



## From awareness to action: Awareness and utilization of physiotherapy in geriatric population: A survey study

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### Abstract

**Background:** The geriatric population is increasing, leading to a high demand for healthcare services designed for their specific requirements. Geriatric population and its care are complex due to multitude of problems and the care requires several professions. In India, the geriatric population is growing rapidly, with increasing demand for healthcare strategies that support mobility, independence, and quality of life. One of the most common, accepted and important strategies for ageing well and efficiently is physical activity. It improves cognitive health and mobility which are essential and important components for functional capacity, endurance and significant indicators for overall good health. There is noticeable lack of knowledge, awareness and lack of facility usage by the ageing population in regards to physiotherapy geriatric care.

**Objective:** The study focuses and aims to find out the level of awareness, utilization of services and issues faced by the ageing population related to physiotherapy services in Rohtak, Haryana.

**Methodology:** A face-to-face community-based survey was conducted involving 60 elderly individuals aged 60 years and above, recruited from both community dwelling and old age home in Rohtak, Haryana. A questionnaire was administered to collect data on awareness levels, previous experience with physiotherapy, referral sources, and perceived barriers to utilization of these services. Responses were analyzed descriptively, and findings were expressed in percentage distribution.

**Results:** The study revealed that overall awareness about physiotherapy among the geriatric population was 55%, but regular utilization of services was reported by only 35% of participants. Among those aware, 40% had heard about physiotherapy through physicians, 10% through family or peers, and 5% via mass media. Barriers to utilization were multifactorial: financial constraints (45%), lack of nearby physiotherapy facilities (40%), and transportation challenges (35%) were the most frequently cited. Misconceptions regarding physiotherapy—such as perceiving it only as exercise for the young or assuming it provides no benefit in old age—were reported by 30% of respondents. Psychological barriers were also significant, with 25% of participants expressing fear of pain during exercises or low motivation to engage in rehabilitation.

**Conclusion:** A substantial gap exists between awareness of physiotherapy and its actual utilization among the geriatric population. This highlights the need for comprehensive community-level awareness programs, physician-led counselling, and the availability of affordable and easily accessible physiotherapy services within primary healthcare settings. By integrating physiotherapy into routine geriatric care and addressing both social and psychological barriers, healthcare systems can significantly improve the uptake of these services. Such efforts would not only encourage greater participation but also contribute to healthier, more functional, and independent aging among older adults.

**Keywords:** Geriatrics, physiotherapy, awareness, utilization, barriers, rehabilitation, aging

### Introduction

The geriatric population is one of the fastest-growing age groups worldwide, with India witnessing a rapid demographic transition. <sup>[1]</sup> Advancing age is commonly associated with multiple chronic conditions, reduced mobility, impaired balance, and higher dependency in activities of daily living. <sup>[2]</sup> As an individual grows older their ability to move safely and independently becomes a crucial part for an efficient quality of life. Decline in muscular strength can lead to limitation to mobility, endurance and strength leading to dependence and greater disability. This is directly linked to various consequences such as reduced cardiovascular endurance, strength, mobility and increased risk of falls. Engagement of an individual in physical activity on regular basis has been proven right and useful for healthy ageing. <sup>[3, 4]</sup> Physical exercises enhance balance and strengthen the muscles. Physiotherapy helps to slow down the progression of disease within the body, reducing the likelihood of falls. <sup>[5]</sup> It also supports the recovery of normal functional abilities and allows patients to carry out everyday tasks more effectively.

Balance can be developed and improved through systematic training. A wide range of exercises is used not only to enhance balance but also to increase flexibility, agility, coordination, and reaction speed. <sup>[6, 7]</sup> In addition, regular physical activity can have a positive impact on the cognitive performance of older adults. <sup>[8]</sup> In spite of recent advances and usage of physical therapy around the globe for better quality for health care awareness of physiotherapy remains as a big question in India. It has been observed that the general population have inadequate knowledge about the physiotherapy. <sup>[9]</sup> Understanding the attitudes and beliefs of the geriatric population is essential to bridge the gap between clinical potential and real-world utilization. Individuals who associate ageing with inevitable decline are less likely to engage in rehabilitation, while those with positive beliefs about recovery are more receptive to physiotherapy. <sup>[10]</sup> objective of this study was to assess awareness and utilization of physiotherapy services among geriatric population and to identify common practical barriers such as affordability, accessibility, and dependence on family support.

**Methodology**

A cross sectional questionnaire-based study design was used to assess awareness, utilization and beliefs toward physiotherapy among older adults. A total of 60 participants aged 60 years and above were recruited from local parks and public spaces in Rohtak, Haryana, using convenience sampling while ensuring representation across urban and rural settings and gender. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Institutional Ethical Committee of Pt. B. D. Sharma PGIMS Rohtak. Participants were provided with brief information about the study and gave written informed consent or thumb impressions where appropriate. Recruitment followed strict inclusion criteria—age ≥60 years, communicative ability, and consent—while excluding individuals who had received physiotherapy in the past three months, had severe cognitive impairment, or were experiencing acute illness. Data collection involved a face-to-face survey,

where participants responded to questions about their awareness, attitudes, and beliefs regarding physiotherapy, along with details about their health status and perceived barriers to physiotherapy use. The data collection instruments included a patient proforma capturing demographic and clinical details, and a structured questionnaire designed to explore awareness, utilization and beliefs toward physiotherapy

**Results**

The study showed that the living arrangement distribution of elderly population of this study is that majority of the population lives with their family members while the rest of them were living alone or in old age home. The questionnaire assessed the knowledge regarding physiotherapy uses and it shows that 42.6% of the population thinks that it is useful for pain relief, 23.8% of participants used it as a post-3.

**Table 1:** demographic representation of Participants

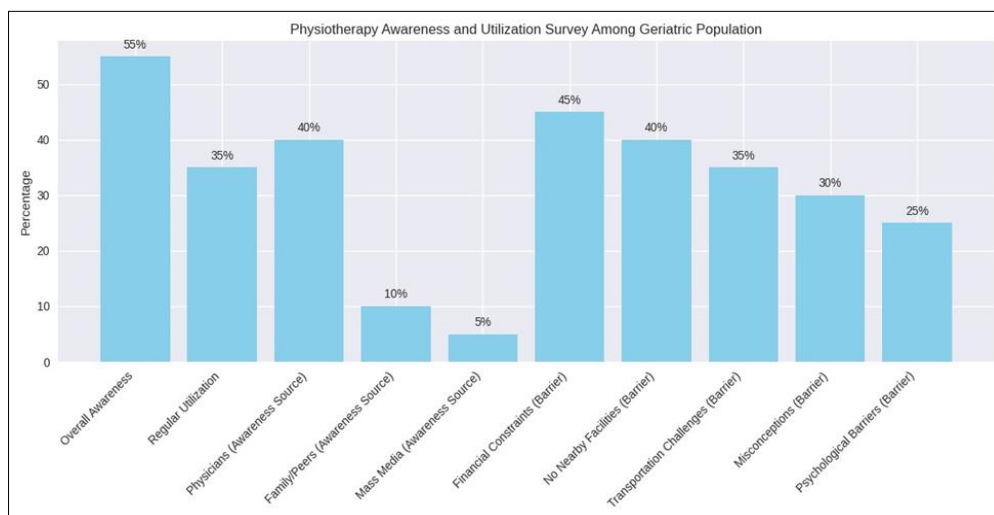
Age Group	Gender Distribution (20 patients each group)	Education Level	Common Occupations	Living Arrangement
60–69	Female: 45% (9) Male: 55% (11)	High School: 50% Postgraduate: 25% Graduate: 25%	Retired, Unemployed, Student	Mostly with family
70–79	Female: 75% (15) Male: 25% (5)		Postgraduate: 50% High School: 30% Graduate: 20%	Retired, Employed, Student Mixed family and independent
80+	Female: 70% (14) Male: 30% (6)		Postgraduate: 45% Graduate: 35% High School: 20%	Retired, Student, Unemployed Mostly with family or alone

**Table 2:** Awareness of Physiotherapy among participants

Age Group	Heard of Physiotherapy	Source of Awareness	Knows Benefits	Knows Conditions Treated
60–69	85%	Doctor: 40% Family: 30% Media: 30%	70%	65%
70–79	95%	Media: 50% Doctor: 30% Family: 20%	90%	85%
80+	90%	Family: 40% Media: 35% Doctor: 25%	80%	75%

Awareness of physiotherapy among the geriatric population was found to be relatively low, making it important to assess their understanding of its benefits. Although 40% of the elderly participants believed that physiotherapy plays an important role in maintaining health and improving functional ability in older adults, many still faced significant barriers to accessing these services. The most commonly reported obstacles included high cost (26%), lack of nearby

facilities (23%), and transport difficulties (20%), all of which limit accessibility. In addition, misconceptions about physiotherapy (17%) and psychological barriers such as fear, lack of motivation, or reluctance to seek help (14%) further reduced participation. These findings highlight the need for greater awareness, improved accessibility, and targeted educational efforts to encourage physiotherapy use among the geriatric population.



**Fig 1:** Physiotherapy awareness and barriers among participants.

## Discussion

This study concludes a moderate level of awareness but a lot of barriers and restrictions for its usage in geriatric population of Rohtak, Haryana. The awareness and its utilization have a significant amount of gap because of lack of transport, financial restraints and no nearby facility. Some of the elderly populations are not even sure about its usage in their lifestyles because of lack of socialization and awareness.

A major finding was the widespread confusion between physiotherapy as a medical specialty and physiotherapy as a standalone service. There was also limited knowledge of the broad range of services offered by physiotherapy departments, which often leads to a lack of referrals from doctors and minimal self-referral by patients. Notably, multidisciplinary rehabilitation has consistently shown better outcomes compared to single discipline approaches, reinforcing the importance of team-based, individualized care<sup>[11]</sup>

D joshi *et al* concluded that Physiotherapy enhances people's quality of life, yet even after being present in India for over sixty years, it is still not used to its full potential. There is a strong need to increase public understanding of the many conditions and impairments in which physiotherapists play a vital role as part of the healthcare team. Consistent efforts—such as media campaigns, writing articles for local newspapers, organizing health camps, and delivering talks in schools, colleges, and community areas—should be made to educate the general population about the value of physiotherapy.<sup>[9]</sup> There were also clear misunderstandings about the range of physiotherapy services, as many participants believed it was needed only after an injury or surgical procedure. Chatterjee and Das<sup>[12]</sup> pointed out that in semi-urban regions of India, physiotherapy is seldom recognized as a preventive or comprehensive healthcare approach. Such a limited perception reduces its usefulness in addressing age-related functional decline, preventing falls, and supporting independent living. Similar observations were made by Al-Eisa *et al.*<sup>[13]</sup> who found that many older adults are unaware of physiotherapy's contributions to chronic disease management and maintaining daily functioning.

## Conclusion

Physiotherapy is acknowledged to some extent among older adults, yet it remains insufficiently utilized. Key obstacles include limited access, financial constraints, and reluctance or negative attitudes toward seeking care. To increase physiotherapy, use within geriatric groups—particularly in rural areas—strategies should prioritize improving availability of services, providing home-based interventions, simplifying exercise plans, and ensuring active involvement of caregivers. By tackling these challenges through community-based initiatives and customized physiotherapy approaches, it may be possible to achieve better functional abilities and enhance the overall quality of life for the elderly population.

## Limitations

- The use of convenience sampling and a small pilot sample reduces the extent to which the findings can be applied to a broader population.

- Conducting the survey in person may have influenced participants' responses due to potential interviewer bias.
- As a pilot study, the focus is mainly on assessing feasibility, and the sample size is not sufficient to identify subtle differences in attitudes.

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