

BACKGROUND

- As social justice, health disparities, and shifting national demographics take center stage, health workforce diversity has become a cross-cutting priority.
- Most health professions in the United States have adopted clinical doctorates, and there has been an ongoing debate on whether the terminal degree for physician assistants (PAs) should transition from a master's degree to a clinical doctorate.¹⁻³
- An American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA) November 2020 report researching the entry-level doctorate across four health professions highlights the lack of research on the entry-level doctorate impact on diversity.⁴
- Despite the phenomenal growth of the physician assistant (PA) profession, racial/ethnic diversity remains a significant and stagnant challenge. Currently, approximately 87% of practicing PAs, 85% of faculty, and 82% of matriculants are white, with less than 11% of PA students classified as underrepresented in medicine (URM).⁵
- As the profession continues to debate transitioning from a master's degree to an entry-level doctorate, there is a critical need to assess how the transition will influence diversity in the PA profession.⁶

PURPOSE

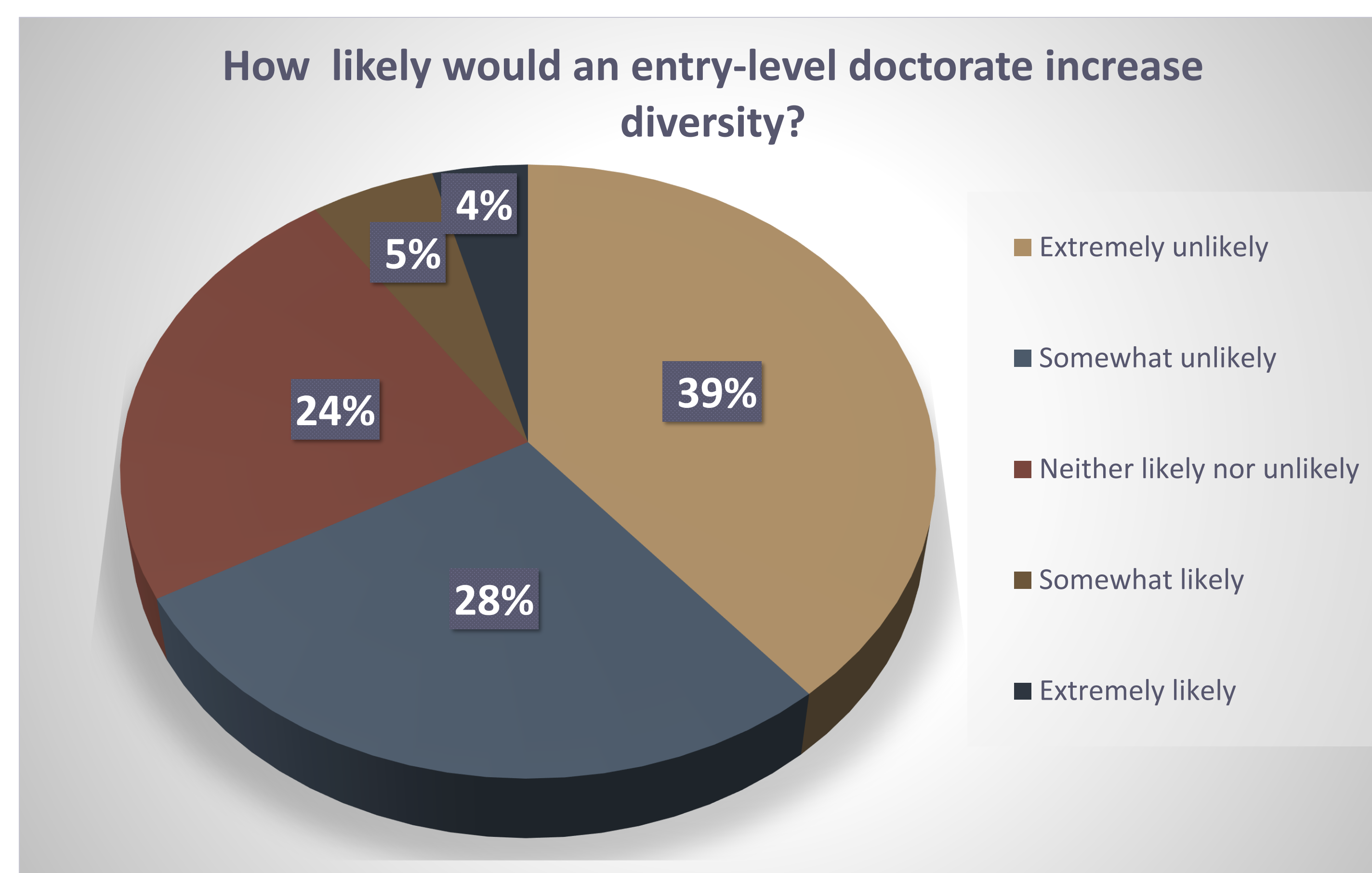
To explore various stakeholders' perspectives on the impact of transitioning to an entry-level PA doctoral degree on diversity.

METHODOLOGY

- We conducted a multi-pronged, mixed-methods study involving a national study and interviews with key stakeholders.
- Participants were asked to respond to the perceived impact of an entry-level PA doctoral degree and diversity.
- Quantitative and qualitative data was collected via a survey distributed to 1368 practicing PAs and PA students and 38 interviews with key stakeholders.

RESULTS

- Thematic qualitative analysis and descriptive quantitative analysis were performed to evaluate relationships between perceptions/perspectives on an entry-level PA doctoral degree and the anticipated impact on diversity in the PA profession.
- Out of 627 national survey responses, **67%** of participants said transitioning to an entry doctoral degree would be extremely or somewhat unlikely to increase diversity.
- When asked to select potential negative impacts of an entry-level PA doctorate, a decrease in diversity was listed as one of the top three of all responses.
- Similar findings were obtained from the qualitative data, with one responder stating: **"I think a doctorate will be an advantage clinically but will further the diversity struggles our profession faces."**



Which of the following are most likely to be negatively impacted by transitioning to a doctoral degree?

- #1** Cost of PA education programs
- #2** Diversity in the PA programs
- #3** Physician Relationship

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

- Majority of our study participants believed that transitioning to a doctoral degree will unlikely increase diversity in the PA profession
- While additional education has several benefits, a terminal doctoral degree is believed to be a barrier to increasing workforce diversity by a significant portion of the PA profession.
- If the profession decides to transition to an entry-level doctoral degree, it should take lessons from the impact on diversity two decades ago when we transitioned our terminal degree to the master's degree and address these issues before advancing the entry-level credential again.

FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

- Expand quantitative analysis to include bivariate and multivariate analysis to explore further association between independent variables and the dependent variable of PA profession diversity.
- Explore diversity trends present when the PA profession transitioned to the master's degree.
- Explore the impact of transitioning to the entry-level clinical doctorate on other health professions.
- Critically analyze the Net Present Value (NPV) of a doctoral degree for PAs across various demographics

REFERENCES

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