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Research Article

**PHYSICAL THERAPY STUDENTS ATTITUDES TOWARD  
OLDER PEOPLE AND CONSIDERING GERIATRIC  
PHYSICAL THERAPY AS CAREER**<sup>1</sup>Humaira Firdous, <sup>2</sup>Dr. Shahzad Ahmad, <sup>3</sup>Husna Haroon, <sup>4</sup>Sajid Mehmood,  
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College<sup>3</sup>Physical Therapist, University Teaching Hospital, University of Lahore<sup>4</sup>University of Health Sciences, Lahore<sup>5</sup>Dean, Lahore College of Physical Therapy, Lahore Medical and Dental College**Abstract:**

**Background:** Now a day, when life style has been shifted, health care for elderly has become challenging. The advance age all visceral and somatic systems suffer deterioration due to aging, among which neuromuscular and musculoskeletal are prominent. Physical therapy students are potentially a part of health care system that can help elderly alleviate these problems.

**Objective:** To find out the attitudes of physical therapy students towards older people and possible career choice.

**Methods:** The study design was Cross Section Survey. Data was collected from Colleges affiliated with University of Health Sciences, Lahore. Sampling method was Convenience Sampling Technique. The study was completed in a duration of six months after the approval of synopsis. SPSS version 20.0 was used for data analysis.

**Results:** Results showed that students of doctor of physical therapy program had positive attitude towards old people 68.9% having interest in joining geriatrics in physical therapy as career. Average percentage of agreement showed 62.68%, which is fairly positive attitude.

**Conclusion:** The findings of study concluded there found fairly positive attitude towards elderly however, there is also deficit and students should be trained to accept problems of elderly. Interestingly, majority students expressed their interest for working in geriatrics as career after graduation.

**Keywords:** Physical Therapy, Attitude, Career Choice, Elderly, Geriatrics

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**INTRODUCTION:**

Globally, the major problem faced by health care system is increasing population of older people. With advance age, the possibility of health issues and chronic disease will rise and this problem in turn demands more health care. As a result of aging population, health care professionals will find elderly patient more frequently, it is essential for them to increase their skills, knowledge and attitudes regarding geriatrics (1, 2).

According to an estimation, elderly population is increasing globally and may reach 2 billion by 2050. Although, this increase is result of improved health care facilities. However, old age is associated with multiple health issues and generalized deconditioning. This requires a greater number of health care providers specialized in geriatric care. Advance knowledge, skill and positive attitude of health care students, towards geriatric population, is essential for efficacious care. Although, geriatric medicine, doctors and nurses have played pivotal role in geriatric health provision, there is increasing need of physical rehabilitation providers to take geriatric care to optimal level.

Physical therapy is integral part of multidisciplinary team for dealing geriatric conditions. They practice in geriatrics according to patient management model of examination, evaluation, diagnosis, plan of care and outcome assessment. There is greater need of professionals who provide care and work with rapidly growing elderly population. Different variety of health care provider from hospitals, nursing homes and community needed to provide care to elderly. Therefore, an important research area is to understand physical therapy student's attitude towards elderly (3).

Physical therapy student of today must be prepared for future changes. These future clinicians may have some already formed negative attitudes about elderly. These negative attitudes are stem from students' belief about the conditions of elderly that the conditions are chronic, unable to treat and ultimately lead to death. To generate older people friendly health care system these negative attitudes must be addressed because these attitudes may affect patient management (4, 5).

There is deficiency of geriatrics specialize health care provider. Physical therapist as an integral part of health care team, have important role in older people care. It is necessary that current physical therapy student must have sufficient knowledge and skill for treatment of elderly. Negative attitude and lack of knowledge can impact quality of care. So it

is important to promote knowledge and positive attitude towards elderly(6-8).

The number of trained health professionals need to increase to serve the older population that increasing dramatically. Anyhow the health professional schools are not meeting this market demand. The estimated number of health professional required to serve older population is 2.5 to 3.2 times higher in 2000 compared with 1980. The health professional's knowledge and attitudes toward older people is still "poor" in geriatric practice the knowledge of service provider is categorized as general knowledge as compare to specific disciplinary knowledge and skills in geriatrics. Positive attitudes toward older people would increase the level of knowledge of health providers. Attitude, mean feeling or emotion toward an individual. The preference of health professionals to work with older people depends on the knowledge and emotional attitude toward older people. The increasing need of large number of trained professionals working in geriatrics, there is also a need of new services creation for these professionals. Medical students have little interesting working with older adults. Lack of challenge, low social status and low income may be related to low interest. By promoting direct contact with elderly and addition of age related problems in university course, these negative attitudes can be addressed.(9-11)

Barriers were doing not want to work with older patients. Female student who prefer travelling were more interested. In results the students who showed positive impact of community medicine module were more interested. This study recommended that to effectively treat older patients, increase the exposure of undergraduate students to geriatrics medicine (2-5, 8, 9, 12-15)

**OBJECTIVE OF STUDY**

Therefore, the objective of study was to find out the attitudes of physical therapy students towards older people and possible career choice.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS:****STUDY DESIGN**

Cross sectional study design used.

**SETTINGS**

Data was collected from different colleges affiliated with the university of health sciences, Lahore.

**SAMPLING TECHNIQUE**

Convenience sampling technique was used for sampling.

**SAMPLE SIZE**

The calculated sample size is n=90

**Inclusion Criteria:**

- Physical therapy fourth and final year students
- Students having been studied geriatric
- Both male and female
- Student having clinical exposure to geriatric population
- Government college's affiliated with UHS

**DATA COLLECTION TOOL**

Data collection tools i.e. Questionnaire consist of two parts. Demographics and university of

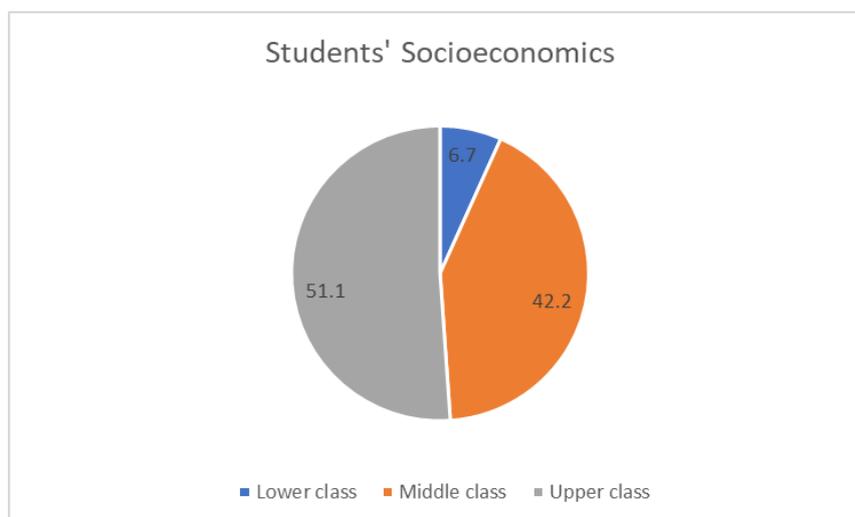
California at Los Angeles geriatrics attitudes scale, to examine attitude. One additional question was added to ask if they are going to consider geriatrics as their career in future after graduation.

**RESULTS:**

Results regarding that participants would consider career in geriatrics showed 31.1% and who said no 68.9% were found. Results regarding socioeconomic status of participants showed that out of 90(100%) participants lower class were 6(6.7%) and middle class were 38(42.2%) and upper class were 46(51.1%). Results regarding level of education of participants showed that out of 90(100%) participants who were in fourth year were 44(48.9%) and who were in fifth year 46(51.1%).

**Table 1 Agreement Trend regarding attitude towards elderly**

Variable	Agree	Disagree
Old People are Pleasant	64.4	35.6
Government should Reallocate Money in Elderly Research	82.2	17.8
I would like to see rather younger patients	28.9	71.1
Society should provide care to elderly	58.9	41.1
Medical care for elderly used up too much resources	47.8	52.2
Old people are less organized and disciplined	47.8	52.2
Old people are more suitable for treatment	52.2	47.8
Elderly people give orderly medical history	33.3	66.7
I pay more sympathy to older	41.1	58.9
Old people do not contribute to society	35.6	64.4
Chronic ill patients should not be given treatment	13.3	86.7
Old people should pay their health cost	14.4	85.6
Old people work too slow	70.0	30.0
Listening to old people is interesting	63.3	36.7
I would choose geriatrics in career	31.1	68.9



*Figure 1 Socioeconomics*

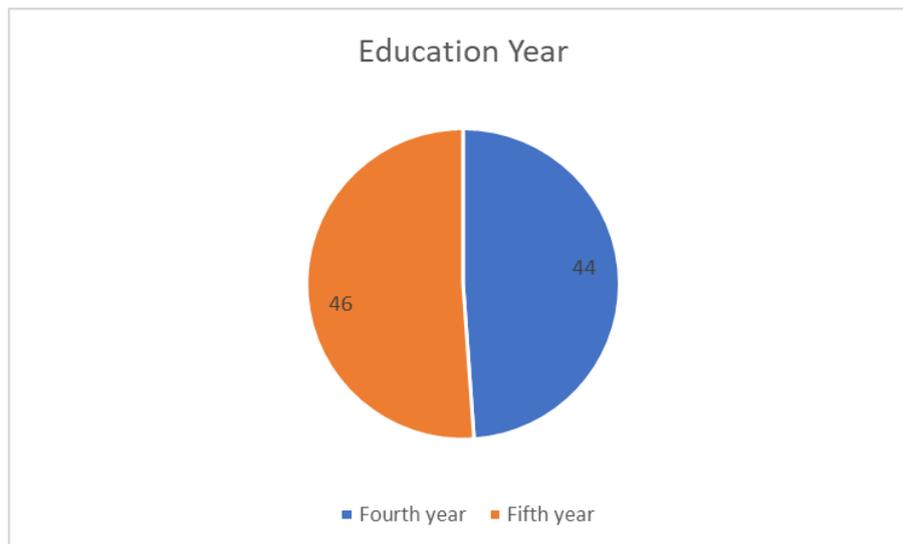


Figure 2 Education Year

### DISCUSSION:

A report of world health organization on aging shows that the population of older people is increasing rapidly, it would be double in 2025 and will reach two billion in 2050. Like all other countries Pakistan also have threat of ageism. To effectively deal with this increasing aged population, it is important that health provider show positive attitude, must have sufficient knowledge about aging and specific skills to deal with health issues and chronic illness of elderly. the attitudes of health care provider can affect patient management. Medical students of today are future health care provider, that's way it is important to understand student's attitude (15-19).

The results of this study showed that the mean UCLA attitude shows neutral and relatively positive attitudes towards elderly. Final year physical therapy student had more positive attitude than fourth year frequencies when drawn against gender and mean score of UCLA female had more positive attitude as compared to male. Although there was no significant link between gender and mean score of UCLA. Association between socioeconomic status and mean score of UCLA, upper class students had more positive attitude middle- and lower-class students although there was no significant association between socioeconomic status. The physical therapy students show their willingness in considering geriatrics as a career. There were many of those students who were not interested. There was a significant difference between male and female interest with females being more interested. Previous literature shows a great different where there was equal interest in geriatrics whatever the gender was. However, the choice of career found be channelize in early years of entry level education.

Yet the students of different disciplines were investigated during or after their graduation (20-23).

Understanding the allied health and medical students' attitude toward older people has identified as important area of research. In both developed and developing countries the world has seen a rapid increase in the number of elderly people (defined as 60 or more) in recent years. According to the world health organization (2002), the number of seniors will double in 2025 and will reach up two billion by 2050 there would be greater need for people to work, and provide care for elderly as the older population increases. This need of increased care for the elderly will cover the wide variety of health professional from hospitals to community centers and nursing homes. This rapidly increasing older population in turn demands skilled and experienced health care provider for elderly people. But there is deficiency of geriatrics specialize health care provider. Physical therapist as an integral part of health care team, have important role in older people care. It is necessary that current physical therapy student must have sufficient knowledge and skill for treatment of elderly.

Major causes of bad attitude may be student's negative perceptions about aging, for e.g. Student's perception about chronic diseases that treatment of chronic diseases is hopeless, older people become less organized and confused, geriatrics is low status and low income field and about life span of older people that the life span of elders are not enough to pay therapist's investment back. To promote student's knowledge, attitudes and skill. University curriculum must be focused on both academic and geriatrics training (24-26).

**CONCLUSION:**

The findings of study concluded that students of doctor of physical therapy program, who were in fourth and final year, demonstrated neutral to positive attitude towards elderly. Majority students expressed their interest for working in geriatrics as career after graduation.

**Conflict of Interest:**

There is no conflict of interest

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