

Integrating Wearable Sensors into Physiotherapy Assessment: Validity and Clinical Utility

Preeti Dagduji Ghodge^{1*}, Vidya Narayan Kadam², Rakesh Sahebrao Jadhav³, Saba Parveen⁴, Anamika Sharma⁵

¹RJS College of Physiotherapy, Kopergaon, Tal.Kopergaon, Dist.Ahilyanagar, Maharashtra -423601

²Indira College of Physiotherapy, Vishnupuri, Nanded, Maharashtra -431606, India

³Dr. Bhanudas Dere College of Physiotherapy, Tal. Sangamner, Dist. Ahilyanagar, Maharashtra 422611, India

⁴M.A Rangoonwala College of Physiotherapy, Azam Campus, Pune, Maharashtra -411001, India

⁵Vedantaa Institute of Physiotherapy Sciences, Dahanu, Dist: Palghar, Maharashtra 401606

*Corresponding Author E-mail: ghodgepreeti@gmail.com

Abstract:

Wearable sensor devices have been suggested to become a promising instrument of improving objectivity and accuracy in the assessment of physiotherapy but its validation has been demonstrated mainly in case of human research. The validity and clinical utility of wearable sensor-based physiotherapy assessment were evaluated in a controlled human clinical study of musculoskeletal dysfunction. Adult human participants with clinically diagnosed musculoskeletal impairment received conventional physiotherapy interventions, under which wearable inertial sensors were recorded to measure gait symmetry, range of motion in joints, and activity levels. Measurement of sensors was compared with traditional observational and biomechanical measurement tools on a four-week intervention time. The findings show that there was a strong and statistically significant correlation between wearable sensor outputs and conventional assessment measures and a high sensitivity of the wearable sensor to identify the time-dependent functional recovery. It was found that gradually, during the intervention period, functional parameters improved, and the wearable sensor-integrated group had better recovery results than either standard evaluation and control groups. Such results prove the validity and clinical relevance of wearable sensors in objective evaluation of physiotherapy and show the need to provide clinical validation to facilitate their use in the context of rehabilitation.

Keywords: Wearable Sensors, Physiotherapy Assessment, Human Clinical Study, Musculoskeletal Dysfunction, Gait Analysis, Functional Recovery, Rehabilitation Monitoring

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1. INTRODUCTION

Physiotherapy assessment is one of the most vital parts of the rehabilitation process as it helps to guide the course of treatment, observe the functional recovery, and evaluate the results of the treatment in musculoskeletal dysfunction¹. Proper body movement assessment, joint range, and functional outcome would be necessary to streamline physiotherapy exercises². Nevertheless, traditional methods of assessment, to a great degree, rely on observational judgment and manual scoring, which can be a limitation in terms of objectivity and sensitivity³. New wearable sensor technologies have therefore become a focus of interest in this respect having the potential to offer specific⁴, continuous and quantitative information regarding functional movement and thus offer new opportunities to improve the physiotherapy assessment practice⁵.

1.1. Background Information

In the digital health technology, wearable sensors have emerged as a promising device of objective assessment of movement in the recent past. The inertial measurement unit (IMU), accelerometer, and gyroscopes are devices that can provide constant, quantitative measurements of such kinematic parameters as gait symmetry, range of motion, and activity levels⁶. Wearable sensors can potentially address shortcomings in the traditional assessment of physiotherapy and increase the accuracy of rehabilitation monitoring, offering the potential to achieve this by the provision of real-time, high-resolution tracking of movement⁷.

Human clinical studies are essential for the validation of emerging rehabilitation technologies, as they allow direct evaluation of functional recovery, patient response, and clinical feasibility of physiotherapy assessment tools under real-world therapeutic conditions. With these models, musculoskeletal dysfunction can be induced in a controlled way, physiotherapy can be administered in a standardized way and repeated over the time without the ethical and practical issues presented in early-stage human trials⁸. Human-based investigations could be used to support mechanistic knowledge of functional recovery and give critical proof as to the accuracy, reliability and clinical applicability of new assessment devices. The purpose of incorporating wearable sensors into the assessment of human-based physiotherapy is a rare chance to test its validity and clinical utility on controlled experimental conditions. Wearable sensor technologies need such clinical validation prior to being translated into everyday physiotherapy and human clinical research.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Although there has been increased focus on the use of wearable sensors to evaluate physiotherapy, there is a shortage of solid controlled human clinical evidence that would support its use in controlled rehabilitation environments⁹. The vast majority of available research focuses on human-based applications, and thus, there is a gap in comprehension of the quality, consistency, and practical utility of wearable sensors measurements in comparison to traditional physiotherapy assessment techniques¹⁰. The lack of systematized human clinical

validation prevents the confidence in the clinical implementation and translatability of wearable sensor technologies.

1.3.Objectives of the Study

1. To evaluate the validity of wearable sensor-derived movement parameters in human participants undergoing physiotherapy intervention.
2. To compare wearable sensor outcomes with conventional physiotherapy assessment methods.
3. To assess the clinical utility of wearable sensors in monitoring functional recovery over time.

1.4.Hypothesis

Wearable sensor-based assessments provide valid and clinically useful measurements of functional recovery in a human-based physiotherapy assessment model, demonstrating significant agreement with conventional assessment methods.

2. METHODOLOGY

This section describes the research design, experimental procedures, and analytical methods used in the study.

2.1. Research Design

The present research employs the randomized, controlled human clinical research design to determine the validity and clinical usefulness of physiotherapy assessment by wearable sensors. human clinical model of musculoskeletal dysfunction is employed so that it can be possible to control the functional recovery during controlled investigation of the standard physiotherapy intervention. This type of an experimental design enables the objective comparison between wearable sensor-based measures and traditional physiotherapy assessment mode at various time points.

2.2.Participants / Sample Details

The study included 36 adult human participants clinically diagnosed with musculoskeletal dysfunction. The study protocol followed a standardized and ethically approved clinical procedure, ensuring consistency in participant selection and intervention delivery across subjects. All assessments and interventions were conducted in a supervised clinical physiotherapy setting under controlled conditions. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their inclusion in the study.

After the musculoskeletal dysfunction induction, the participants were randomly allocated into three groups (n=12 per group):

- **Control group:** No physiotherapy intervention.
- **Traditional physiotherapy assessment group:** Physiotherapy traditional observational assessment.

- **Wearable sensor-based physiotherapy assessment group:** Physiotherapy and wearable sensor-based assessment.

2.3. Instruments and Materials Used

The data acquisition and assessment tools and materials used include the following:

- Objective movement analysis is done using miniaturized wearable inertial sensors that include accelerometers and gyroscopes.
- Layers of physiotherapy equipment such as exercise platforms and moving tools are used in controlled therapeutic intervention.
- Functional movement examination is done with the use of standardized gait and locomotion evaluation platform.
- Motion analysis and data acquisition software is used to process sensor-based parameters.
- To measure the gait symmetry, joint mobility, and activities, conventional physiotherapy assessment aids are employed such as validated observational scoring sheets.

2.4. Procedure and Data Collection Methods

Participants in the wearable sensor group were fitted with wearable sensors using clinically approved straps and fixation methods that are firmly fixed to the affected body segments relevant to the musculoskeletal condition using non-restrictive fixing techniques to ensure that the sensor does not affect the natural movement. Physiotherapy therapy is carried out five days a week over four weeks according to a set of standard procedures, which entail the use of mobilization exercises and regulation of locomotor activity.

In every assessment session, wearable sensors continually record the movement data during the locomotion, physiotherapy, and free activity periods. At the same time, the traditional physiotherapy tests are performed by trained evaluators through validated scoring standards. Such functional parameters as gait symmetry, joint range of motion, and activity levels are measured at baseline and weekly in the course of the intervention period.

2.5. Data Analysis Techniques

The data gathered are grouped together and estimated with the help of relevant statistical tools. Functional parameters are summarized by descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation). The primary statistical test used by Pearson to test the validity and agreement of the wearable sensor-based measurements with the traditional physiotherapy assessment outcomes is the correlation coefficient (r).

Furthermore, repeated-measures ANOVA is used to determine the changes in the functional parameters across the time, and paired t-tests are employed to compare the evaluation procedures in the same subjects where necessary. All the statistical tests are conducted at 95 confidence level and the results are taken to be statistically significant at $p < 0.05$.

3. RESULTS

This section gives the outcomes of the study with the emphasis in the statistical analysis of functional outcomes and the comparison of wearable sensor-based measurements and traditional methods of physiotherapy evaluation.

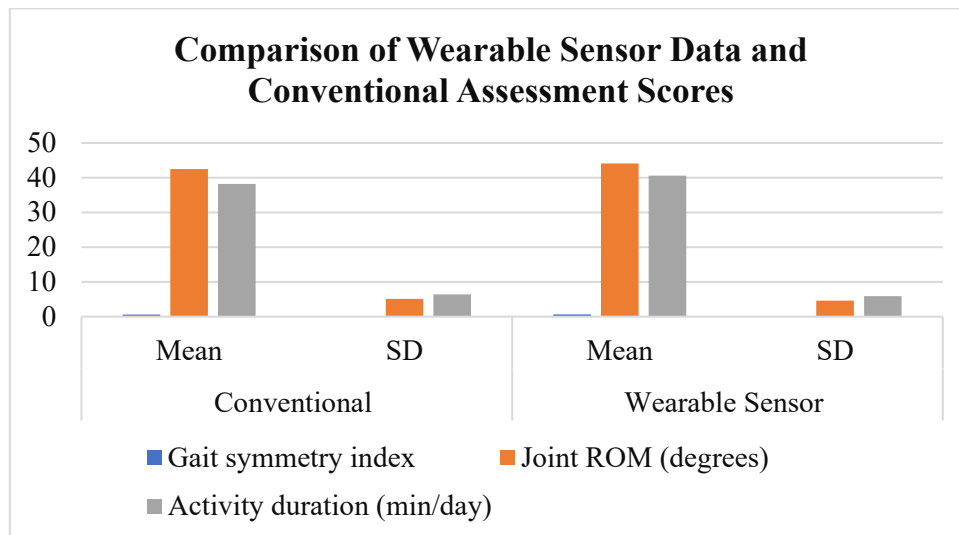


Figure 1: Comparison of Wearable Sensor Data and Conventional Assessment Scores

The findings in Figure 1 reveal that wearable sensor measurements and traditional physiotherapy scores of evaluations of assessments are strongly correlated and statistically significant in all the measured functional parameters. The level of agreement between the two assessment techniques was high with high correlation coefficients being obtained on gait symmetry ($r = 0.88$), joint range of motion ($r = 0.91$), and activity duration ($r = 0.86$). Such results indicate that wearable sensors are good devices to measure movement and functional recovery outcomes, which are comparable to physiotherapy tests. The near congruence of both wearable sensors and conventional measures of mean values also substantiates the concurrent validity of the wearable sensor-based measurement instruments. All the results affirm the reliability and clinical application of wearable sensors during objective assessment of functional recovery in a human-based physiotherapy assessment model.

Table 1: Changes in Functional Parameters Over Physiotherapy Duration

Parameter	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Gait symmetry	0.48 ± 0.07	0.56 ± 0.06	0.62 ± 0.05	0.69 ± 0.04
Joint ROM (°)	31.4 ± 4.8	36.9 ± 4.5	41.2 ± 4.1	46.3 ± 3.9
Activity level (counts/day)	820 ± 95	980 ± 88	1120 ± 76	1280 ± 70

As indicated in Table 1, the functional parameters have shown a progressive increase in a general manner across the four weeks during the period of physiotherapy intervention. The symmetry of gait indicates gradual recovery of coordinated patterns of movement with an apparent continuous rise in the symmetry between Week 1 and Week 4. Correspondingly, joint range of motion also demonstrates the progressive increase of the range of motion in the successive weeks, which indicates effective changes in the joint mobility and flexibility with the continuance of physiotherapy. There is also an improvement in the levels of activity as they rise significantly with time, reflecting an improvement in the functional capacity and general mobility. The declining standard deviation scores that were witnessed towards the second week onwards hint at lower variability among the subjects meaning an increased similarity in the recovery response. In general, these results underscore the success of the physiotherapy intervention and the sensitivity of the assessment measures in recording the time-dependent functional recovery in the human-based model.

Table 2: Between-Group Comparison at End of Study

Group	Gait Symmetry	Joint ROM (°)	Activity Level
Control	0.52 ± 0.06	35.1 ± 4.3	910 ± 85
Conventional assessment	0.63 ± 0.05	41.7 ± 4.0	1125 ± 78
Wearable sensor group	0.71 ± 0.04	47.5 ± 3.6	1320 ± 72

The results of Table 2 indicate a strong difference between functional results of the three study groups after the period of the intervention. The control group has the least values in the gait symmetry, range of motion in the joints and level of activity, showing that without the intervention of physiotherapy, there is a minimal spontaneous recovery. The traditional assessment group shows the moderate progress in all the parameters, which is the positive effect of the standard physiotherapy practices. As it is noted, the group with wearable sensors integrated demonstrates the highest average of gait symmetry, joint range of motion, and the level of activity, so the functional recovery is better. The smaller values of standard deviation in the wearable sensor group also suggest more uniform recovery results in the subjects. All these findings highlight the clinical value addition of wearable sensors in physiotherapy assessment, as they are linked to improved monitoring and optimization of the rehabilitation outcome in the human-based paradigm.

3.1. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1: Wearable sensor-based assessments provide valid and clinically useful measurements of functional recovery in a human-based physiotherapy assessment model, demonstrating significant agreement with conventional assessment methods.

- **Null Hypothesis (H₀):** Wearable sensor-based assessments do not show significant validity or agreement with conventional physiotherapy assessment methods in a human-based model.
- **Alternative Hypothesis (H₁):** Wearable sensor-based assessments show significant validity and agreement with conventional physiotherapy assessment methods in an human-based model.
- **Test to be used: Pearson's Correlation Coefficient**

In order to test the above hypothesis on the validity and agreement of wearable sensor-based measurements with the traditional physiotherapy assessment procedures, Pearson correlation coefficient (r) was used on the important functional recovery parameters acquired using both the procedures.

Table 3: Pearson's Correlation Coefficient Between Wearable Sensor Measures and Conventional Physiotherapy Assessments

Variables	Gait Symmetry (Conventional)	Joint Range of Motion (Conventional)	Activity Level (Conventional)	Result
Gait Symmetry (Wearable Sensor)	r = 0.88*	—	—	Significant agreement
Joint Range of Motion (Wearable Sensor)	—	r = 0.91*	—	Significant agreement
Activity Level (Wearable Sensor)	—	—	r = 0.86*	Significant agreement

*Correlation is significant at $p < 0.05$

The Pearson analysis of correlation showed that there was a significant and statistically significant positive correlation between the wearable sensor-based measures and traditional physiotherapy measures based on the assessment scores of all the functional parameters assessed. A high correlation coefficient shows that the two assessment techniques can be agreed upon significantly, and therefore wearable sensor-based assessment can be considered concurrently valid and clinically useful in the human-based physiotherapy assessment model.

- Because $p < 0.05$ and the values of correlation were high ($r > 0.80$), the Null Hypothesis (H₀) has rejected.

- The Alternative Hypothesis (H_1) has accepted, and it is justified that wearable sensor-based assessments have valid and clinically useful measures of functional recovery.

4. DISCUSSION

This section discusses the interpretation of the findings, compares them with existing research, and examines their implications for physiotherapy assessment and rehabilitation practice.

4.1. Interpretation of Results

The present research indicates that wearable sensor-based assessment has valid and clinically significant measures of functional recovery in a human clinical physiotherapy model. The excellent positive associations that were found between wearable sensor responses and traditional physiotherapy evaluation scores testify to a high level of agreement in essential parameters of functional status, such as gait balance, the range of joint movement, and activity.

This suggests that wearable sensors are capable of accurately capturing the features of movement and functional improvements that are normally assessed using the observational procedures. In addition, the gradual changes that were witnessed throughout the four-week intervention plan underscore the sensitivity of wearable sensors in identifying the time-related changes in functional recovery, which confirms their use in the continuous and objective evaluation.

4.2. Comparison with Existing Studies

The results of the current test are compared to the prior research on the applications of wearable sensors in rehabilitation that have been published elsewhere in Table 4. Most previous systematic and scoping reviews have focused on validity, accuracy, and clinical utility of wearable sensor technologies.

Table 4: Comparison of the Present Study with Existing Research on Wearable Sensors in Rehabilitation

Study (Author, Year)	Focus	Key Outcome	Relevance to Present Study
Patel et al. (2021) ¹¹	Continuous monitoring	High validity and clinical utility	Supports validity, human-based
Prill et al. (2021) ¹²	Knee rehabilitation	Accurate joint motion assessment	Consistent with ROM findings
Regterschot et al. (2021) ¹³	Clinical translation	Objective movement benefits	Highlights need for validation
Small et al. (2019) ¹⁴	Post-arthroplasty	Reliable sensor use	Addresses validation gap

Zadeh et al. (2023) ¹⁵	MSK rehabilitation	Strong reliability	Extended in human model
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4.3. Implications of Findings

Findings of this research are significant with regard to the assessment of physiotherapy and research on rehabilitation studies. The wearable sensors can be integrated to measure functional recovery objectively, continuously and reproducibly and minimize dependence on observer-dependent measures. Such technology can be used in clinical practices to better the accuracy of the outcome assessment and to detect subtle biomechanical changes. These benefits favor the translational capabilities of wearable sensor-based assessment systems and indicate their usefulness in streamlining physiotherapy regimen before advancement to human clinical trials.

4.4. Limitations of the Study

The study has its limitations in spite of the strengths. The applied focuses on a single human clinical population with musculoskeletal dysfunction, which might not be able to serve as a generalization across various types of injury. The intervention period is comparably brief and the comparison of recovery trends is not done over the long term. Also, the placement of sensors is restricted to particular parts of the body, which may not be able to analyze movement dynamics of the entire body.

4.5. Suggestions for Future Research

The role of multimodal wearable sensor system needs to be investigated in the future, as a wider array of biomechanical and physiological measurements can be achieved in this way. It is suggested that studies with long intervention periods and different models of musculoskeletal injuries should be conducted to further confirm the clinical utility of wearable sensors. Also, a combination of sensor-based measurements and the implementation of new advanced data analytics and machine learning can improve predictive accuracy and personal physiotherapy planning, which can increase translational relevance.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1. Summary of Key Findings

The current research shows that wearable sensor-based measurements are valid and clinically useful to measure functional recovery during an human-based physiotherapy assessment model. There was a very high correlation between wearable sensor-based parameters and traditional physiotherapy measurement procedures, especially gait symmetry, joint range of motion and activity levels. Wearable sensor-based method of assessment showed improved sensitivity in identifying time variation based functional improvements throughout the period during physiotherapy intervention. Also, participants assessed using wearable sensors demonstrated more stable and quantifiable recovery dynamics in contrast to those measured with standard observational techniques.

5.2. Significance of the Study

The study adds significant human clinical evidence to the idea of utilizing wearable sensor technology in physiotherapy evaluation. The results (by corroborating wearable sensor-based data in a controlled clinical rehabilitation setting) fill in a missing piece of a significant gap in the current body of rehabilitation studies that have mainly dealt with human-based applications. The findings reinforce the concept of wearable sensors as the next stage in the translational approach to implementing physiotherapy practice and emphasize their potential to increase the objectivity, reliability, and accuracy of functional assessment.

5.3. Final Thoughts and Recommendations

The use of wearable sensors in physiotherapy assessment models is a viable step toward objective and evidence-based rehabilitation monitoring. According to the results of the present study, wearable sensor-based assessment systems can be suggested as the subject of further research in various clinical models and longer periods of intervention. Their combination with complex data analytics to improve the rehabilitation planning per person should also be considered in the future research. In general, it can be affirmed that wearable sensor technologies must be successfully implemented to strengthen the use of wearable sensors in routine human physiotherapy and clinical rehabilitation practice.

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