LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Response to “Professional sexual boundaries—Asian and Western perception: An observational study”

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I enjoyed reading the recently published paper “Professional sexual boundaries—Asian and Western perception: An observational study” by Cooper et al [1]. In the study to identify sexual professional boundaries in Hong Kong physiotherapists and compare them with the Western Australian physiotherapist cohort, the investigators found an inconsistency between the countries. The physiotherapists in Hong Kong are less critical in instances of perceived boundary transgressions. This is contrary to the literature, which demonstrates conservative sexual attitudes and behaviours among the Chinese community [2]. There are, however, certain points and suggestions that I would like to share with readers about the findings.

First, I believe the “snail mail” approach adopted may have contributed to the low response rate in the study. Web-based survey tools may be an alternative way by which to conduct this study, considering the pace of life is much faster in a city like Hong Kong than in most parts of Western Australia, and the use of online tools is common among Hong Kong Chinese. Similar consent can be implied by the return of the completed online questionnaire. Online distribution of the questionnaires can also save time.

Second, the low response rate of 16% should raise concerns about data interpretation and whether the results are representative of the cohort. More female physiotherapists and more respondents from the public sector may potentially skew the study results.

Nevertheless, this research report is a pioneer study to investigate professional sexual boundaries among physiotherapists in Hong Kong. In my opinion, it will be interesting to conduct a similar study in Singapore, a city-state and island-country that shares many similarities with Hong Kong. Despite the fact that full registration and regulation of physiotherapists in Singapore only started in 2013, the Code of Professional Conduct established by the Allied Health Professions Council of Singapore is comparable. It includes explicit clauses such as "you must not engage in any improper relationship or behavior with your patient and the immediate members of your patient’s family" and "you are to report any breach in such laws and regulations of other professionals or colleagues to the Council". It will be particularly useful to include undergraduates, recent graduates, and experienced physiotherapists in the study.

Above all, the collective research work by the authors served to highlight the need to educate physiotherapists on the issue of sexual boundaries within the professional relationship.

References


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