
Conclusions:	The public interest in physiotherapist profession is on an average level, positive opinions about physiotherapists prevail, especially among older people. The profession is considered to be averagely profitable.
Keywords:	Physiotherapists; prestige of the profession; public opinions
<p>Word count: 1495</p> <p>Tables: 2</p> <p>Figures: 0</p> <p>References: 21</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Corresponding author</p> <p>Andrzej Knapik School of Health Sciences, Department of Adapted Physical Activity and Sport, Medical University of Silesia 40-071 Katowice, Medyków 8 aknapik@o2.pl</p>

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, a biomedical approach to health, that takes into consideration the lack of dysfunctions in the biological functions of the body, does not meet the social expectations [1]. The holistic pursuit of achieving the highest possible wellbeing, results in a constant increase in demand for benefits and services which cater to the need.

Physiotherapy is an integral part of medicine, both in terms of prevention and treatment. Growing demand for medical services also applies to services provided by physiotherapists. According to statistics in Poland, there are over 25 thousand people who have the right to practice this profession [2]. Although the use of movement and other medical factors is one of the oldest medical specialties, physiotherapy is considered to be a relatively young field of medicine, which is in the phase of continuous dynamic development [3]. Hence, the position of this profession is still in the building phase. Health as a value causes that other - "historically conditioned" medical professions: nurses and doctors invariably are in the top ranking of the highest prestige occupations [4].

In 2016, there was a statutory regulation of the profession of physiotherapist as the medical profession, including the definition of responsibilities and method of training of physiotherapists in Poland [5]. It should be assumed that together with the legal regulations begins the process of consolidation of the physiotherapist profession in the social consciousness and building the position of this profession. This also applies to the context of social perception of this profession. This problem is relatively poorly explored, and its clarification can not only be a good material for creating the image of the profession by physiotherapists themselves, but it is also a prerequisite for social education in this area.

The aim of the study was to investigate the interest in physiotherapist profession and its social perception. The public interest in the work of physiotherapists, self-assessment of knowledge and its sources, opinions and expectations of physiotherapists, the assessment of the availability of services and their financing have been taken into account.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study involved 199 people, including 117 women (58.79%) and 82 men (41.21%). The age of respondents ranged between 16 and 81 years ($x = 46.22$, $SD = 13.45$).

In order to provide high representativeness regarding gender, age, education and size of place of residence, the study was conducted in four towns of the

Silesian Voivodeship – in Katowice, Piekary Śląskie, Lubliniec and Lisów. The respondents have been informed about the purpose of the study, their anonymity and full voluntariness.

The research tool was an original questionnaire, which consisted of metric part and essential part. Metric part included questions about gender, age, place of residence, education, and the occurrence of chronic disease. The main part included closed questions about the interest, knowledge and opinions about the profession of physiotherapist. Posed questions and possible answers with statistics are presented in the results section.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were made. Relationships and differences between variables were calculated using nonparametric statistics: Spearman correlations, U Mann-Whitney test, and Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA. In every case, the level of statistical significance was $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

Correlation analysis indicates the impact of age on two aspects: positive in terms of service quality and negative - regarding the cost-effectiveness of physiotherapist practice (Table 1).

Statistical significance was observed in the case of positive correlations between age and interest in the profession and social prestige of the profession. However, correlation coefficients were weak.

Gender and education – these variables differentiate interest and self-knowledge of the profession of physiotherapist, the place of residence differentiated, although in different ways, profitability and social prestige of the profession – table 2.

The place of residence differentiated opinions about the social prestige of the profession between inhabitants of the village and the city to 25 thous.: $p = 0.0190$ and opinions about the profitability of the profession between inhabitants of the city to 25 thous. and the city of 25-100 thous.: $p = 0.0317$.

Education had an impact on the interest in the profession. Multiple comparisons show the differences between people with higher education and people with vocational education: $p = 0.0123$. People with higher and secondary education also evaluated their knowledge of this profession higher - compared with those with basic education, and the significance levels of differences were respectively: $p = 0.0028$ and $p = 0.0184$.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of evaluated variables and correlations of responses with age.

Variable	Rank	Answer	n	%	x (SD)	Me	CI: ±95%	Age r -
Interest in the profession physiotherapist (thinking or conversation)	1	Never	77	38.69				
	2	Rarely	26	13.07	2.31	2.00	2.14-	0.154*
	3	Sometimes	54	27.14	(1.19)		2.47	
	4	Often	42	21.11				
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Self-assessment of knowledge of the profession	1	Very small	9	4.52				
	2	Rather small	55	27.64	3.28	4.00	3.13-	0.122
	3	I do not know	26	13.07	(1.11)		3.44	
	4	Rather big	89	44.72				
	5	Very big	20	10.05				
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Sources of knowledge of the profession (<i>multiple choice</i>)		Media	87	43.72				
		Using services	87	43.72				
		Personal contacts (not as a patient)	58	29.15				
		Other opinions	97	48.74				
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Opinions on the quality of services	1	Definitely negative	1	0.50				
	2	Rather negative	2	1.00	3.91	4.00	3.81-	0.268*
	3	Various	48	24.12	(0.71)		4.01	
	4	Rather positive	111	55.78				
	5	Definitely positive	37	18.59				
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Availability of opportunities to use the services of physiotherapists	1	Small	14	7.03				
	2	Rather small	40	20.10	3.28	4.00	3.13-	-0.077
	3	I do not know	32	16.08	(1.06)		3.43	
	4	Big but at my own	103	51.76				
	5	Generally large	10	5.03				
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Social prestige of the profession	1	Very small	8	4.02				
	2	Small	48	24.12	3.10	3.00	2.97-	0.193*
	3	I do not know	66	33.17	(0.95)		3.24	
	4	Rather high	69	34.67				
	5	High	8	4.02				
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Profitability of the profession	1	Low pay	51	25.63	2.77	3.00	2.60-	-
	2	Average	120	60.30	(1.24)		2.94	0.349*
	3	Well-paid	28	14.07				

*p<0.05

Table 2. Differentiation of variables related to physiotherapist profession including gender, place of residence and education.

Variables	Grouping										
	Gender ¹		Place of residence ²				Education ²				
	F	M	1	2	3	4	I	II	III	IV	
	n	117	82	57	59	50	33	9	50	64	76
Interest in the profession	x	2.48	2.06	2.37	2.36	2.16	2.33	2.11	1.86	2.38	2.57
	p	0.0173*		0.8051				0.0119*			
Self-assessment of knowledge	x	3.43	3.07	3.19	3.24	3.38	3.36	3.33	2.74	3.44	3.50
	p	0.0134*		0.7199				0.0016*			
Opinions on the quality of services	x	3.85	3.99	3.93	4.03	3.74	3.91	4.00	3.98	3.94	3.83
	p	0.1996		0.1241				0.5140			
Availability of opportunities to use the services of physiotherapists	x	3.30	3.24	3.93	4.03	3.74	3.91	4.00	3.98	3.94	3.83
	p	0.5359		0.0955				0.2932			
Social prestige of the profession	x	3.03	3.21	2.75	3.34	3.18	3.18	3.11	3.26	3.25	2.88
	p	0.2830		0.0154*				0.0671			
Profitability of the profession	x	2.93	2.54	2.75	2.32	3.08	3.12	3.00	2.68	2.84	2.74
	p	0.0267*		0.0035*				0.8339			

Explanation of abbreviations: ¹ U-MW Test; ² Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA; 1-country; 2-city to 25 thous.; 3- city 25-100 thous.; 4-city above 100 thous.; I-basic; II-vocational; III-secondary; IV-higher; ***p<0.05**

DISCUSSION

Health is an autotelic and instrumental value and has a high position in the hierarchy of social values [6,7]. Social expectations and needs concern the possibility of achieving the highest possible standards, which is consistent with the priorities of the World Health Organization (WHO) [8]. According to the holistic approach to health, these priorities concern not only aspects of functioning of the biological system, but also the satisfaction of the highest possible quality of life related to health (Health Related Quality of Life – HRQOL) [9,10].

The development of physiotherapists education process meets these social expectations. Demographic trends, which point to the aging process of society, are also conducive to this process [11], and as a result, the demand for physiotherapist services is growing. The aim of the introduced legal regulations and organizational changes following them, is to raise services to the highest level.

Meeting the demand for physiotherapy services, quality of service and social prestige of physiotherapists are inseparable values. The query of the literature indicates that the problem of public perception of the profession of physiotherapist is poorly explored, and there are not many publications about this. This problem was described only by Weber-Nowakowska and Kocjan [12,13]. In addition, the occupational position of physiotherapists - in the perspective of future work among physiotherapy

students, was analyzed by Gotlib with co-authors and by Pujza [14,15].

The results of presented study indicate that the interest in physiotherapist's profession can be considered as weak or at most average, and the sources of knowledge of the profession were varied (Table 1).

Women declared reflection on the profession more often than men, which can be explained by their greater general concern about the health [16]. The natural consequence of this greater interest is that women also assess their knowledge of the profession better. The second factor which favorably influenced both interest in profession and self-knowledge of profession was education. Higher levels of knowledge, awareness, and health-related concerns correlate with health self-assessment [17,18]. Weber-Nowakowska et al. [12] found a positive relationship between education and the use of services of physiotherapists with the knowledge of the profession.

In presented study, the opinions of physiotherapy services were positive - average values were at the upper levels of the adopted scale. It was noted that with the age of the respondents, the percentage of positive opinions showed an upward trend. It can be assumed that older people are more likely to have health problems, and are therefore more likely to seek help from physiotherapists. Interesting in this context seem to be Gotlib's research on medical interpersonal relationships, which shows nurses good opinions about the services of physiotherapists and high assessment of their competence [14].

Analysis of opinions on the prestige of the profession of physiotherapist indicates a symmetry. According to the authors, this seems to indicate the ongoing process of shaping the profession's image in public consciousness. It is noticeable that the place of residence differentiates opinions about prestige – better opinions are presented by inhabitants of a small city. Perhaps this should be associated with the image of the profession, as performed in quite comfortable conditions and therefore attractive. In this case, the financial considerations did not play a significant role. The profitability of the profession has been assessed higher by the inhabitants of large cities, which is probably associated with a greater number of contacts with physiotherapists, personal or as patients. Financial aspects may play a role in the assessment of professional prestige, although the social prestige of the profession is conditioned by many factors, and changes over time [19]. It is noticeable that women assess the profitability of the physiotherapist profession higher. Perhaps this should be attributed to differences concerning the financial expectations of women and men. The justification for these expectations is that health care occupations are female – dominated and

that there is still a generally lower level of wages among women [20].

This study indicates poorly recognized problem. Its cross-sectional character, limited area of research and the number of subjects are undoubtedly its limitations. It seems, however, that monitoring this problem may suggest courses of actions aimed at both high quality services and the prestige of the profession of physiotherapist, like it is in Australia [21].

CONCLUSION

1. The public interest in physiotherapist profession is on an average level, while respondents evaluate their level of knowledge of the profession as good.
2. Positive opinions about physiotherapists prevail, especially among older people. Older people rate the prestige of the physiotherapist profession higher than younger people.
3. The dominant opinion, especially among the inhabitants of small towns, among the elderly and among men, is that this profession is averagely profitable.

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