

# WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS/ FACILITATORS TO PHYSIOTHERAPY WITHIN FORENSIC MENTAL HEALTH?

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## INTRODUCTION

- ❖ Forensic mental health refers to the specialist management of individuals that have offended and are suffering from mental health disorders and severe mental illness.
- ❖ As it is challenging to provide the appropriate mental health support to individuals inside prison, the Mental Health Act (1983) allows for people with mental health disorders to be formally detained and transferred to specialist secure hospitals.
- ❖ Within forensic mental health, pharmacotherapy is seen as the backbone of forensic mental health rehabilitation (Andiné and Bergman, 2019)
- ❖ However, antipsychotic medication has been found to have negative metabolic side effects (Hirsch et al., 2017). Pérez-Iglesias et al, (2013) found that there was a 12.1kg weight gain after three years of taking antipsychotic medication in a cohort of 170 first episode psychosis patients, with 80% of this weight increasing during the first year.
- ❖ Also, physical activity levels are low within this population. VO2max was 25.3 mL/min/kg, which is 15 mL/min/kg below that of the matched age healthy adult (Bergman et al, 2018).
- ❖ Therefore, people with SMI are at risk of poor physical health, Chesney et al (2014), states that in England, people with SMI on average die 15-20 years younger than that of the general population.
- ❖ There are also 198 more deaths per 100,000 in SMI compared to the general population for cardiovascular diseases (NHS, 2016). Two in three of these deaths are from physical health conditions that can be prevented (NHS, 2016).
- ❖ Stubbs et al (2014) explains that physiotherapists help by bridging the gap between physical and mental health, by providing health promotion, therapeutic relationships, and specialist rehabilitation related to complex mental health disorders
- ❖ Probst (2017), states that physiotherapy within mental health is often overlooked
- ❖ Patients and mental health professionals show a limited understanding of the role of physiotherapy within severe mental illness (Stubbs et al, 2014).
- ❖ Research highlights that the barriers to physiotherapy within schizophrenia are lack of motivation, cost, and transport. Facilitators to physiotherapy were education of physiotherapy, cost, and provision of transport (Soundy et al, 2014).
- ❖ However the majority of research is investigating schizophrenia populations, and there is limited research into forensic mental health populations, when the research suggests that physiotherapy may be a beneficial intervention for the forensic mental health population.
- ❖ With unclear terminology and search terms, and limited amounts of studies, it is clear that physiotherapy within forensic mental health has not been thoroughly researched.

## STUDY AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

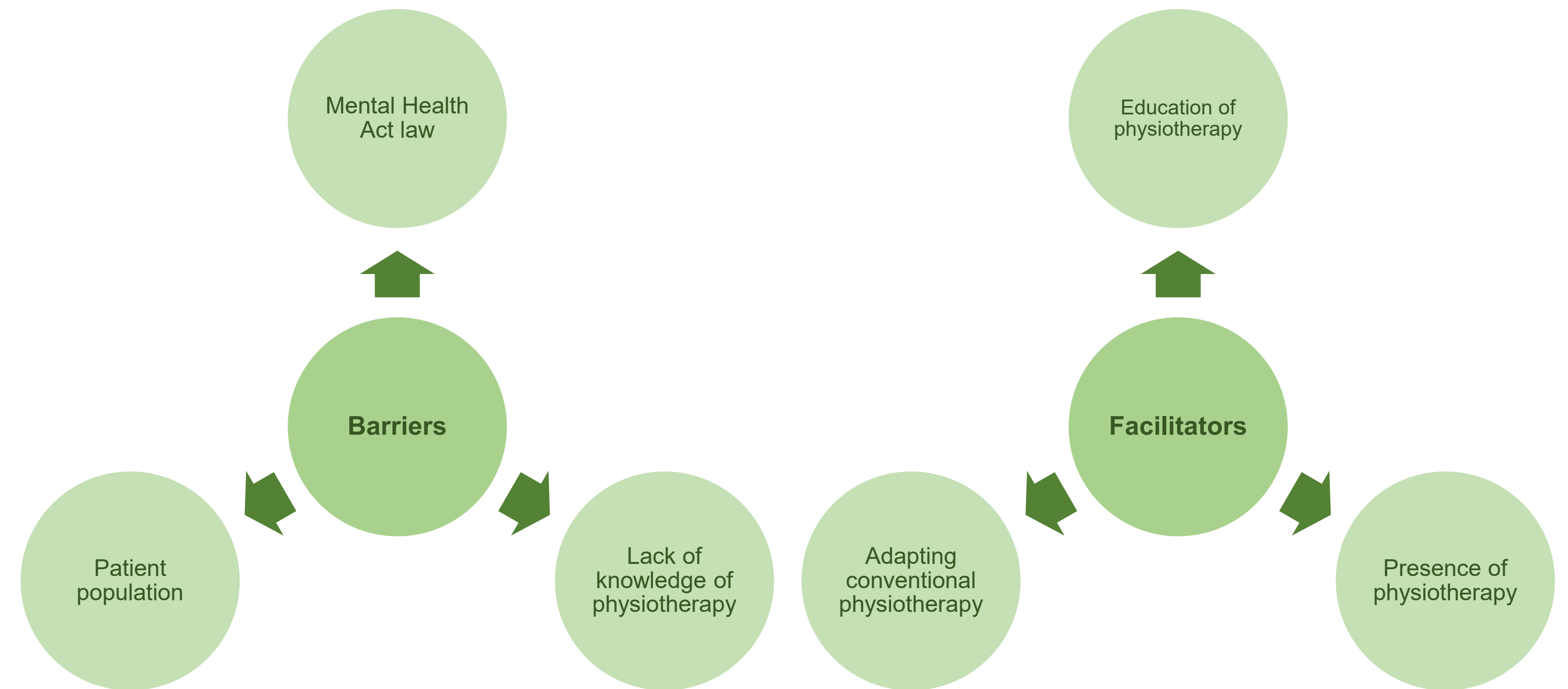
- AIM:** explore the perceived barriers and facilitators to physiotherapy within forensic mental health, combining the views of experienced physiotherapists and mental health nurses.
- OBJECTIVES:** The overall study objectives were to:
1. Explore the barriers to patients accessing physiotherapy within forensic mental health.
  2. Explore the facilitators to forensic mental health patients accessing physiotherapy

## METHODOLOGY

- ❖ The research adopted an interpretivism approach with an epistemology stance.
- ❖ Qualitative online semi structured interviews via Skype were used to capture the experiences of physiotherapists and nurses that worked within forensic mental health hospitals.
- ❖ Participants were recruited via poster advertisement on The Chartered Physiotherapists within Mental Health Web and Twitter platform. Mental health nurses were then recruited via snowball sampling following engagement with original recruits.
- ❖ Data collection was terminated as per saturation
- ❖ Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data through Nvivo software.

## RESULTS

- ❖ Saturation occurred after 8 participants (6 physiotherapists, 2 nurses).
- ❖ The 8 participants (two males and six females) experience ranged from 3 to 15 years across private and NHS sectors.
- ❖ On average the eight interviews lasted 40 minutes.
- ❖ The most stated perceived facilitators to physiotherapy within forensic mental health were education of physiotherapy (37), adapting conventional physiotherapy (28), and the presence of physiotherapy (39).
- ❖ The most common barriers were the patient population (64), the Mental Health Act law (46), and a lack of knowledge of physiotherapy (20).



## KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

- ❖ Restrictions as per the Mental health Act law, and symptoms of the patient population prevented access to physiotherapy.
  - ❖ Lack of understanding from the patients and staff led to miss referrals preventing patients access.
  - ❖ Education of what physiotherapy entails, and being more present on the wards improved referral and access to physiotherapy.
  - ❖ Adopting flexible and alternative methods to suite the patient needs also acted as a facilitator to physiotherapy
- CONCLUSION:** These findings are similar to the findings of other studies which explore the perceived facilitators/ barriers within other mental health settings. Nonetheless, the findings provide a good insight into physiotherapy within forensic mental health. Services within mental health should be parallel to those within general health settings, however it is clear that the presence and understanding of physiotherapy within forensic mental health is lacking.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings could help promote physiotherapy within forensic mental health. There is a gap within the knowledge, highlighting that research within physiotherapy and forensic mental health is sparse, and more efforts need to be made to promote the service for patients. Further research and guidelines are needed to help clarify and promote the physiotherapy profession within forensic mental health.

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