

## Mapping Physical Therapy Journals: A Citation Frequency Analysis

Michelle Nielsen Ott, MLIS, MTS, AHIP<sup>a</sup>; Jennifer Monnin, MLIS<sup>b</sup>; Sarah Wade, MLS<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Assistant Professor, Sciences/Health Sciences Librarian, Cullom-Davis Library, Bradley University, Peoria, IL, [0000-0002-2730-2928](tel:0000-0002-2730-2928)<sup>ORCID</sup>, [mnielsenott@bradley.edu](mailto:mnielsenott@bradley.edu)

<sup>b</sup>Research Support and Engagement Librarian, West Virginia University Health Sciences Library, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV, [0000-0002-4842-2814](tel:0000-0002-4842-2814)<sup>ORCID</sup>, [jennifer.monnin@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:jennifer.monnin@mail.wvu.edu)

<sup>c</sup>Medical Librarian, Campbell University School of Osteopathic Medicine Medical Library, Campbell University, Lillington, NC, [0000-0002-7640-6715](tel:0000-0002-7640-6715)<sup>ORCID</sup>, [swade@campbell.edu](mailto:swade@campbell.edu)

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### Abstract

This citation frequency analysis aimed to update a core list of physical therapy (PT) journals. References from four PT association journals were used for the analysis, and Bradford's Law of Scattering was applied. Fifteen journal titles were identified as the core list of journal titles for PT. This updated list of the core journals for PT assists librarians with evidence-based collection development and scholarly communication responsibilities.

**Introduction** Health science librarians' awareness of physical therapy (PT) publishing trends allows librarians to make collection development decisions so libraries can provide the best evidence-based resources and services. A list of core journal titles for PT is an asset for both collection development and scholarly communication duties. This study updates previous studies that identified core PT journals in 2011 and 1997<sup>1,2</sup>.

**Methods** This citation frequency analysis followed three main steps as noted by Fell, et al. and Wakiji<sup>1,2</sup>: (1) select the analysis journals, (2) collect citation data, and (3) perform the analysis. We selected the same analysis journal titles used by Fell et al.<sup>1</sup>: Physical Therapy (title changed to PTJ: Physical Therapy Rehabilitation Journal in 2021), Physiotherapy Canada, Physiotherapy, and Journal of Physiotherapy. These titles represent the official publications for the national associations of PT in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Citation data for the analysis journals was collected using Scopus. The references from the articles published in the analysis journals from January 2018 to September 2023 were exported from Scopus on September 11, 2023. We reviewed the citation data for the frequency of each journal title listed in the citations within the analysis journals and sorted the titles from most to least citations. Using Bradford's Law of Scattering, the journal titles were ranked by frequency and divided into three zones. Bradford's Law of Scattering is used for analyzing published scientific literature on a specific topic that is scattered among many titles<sup>3</sup>. This analysis indicated a "core set of journals" based on the ranked volume of productivity found in the citations of the four analysis journals<sup>4</sup>. Finally, the core set of journal titles was compared to Fell et al.'s titles from 2011 to determine if the core PT journals have changed<sup>1</sup>.

## Results

The citation data collected from the four analysis journals resulted in 30,175 references from 240 unique journal titles. Using Bradford's Law, the journal titles were ranked by frequency and divided into three zones with approximately 10,059 references in each zone. We identified 15 journals in Zone 1, which represent the core journals for PT (6.25% of the 240 total unique sources). Zone 2 contained 44 journals (18.33% of total unique sources) and Zone 3 contained the remaining 181 journals (75.41% of total unique sources). Table 1 provides a side-by-side comparison of this study's Zone 1 journals and Fell et al.'s Zone 1 journals<sup>1</sup>. Appendix 1 provides our full zone analysis, with journal name, number of references to that journal, and zone placement. **Table 1.** This is a comparison of journals in 2024 Zone 1 Analysis and Fell et al<sup>1</sup> Zone 1 analysis.

2024 Zone 1 Analysis		Fell et al Zone 1 analysis <sup>1</sup>	
Source Journal	References	Journal Title	References
<i>Physical Therapy/PTJ: Physical Therapy &amp; Rehabilitation Journal</i>	1934	<i>Physical Therapy</i>	1106
<i>Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation</i>	1305	<i>Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation</i>	798
<i>Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews</i>	659	Spine	739
<i>Journal of Physiotherapy (previously Australian Journal of Physiotherapy)</i>	464	<i>Australian Journal of Physiotherapy (continued as Journal of Physiotherapy)</i>	202
<i>British Journal of Sports Medicine</i>	460	<i>Clinical Rehabilitation</i>	193
<i>BMC Musculoskeletal Disorders</i>	420	<i>Pain</i>	190
<i>Journal of Clinical Epidemiology</i>	407	<i>Physiotherapy Canada</i>	190
<i>Lancet</i>	405	<i>Clinical Orthopaedics and Related Research</i>	185
		<i>Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)</i>	176

## Discussion

The core title list for PT developed through this citation analysis includes fifteen titles, of which seven did not appear in Fell et al.'s list from 2011<sup>1</sup>. The top two most frequently cited journal titles for Fell, et al.1 and this study have remained the same. Notably, only two of the analysis journals used in this study appear in the Zone 1 core journal list. The remaining two are highly ranked within Zone 2. This differs from Fell et al.'s findings, where all four analysis journals were classified within Zone 1<sup>1</sup>. This updated list of the core journals for PT will assist librarians with evidence-based collection development decisions and additionally assist with scholarly communication responsibilities.

## Data Availability Statement

Data associated with this article are available in the [Appendix](#).

## CRedit Statement

Term	Author Initials
Conceptualization	MNO, JM, SW
Data Curation	MNO
Formal Analysis	MNO, JM
Investigation	MNO, JM, SW
Writing - Original Draft	MNO, JM, SW
Writing - Review & Editing	MNO, JM, SW

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