"Perceived Job Transition Readiness" of Physical Therapy Students in Abha, Saudi Arabia

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Abstract Students gaining professional education in physical therapy and other related health care professions often have high stress associated with a fear of practice. This study tries to examine the "perceived job transition readiness" of physical therapy students in a single cross-sectional study. An ANOVA details the different perceptions among first year students and final year students of physical therapy education. The study points out that, final level students lack role identity in their chosen profession and, they have less confidence about their professional readiness to practice physical therapy than the junior students. The study provides an in depth understanding for the graduates to be that such stress they experience is only momentary and that it is a positive stress that would help them to excel in future.

Keywords: Perceived, job transition, readiness, physical therapy students

1. INTRODUCTION

Medical professionals today are required to be equipped with adequate professional health care acumen to save and manage other people's health and lives. In the wake of such professional responsibilities, many students find it difficult to process the information gained through curriculum, and the skills imbibed through education, to ensure a strong line of professional interaction with the patients and also fear their ability to cope with the expectations society has of them. Health care professional students are found to have more psychological morbidity [1]. Several studies have charted the sources of stress among medical students and have concluded them as: academic pressures, social issues and financial difficulties.

Various studies around the globe have emphasised that students studying in medical courses experience higher stress [12, 13]. However there are few studies on this topic in Saudi Arabia, especially on populations in smaller cities. Physical therapy students, immediately after graduation, have to manage and deal with anxiety-provoking situations like finding a job, honing job-related knowledge, and also gaining quick success in the chosen profession. The transition from being a student to a prospective employee is very stressful. Factors contributing to stressful experiences in health care professionals-to-be might be found in the gap between the students' expectations, and the reality of clinical practice [14]. Unfortunately, students realize this as soon as they enter the final years of study. It becomes taxing to realize they must shoulder the responsibility of making important career decisions. This could be the reason why a once confident junior student becomes indecisive about his/her career choice and future success when reaching the graduation phase.

The stress and associated problems of transition to actual practice is studied by [9] who called it reality shock. In yet another study, [15], the participants used the term "flying without a parachute" to denote the stress associated with the transition from student to employee. The fear of a potential difference between classroom based training and the expectations of the real world of practice can be extremely trying for the final year students [7]. According to Kramer, reality shock has four phases, which are sequential in nature. The first phase is a honeymoon phase, with excitement and euphoria of getting a real job which moves on into a shock phase. This phase begins with the understanding of the gap between the reality of clinical work and the expertise they gained only from what was taught. Phase three is recovery, which provides them with an objective understanding that they can actually cope with the expectations. Phase four is when they start practicing. The study tries to understand the first two phases of reality shock of physical therapy students in Abha, Saudi Arabia.

Accordingly, junior and final-year physical therapy students' perceptions during their studies are assessed using the following research question:

- Is there a difference among beginners and final year students in their perceived readiness to practice in their jobs?

The objective of the study is to find out the differences in perceptions of both beginners and final year physical therapy students about their profession.

1.1 Research Methods

A total of 147 students of physical therapy from the College of Applied Medical Sciences, Abha, participated in this cross-sectional study. An 11 item questionnaire was developed for the purpose of the study. The items in

the study fall under three variables: 1. Readiness to practice; 2. Perception about the scope of the profession; and 3. Satisfaction about learning and skills acquired.

1.1.1 Analysis

Out of the 147 students, 80.2% of students are under 21 years of age. There are 12.8% of students who are 22 years old. Among the 147 students, 74.8% are males and 25.2% are females. There are 80 students in the junior level and 67 students in the final year level.

Analysis of Variance details the differences in perception about work readiness as well as the professional commitment of the students. Level 1 includes students from first year to third year and level 2 consists of students in the final year.

It can be found that, while measuring the perceived readiness for their employment, the final year students showed a relatively lesser readiness when compared to the junior level students. It is surprising to see that the final year students, who are on the verge of completion, feel less confident about their profession and would not recommend it to others. They are also not ready to work as a therapist in the near future and are sceptical about the scope of their profession, believing that they might not receive any respect in their profession as a physiotherapist. It is interesting to see that the final year students admit that they have enough clinical training when compared to junior students; yet, they show lesser confidence in their ability to apply what they have learnt in class, as well as doubt the amount of clinical training received by them, to practice in the real world.

Table 1: Respondents in relation to age, gender and levels of education.

Age	(n=147)	Percent
19-21	126	85.6
22-23	21	14.3
Gender		
Male	110	74.8
Female	37	25.2
Level of education		
1	80	54.5
2	67	45.5
Total	147	100.0

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

There is a certain handicap to generalizing the views due to the dearth of research papers available about the fear of perceived job transition readiness

Table 2: Student Levels of Study and Job transition-readiness constructs.

Readiness	Level	N	Mean	F value	Significance p<0.01,0.05
I was aware of the course before joining the course itself	1	80	4.0000	2.524	0.04
	2	67	3.2821		
	Total	147	3.6803		
I joined because I wanted to be a physical therapist	1	80	4.9286	3.685	0.005
	2	67	4.1071		
	Total	147	4.5374		
I am ready to work as a therapist in future	1	80	4.6552	5.473	0.002
	2	67	3.6071		
	Total	146	4.2260		
I would recommend others to join the course	1	80	4.5862	3.922	0.005
	2	67	3.7143		
	Total	147	4.2177		
Scope					
Other professionals are aware of physical therapists	1	80	2.2143	2.561	0.040
	2	67	3.2143		
	Total	147	3.0952		
Would I receive respect being a physical therapist	1	80	4.0714	2.175	0.043
	2	67	3.2857		
	Total	147	3.6667		
Satisfaction about learning and skills acquired					

Readiness	Level	N	Mean	F value	Significance p<0.01,0.05
Both theoretical and practical patient assessments are provided	1	80	2.9286	11.186	0.001
	2	67	4.5172		
	Total	147	3.6939		
Classroom learning helps to gain knowledge	1	80	4.0000	4.065	0.002
	2	67	3.1071		
	Total	147	3.7483		
I can apply what I have learnt	1	80	4.1034	2.721	0.032
	2	67	3.2857		
	Total	147	3.7415		
Appropriate clinical training is available that would help me to practice	1	80	4.1034	4.743	0.001
	2	67	2.9487		
	Total	147	3.6463		

of physical therapy students. Overall, it is easy to understand that, during the first few years of their study, every student feels pride, joy and excitement in joining the course. However, while learning more about the practice, they start doubting their practicum and their choice of profession. According to Eric [4], early adulthood is an important stage of identity development and it is easier for the students to move into identity confusion/ diffusion. The same junior level student who feels comfortable about the curriculum and choice of profession later starts doubting their future in the chosen job role when they become a final year student. The effectiveness of the curriculum is not to be doubted here, but the self appraisal of the final year student undergoes tremendous change. Studies have shown that, despite the confusion they have in the final years, health care students quickly accommodate for, and transition into, new roles and responsibilities and overcome the differences between theoretical learning and practical focus [2].

In a related profession, [3] has detailed the acquisition of nursing expertise and proposed five possible levels of expertise: novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient, and expert. According to Benner, novice is the student

who is still in college, and then there is a natural move along a sequential path to becoming an expert in their respective field of profession. The novices could undergo reality shocks while discovering the gap between academia and actual practice within the industry. It is important to note that physiotherapy is a profession that provides the students extensive clinical exposure through ward and clinical postings. The junior level student is more confident about the education is enough for future patient care, but the most interesting factor here is that the final level students have shown higher satisfaction about both theoretical and practical patient assessments are provided in their education. The junior level student shows lesser satisfaction about the same. This provides ample evidence that the physiotherapy education system is comprehensive, but when the final year student realizes that when they start practising they would be responsible for their action, might be the significant contributor to their stress. In a study among physiotherapist new into profession, during their professional socialization shows a motivation to remain in the job with added satisfaction of work place, a sense of achievement, a sense of recognition and a sense of advancement, which provides higher job satisfaction [6]. The role confusion experienced by final year students would be temporary.

A lack of on the job training is found to be a significant stressor among potential candidates in other disciplines. According to [5], initial clinical experience is the main factor that generates the most anxiety among nursing students. It is important to understand the role of professional socialisation, which provides a final year student with an understanding of their professional role and hierarchy of occupation [8]. This can happen only when the student feels that they have received adequate competence in the practical skills they require to carry on with the job. [11] has indicated the need for carefully fracturing the academic and practice components of education. Even after extensive clinical postings, physiotherapy students are doubtful about their employment, then the fear of readiness to practice in other health care professions and different fields of education are very important to consider.

The stress distress eustress model of emotion regulation by [10], have suggested that eustress is a positive stress that motivates individuals to perform better. They have put forward a transaction model of stress with eight types of coping mechanism. The most important coping mechanisms are planful problem solving, social support and positive reappraisal. Escape avoidance, confrontive coping, distancing etc are considered to be maladaptive coping responses. The need for enlightening the students about planning through their college years as well as positive reappraisal during their practical curriculum could bring mountain of difference in contributing to a positive self image.

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There are a multitude of studies that measures the amount of perceived academic stress of health care students and have found that curriculam dissatisfaction contributes to stress along with familial problems. In this study the final year students are satisfied with their curricula, both theory and practice. Zastrow (1985) in a study among social work students found that they fear that they will not be able to meet the needs of their clients. Um and Brown-Standridge (1993) has pointed out that social work students need mentors with a clear respect for the social work profession and clear understanding of their role. Likewise, Pagana (1988) has found that a considerable source of stress among nursing students is the fear of role expectations placed upon them.

It is important to note that the students do not doubt the effectiveness of the curriculum, but rather the amount of stress they perceive they might endure in order to get into actual employment is adversely affecting their self confidence. In effect, it is the student's perceived lack of competency in clinical skills, especially for final year students, which is the major problem. They can definitely gain from a sufficient social network, social support, the practice of stress relieving behaviour, and the performance of self-reflective competencies, all of which has to be provided in today's educational institutions. The study provides a better understanding about the need for an in-depth alongside career guidance counselling to be a part of any student's academic journey to make them feel and believe that they are competent professionals.

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