

Physiotherapy as a Career among Sri Lankan First Year Undergraduate

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Abstract

Background: Physiotherapy is a profession with the holistic approach to maximize the movement and functional ability throughout the life span. Physiotherapy degree programme was commenced in Sri Lanka in 2006. Selecting an appropriate career is vital for an individual. The purpose of the study is to investigate the factors which influenced the selection of physiotherapy as a career among 1st-year undergraduate.

Methods: A cross sectional descriptive survey was conducted among first-year physiotherapy undergraduates in three universities before their university orientation programme, with the permission from the institution and written consent from the participants. The pre-tested questionnaire was used in the data collection. Data were analysed with SPSS 16 using appropriate descriptive statistics.

Results: 58 undergraduates from first-year physiotherapy programme participated in this study. 42 female and 16 male were responded to the questionnaire. 43% and 17% of participants enter to the physiotherapy programme in their Advance level third and first attempt respectively. Participants indicated working health related field, personal interest, Z-score, foreign employment opportunity, future scope for their career development are the reason for selecting physiotherapy as their career. None of them marked parents influence as a reason. Internet, friends, school teachers, parents and University prospects were the main source of information where they get to know about physiotherapy. There was a slight difference in impact of these factors among state and non-state responded.

89.6% participants stated that they have chosen physiotherapy profession since working in health related field was their main concern. 88% of them had dreamed of working in health field from their childhood. 89.7% participants consider that physiotherapy profession has a good reputation in society. 94.8% of respondent indicated that this career would develop their career pathway. 86.2% of participants consider this field as growing field in Sri Lanka.

Conclusion: One of the main factors to choose physiotherapy as their career is to work in health related field. Majority of the female choose physiotherapy as their career. The Internet is the main source of information by which they get to know about physiotherapy. Majority of them consider that this field would develop their career pathway.

Keywords: Physiotherapy; Sri Lanka; Factors

Introduction

"A career refers to the individual sequence of attitude and behaviour associated with work-related experiences and activities over the span of the person's life" [1]. Also, career management is the process which involves aware of their own interests, values, strength and weakness, identify their job opportunity and identify their career goal and have established action plan to achieve their career goals [1].

Three aspects considered under the career motivation. Those are career resilience, career insight and career identity. Career insight is "How much employees know about their interests and their skill strength and weakness" and their awareness of how these perceptions relate to their career goal [1].

Physiotherapy is defined by World Health Organization that "Physiotherapists, who assess, plan and implement rehabilitative programs that improve or restore human motor functions, maximize movement ability, relieve pain syndromes, and treat or prevent physical challenges associated with injuries, diseases and other impairments" (Organization). The demand for physiotherapy services increased sharply over the last few years.

Physiotherapy career in Sri Lanka

Physiotherapy was introduced as a degree programme in Sri Lanka in 2006 to cater the growing demands of physiotherapy services in Sri Lanka. It is a four-year degree programme. Currently, three universities offer physiotherapy degree programme which can be categorized as state and non-state University. Those are the University of Colombo,

University of Peradeniya and General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University. There are other institutes which offer Diploma programme and external degree programme. Each year around 60 students entering to state Universities, 30 students recruited to defense University to follow Physiotherapy degree programme. When it comes to State University students are selected to physiotherapy programme mainly based on Z-Score. Cut off (Z score) for each degree programme is decided mainly based on the number of applicants' preference. If the demand for a programme is high, the cut of marks will be higher. According to the ranking of Z-score, physiotherapy programme achieves around 4th position.

The general public is not aware of the physiotherapy career. Even though one decade has gone after establishing physiotherapy degree programme, there are no proper laboratory facilities and taught post graduate opportunity available in Sri Lanka in physiotherapy field for those who willing to advance their career in research aspect and clinical aspect further.

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This study was aimed at investigating the factors which influenced the selection of physiotherapy as a career, factors which influenced the selection of their University, determine the perception about physiotherapy profession among 1st-year undergraduate, and determine the knowledge about postgraduate opportunity and satisfaction about their career.

Methods

Setting

The study was carried out in three universities which offer physiotherapy programme in Sri Lanka.

Design and study population

This study was a cross sectional descriptive study. The ethical clearance was obtained from an ethical review committee of faculty of allied health sciences and permission was obtained from the relevant institution and written consents from participants.

Inclusion criteria

1st-year undergraduates' aged 18 to 23 years before their orientation programme regarding their career and study subject.

Exclusion criteria

Undergraduate who entered to follow programme as a lateral entry (from health ministry), Participants who fail to give a written consent.

Questionnaire design and questionnaire administration

Closed ended questionnaire was developed to investigate the objectives of this study. A pilot study was done to validate the questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into following headings. Those are demographic data, factors influencing the selection of an undergraduate programme, preference order of physiotherapy programme, knowledge about the career, postgraduate opportunity and career satisfaction.

Statistical analysis

Data was analysed using SPSS statistics 16 and presented in percentages.

Results

A total of 58 first year students took part in the study. Percentage of participants from three Universities was 38%, 22% and 40 % from University of Colombo, University of Peradeniya and General Sir John kotelawala University respectively. Majority of the first year physiotherapy students were female (72%). Respondents' age range was between 19-23 years. Most of the participants were at age of 22 years starting their career related programme. Most of the participants enter to the physiotherapy programme after their 2nd (42%) and 3rd attempt (41%) in their advance level examination (Figure 1).

The number of reason for their selection was questioned. 45% of them stated only one reason for their selection. Health related field (58.6%), interesting field (50%) and Z-Score (46.5%) were the most marked reasons. Also, the future scope had a relatively high frequency as a reason for their selection. But parents, job security were not a reason at all for their selection of this career (Figures 2-4).

There is a slight difference between male and female students. Female students consider the health related field and interested field as a reason for selecting physiotherapy. Whereas male students consider, Z-score was the main reason why they follow this course.

The question was analyzed about the source of information. Results revealed that majority of participants indicated the internet as a source of information. Secondly, school teacher, friends and thirdly parents marked as a source of information. UGC prospects marked as a fourth major source of information (Figure 5).

Course preference number was analyzed. According to the results, 66% of the participants respond was not as a first preference. 52% of participants stated that physiotherapy was their third preference (Figure 6).

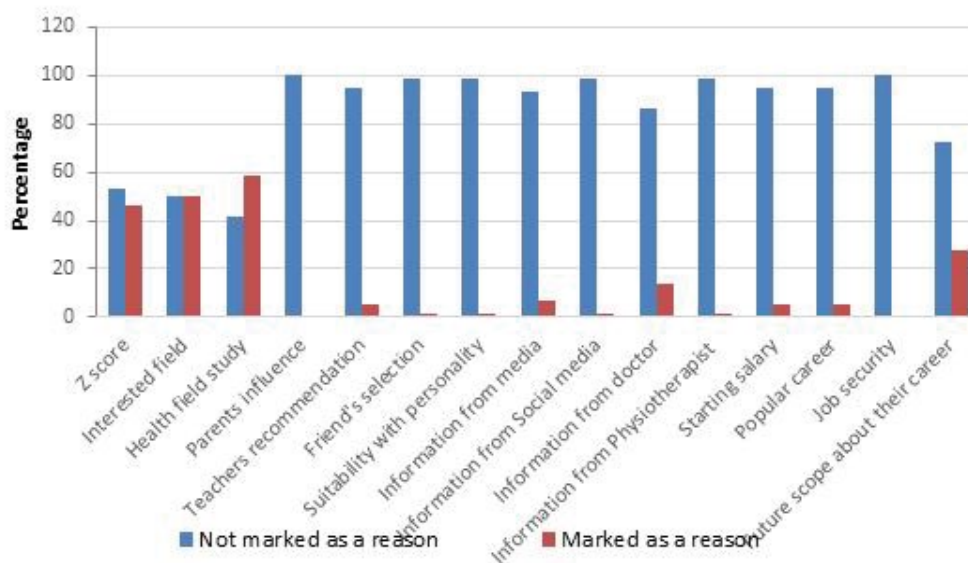


Figure 1: Reason for selecting physiotherapy as a career.

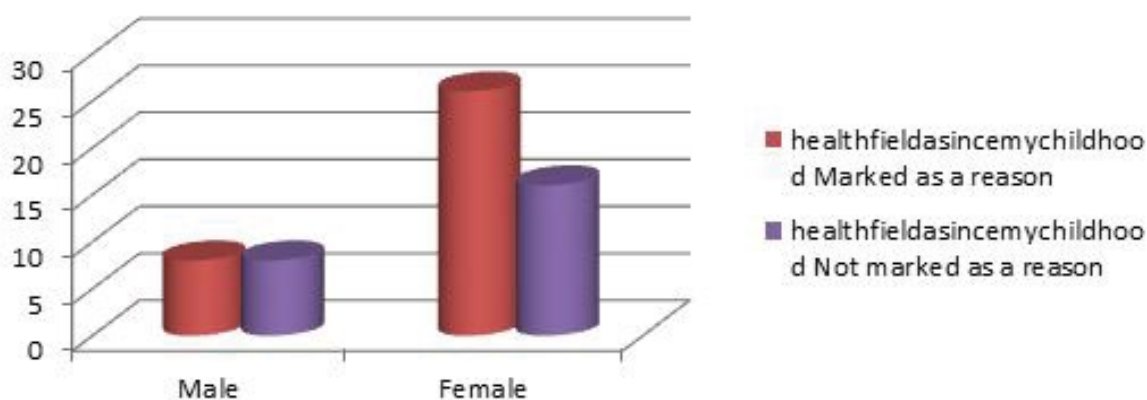


Figure 2: Health field, response differences between male and female students.

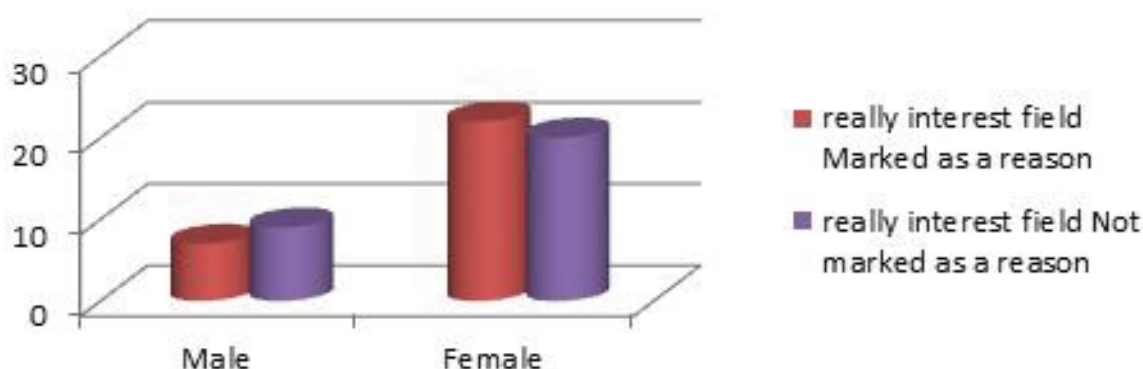


Figure 3: Interested field, response differences between male and female students.

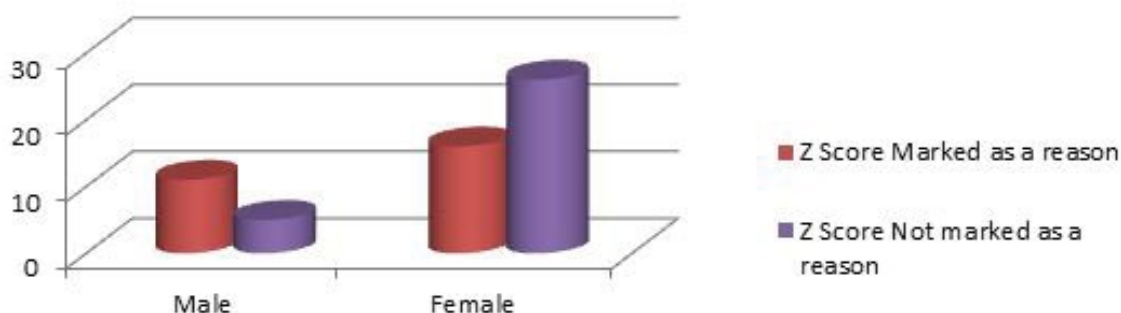


Figure 4: Z-score, response differences between male and female students.

Reason for not selecting physiotherapy as first preference was analyzed. Out of several reasons, lack of awareness was marked by 35% of the participants.

The questions were included to identify the perception about physiotherapy among undergraduate. Question regarding the knowledge about the course prior to their application and whether they

searched about the physiotherapy were included. Also, reputation, what they consider about the physiotherapy field in Sri Lanka included in the questionnaire (Figure 7).

Based on the response, 55% of the participants were not aware of this course prior to their application. Also, 77% of the participants stated that they searched about this career before they start to follow this programme as their career (Figures 8 and 9).

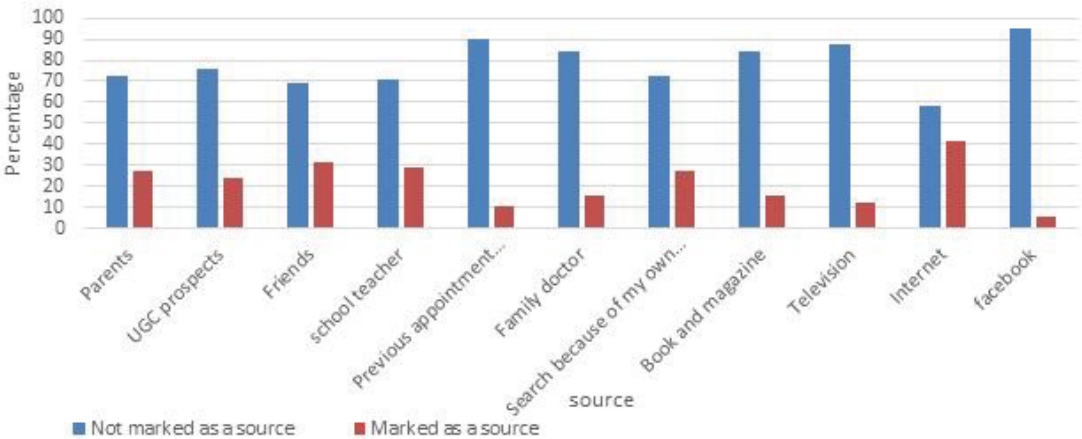


Figure 5: Source of information.



Figure 6: Course preference.

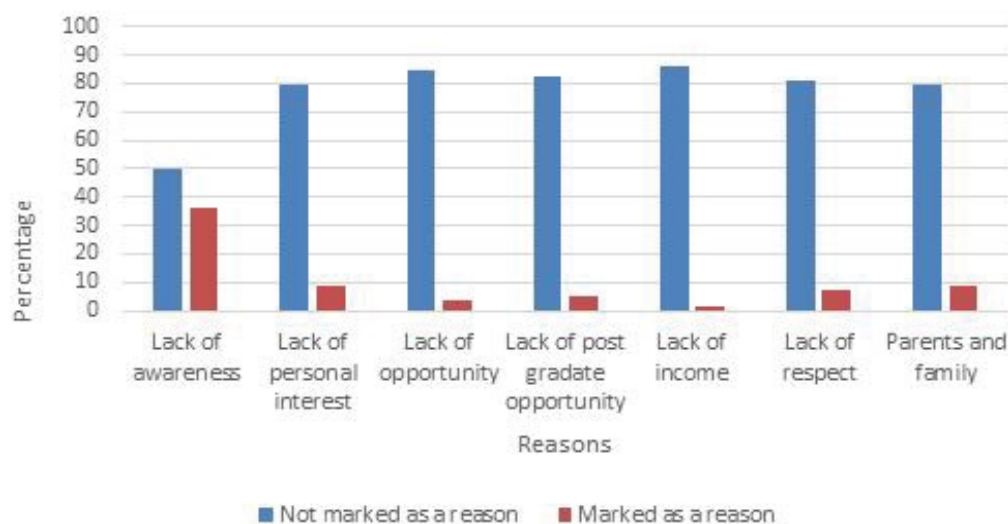


Figure 7: Reasons for their preference.

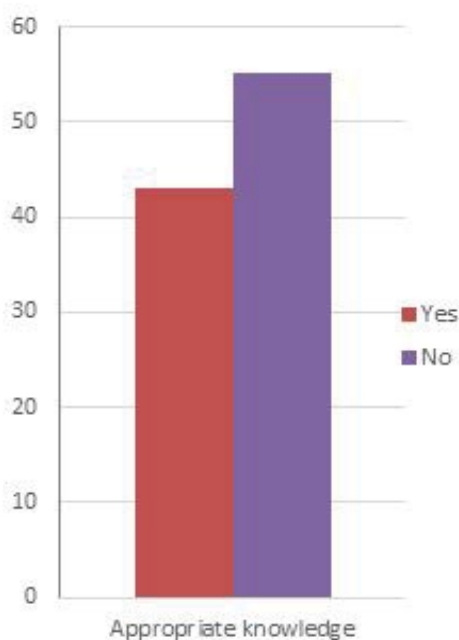


Figure 8: Appropriate Knowledge.

According to the responses (Figure 10), around 90% of the participants considered that physiotherapy field has a good reputation and 90% of them considered it as a newly emerging field in this country (Figure 11).

Next part of the questionnaire analyzed about their post graduate opinion. Questions included were the preference to obtain post graduate qualification, preference place to obtain their post graduate qualification, the purpose of their post graduate study and awareness about the postgraduate opportunity in Sri Lanka.

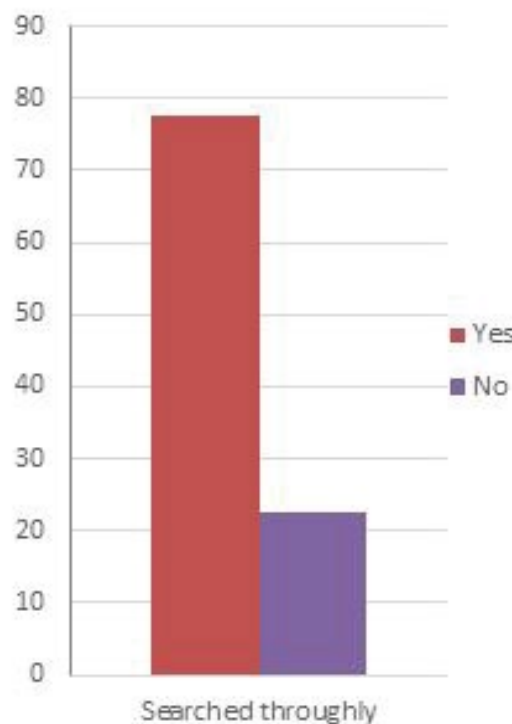


Figure 9: Searched about their career.

Responses revealed that approximately 92% of the participants willing to do their post graduate (Figure 12) and most of them indicated that they willing to continue their higher studies in abroad compared to Sri Lanka (Figure 13).

Develop their knowledge in this career is the main reason to

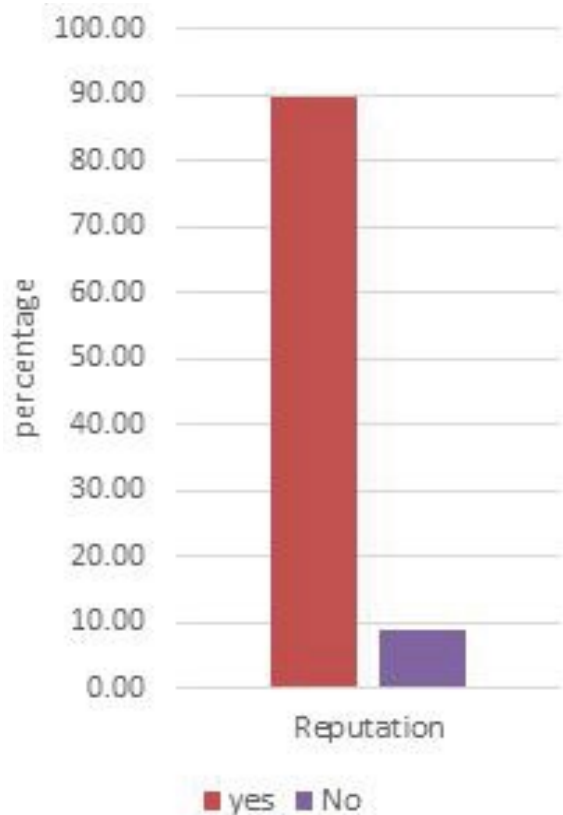


Figure 10: Reputation.

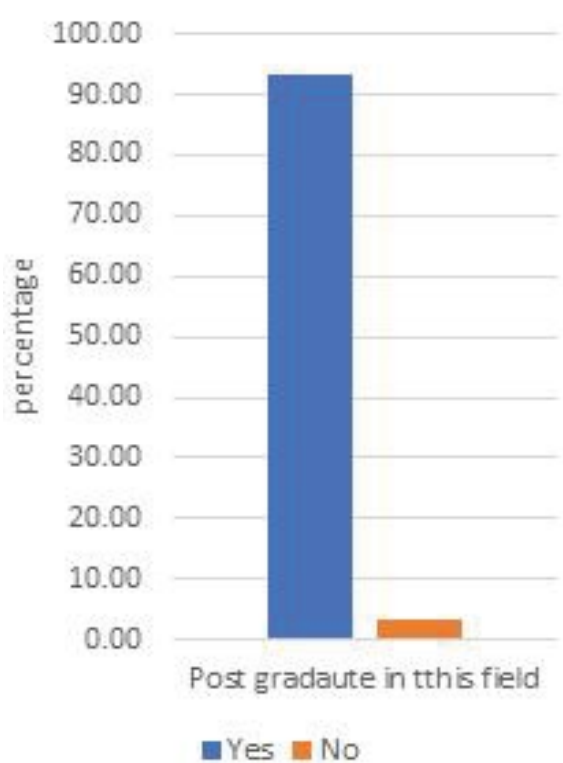


Figure 12: Post graduate in this field.

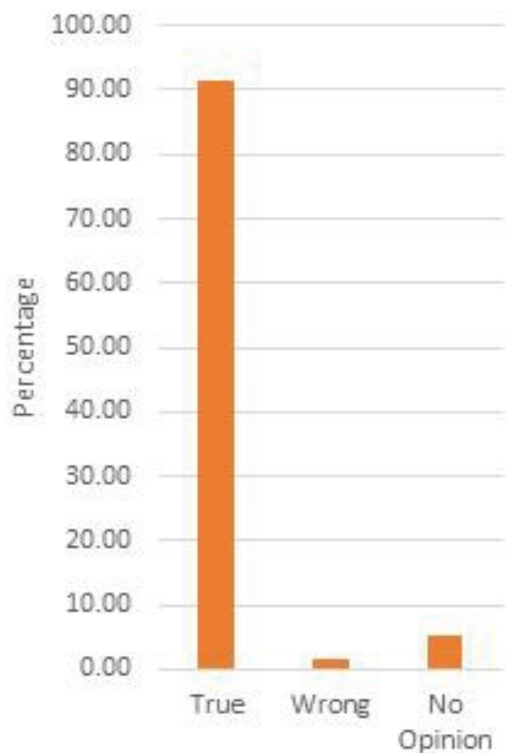


Figure 11: New emerging field.

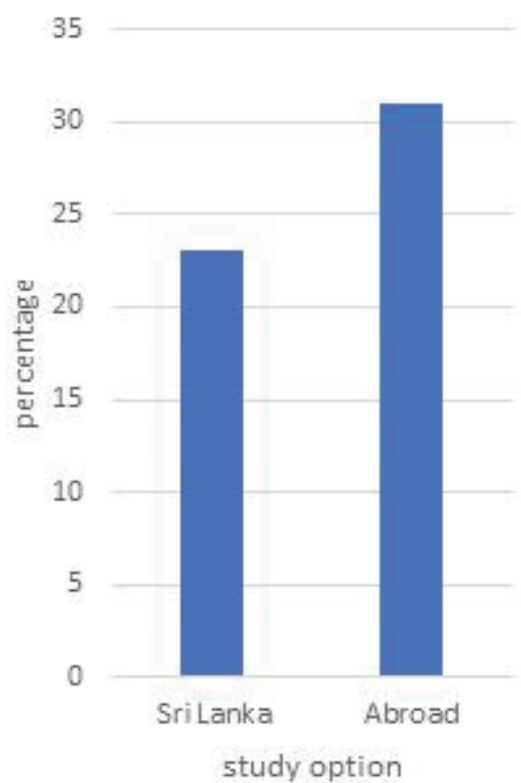


Figure 13: Preferred place.

continue their post graduate studies. Also, 10% of them indicated that they wanted to continue their studies because of their self-interest (Figure 14).

Only 10% of the participants were aware of the post graduate

option in Sri Lanka. Because, around 42.5% participants indicated that they don't have any idea on that, 15% of stated that they didn't search about that and around 28% of participants stated that there is post graduate study option available in Sri Lanka, which is a wrong opinion. Because so far there is no physiotherapy taught course post graduate

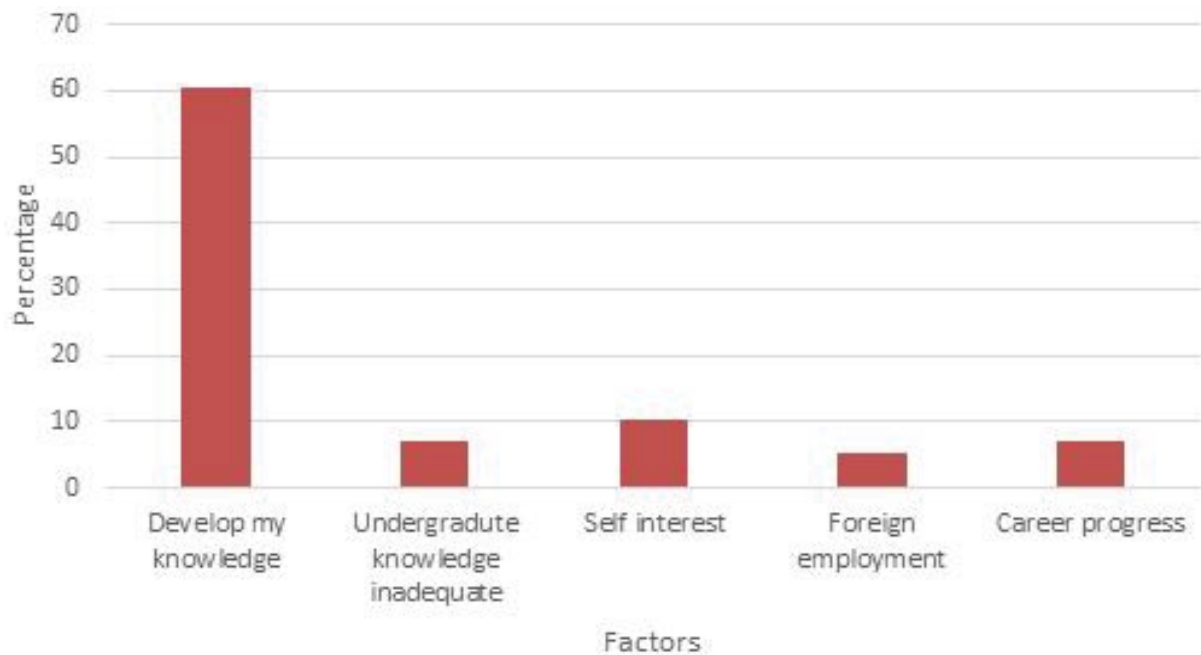


Figure 14: Purpose of post graduate study.

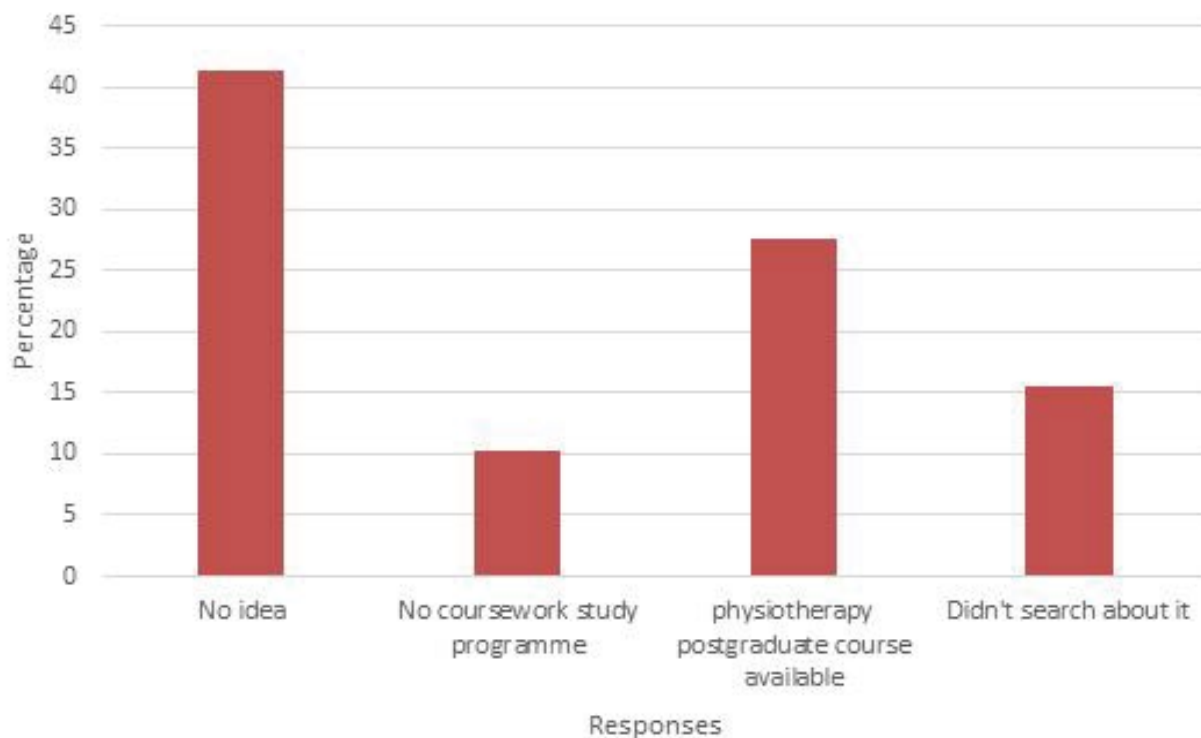


Figure 15: Awareness of post graduate study option in Sri Lanka.

option available in Sri Lanka. Only research based post graduate option available (Figure 15).

Most of the participants stated that they are satisfied with this career programme (Figure 16).

Results indicate that more than 90% of them perceived that this programme will develop their career.

Final questions in the questionnaire were analyzing about their University. Questions included were whether they have obtained

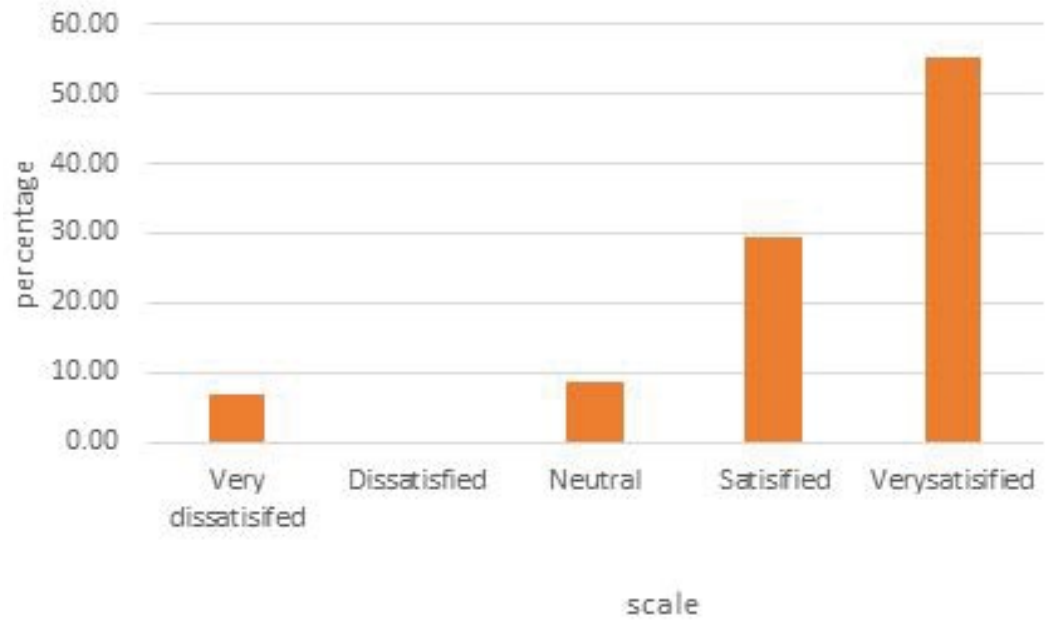


Figure 16: Satisfaction.

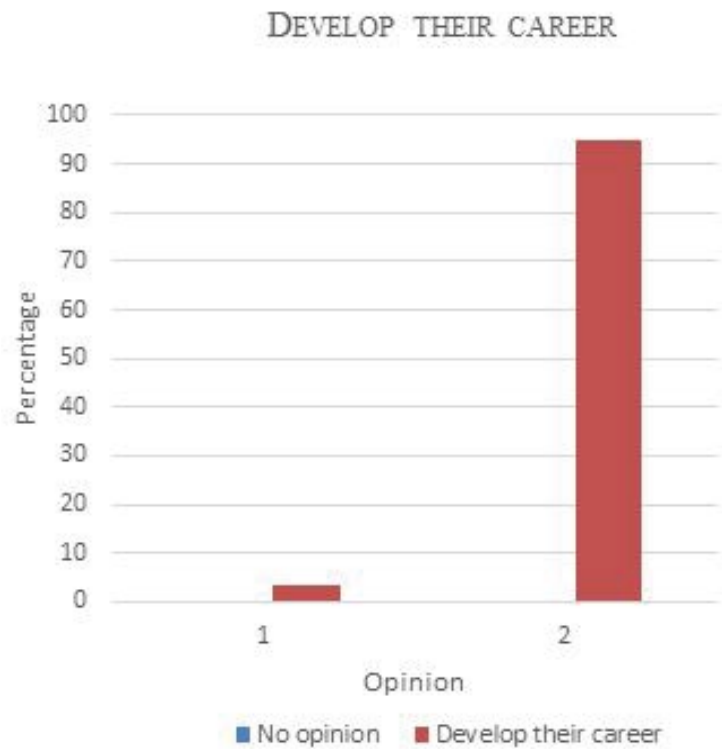


Figure 17: Develop their career.

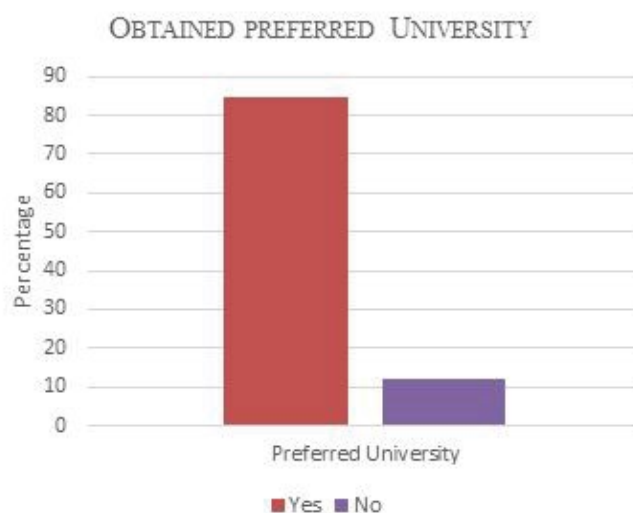


Figure 18: Obtained preferred University.

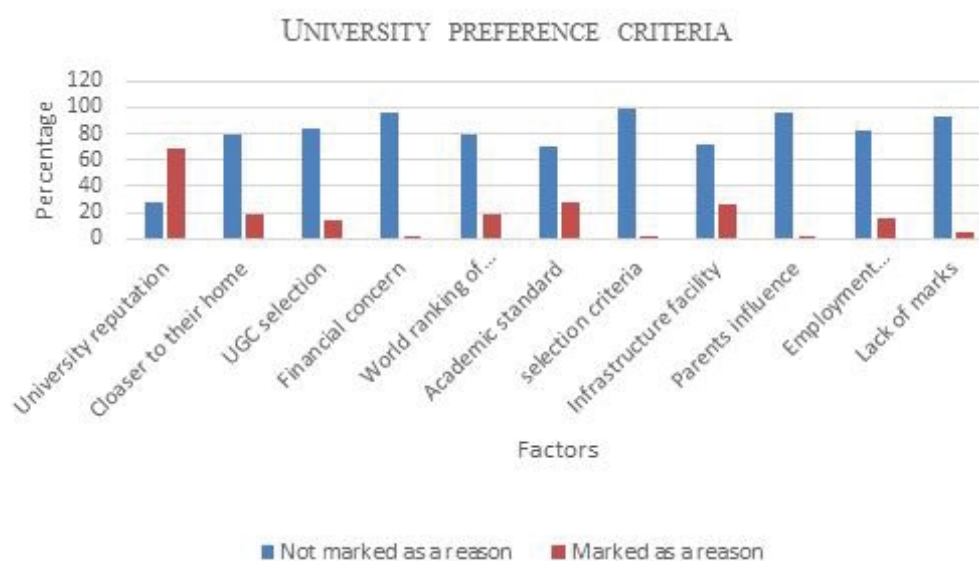


Figure 19: University preference criteria.

preferred University and criteria for indicating preferred university in the application (Figure 17).

Based on the response, more than 80% of the participants obtained their preferred university. University reputation, academic standard, infrastructure facilities are considered as main criteria for their university preference (Figures 18 and 19).

Discussion

Physiotherapy is a health related field. This has been indicated by most of the participants as a reason for selecting this programme. This programme was not the first preference for most of the participants. The reason stated was lack of awareness. Many participants did not aware about this programme before they apply for this. But they used

to search about the programme before they enrol into the programme. Lack of awareness about other career options needs to be addressed. This can be overcome by proper career guidance given in the school. Also, teachers and parents should be aware of other career options. They have potential to guide students.

Results showed that most of the general public is not aware of this study programme. Because most of the participants indicated that internet was the main source of information. Even though teacher and parents considered as a source of information, participants' response percentage was low for that. However, according to a study Parental guidance and family influence considered as the main factor in career choice [2]. If parents and teachers are aware of physiotherapy, that might make them explain students about different career option.

This study revealed that majority of the students was satisfied with their career choice. This is a positive sign toward their career achievement. Because career satisfaction is most important factor in career success [3].

The results revealed that most of the participants willing to do their higher studies, especially in abroad. Develop their knowledge in this field was stated as a reason by a majority of the participants. However, few participants wanted to do their post graduate study in Sri Lanka. But, most of the participants don't have proper knowledge about the Physiotherapy post graduate availability in Sri Lanka. 10% of them had proper knowledge about the physiotherapy taught the postgraduate programme in Sri Lanka. Currently no any Sri Lankan university offer physiotherapy postgraduate study programme.

University preference criteria were analyzed. Most of the participants indicated that University reputation as a reason. This result is similar to the finding of a study carried in UK [4]. But the distance from the home is marked as a reason by only 20% of the students [4]. Also, few of participants stated that infrastructure facility, academic standard and world ranking were the factors. Soutar et al, stated that academic standard is one of the factors considered in University selection [5]. Also, Studied carried in Malaysia stated that this factor was ranked as number one and Campus Facilities and Atmosphere ranked as second in University selection [6]. However, infrastructure facility for physiotherapy programme teaching learning activities and research activities is still lacking in Sri Lanka. If these facilities can be improved in future, it will give a pathway to most of the students to carry out their research studies. This will attract more students since it gives career development pathway.

Limitation of the Study

Data were not collected from the undergraduate who was not there in the first day, before the inauguration ceremony. Only first-year undergraduates were recruited for this study. Because of this, another student perception is not addressed here.

Conclusion

One of the main factors to choose physiotherapy as their career is to

work in health related field. Majority of the female choose physiotherapy as their career. The Internet is the main source of information by which they get to know about physiotherapy. Majority of them consider that this field would develop their career pathway.

Adequate career guidance, proper orientation and creation of awareness of the discipline amongst school students, parents, teachers and public are important. Educate advance level students on other available programmes in sciences before they face the Advance Level examination (should be emphasized) facilitate them to plan a future career. Ensuring good infrastructure to fulfill the demand of the physiotherapy programme, well-equipped research laboratory will attract more students to choose this field. Establishing a post graduate physiotherapy programmes with in the country will encourage students to have future career development in their own country. This will prevent country losing good physiotherapist who might have a good potential to be a part of health care profession.

Ethical approval and consent to participate: Ethical clearance was obtained from ethical review committee, faculty of allied health sciences, University of Peradeniya. Consent to participate was obtain from participant prior to the study in written.

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