

GENDER DISTRIBUTION OF PHYSIOTHERAPY GRADUATES FROM NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

ODEBIYI DANIEL O, M.Sc.

Department of Physiotherapy, College of Medicine, University of Lagos

ADEGOKE BOA, Ph.D

Department of Physiotherapy, University of Ibadan, Ibadan

Correspondence: DO Odebiyi, M.Sc. (Physiotherapy), Department of Physiotherapy, College of Medicine, University of Lagos, PMB 12003, Lagos, Nigeria • E-mail: femiodebiyi@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Physiotherapy has been reported to be a predominantly female profession in the United Kingdom. There is a paucity of socio-demographic literature on Nigerian physiotherapists generally and the gender distribution of the practitioners in particular. The objective of this study was to document the gender distribution of physiotherapy graduates from Nigerian universities.

This was a retrospective study of 1490 physiotherapy graduates from Nigerian universities from the inception of physiotherapy training in the institutions up to the end of the 2003/2004 session. Data were obtained from the records of the Medical Rehabilitation Therapist Board of Nigeria (MRTBN) and the records of the schools concerned. The student files of the graduates were reviewed to obtain details of their sex, state of origin and year of graduation.

Nine hundred and twenty (62%) of the graduates were male while 570 (38%) were female. The majority (62%) graduated from the University of Ibadan. The results also showed that majority of the graduates hailed from the southwestern geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

More men than women have graduated in physiotherapy from Nigerian universities. We also inferred that unlike in the United Kingdom and other overseas nations, the practice of physiotherapy appears to be dominated by men.

Key words: physiotherapy graduates, Nigerian universities, physiotherapy training

INTRODUCTION

The art and science of the practice of physiotherapy has evolved to such an extent that virtually every man or woman, whether sick or healthy, can physically benefit from some of the procedures of this profession.¹ The growth of the practice of physiotherapy to what it is today has been the collective effort of all the practitioners, irrespective of their gender.

According to Thornton,² physiotherapy practice and training was started by two females (nurses): Rosalind Paget and Lucy Robinson in 1894. Admission of students was limited to women until 1920 when membership was extended to men. Most of the existing schools of physiotherapy claimed not to have facilities for training men.² This explains why there were predominantly more women in the physiotherapy profession in the United Kingdom. However, the number of male physiotherapists began to increase between 1932 and 1941, due to the increase in the number of training schools for males; this increase in training schools for males has also been postulated to be due to the English Government's pronouncement in 1942 that females were not to remain in full-time education after the age of 20 years.²

There was a problem of retaining qualified staff (physiotherapists inclusive) within the National Health Scheme (NHS) in the United Kingdom, as many of the staff who were leaving the NHS were doing so for child-rearing reasons, and many of them did not return to the NHS workforce or returned to work part-time.³ Davies³ reported that men are more represented in the senior posts, with the women leaving the profession for maternity reasons. It was

suggested that men could offer greater stability to the (physiotherapy) profession as they are likely to make a lifetime professional commitment. This eventually led to the process of masculinization of the physiotherapy profession in Europe.

Two chartered physiotherapists from Britain (Miss Manfield and Mr. Williams) introduced science-based physiotherapy into Nigeria in 1945.^{4,5} They were employed by the government of Nigeria and attached to the Orthopaedic Hospital, Igbobi, Lagos. Their primary assignments were to treat wounded and disabled Nigerian soldiers returning home from the Second World War and start a three-year (diploma) training programme in physiotherapy. The graduates from the training programme at Igbobi were designated as assistant physiotherapists and were required to work strictly under the supervision of chartered physiotherapists who were trained in England.⁴ The training programme at Igbobi eventually gave way to a Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) degree in Physiotherapy at the University of Ibadan in October 1966.^{4,5}

The first set of British-trained Nigerian physiotherapists returned to the country between 1958 and 1959⁶ — about 75% of them were men. The observed low proportion of male physiotherapists in many countries of the world has necessitated the recruiting of more men into the physiotherapy profession in such countries.⁷ To date, information on the gender distribution of physiotherapists in Nigeria is not readily available; hence this study investigated the gender distribution of physiotherapy graduates from Nigerian universities.

METHODOLOGY

This study involved five Nigerian universities that were accredited to train physiotherapists by the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC). The universities were: University of Ibadan, Ibadan; University of Lagos, Lagos; Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife; University of Nigeria, Nsukka; and Bayero University, Kano (formerly Federal School of Physiotherapy, Kano). Data were retrieved from the records of these schools and the Medical Rehabilitation Therapists Board of Nigeria (MRTBN). Personal visits were also made to the schools in order to include data of those who graduated from the five schools before the signing into law of the decree (Decree 39 of 1993) that established the MRTBN.

The study involved data on 1490 individuals that graduated from the training institutions from their inception up to the end of the 2003/2004 academic session. The following data were retrieved from the records of the participants: gender, state of origin, and year of graduation. However, the complete records on students that were enrolled in the physiotherapy training programme of Obafemi Awolowo University between 1977 and 1988 were not available hence the data on the school for this period were excluded. Descriptive statistics of percentages were used to present the data.

RESULTS

Data on 1490 physiotherapy graduates were studied. Sixty-two percent of the graduates were men. Table 1 shows the gender distribution of the graduates. About half (49%) of the physiotherapists graduated from the University of Ibadan, the first university in Nigeria, while the least percentage (8%) graduated from Bayero University, Kano.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of the Gender of the Physiotherapy Graduates

University	TOTAL		MALE		FEMALE	
	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)
University of Ibadan	724	48.59	445	61.46	279	38.45
University of Lagos	320	21.48	193	60.31	127	39.96
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife	166	11.14	107	64.46	69	41.57
University of Nigeria, Nsukka	167	11.21	104	62.28	63	37.72
Bayero University, Kano	113	7.58	81	71.68	32	28.32

DISCUSSION

The problem of retaining qualified staff within the National Health Service (NHS) has been identified in the United Kingdom, as many of the female health care professionals left the NHS for child-rearing and domestic reasons; as physiotherapy had originally been a predominantly female profession.⁴ This retrospective study was designed to provide information on the pattern of gender distribution of physiotherapy graduates from Nigerian universities.

The first objective of this study was to determine the gender distribution of physiotherapy graduates from Nigerian universities. The results showed that

in all the schools, the proportion of males was higher than that of the females. The highest number of graduates expectedly came from the University of Ibadan, being the pioneer school of physiotherapy in Nigeria. Also, the majority of the graduates were from the western part of the country. The ratio of male to female was approximately 3:1 for the graduates from the universities of Ibadan and Lagos and 4:1 for graduates from Bayero University Kano. However, in the eastern part of Nigeria, the ratio of male to female physiotherapy graduates was quite close. This observation may not be unconnected with the 'boys drop out syndrome' brought about by the societal values in eastern Nigeria. This observed phenomenon was corroborated by Birabi⁸ who cited the work of Professor Gilbert Onwu for UNICEF on 'why boys are out of school in Eastern Nigeria' and which attributed the 'boys drop out syndrome' to some cultural and religious beliefs.

The second objective of this study was to compare the results obtained with what is obtainable in Europe and Asia. The results of this study are not consistent with previous studies in Europe and Asia. The latter reported that there are more females in the physiotherapy profession than males.^{3,9} There are historical reasons why there are so few men in physiotherapy in Europe, which according to Davies,³ included a lack of information and career advice concerning physiotherapy that boys received at school, and the fact that physiotherapy had not shed its female image, association with nursing, non-availability of degree programme in physiotherapy, poor pay and the associated lack of status and prestige. The majority of these factors had been largely resolved before physiotherapy spread from England to Nigeria. More so, physiotherapy training started in Nigeria as a degree course at the University of Ibadan. Davies,³ in his study, reported that changes in physiotherapy education from diploma to degree-based course and the increased autonomy of physiotherapists have attracted more men into the profession in several countries. However, the general effects of culture, religious

beliefs and societal factors on education in Africa, and Nigeria in particular, cannot be overemphasized.

CONCLUSION

In Nigeria, the proportion of males in the physiotherapy profession is higher than that of the females, unlike in the United Kingdom where physiotherapy is reported to be a predominantly female profession. The historical background of physiotherapy in Nigeria whereby the foundation practitioners were a male and a female expatriate and the fact that the first set of Nigerian physiotherapists were mostly male might explain why there are more male in the physiotherapy profession in Nigeria than in the Western nations.

REFERENCES

1. Owocye IO. What is physiotherapy? *Journal of the Nigeria Medical Rehabilitation Therapists* 1996; **1(1)**: 7-8.
2. Thornton E. Hundred years of physiotherapy education. *Physiotherapy* 1994; **89**: A.A. 11A-19A.
3. Davies J. Physiotherapy: Where are the men? *Physiotherapy* 1990; **76(3)**: 132-134.
4. Oshin TA. Physiotherapy in Nigeria: Ycster years, presently and in the next millennium. A paper presented during 1999 annual conference and scientific seminar (40th Anniversary), Osun Presidential Hotel, Osogbo, Osun State.
5. Olaogun MOB. Personal communication, 1994.
6. Ajao CA. The Nigeria Society of Physiotherapy: the First Decadc. *Journal of Nigeria Society of Physiotherapy* 1969; Maiden Issue: 4-10.
7. Westbrook MT and Nordholm LA. Changes in the characteristics of physiotherapy students in New South Wales over the decades 1976-1986. *The Australian Journal of Physiotherapy* 1987; **32(2)**: 101-109.
8. Birabi, B: Personal communication, 2001.
9. Meager N. School leavers: Here today gone tomorrow. *Manpower Policy and Practice* 1987.