

Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS): a Syndrome Multiple



Emma G. Zblewski^{1,2}

MA, PhD; MD year 3 student
Michigan State University (MSU)

BACKGROUND: Why does this matter?

- Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS) is diagnosed in patients with chronic orthostatic intolerance that maintain normal blood pressure with standing but have a compensatory jump in heart rate past a specific threshold.¹
- POTS is associated with significant morbidity (e.g., a lower health-related quality of life and are a significantly higher risk of suicide than the general population), as well as major negative psychosocial wellbeing and socioeconomic outcomes related to education and employment.²⁻⁴



MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This poster draws from my doctoral dissertation¹ in the MSU Department of Anthropology. My major research questions were:

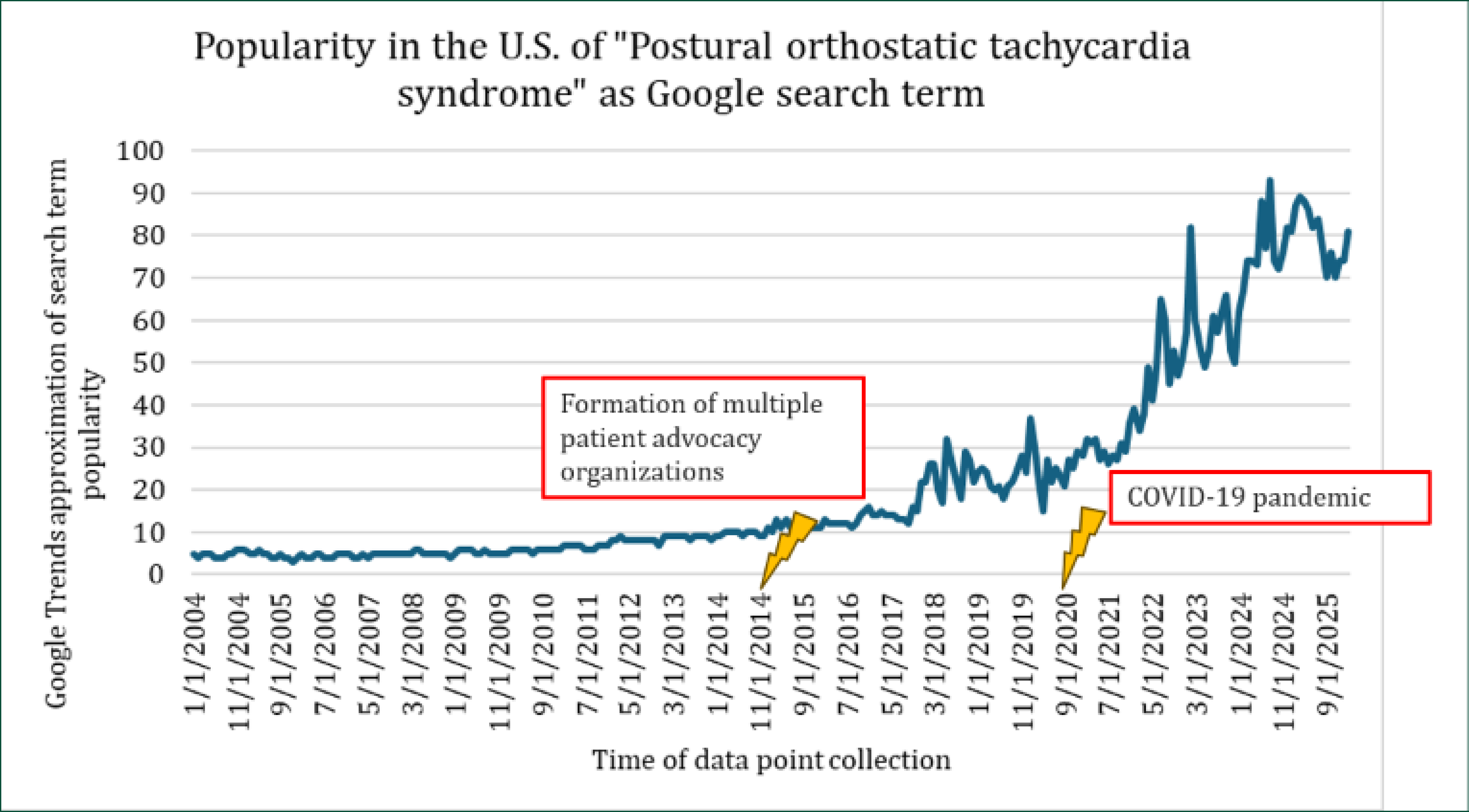
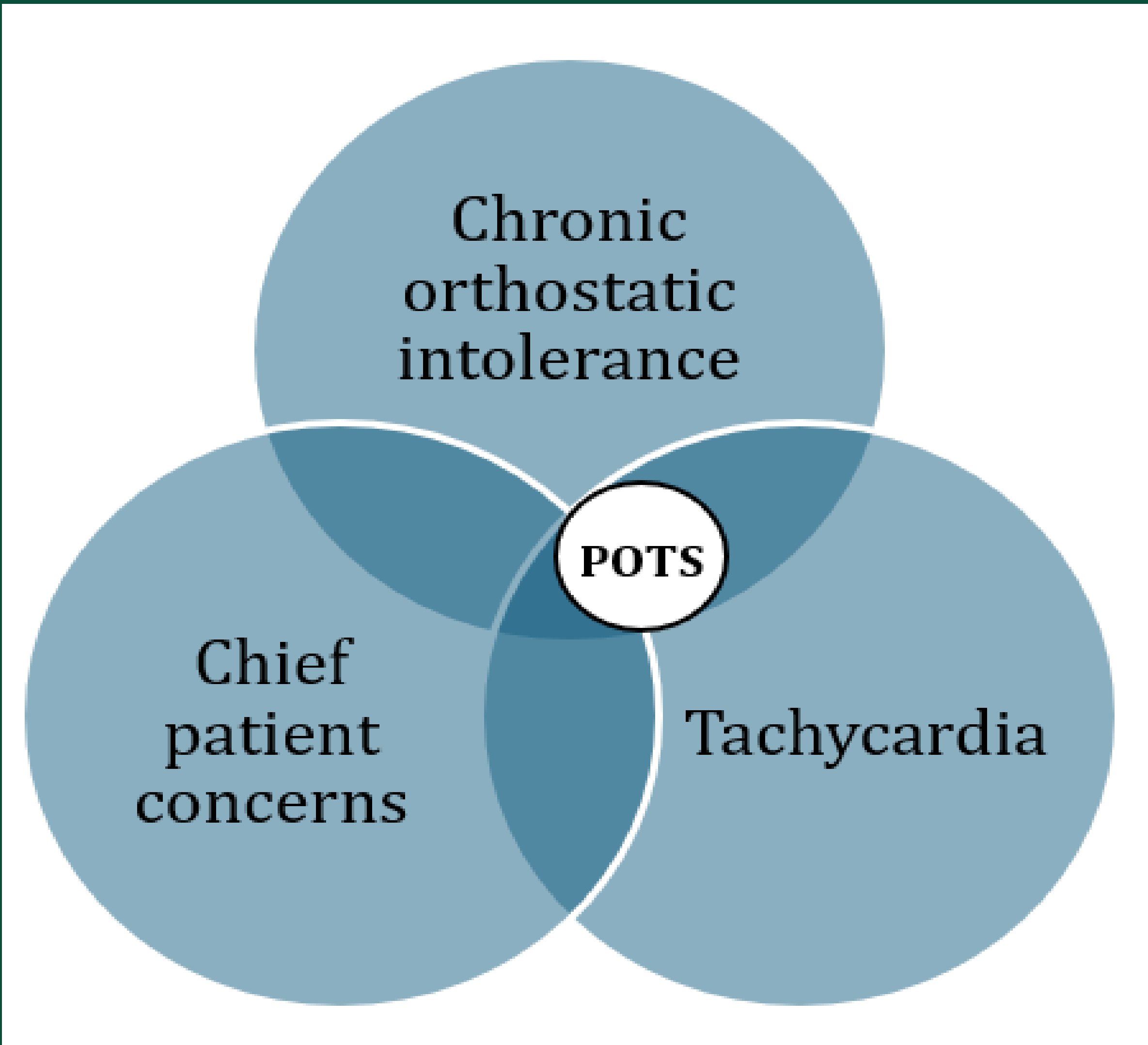
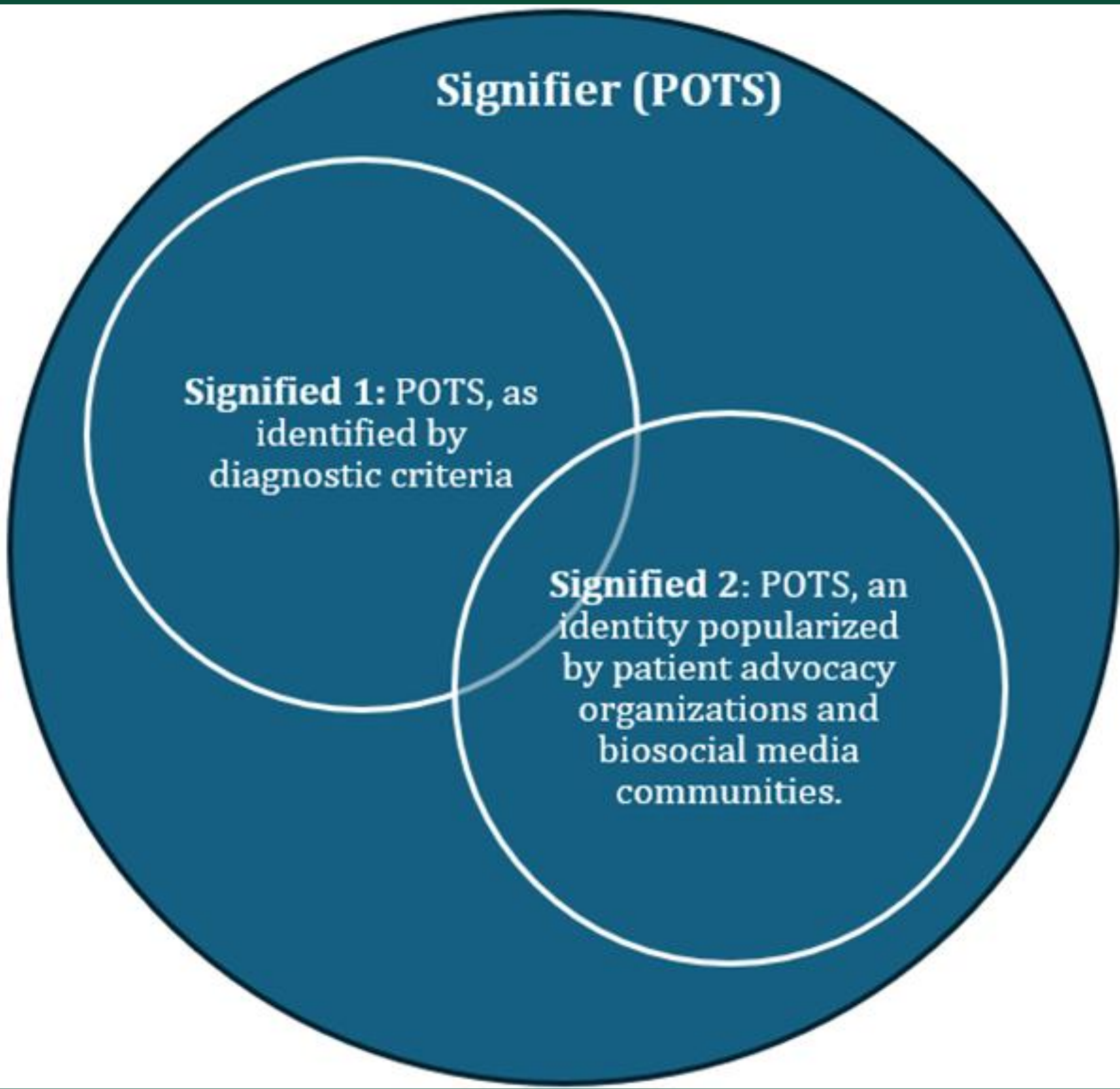
- What is POTS?
- Why (and how) do some people find POTS to be controversial?
- What factors make POTS difficult to treat (and recover from)?

METHODS

Methods used for that project include:

- Participant observation - professional conferences;
- Semi-structured interviews with clinicians and researchers;
- POTS patient free-response surveys;
- Digital biosocial media discourse analysis of POTS groups on Facebook and Reddit and TikTok discourse;
- Archival research of contemporary and historical biomedical literature;
- Personal experience as patient and MD student as well as long-term passive observation of digital biosocial media groups.

There is no singular “POTS:” it refers to different entities depending on context, making it difficult to study, treat, and recover from.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am extremely grateful for funding support from the MSU College of Human Medicine (CHM), MSU MD PhD program, MSU College of Social Sciences (CSS), MSU Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (RCPD)!

I also want to acknowledge the intellectual contributions of my doctoral committee members and research assistants: Heather Howard, PhD;² Mindy Morgan, PhD;² Masako Fujita, PhD;² Erica Wehrwein, PhD;^{1,3} Lydia Podlesak, Brooke Lattner, Lourdes Merem, and Rain Woodard.

1. MSU College of Human Medicine; 2. MSU Department of Anthropology; 3. MSU Department of Physiology

Study covered
by IRB:
STUDY00011285

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

- What is POTS?**
We do not know! (Or at least we only *somewhat* know)
- Why (and how) do some people find POTS to be controversial?**
POTS exists in at the intersection of complicated, contested forces (*i.e.*, *biosocial media*, *biological legitimacy*, *evidence-based medicine*, *mind-body interrelatedness*, *patient advocacy*).
- What factors make POTS difficult to treat (and recover from)?**
Structural aspects of modern biomedicine and *research + cultural stigma + conceptual fuzziness* = *unmet patient needs and burnt-out clinicians*
- Patients get left behind when nobody is responsible for their care (e.g., coordinating complex medical care).
- To build trust and rapport with patients, we need to recognize their individual and collective subjective knowledge.
- We should support clinicians that care for POTS patients to help prevent burnout and improve treatment outcomes.
- We should spread the love (*i.e.*, education about treating POTS for primary care, secondary specialists, and allied health professionals)!
- It may be time to question some assumptions underlying current conceptualizations and research.

REFERENCES

- Lau DH, Fedorowski A, Raj SR, et al. Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome: A State-of-the-Art Review. *Heart, Lung and Circulation*. 2026;35(2):171-185. doi:[10.1016/j.hlc.2025.09.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hlc.2025.09.004)
- Benrud-Larson LM, Dewar MS, Sandroni P, Rummans TA, Haythornthwaite JA, Low PA. Quality of Life in Patients With Postural Tachycardia Syndrome. *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*. 2002;77(6):531-537. doi:[10.4065/77.6.531](https://doi.org/10.4065/77.6.531)
- Pederson CL, Brook JB. Health-related quality of life and suicide risk in postural tachycardia syndrome. *Clin Auton Res*. 2017;27(2):75-81. doi:[10.1007/s10286-017-0399-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10286-017-0399-5)
- Bourne KM, Chew DS, Stiles LE, et al. Postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome is associated with significant employment and economic loss. *Journal of Internal Medicine*. 2021;290(1):203-212. doi:[10.1111/joim.13245](https://doi.org/10.1111/joim.13245)
- Zblewski EG. *POSTURAL ORTHOSTATIC TACHYCARDIA SYNDROME (POTS): A SYNDROME MULTIPLE*. Doctoral Dissertation. Michigan State University; 2026. doi:[10.25335/n941-2312](https://doi.org/10.25335/n941-2312)
- Google Trends. United States interest over time: Postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (condition) + 5 top search terms from 1/1/2004-3/2/2026. Published online 2026. Accessed March 2, 2026. <https://trends.google.com/explore?q=postural%2520orthostatic%2520tachycardia%2520syndrome%2CPOTS%2520syndrome%2CPots%2520syndrome%2Cpots%2520postural%2520orthostatic%2520tachycardia%2520syndrome%2C%2Fm%2Fo4l6qx%2Cpostural%2520orthostatic%2520tachycardia%2520syndrome%2520symptoms&date=2004-01-01%202026-03-02&geo=US>

Correspondence:
zblewski@msu.edu