

## Emerging Challenges Faced by Private Clinic Physiotherapist in New Normal Times During the Covid-19 Pandemic in Pune City

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**How to cite this article:** Chirag Chaudhari, Ankita Talreja. Emerging Challenges Faced by Private Clinic Physiotherapist in New Normal Times During the Covid-19 Pandemic in Pune City. Indian Journal of Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy 2022;16(3):103-108.

### Abstract

**Objective:** Primary Objective: To assess the challenges faced by private clinic physiotherapists in Pune after easing of lockdown using validated self-reporting questionnaire.

Secondary Objective:

1. To assess the financial impacts on private clinics.
2. To assess the foot fall in the private physiotherapy clinic in Pune after easing of lockdown.
3. To assess the physiotherapy treatment limitations during this pandemic.
4. To assess difficulties while following Maharashtra State Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy Council (MSOTPT) guidelines while treating patients during covid-19 pandemic.
5. To assess problems faced during tele-rehab using Validated self-reporting questionnaire.

**Method:** A cross sectional study was done in Pune City with a sample size of 60 over the period of 3 months using self-reporting validated questionnaire. Participants were picked based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. Questionnaire was circulated through the social media & emailing the link of google form of questionnaire to the participants after the approval of ethical committee. A total of 60 participants submitted the correctly filled questionnaire. After receiving the responses, it was analysed statically and Questionnaire results was presented in the graphical form & conclusion were made according to the pie charts and graphs.

**Results:** Through results it was sighted that the COVID-19 pandemic reinforced critical weakness and numerous challenges for the private clinic physiotherapists. They were facing financial problems, number of patients have reduced in the clinic, they have lost their follow ups during the pandemic, many are following MSOTPT guidelines while treating patients and finding it difficult to follow the guidelines while treating patients and many have shifted their mode of practice to tele-rehabilitation and having problems in that.

**Keywords:** Challenges; physiotherapists; private clinic; covid-19 impact.

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## Introduction

An outbreak of novel Coronavirus disease (Covid-19) in China has influenced every aspect of life.<sup>1</sup> The first case of covid-19 in India was reported in Kerala & the first patient of Coronavirus in Maharashtra was reported on 9 March 2020 in Pune. Covid-19 has the potential to cause severe respiratory tract infection among infected person and is commonly transmitted from person to person via hands, saliva and nasal droplets<sup>2,3</sup> The clinical manifestations of covid-19 comprise fever, cough, nasal congestion, fatigue, and other signs of upper respiratory tract infections including dyspnea and severe chest Symptoms corresponding to pneumonia, and, to date, no specific therapeutic drugs is found.<sup>4-7</sup>

Since the covid-19 spread is so fast and detrimental, many countries have shut down various institutions, social meetings, sports activities, events and even banks in an attempt to check the spread of the infection. When it was identified that community transmission was occurring, including several cases without any connections to previous cases or travel histories to China, India raised its pandemic preparedness alert level, establishing lockdown and sealed the affected area.<sup>8</sup> The first lockdown was imposed on 24th March and A series of gradually increased counter measures were implemented involving all professional groups, including physical therapists.<sup>8</sup>

Physiotherapy services provide the development, maintenance, and recovery of people's movement and functional ability, improving their quality of life.<sup>9</sup> During first wave lockdown all physical therapy interventions, with the exception of respiratory physical therapy in hospitals had stopped and switch into a tele-rehabilitation mode and to manage through telephone or webcam counselling exercise sessions that can be temporarily self-managed by the patient or caregiver to avoid the spread of the disease.<sup>8</sup> So, all private practice Physiotherapy clinic closed during first wave lockdown period.<sup>10</sup> During this period covid-19 reinforced critical weakness and numerous challenges for the physiotherapy profession.<sup>10</sup>

After loosening of lockdown private clinic practice again started all over India. During this period Physiotherapist were exposed to a higher risk

of getting infected due to their close contact with their patients. In particular, physiotherapist perform their duties not only in close contact with the patients. As manual touch is important in Physiotherapy evaluation and treatment they are at higher risk of exposure and getting infected due to close contact with their patients.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, Physiotherapist have a high probability of getting infected from patients and spreading it to their peers, family members and other patients. Patients flow in the clinic may be reduced due to fear of infection.

Considering the current rapid spread of infection, the MSOTPT council highlighted key steps to be taken by Physiotherapist in addition to the standard universal precautions which includes, Infection control measures to be taken at the clinic/hospital includes taking patients' recent travel history; assessing sign and symptoms of RTI; recording patients' body temperature; mouth rinsing with 1% hydrogen peroxide prior to commencing any manipulations & modalities; and frequently cleaning and disinfecting public contact areas including door handles, chairs, plinths, modalities and, washrooms

2. Home visit recommendations
3. Paediatrics Care,
4. Geriatric care
5. Manual therapy recommendations
6. Tele-rehabilitation & teleconsultation and general advice.<sup>11</sup>

Due to Covid-19 pandemic many of private clinic Physiotherapist interrupted their practice may be due to loss of follow-ups after loosening of lockdown. Many has faced financial loss because of reduced flow in the clinic and may be due to financial burden of rent of the clinic during lockdown phase. Many of them started giving treatment via tele-rehab to compensate for loss during this pandemic. Maharashtra Occupational therapy & physical therapy council has made some guidelines to treat patients during this pandemic. In fact, most Physiotherapist may be not be aware of the recent guidelines. The purpose of this study was to determine the challenges private clinic physiotherapist faced during this covid-19 pandemic.

## Materials and Methodology

It was a cross-sectional study in which a self-made validated questionnaire was used to know the challenges faced by private clinic physiotherapist in

new normal times during covid-19 pandemic. Ethics committee clearance was taken prior to start of the study. An online self-made questionnaire was made through google form. Google form link was mailed to the 60 participants by making a list of all owners of private clinics of physiotherapy and data was collected through the submitted form. The google form did not reveal the identity of the participants. After completion, the data was analysed statistically and the survey results were shown as percentage in the form of graphical representation through pie charts and bar graphs. The study was conducted from month January 2021 - May 2021 in MAEER's Physiotherapy college, Talegaon Dabhade, Pune.

**Outcome measure:** The questionnaire contains six domains:

Domain 1: Demographic Data: (Age, Gender, Qualification wise distribution, distribution according to department of practice, years of experience wise distribution).

Domain 2: Questions on financial impact of covid 19 pandemic on private physiotherapy clinics.

Domain 3: Questions on foot fall in the clinic during covid 19 pandemic.

Domain 4: Physiotherapy treatment limitations during covid 19 pandemic.

Domain 5: Difficulty while following MSOTPT guidelines during covid 19 pandemic.

Domain 6: Tele-rehabilitation and its limitations.

## Results

A total of 60 participants completed the questionnaire with a total of 21 questions. 21 questions comprising of 6 sections 1. Demographic data 2. Financial impacts on private clinic 3. Foot fall in the clinic 4. Treatment limitation 5. Difficulties while following MSOTPT guidelines 6. Problems faced during tele-rehabilitation.

1. Were you able to pay wages/Salaries of staff members of your clinic during covid-19 pandemic?

Able to pay salaries	Total numbers	% Distribution
Yes	14	23%
No	9	15%
Partial amount	37	62%
Total	60	

2. Did you observe any changes in patients flow in your clinic after easing of lockdown?

Patient's flow	Total numbers	% Distribution
Yes (Increased)	16	27%
Yes (Reduced)	26	43%
No	14	23%
Don't know	4	7%
Total	60	

3. Did you routinely follow MSOTPT guidelines in your clinic while treating patients in Covid-19 Pandemic?

Following MSOTPT guidelines	Total numbers	% Distribution
Yes	59	98%
No	1	2%
Don't know	0	0%
Total	60	

4. Did you give limited treatment at your clinic to avoid spread of Covid-19?

Gave limited treatment at clinic	Total numbers	% Distribution
Yes	23	38%
No	36	60%
Don't know	1	2%
Total	60	

5. What problems did you face during Tele-rehabilitation?

Problems faced during Tele-rehabilitation	% Distribution
Low internet connectivity	78%
Lack of confidence	23%
Lack of digital knowledge	23%
No problems faced	15%
Don't know	3%
Total	

**Discussion**

The present cross-sectional study reported “Emerging challenges faced by the private clinic physiotherapist in the new normal times during Covid-19 pandemic in Pune. For this purpose, a validated self-reporting questionnaire focusing on closer ended questions was made to gather information about challenges faced by private clinic physiotherapist in new normal times during Covid-19 pandemic. The Questionnaire used in the present study collected information objectively and validated through expert physiotherapists. Challenges were faced by many fields in India during this pandemic due to impact of lockdown and fear of infection especially by the private businesses.

Financial impact has occurred to the physiotherapist during this lockdown period because people were afraid of getting out of their houses and because of this Foot fall in the clinic reduced significantly. Physiotherapist were facing difficulties while treating patients due to close contact. Many has shifted to the tele-rehab mode of treatment to avoid contact and continue their follow up and facing difficulties during tele-rehab. Many of them were facing difficulties while following respective guidelines to treat patients while avoiding close contact. Physiotherapist were treating patients and at a higher risk of acquiring infection.

First case of covid-19 in Maharashtra was found in Pune on 9th March 2020. After that gradually spreading of virus takes place. To avoid this, 1st lockdown was implemented in India from 24 March hence, all non-essential services had stopped due

to this many private sector businesses faced many problems due to lack of income source. Physiotherapy comes under essential and non-essential. Essential services consist of Respiratory care in ICU patients. Physiotherapy in covid-19 patients and all other private services comes under non-essential services. So, all nonessential services had stopped during the lockdown phase and after loosing of lockdown some of the services started but with precautions. During this time many had faced difficulties.

1. Financial impact of clinic: Private Physiotherapy clinic owner had to pay their rent or EMI during lockdown, without any income, after loosening of lockdown clinics got started but due to financial issues many had to change their treatment patterns due to financial impacts on clinic turnover. Many weren't able to pay salary to their staff member of their clinic. Many were paying only partial amount of salary. Many private physiotherapy clinic owners had to closed their clinic temporary due to financial losses, some had Covid centre around their clinic and reduced patients in the clinic.

2. Foot fall in the clinic: Patients flow in the clinic had significantly reduced due to fear of covid-19 infections in people. People were afraid of getting outside the house. Many physiotherapists lost their follow-ups after loosening of lockdown. Due to this overall financial income of clinic has reduced which directly affect the income of the private physiotherapy clinic owner.

3. During Covid-19, after relaxation of lockdown many private physiotherapy services started but guidelines were made to treat patients in this pandemic to avoid the spread of diseases and maintaining social distancing. Maharashtra State Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy Council (MSOTPT) made guideline's for Physiotherapist to treat patients at various sectors which includes following:

Section 1: Training on Covid-19 - update the knowledge on Covid-19.

Section 2: Administration and documentation at the clinic a. Entry point, b. consent and declaration by the patient, c. Workforce planning management, d. Sanitization register e. display safety measures and posters of hand washing.

Section 3: Infection control measures a. social distancing, b. Patient's instruction and preparation, c. Physiotherapists personal care, d. Hygiene measures for equipment, e. Biomedical waste management.

Section 4: Recommendations for special services and set-up a. Home visits recommendations b. Acute care set-up: Covid care, c. Paediatrics physiotherapy care, d. Geriatric physiotherapy care, e. Manual therapy, f. Tele-rehabilitation and teleconsultation.

Section 5: General advice.

Many physiotherapy clinics are following these guidelines to treat patients during pandemic. Many of them were facing difficulties while following these guidelines and they think that modifications should be made in the guidelines like spaced appointment, minimal contact policy, less follow-up and increase focus on home exercise program reduced the close contact with the patients.

4. Treatment limitation: Many are facing difficulties while treating patients during this pandemic due to fear of getting infection and to avoid spread of infection. Many clinics had stopped using some modalities and methods to avoid the spread. Modalities like Hot pack, cryotherapy, Hot fermentation, paraffin wax, SWD, chest pt. in paediatrics had stopped to avoid the spread. Many methods of treatment like MFR Cervical mobilization had stopped due to fear of spread of the infection. Many had given limited treatment at their clinic to avoid the spread of the disease. Many had reduced the duration of treatment during this pandemic.

5. Problems faced during tele-rehabilitation: After lockdown many had shifted their mode of treatment to the tele-rehabilitation but as in physiotherapy manual touch is important to teach and correct the exercise using manual contact. Many had faced problems like low internet connectivity, lack of confidence, lack of digital knowledge. Many had altered the charges of treatment while treating patients using tele-rehabilitation. Many had increased charges due to excess time loss during treatment and many had reduced the charges due to no modalities given during tele-rehabilitation. Many private clinic physiotherapist's think that standard prescription

format should be made for every condition during covid-19 pandemic.

### Conclusion

The covid-19 pandemic reinforced critical weakness and numerous challenges for the private clinic physiotherapist. They are facing financial problems during this pandemic. Foot fall has reduced in the clinic, they have lost their follow-ups during pandemic. They have to give limited treatment to the patients to avoid closed contact with the patients. Many private physiotherapy clinics are following MSOTPT guidelines in Pune district. Many have shifted their practice to Tele-rehabilitation. They are treating patients via Tele-rehabilitation and are facing problems while treating patients.

### Clinical Implications

Standard treatment format should be made to treat patients in the Covid-19 pandemic to avoid spread and excess duration of the treatment. Better internet connectivity should be provided during this pandemic so that tele-rehab can be done without any disturbance and time loss. Standard prescription format should be made for every condition while treating patients using tele-rehabilitation. Every follow-up should be treated digitally to avoid loss of time in explaining & correcting the exercise and to reduce the spread. Financial benefits should be provided by the government in the EMI & rent for such population to avoid financial impacts. More specific guidelines should be designed and legislation on the use of technologies at private clinical setup while attending the patients physically & virtually.

### Future Scope

This study was done on 60 private clinic physiotherapists in Pune district. Further study can be done using larger place and population so, in the future we will be prepared for future pandemics like covid-19 to minimize the impact of these pandemics on various settings.

**Source of funding-** Self

**Conflict of Interest-** nil

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