

Recent Trends in Occupational Therapy Practice amongst the Budding Therapists Across India

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Abstract

Background: Occupational Therapy is increasingly becoming popular. The objective of the present study is to develop an insight to the current trends in practice of occupational therapy in India. The target group chosen for the study are budding occupational therapists who have completed their graduation within the last 5 years.

Objectives: The study aims to investigate the trends in location of work setups, nature of organization of work, nature of place of employment, current work profile, nature of cases these budding therapists are dealing with currently, the work setup they are employed in and remuneration they are receiving. The trends emerging from the present study would be helpful to understand the current work dynamics and thus prepare the young workforce for future possible opportunities.

Study Design: The present study was a survey-based research design. Data was gathered through a questionnaire.

Methods: This questionnaire was distributed on an online platform to 695 therapists practicing across India. Care was taken to include only the therapists who had completed their graduation within the last five years i.e., between 2018-22. Data collection was carried out for a period of 8 months from October 2021 to May 2022.

RESULTS: The analyses revealed that the profession of Occupational Therapy in the country is dominated by female therapists. The age of the workforce that have responded are in their mid-twenties. Most of them are working in urban or metropolitan setups primarily in Paediatric setups in clinics which are mostly privately owned rehabilitation centres.

Conclusion: The present analyses pointed out that there may be a lack of diversification of practice in Occupational Therapy in the country. It also indicated that the freshly graduated out professionals feel that there are a limited remuneration and lack of opportunities in the Government sector, and as a result the current scenario suggests that most of them after being trained turn their head to foreign land for a better opportunity with respect to employment. However, new setups and areas of practice are slowly emerging and opportunities for young budding therapists are increasing back home.

Key Words: Occupational Therapy (OT), American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), Mental Health and Geriatric Care, Neurorehabilitation, Hand Rehabilitation, Oncological Rehabilitation.

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Introduction

With an increase in average life expectancy and awareness in India, the opportunities of an occupational therapist have increased substantially. Awareness about disability and accessibility is increasing. Government policies that support inclusion of people with disabilities in India have increased. This, resulted in growth of occupational therapy as a profession in India.^[1-2-3] According to data obtained in 2019-20 from All India Survey on Higher Education by the Government of India, a total 4102 students get enrolled in Bachelors of Occupational Therapy and a total of 362 students get enrolled in Masters of Occupational Therapy in India.^[4] It is a common experience, in this field, that most of the students drop out of the course or change their stream post completion of graduation. Of those who continue, more than 25-30% of occupational therapists in India migrate to overseas countries owing to inadequate lucrative opportunities in both government and private sectors^[5]. There are approximately 5000 occupational therapists in India mostly employed in the private hospitals, special schools, rehabilitation clinics, home health systems, non-governmental and non-profit organisations.^[3]

Recent trends amongst young and budding occupational therapists in the country show an alarming and critical situation may arise regarding future of this profession. The present study, thus, gathers information which may provide a basic layout of the choices made by the budding therapists with respect to the aspects as mentioned above. This outcome of the present would also be informative for the freshly graduated professionals for it could provide valuable information to a spectrum of opportunities that may lie in front of these upcoming students and budding professionals helping them to plan a way ahead, giving them an insight of the current situation too.

Materials and Methods

A questionnaire consisting of 12 questions related to demographics and information regarding current nature of work of the budding therapists across the country was formed. The questionnaire was administered in the form of 'Google Forms', as the survey was to reach professionals far and wide. It was administered to the professionals who had completed their graduations and had passed out within five years and were working presently. Informed consent

regarding willingness to participate in the study was taken from the participants and confidentiality of information was assured. The questionnaire was shared online to about 695 budding therapists, out of which 402 responded. The study focused on getting responses from therapists who completed their graduation within last 5 years so as to capture the essence of the voice of the young budding therapists of the country. The data collection was carried out for a period of 8 months from October 2021 to May 2022. The study was carried out for a period of one year from October 2021 to October 2022. The raw data was transferred to the Excel sheet in Microsoft Office software. Data was interpreted as percentages and aggregate numbers for comparative purposes.

Findings

3.1 Data pertaining to male to female ratio of the respondents:

The Data constituted 63.18% females and 36.81% of males (Fig 1)

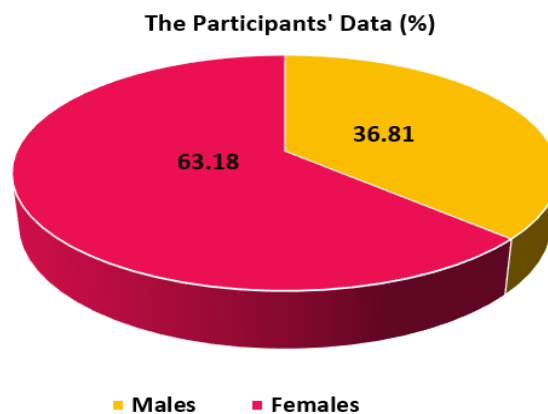


Figure 1. Percentage of male and female participants

3.2 Data pertaining to age group of the participants:

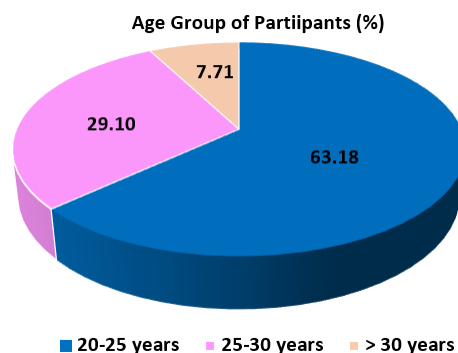


Figure 2. Age group of the participants

3.3 Data pertaining to Work Set-up locations of the participants:

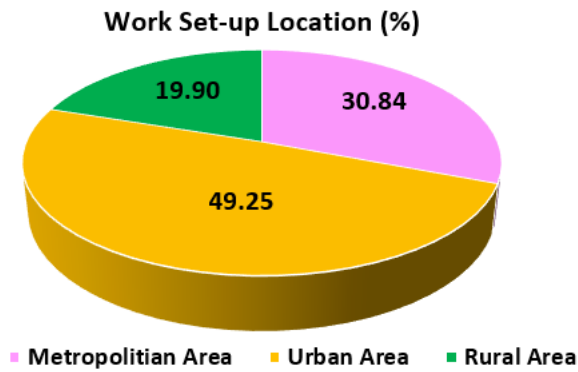


Figure 3. Work Set-up locations of the participants

3.4 Data pertaining to Nature of Organizational

which the participants work.

Nature of Organization where the participants Work (%)

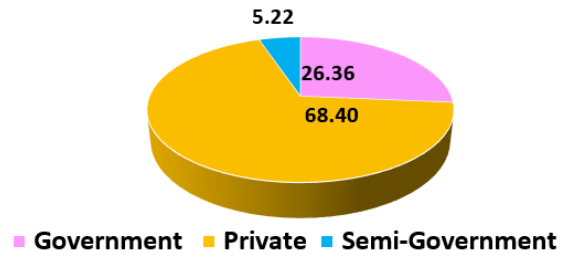


Figure 4. Nature of Organization in which the participants work

3.5 Data pertaining to the place of employment of the participants.

Place of Employment of the participants (%)

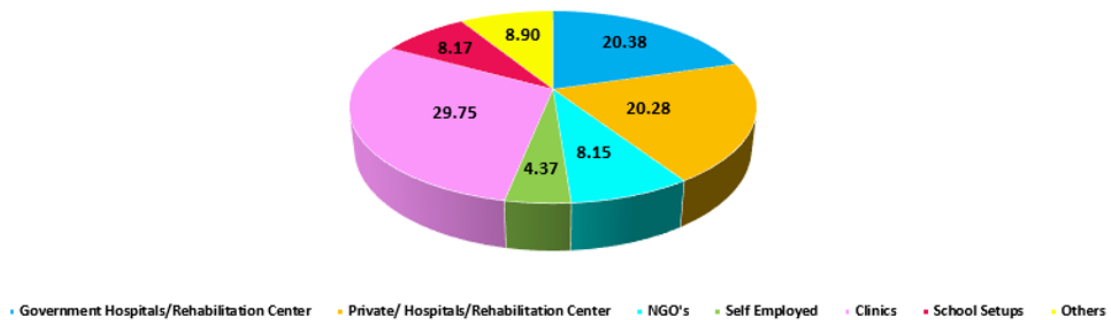


Figure 5. Place of employment of the participants.

3.6 Data pertaining to the Nature of work set up of the participants.

Nature of Work Setup (%)

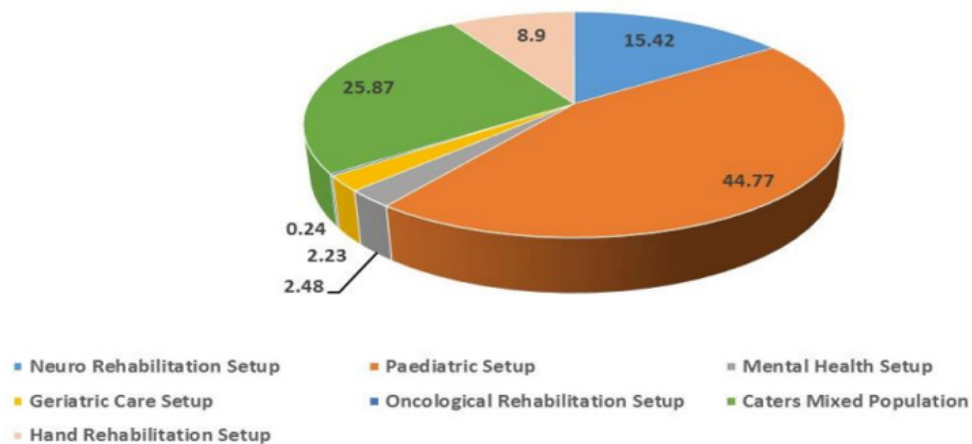


Figure 6: Nature of work set up.

3.7 Data pertaining to Annual Income of the participants.

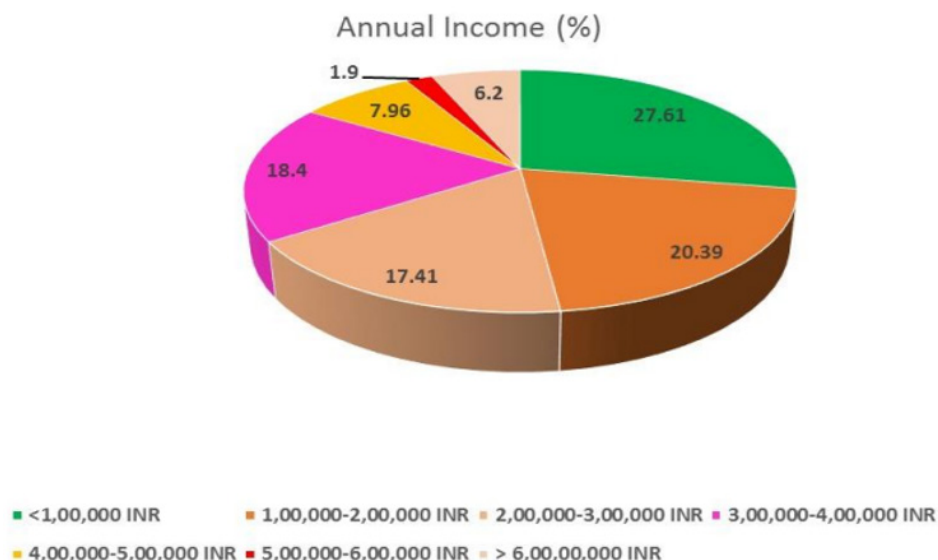


Figure 7. Percentage wise Annual income of the respondents.

Discussions

There were 402 respondents out of whom 254 were females i.e., 63% and 148 males i.e., 37 % of the entire data set. It was found that the number of female therapists were 26% more than the males. According to data released by AOTA, in 2012 females dominate the occupational therapy field and a majority of 91% of the therapists are females. [6] According to a 2020 report of popular website Data USA 88% of the occupational therapists are females worldwide attributing to better emotional understanding and empathetic stand point. Following the same trend 63% of the budding occupational therapy workforce are women in India. However, it appears that India produces more male OTs in comparison to other parts of the world. [7-8-9]

Maximum therapists, i.e., 63% who have completed their graduation in last 5 years are in the age group of 20-25 years. Only 7.7% are of the age group 30 and above.

Almost 80% of the young occupational therapy workforce is either working in a metropolitan or urban type of work setup. A minority of 9.9% of the budding therapists work in the rural setup. There could be multiple causes for the same. Either there is a lack of awareness amongst rural population and rural areas in this sector or the concerned administration

in the rural areas has yet to equip the therapists by setting up the required infrastructure for this sector, resulting in so few a therapist working in rural areas. This could be further investigated.

Majority of the budding therapists are working in a Clinic (29.85%). The percentage of therapists working in a Private Hospital/Rehabilitation Setup and Government Hospital/ Rehabilitation Setup is nearly the same, being 22.88% and 22.38% respectively. However only a small population of therapists work in Non-Government Organizations (NGO) and School Setups (8.20% and 8.95% respectively).

Only 26.4% are employed in the government setup indicating lack of enough government posts and less interest of the candidates due to less remuneration. Setups in Urban and Metropolitan areas on the other hand provide better remuneration, working facilities and opportunities for recognition for the therapists. Similar reasons may account for the majority of the therapists working in Clinics and Private Rehabilitation Centres. The concept of therapists working in Special Schools and NGO's is a concept which has still not gained much popularity in India, but may gain momentum in the coming years.

As per the present study, majority of therapists are currently engaged in a Paediatric setup that is about 44.77% of the respondents, setups that caters

mixed populations, is the next in list of setups, in which young therapists are engaged in, the percentage being 25.87% followed by Neurorehabilitation i.e., 15.42%. 8.9% of the therapists are working in a Hand Rehabilitation setup. However, domains of Mental Health and Oncological Rehabilitation are concepts that are still in budding stage in the country and only 2.48% and 0.24% of the therapists are engaged in these setups. 2.23% of the therapists work in a Geriatric Care setup, which is also a growing trend in India.

In the present sample it is observed that a small percentage of therapists, i.e., 16.06% have an annual income of more than 4,00,000 INR. About 27.61% of therapists are working at an amount of less than 1,00,000 INR per year. 20.9% have a range of 1,00,000 to 2,00,000 INR. 17.41% have their salary as 2,00,000 to 3,00,000 INR, 18.4% have their annual income as 3,00,000 to 4,00,000 INR. A minority of therapists work for incomes between 4,00,000 to 5,00,000 INR; 5,00,000 to 6,00,000 INR; more than 6,00,000 INR that is 7.96%, 1.9%, 6.2% respectively.

There are 45,000 qualified occupational therapists in India and around 2.5 lakh patients are handled by OTs in India per day.^[4] Despite this fact, the average annual compensation range of occupational therapists in India was 2, 40,000 to 3, 60,000 INR^[3,10] (2015), which falls way below than that of general physicians, which is 5, 39,488 INR^[11] (2015). According to the website Pay-scale average annual salary of an occupational therapist is 4,09,349 INR^[11] whereas annual salary of a general physician 6, 97,141 INR^[7] as of the year 2021, clearly the gap seems to be widening.

Conclusion

The recent trends amongst budding occupational therapists in the country suggest that a young task force, majority in the mid-twenties mostly work in the urban and metropolitan areas of the country. Private setups and clinics, especially of Paediatrics, dominate as primary areas of practice in the country. The annual salary for majority does not increase more than 4 lakhs per annum. Lack of a regulatory body, limited government policies, limited job opportunities and overlapping professional boundaries could be factors contributing to limited

practice areas and work setups of occupational therapy within the country. Encouraging more of adult based services setups, encouraging induction of OTs in School Setups, NGOs, Oncological Rehabilitation/ Mental Health and Geriatric Care units; awareness driven rural campaigns and reaching out to the administration regarding proper framework and regulatory body for the profession could be the possible solutions.

Limitations of the Study

The data collection was limited to an online mode only. A future scope of the study would explore a detailed statistical analysis to establish associations within different aspects of the questionnaire.

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Conflicts of Interest: The authors have no conflict of interest.

Ethical Clearance: Not applicable in the present study

Declaration

The authors declare the following:

- that this manuscript is the original work of ours and entire information in it is accurate.
- that all research is conducted ethically. The data collected was survey based via a questionnaire which was administered Pan India, both online and offline. Before the data was collected, the authors informed the subjects that the identity of the participants will be confidential and if they (the participants) agreed, then they could proceed with the survey.
- that the content in the manuscript has not been previously published and is not being concurrently submitted elsewhere.

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