



EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND AND POSITION PROFILE OF AMERICAN PHYSICAL THERAPISTS

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Introduction

The educational background and position of various allied health professions have been studied (5,6) in the United States (US). These factors have never been studied for physical therapists (PT) in countries outside the US. Additionally, details of the background and position profile of PT are limited to a study conducted in one state in the US (2). Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate the educational background and position profile of US PT.

Methods

- 116 PT (Age = 54.8 ± 4.5 years) participated including 78 women and 37 men, from 39 states in the US. Written informed consent was provided prior to the study, which was approved by the Institutional Review Board.
- The survey instrument, National Role Delineation of Physical Therapists, was adopted from a previous published research study of PT (2). This qualitative, cross-sectional conventional mail survey instrument was used to characterize the background and position profile of PT.
- Surveys were sent via conventional mail to 500 US PT whose information was obtained from the APTA. The survey contained 33 open-ended and fixed-response questions, resulting in 452 pages of data.
- Descriptive data were analyzed, using Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS 27.0).
- Pearson's correlation coefficients were used to determine the relationship between subject variables and measures of job satisfaction.
- Quantitative data were analyzed according to previously published recommendations (3).

Results

- Number of undergraduate internship hours was correlated with number of undergraduate studies ($r=0.81$, $p \leq 0.001$) and time at end of work-day ($r=-0.56$, $p \leq 0.001$).
- Number of PT observation hours was correlated with number of undergraduate internship hours

Results (Continued)

- ($r=0.31$, $p=0.034$), number of graduate internship hours ($r=0.42$, $p=0.015$), and consideration of other professions ($r=-0.19$, $p=0.047$).
- Years of experience was correlated with undergraduate ($r=0.28$, $p=0.043$) and graduate internship hours ($r=-0.33$, $p=0.028$), and compensation normalized to a 40-hour week ($r=0.27$, $p=0.011$).
 - Hours worked per week was correlated with time at start ($r=-0.32$, $p \leq 0.001$) and end of work-day ($r=0.26$, $p=0.008$), compensation ($r=0.55$, $p \leq 0.001$), and compensation normalized to a 40-hour week ($r=0.29$, $p=0.006$).
 - Annual compensation was correlated with current job ($r=0.30$, $p=0.004$) and career satisfaction ($r=0.23$, $p=0.028$).
 - Forty-two, 38, and 25 participants possessed a Doctorate in Physical Therapy, Master's of Science in Physical Therapy, and a Bachelor's of Science in Physical Therapy, respectively.
 - Ninety-three subjects specified they did not attend a direct admission institution.
 - Table 1 demonstrates sex-based differences. Table 2 indicates employment status based on hours worked per week. Table 3 shows background position profile data. Table 4 lists the top five PT certifications out of the 44 specified. Table 5 lists top five PT specializations of the 35 specified.

Table 1 : Mean Sex-Based Differences (N=112)

Higher Order Themes	Women	Men	Difference
Age	54.29	55.62	2.39%
Education	1.87	1.79	4.13%
Undergraduate Internship Hours	630.35	663.29	4.97%
Graduate Internship Hours	831.54	767.50	7.70%
Observation Hours	234.98	390.00	39.75%
Undergraduate GPA	3.67	3.54	3.65%
Number of Undergrad. Studies	1.86	1.53	17.65%
Number of Programs Applied To	3.20	3.48	8.24%
Years of Experience	29.70	29.97	1.18%
Hours/Week	35.36	42.19	16.20%*
Start of Work-day	8:00	7:22	6.90%*
End of Work-day	5:06	5:08	2.75%
Annual Compensation (\$)	85,449	110,000	22.32%*
Annual Comp. 40hr/week (\$)	94,299	114,724	19.54%*

*Statistically Significant Difference ($p \leq 0.05$).

Results (Continued)

Table 2: Employment Status (N=116)

Type	Number
Full-Time	78
Part-Time	26
Self-Employed	3
Pro-Re-Nata	3
Other	3

Table 3: Background and Position Profile Data (N=113)

Mean \pm SD Data for a Variety of Variable Assessed

Undergraduate Internship Hours	640.72 \pm 640.62
Graduate Internship Hours	818.73 \pm 533.36
Undergraduate Research Studies	1.82 \pm 0.38
Observation Hours	291.27 \pm 529.19
Undergraduate GPA	3.63 \pm 0.26
Number of Programs Applied To	3.29 \pm 2.08
Years of Experience	29.66 \pm 4.26
Start of Work-day (Hours)	7:48 \pm 0.04
End of Work-day (Hours)	5:06 \pm 0.08
Annual Compensation (\$)	93,507 \pm 33,580
Annual Compensation 40hr/week (\$)	101,101 \pm 32,820
Number of Employers	5.27 \pm 4.09

Table 4: Top 5 PT Certifications (N=113)

Certification	Number
None	47
Orthopedic Clinical Specialist	12
Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist	8
Aquatic Therapy Specialist	5
Geriatric Certified Specialist	5

Table 5: Top 5 Specializations (N=113)

Specialization	Number
None	51
Orthopedics	11
Pediatrics	6
Manual Therapy	5
Geriatrics	5

Discussion

This is the first comprehensive study of the background, preparation, and position characteristics of PT in the US. Physical therapists in the current study were 11 and 13 years older than occupational therapists (OT) and chiropractors (DC), respectively (6,5).

Men work more hours/week than women. Women PT earn approximately 22% less than men, which is dissimilar to a study of OT (6) where there were no sex-based differences in annual compensation.

Discussion (Continued)

Studies of PT and DC revealed 14% and 30% sex-based differences in annual compensation (2,5). Physical therapists earn approximately \$18,000 more and \$2,000 less than OT (6) and DC (5), respectively. Forty percent of PT in the current study possess a Doctor in Physical Therapy Degree, which is dissimilar to studies of US PT with 32% and 10% of participants, respectively holding such degrees (1,2). Twelve percent less PT are employed full-time (67%) compared to OT (79%) (6). These results are dissimilar to an APTA workforce survey where 83% of PT were employed full-time (4). The mean undergraduate GPA of participants (3.63/4.00) is consistent with previous research (3.67/4.00) (2). Approximately 27% of PT possess professional certifications. This finding contrasts with previous research of US PT (59%) (2). Job satisfaction was related to annual compensation, which was not found in a similar study of OT (6). One reason may be that PT and DC earn higher annual compensation than OT (2,5).

Conclusion

Physical therapists come from varying educational backgrounds and work under different conditions. These data on variables of the education and position profile of US PT as well as the sex-based differences within the profession can help current and prospective PT to understand the necessary qualifications and conditions of employment.

References

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