

Professional Prestige As My Physiotherapy Students Perceive It

Henrik Prendushi

Abstract: The aim of this study was to investigate profession perceived prestige of physiotherapy students compared to 11 selected professions/occupations. The selected professions are: Physiotherapist; Doctor (GP); Nurse; Architect; Secondary school teacher; General economist; Accountant; Policeman; Lawyer; Chef (cook); Mechanic (car mechanic). The study was made by an anonymous questionnaire distributed to 25 (out of 34, the total number of course students) students of physiotherapy course at the University of Shkodra "Luigi Gurakuqi" in Albania. The students gave their evaluations in a 6-point Likert. Analysis of the data is done in Excel. The limited number of participating students did not allow us to use elements of the statistical analysis, other than the average and the percentage. In the questionnaire are treated five dimensions associated with the prestige of the profession as indicated in previous studies. The analyzed dimensions are: level of education, level of income, level of responsibility, level of social standing, and the level of usefulness. The physiotherapist profession was ranked first concerning the levels of education (with equal points to that of doctor) and the usefulness dimensions, and in second place regarding the levels of responsibility and social standing. The students gave the lower estimation for their profession for the level of income, which is placed fourth. Students in general have created a grouping of the three medicine professions resulting in highest scores. In the overall ranking the physiotherapist profession ranks in second place after the doctor and followed by the nurse. The same ranking of professions/occupations is valid for both genders for the top three professions.

Index Terms: Albania, income, questionnaire, physiotherapy, professional prestige, social position, students.

1 INTRODUCTION

The choice of university study program and therefore the selection of the future profession constitute one of the most important choices in life. There are a number of studies about the opinions of students, when they are on the verge of graduating, in relation to the profession and to the preferred university program. Results generally confirm the choice made at the beginning of their university studies [1], [2], [3], [4]. A characteristic of any profession is that it has a social standing compared to the other professions [5], [6], which also influence the professional autonomy [7]. Every profession is associated with certain material and moral values in every society. Some professions, including medical professions, legal and others, are associated with power, prestige and material reward [8], means with career success [9], but all this in many cases is under the influence of gender [10], [11]. In the medical professions there are prestige hierarchies for medical specialties and diseases [12], too. The social position of the profession constitutes, without a doubt, an object of interest for those who exercise it. This also applies for physiotherapy. There are not so many studies providing information about the prestige of physiotherapy profession in different countries. In many countries of the world the attitudes toward this profession as well as the level of awareness are generally good [13] but there are also cases of a low awareness for physiotherapy profession [14]. The general model that comes out it is that the higher educational levels are positively associated with better occupational prestige [11]. There are a number of studies about the perceptions of physiotherapy profession and on what the patients, or other people, thought about it. Studies are generally concentrated on the perceived characteristics of physiotherapist profession, or what the people know about the profession and the services it provides.

From the results obtained comes out that the public, generally, associates the physiotherapist profession with exercise and the treatment of musculoskeletal conditions [13], and seems unaware of the wide range of physiotherapeutic services [14]. But a study completed in the US shows that physiotherapy services are generally known but on the other hand the physiotherapist profession is less well-known [15]. In an Australian study a propos the perception of physiotherapy services by medical students results that the physiotherapists enjoy a positive reputation, but many aspects of the physiotherapists work, regarding different health problems, were unknown [16]. From some other studies results that the physiotherapy profession in all aspects of its work, from the study opportunities up to career possibilities, it is not known enough [17], [18], [19], [20], [21], [22], [23]. In general, there are just a few of studies that evaluate the physiotherapy profession in relation to other professions, which certainly represents a significant lack of knowledge regarding the profession of physiotherapist and it is also related with the future of this profession [24], [25], [26]. With regard of physiotherapists' perception to their profession, the studies, in general, and in particular in recent years, are not numerous. In a short review results that the physiotherapy profession is generally positively perceived by current and future physiotherapists, but in different studies it is pointed out the lack of enough awareness among the people about this profession [27]. A Japanese study with physiotherapists shows that the physiotherapy still lack a definition as a discipline and require more autonomy to be considered as a profession [19]. In a not recent study in England it is found that both physiotherapy students and the public rated physiotherapy as an intermediate occupation rather than as a profession [25]. Even an Australian study shows that physiotherapy needs more definition [28]. In a study completed in some European countries it is shown that the students of physiotherapy in the choice of their profession are pretty influenced by the prestige of the profession, though this is subjective to the countries of origin and also related to differences in legislation [29]. Results from a study with students at the end of their university study show that despite their reasonable doubts on their future professional work they express high confidence in the prestige of the physiotherapist profession [30]. But in another study it is

- Henrik Prendushi
- Department of Nursery/Physiotherapy, Faculty of Natural Sciences, University of Shkodra "Luigi Gurakuqi" Albania.

shown that the physiotherapists are moderately satisfied with their profession [31]. In our study we will try to give some considerations about how our students foresee the prestige of their profession, now at the conclusion of their bachelor study in physiotherapy, close to the start of their exercise. In our work we checked the perceived prestige of physiotherapy profession, especially, relative to other professions as nurse, doctor and other, by the physiotherapy students in their last year of studies in a course of Physiotherapy at University Luigj Gurakuqi in Albania. The prestige of the profession, as a problem, is very little treated in Albanian literature. One of the most significant studies in this respect is that of evaluation and comparison of professional status between the interpreters and the nurses through a questionnaire distributed in 64 countries worldwide [32], in the meantime, Albania currently has a large number of students that after performing secondary school continues the studies with the objective of having a higher social prestige [33].

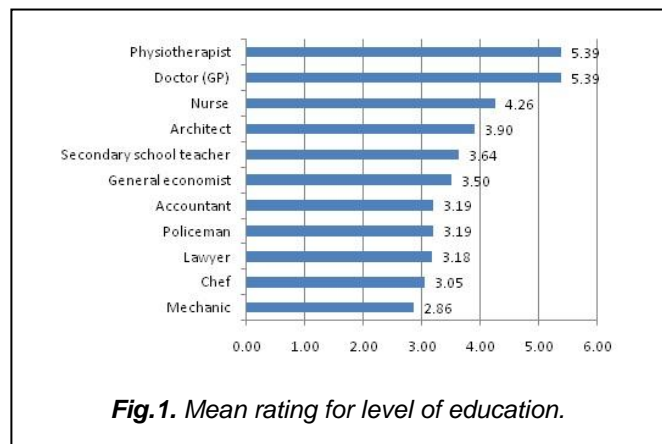
2 MATERIAL AND METHOD

The study is based on preceding studies [24], [26], and is prepared to assess the occupational prestige of physiotherapy students at the end of their university study. The main objective of the study was to know the perceptions of the students regarding their profession, physiotherapy, as well as its position compared to some other professions/occupations. The study is based on a questionnaire in which is asked, to the students, to give evaluations over several dimensions that in general describe the social position of the people exercising these professions/occupations. The used dimensions stem from already mentioned studies [24], [26], and consist of those of level of education, level of income, level of responsibility, level of social standing, and level of usefulness. The questionnaire was anonymous and at the first page was written that the students must not give any identifying information. To the students was made clear that the questionnaire filling is voluntary, and they cannot fill or can fill it partially, too. The questionnaires were randomly gathered and mixed again in front of the students to ensure the anonymity. The questionnaire was distributed to the students in their last lecture of Occupational Medicine and consists of three parts: the demographics and the research divided into two parts. The results of processing of the first part of the research are in publishing process [4], while here we will present the results of the second part, regarding the prestige of the profession of physiotherapist as conceived by students at the threshold of the beginning of their profession exercise. The questionnaire aimed at having a rating of the 11 professions/occupations on each of the five dimensions described above. The choice of professions involved in the study was made based on the above studies, but also looking at the reality of the country. They are as follows: Physiotherapist; Doctor (GP); Nurse; Architect; Secondary school teacher; General economist; Accountant; Policeman; Lawyer; Chef (cook); Mechanic (car mechanic). The outcomes were got on a 6-point Likert. The processing of the questionnaires has begun with their numbering. For analyzing the data it is been used Excel software. At the beginning we build up a table in excel. In each column were placed the questions and the response options, while each row corresponds to a compiled questionnaire. In the cases when in the questionnaires there are unanswered questions it is reflected, in the Excel table, as "ABSENT". In data analyzing there are calculated percentages of *de facto*

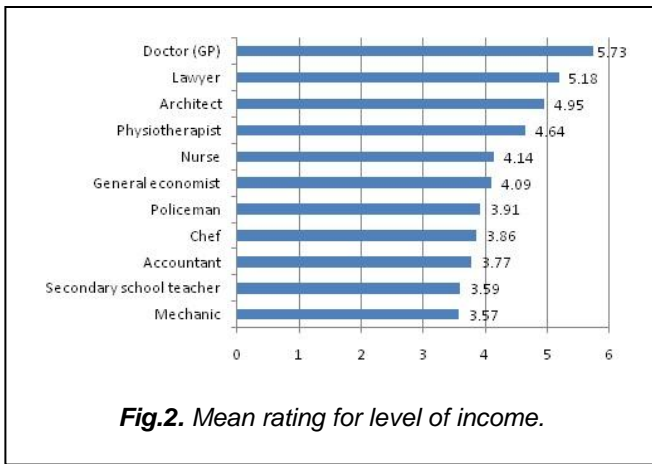
answers. For each of the dimensions are been calculated the mean values of the estimates given by students for each of the 11 professions. Then the results are ordered and it was built the corresponding chart of the data. Finally it is made an overall evaluation for each of the professions by taking the average value of *de facto* data in the table. For the three top professions it is prepared a separately chart for each gender, too.

3 RESULTS

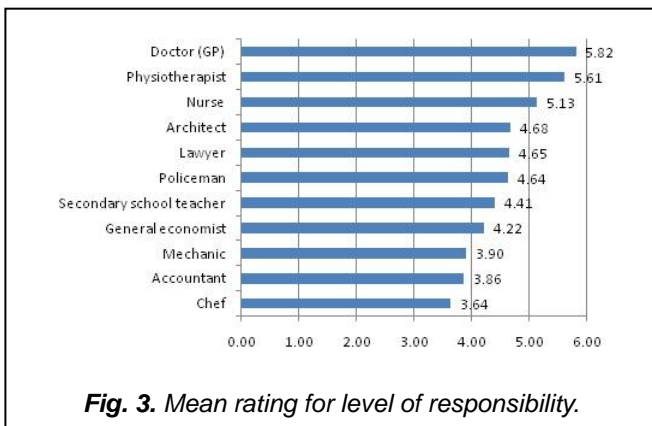
As The study involved 25 students from the physiotherapy course of Luigj Gurakuqi University at Shkodra, out of 34 (23 female and 11 male students), which is the total number of the course students. We had a compiling percentage of 100% (25/25) and a participation rate (calculated over the total number of the course students) of 73.5% (25/34). The questionnaire was compiled by 19 (76%) female, with a mean age of 20.74 and 6 (24%) male students, with a mean age of 21.50. All students declared that they completed the high school in 2013. All the male students studied in public schools. The female students are devised in two groups: 6 of them studied in private schools, and the other 13 in public schools. The students belong to the third year, graduating, of the physiotherapy course. They were all over 18 years old. *Level of education.* By the chart (Fig. 1) appears that the students' perceived level of the education for the different professions places the physiotherapist and the doctor (GP) at the highest level with equal mean points (5.39), and the chef and the mechanic at the lowest. At the third place is ranked the nurse profession with a big difference, 1.13 points, between the first two ranked. Physiotherapy students, clearly, differentiated between their own profession and the nursing.



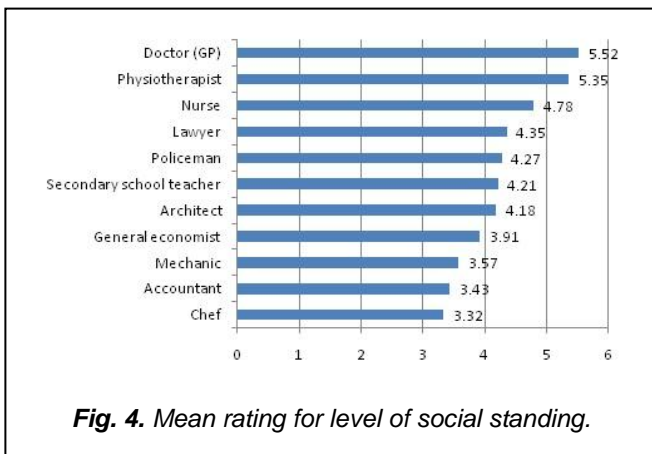
Level of income. In the chart for this dimension (Fig. 2) in the first place it is placed the doctor (GP), with 5.73 points, then the lawyer and the architect and in the fourth position the physiotherapist, with 4.64 points, followed by the nurse with 4.14 points.



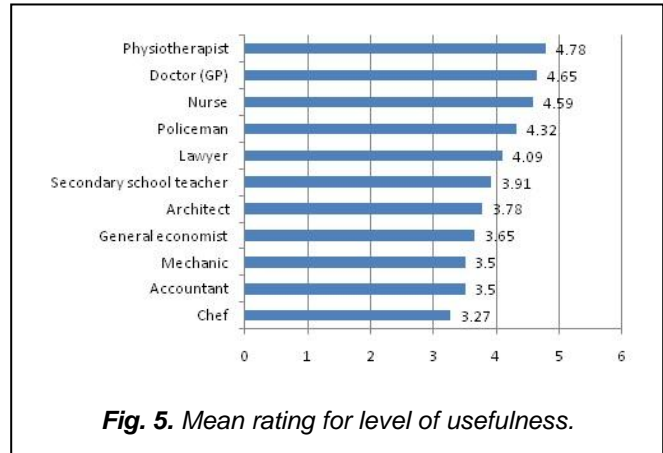
Level of responsibility. In this dimension (Fig. 3) the physiotherapy students place themselves, with 5.61 points, just after the doctor (GP), with 5.82, and followed by the nurse with 5.13.



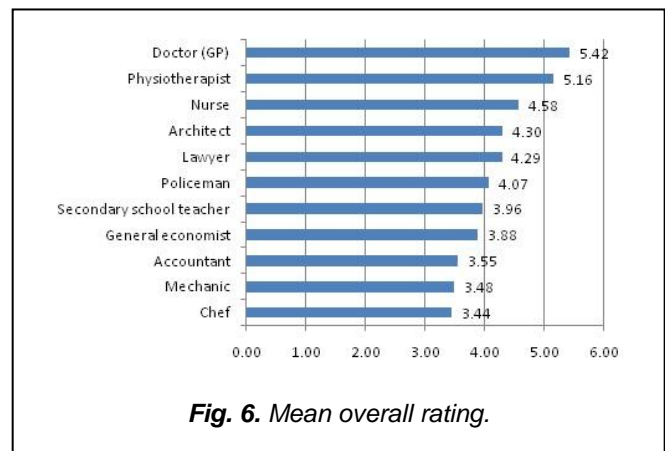
Level of social standing. For this dimension (Fig. 4) the physiotherapy students positioned themselves in the second place, with a mean value of 5.35, just after the doctor (GP) and followed by the nurse. Physiotherapy profession is clearly placed above the nurse, and has a small difference with the doctor.



Level of usefulness. Regarding the level of usefulness the physiotherapy profession, as esteemed by the students, it is in the first place with 4.78 points followed by the doctor (GP) and the nurse in a little distance (Fig. 5).



Overall rating. In the general rating of all the dimensions the physiotherapy profession is placed second, just after the doctor (GP) and followed by the nurse. The difference between the mean values of the doctor and the physiotherapist are little but the difference between the physiotherapist and the nurse are the double of the first difference. The last two professions are considered the chef and the mechanic, with a very little difference between them (Fig. 6).



In the Table 1 there is presented a summary of the positions as the students of physiotherapy esteemed for each of the professions / occupations for every evaluated dimension. **Overall by Gender.** As indicated in the charts below (Fig. 7, Fig. 8) both sexes rank in the same position the physiotherapist profession in terms of its prestige.

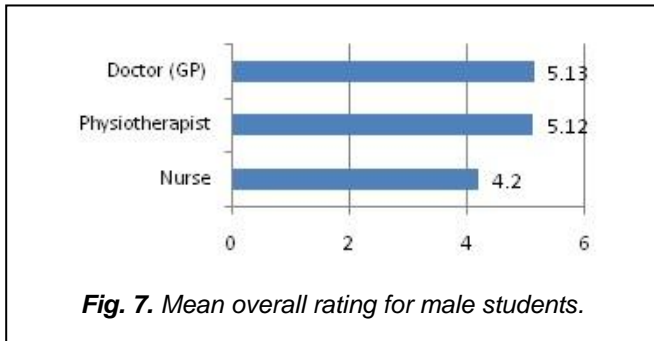
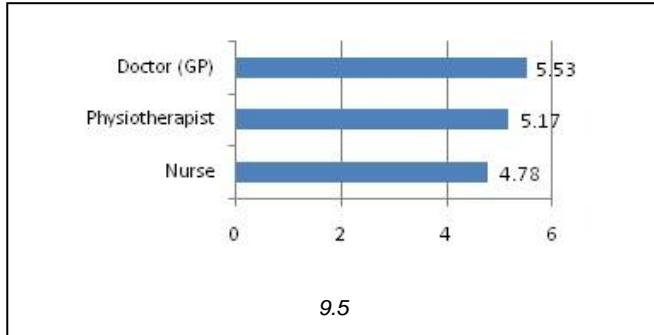


Fig. 7. Mean overall rating for male students.



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4 DISCUSSION

This study represents a first attempt to find out the occupational prestige standing of physiotherapy as perceived by Albanian students of physiotherapy in comparison to other professions. In our study we will compare positions of the professions resulting from our study with those obtained in three studies of reference [24], [25], [26]. This method is previously used by other Authors [24], [34]. The results about the level of education are the first to be treated as, by our opinion, it constitutes one of the most reliable dimensions of the data gained from the survey. This is due to the fact that the students are at the end of their study, bachelor, and the level of education it is a well known dimension for them. We believe that the students are well informed not just about their profession but also regarding the other professions. Our first concern arising from the obtained results it is that the level of education of the physiotherapist and doctor (GP) are evaluated with equal points, while the nursing is somehow detached from them. In three different studies used as reference we find a little different result. According the British study, the oldest of the studies, the physiotherapy students put their profession, for this dimension, in the fourth place [25]. While in the Australian study they put their profession at the third position just after the doctor and the judge [24]. The last study in time, a Nigerian study, physiotherapy is ranked, among 11 professions, in the second place [26].

TABLE 1 POSITION OF EACH PROFESSION / OCCUPATION ACCORDING TO THE DIMENSIONS

Profession	Dimensions					Overall
	Level of education	Level of income	Level of responsibility	Level of social standing	Level of usefulness	
Doctor (GP)	1	1	1	1	2	1
Physiotherapist	1	4	2	2	1	2
Nurse	3	5	3	3	3	3
Architect	4	3	4	7	7	4
Lawyer	9	2	5	4	5	5
Policeman	7	7	6	5	4	6
Secondary school teacher	5	10	7	6	6	7
General economist	6	6	8	8	8	8
Accountant	7	9	10	10	10	9
Mechanic (car mechanic)	11	11	9	9	9	10
Chef (cook)	10	8	11	11	11	11

The level of income is our second dimension. In this dimension the students perceive their profession in fourth place while that of the nurse in fifth place; the first placed it is the doctor. In this category in second and third place are ranked, respectively, the lawyer and the architect. In the British study, for this dimension, the physiotherapy students put their profession in the seventh position [25], in the Australian study it is ranked sixth [24], and in the Nigerian study it is ranked seventh [26]. From an Iranian study about the nurses` level of income results that 77.6% of them consider that nursing is not a profession of high financial reward [35]. In our study the nurse is placed fifth, just below the physiotherapist. The level of this dimension for the physiotherapy profession is the lowest level in the estimation given by the students. In the third dimension, the level of responsibility, we find that our students see their profession positioned in the second place, just after the doctor and followed by the nurse. In the British study the physiotherapy students put their profession in the third place [25], in the Australian study as well at the third position, below the judge and the doctor [24], and in the Nigerian study the physiotherapy is ranked fifth [26]. In our study the physiotherapy profession for the level of social standing, the fourth dimension, it is ranked second after the GP and followed by nurse. In the British study the physiotherapy it is placed fifth [25], in the Australian study in the third position behind the judge and the doctor [24], and in the Nigerian study sixth [26]. In other studies with podiatrists it is seen that some other distinctions, as between private and public sector, and rural and urban, have a key influence in the professional status development [5], [36]. Marketing as well as university education are considered important to image enhancement [5] and to the professional autonomy [7], too. In the dimension of the level of usefulness, the fifth dimension, our students rank their profession in the first place, even before the GP, which is placed second. While in the third place we find the nurse. In the British study the physiotherapy profession is ranked fourth [25], in the Australian study it is in the third place, above the nurse and the policeman [24] while in the Nigerian study it is in the third position [26]. In the overall ranking our students place their profession in the second place after the doctor and followed by the nurse. Generally, it is seen that they have created a group of medical professions which are esteemed in the highest rankings. In the British study the physiotherapy profession is placed in the middle-ranking status [25], in the Australian study the physiotherapy profession is classified between the high prestige professions (doctor, judge, physiotherapist and solicitor) [24], and in the Nigerian study the physiotherapy profession is placed fifth (accountant, lower, doctor, engineer, and physiotherapist) having, so, a middle-ranking [26]. The results of this study shows the high regard of these Albanian physiotherapy students for their profession, which is also confirmed by the fact that in the last year of their university studies the majority of them continue to appreciate as the right choice that of their profession, made three years ago [4]. Regarding the assessment of gender we must begin from the fact that in our study have participated 19 women and 6 men; the whole course is composed of 34 students of which 23 fe-males, about 68%, and 11 males. However, the survey data analyzing shows that the students estimation for both genders, despite the reduced number of male students who participated in the survey, puts the profession of physiotherapist in second place but with differences in mean values; the men estimates are lower than those of women for

the three first ranked professions. There are studies about the different weights and preferences done from the two genders for the professional prestige and social preferences [37]. The women express a stronger preference than men for occupations which are more valuable to society, which means, in this case, that women give a relatively greater weight than men of their occupational prestige [38]. In our study we find that the factors with the highest rating for the profession of physiotherapist are the level of education and level of usefulness; in both cases the students have placed their profession in the first place. It must be mentioned that the students' estimation for the level of education of physiotherapists is equal to that of doctor (GP). Our students see their profession in high standing for all the dimensions, except that of the level of income; the level of income got the lowest mean evaluation, lies in 4th place. In our overall rating the profession of physiotherapist it is placed below doctor, but above the nurse, and had high over-all prestige standing. In an Iranian study about the nursing image 61.8% of the participants declared that the prestige of the nurse was lower than that of physiotherapists [35].

5 CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study suggest that physiotherapy profession in Albania occupies a position of high prestige amongst the physiotherapy students. But we must say that these results are limited by the reduced number of students participating in the survey. These results are the first of its kind in Albania and may be considered only indicative. The high regard of physiotherapy students for their profession it is important for the development of profession in Albania. The research results suggest that both genders have the same regard to their profession. Our objective for the future is to do further studies with a larger number of participants and in different universities of the country.

LIMITATIONS

The main limitation of the survey is that the results are sample-specific and cannot be widely generalized.

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