

You're Not Alone: Examining the Darker Side of Medicine



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Disclosures

- Talia Sierra, DMSc, PA-C;
 - The Burn Clinic, AAPA Burnout Task Force
- Heidi Brown, PA-C;
 - The Burn Clinic, AAPA Burnout Task Force
- Noël E. Smith, MA;
 - AAPA Staff

Objectives

- By the end of the session, attendees should be able to:
 - Discuss prevalence of depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation among PAs and PA students
 - Identify symptoms of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation
 - Identify at least one resource for help

Depression





Depression in Medical Students

27% of medical
students
endorse
depression¹

- General population rates are 7-8% in similarly aged individuals²



Depression in Physicians

28% of residents experience at least one episode of Major Depressive Disorder during their residency or fellowship²

21% during COVID^{3,4}

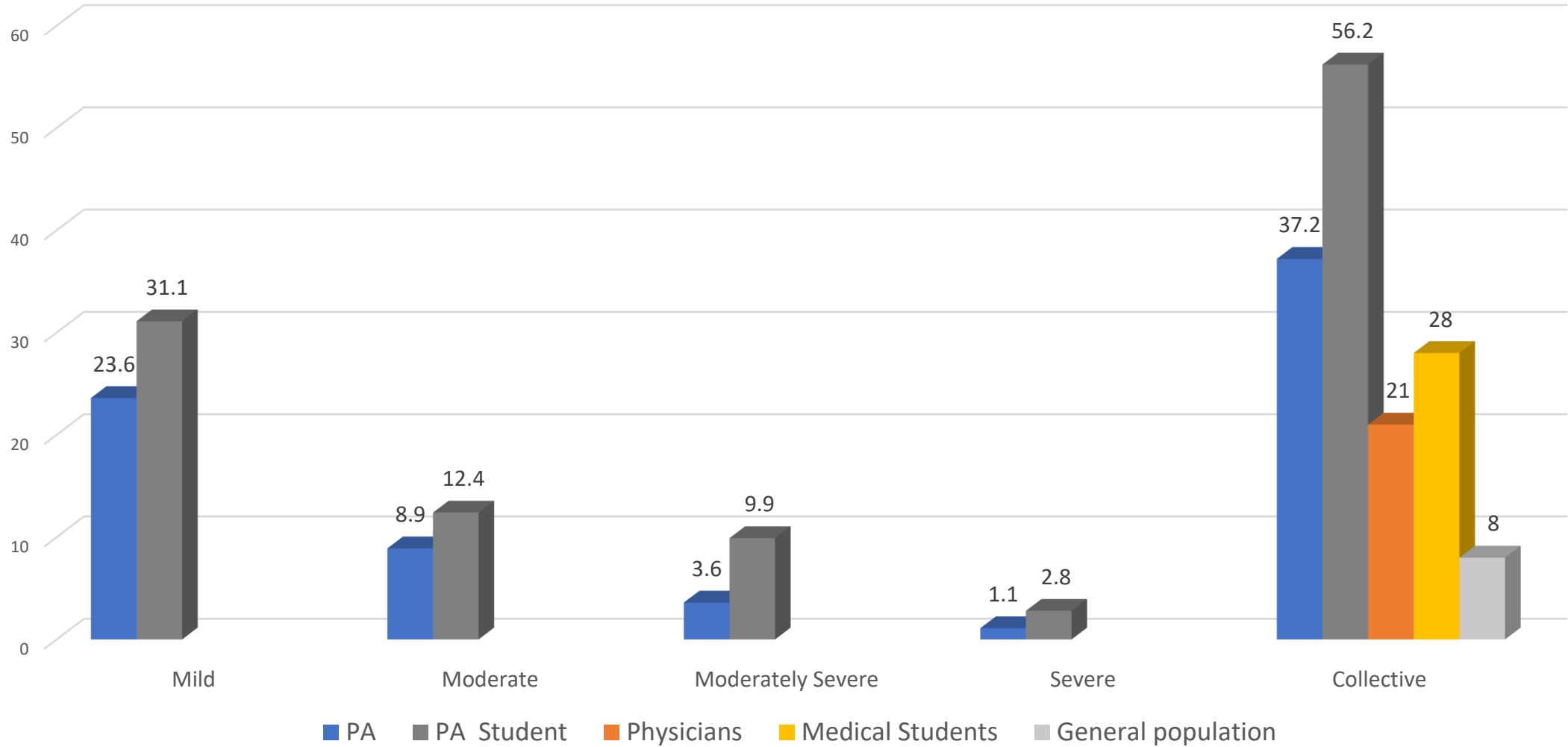
- 62% had never experienced depression prior to becoming a physician



Depression in PAs and PA Students

- PHQ-9
 - Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems?
 - Thoughts you would be better off dead or hurting yourself in some way
 - PA students
 - 10% had thoughts several days or more than half the days
 - PAs
 - 4% had thoughts several days or more than half the days
- PA students
 - 25% moderate to severe risk for depression
- PAs
 - 14% moderate to severe risk for depression

PHQ-9 Depression Severity in PAs and PA Students (% of Respondents)





Anxiety



Anxiety in Medical Students

Global prevalence in
medical students is 34%
percent⁵

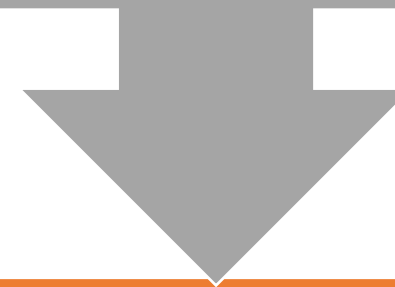
General Population

- 19% of U.S. adults had any anxiety disorder in the past year
 - Females 23%
 - Males 14%⁶



Anxiety in Physicians

Up to 32% of physicians report current anxiety disorder⁷



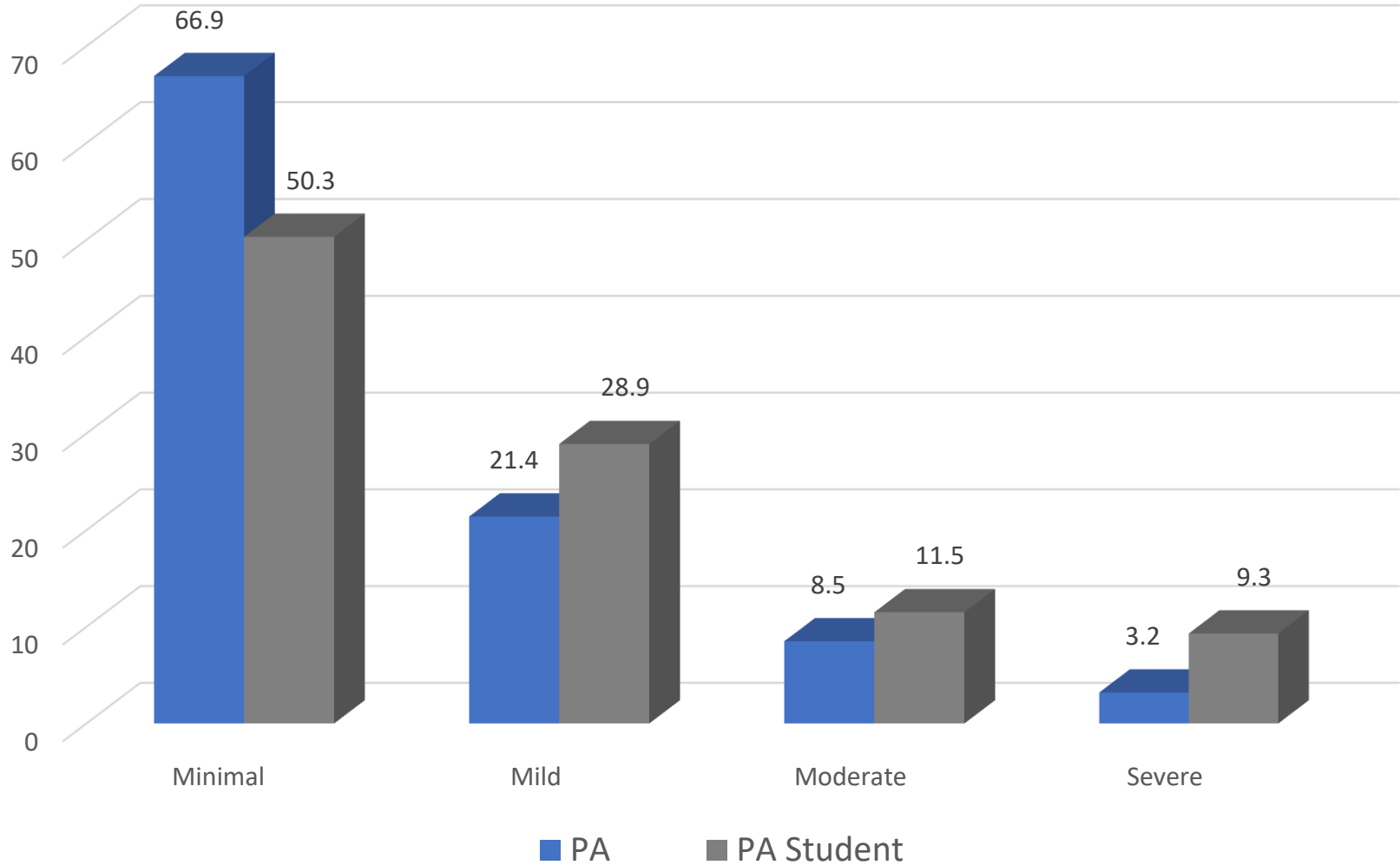
44% reported anxiety during COVID³



Anxiety in PAs and PA Students

- GAD-7 Results
 - PA Students
 - 21% with moderate to severe symptoms
 - 29% with mild symptoms
 - PAs
 - 12% with moderate to severe symptoms
 - 21% with mild symptoms

GAD-7 Anxiety Severity in PAs and PA Students (% of Respondents)





Suicide



Suicide in the General Population

10th leading cause of death
in the US⁸

Affects men 3.63 times
more than women⁸

Average suicide rates⁹

- Males: 22.4 per 100,000 individuals
- Females: 6 per 100,000 individuals



Suicide in Physicians

Physicians have higher rates of suicide than the general population¹⁰

- Males: 1.4 x more likely
- Females: 2.3 x more likely

6.4% considered suicide in the past year¹⁰

Physicians have the highest suicide rate of any profession¹¹



Suicide in Medical Students

Medical students are at high risk of suicidal ideation¹²

- Up to 10% of medical students
- Up to 23% of interns

Second leading cause of death in medical and surgical trainees in the US



Suicidal Ideation in PAs and PA Students

Have you ever felt suicidal since the start of your career (or PA program)?

- PA Students
 - 9.3% Yes
 - 66.7% in the past year
- PAs
 - 8.6% Yes
 - 57% were in the past year

67.3% indicated stress from work or school contributed to suicidal ideation

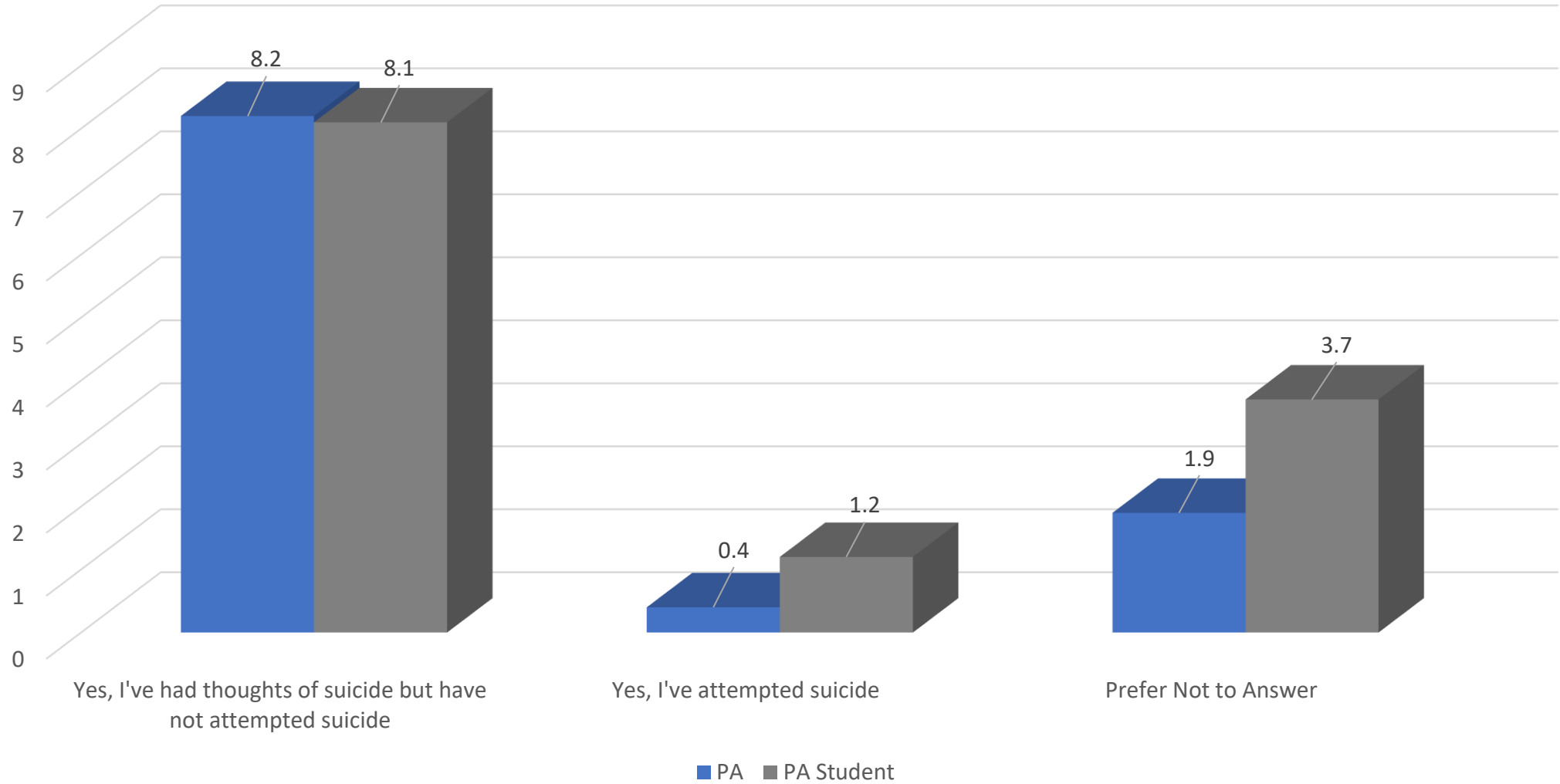


Suicide and PA Students

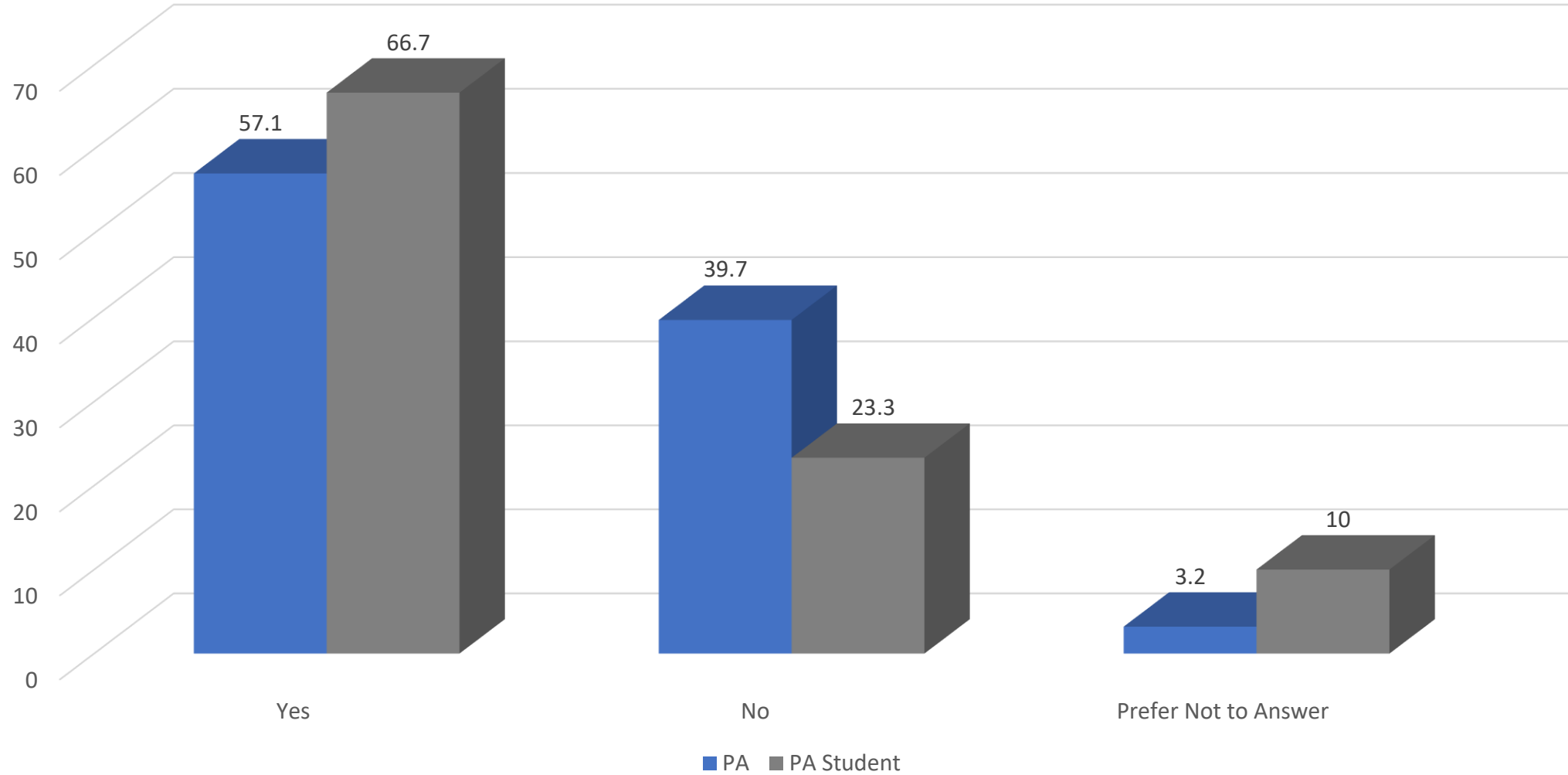
3.5% indicate
suicidal
ideation during
orientation

- Increases to 7.4%
by mid-didactic
year¹³

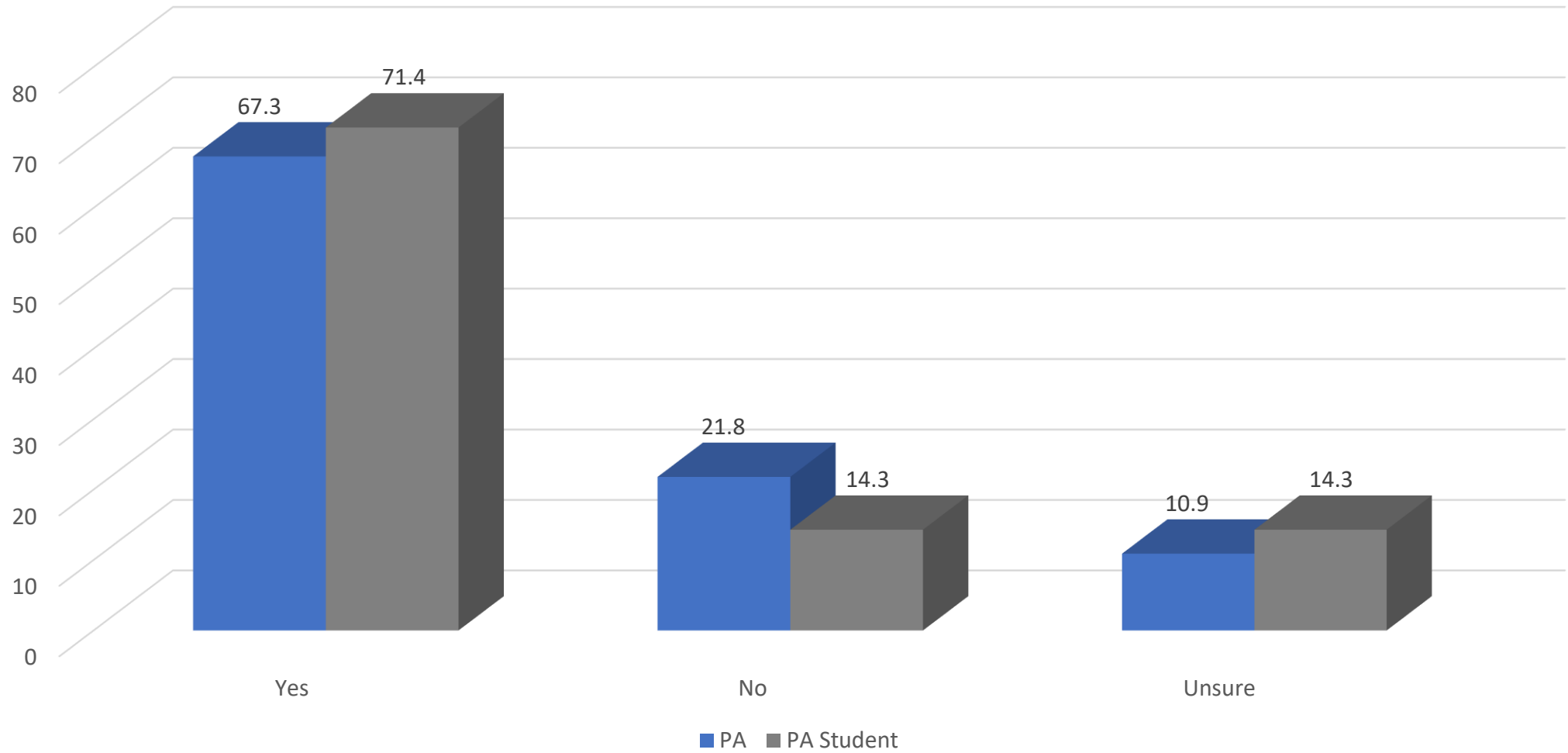
% Who Have Ever Felt Suicidal or Attempted Suicide Since Start of Career/ School



% Endorsing Suicidal Ideation or Suicide Attempt Within the Past Year



Stressors from Work/ School Contributed to Suicidal Ideation or Attempt (%)



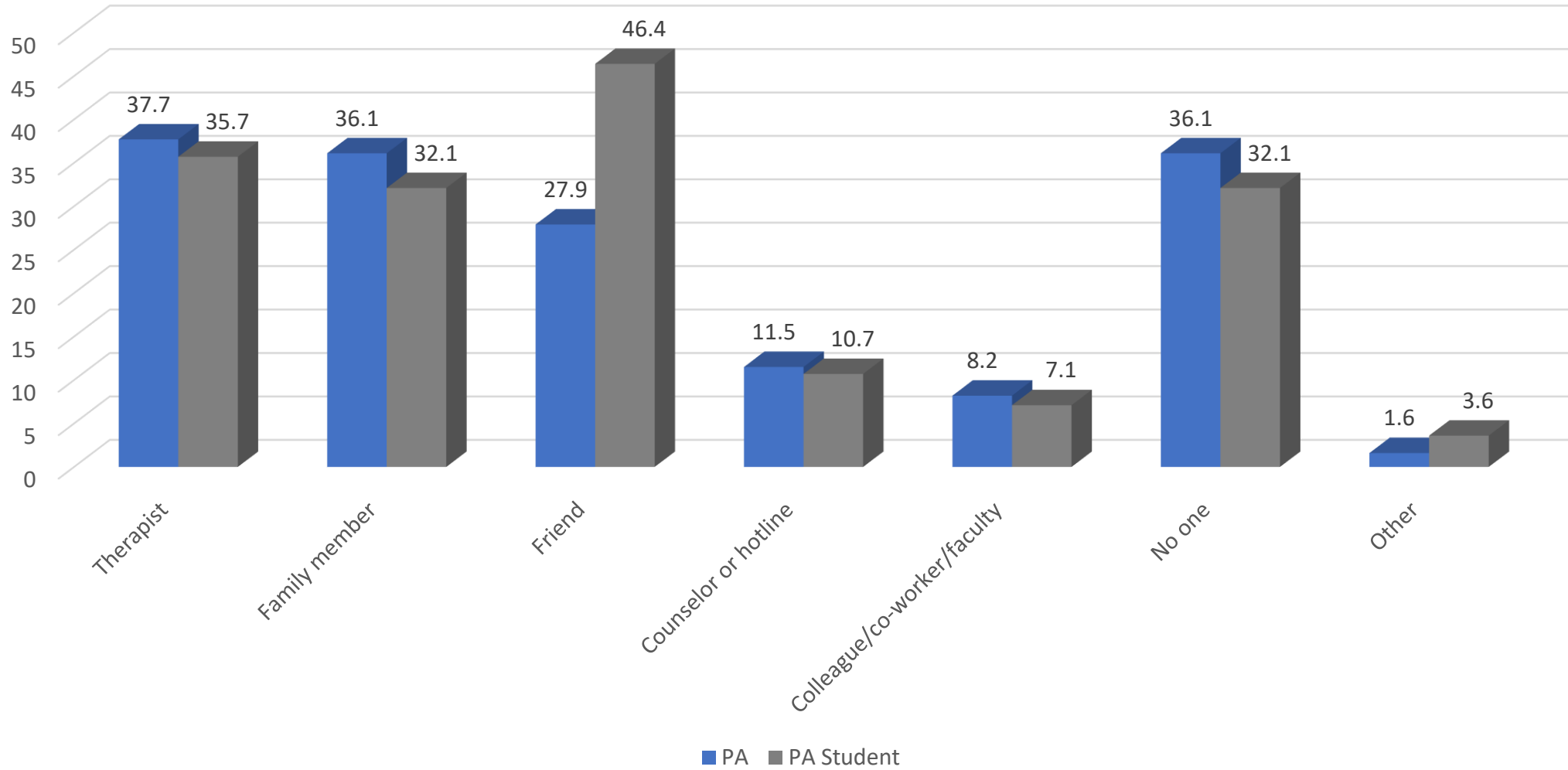


Help Seeking Behavior

36% of PAs and 32% of PA Students did not tell anyone of their thoughts

PA students more likely to receive professional help (25% vs. 18%)

Who Did They Tell About Suicidal Ideation or Attempt (%)



Barriers to Seeking Help

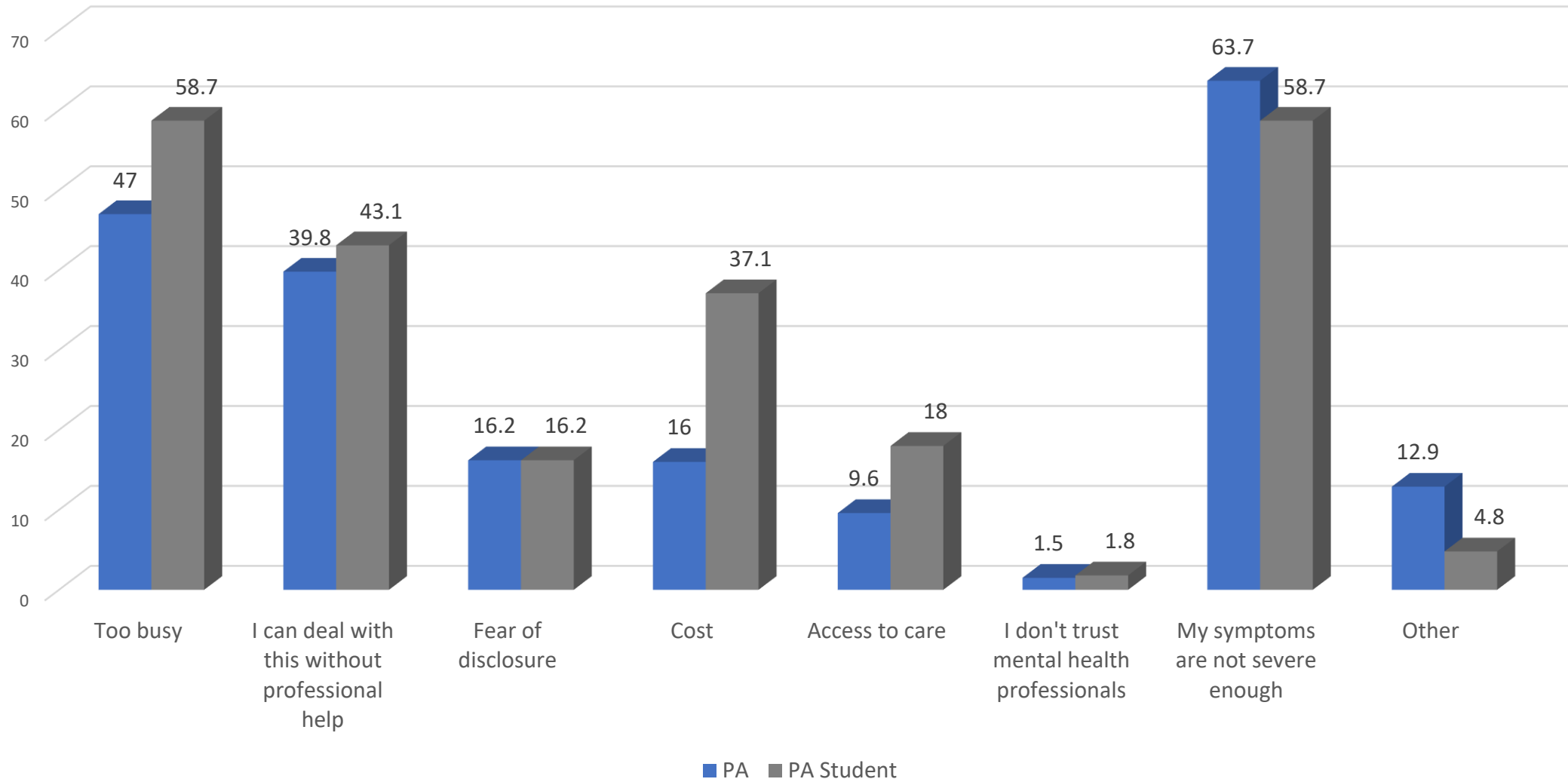
PA Students

- 16% Fear risk of disclosure
- 59% Are too busy
- 37% Cost
- 18% Access to care
- 43% Can deal with it without a professional
- 59% Symptoms aren't severe enough

PAs

- 16% Fear risk of disclosure
- 47% Are too busy
- 16% Cost
- 10% Access to care
- 40% Can deal with it without a professional
- 64% Symptoms aren't severe enough

Reasons for Not Seeking Help (%)





Recognizing the Symptoms





Symptoms of Depression

1. Depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day
2. **Markedly diminished interest or pleasure in activities**
3. Change in appetite/weight
4. Sleep disruption
5. Psychomotor retardation or agitation
6. Fatigue
7. Feelings of worthlessness/guilt
8. Diminished ability to think/concentrate
9. Thoughts of death/suicide



Symptoms of Anxiety

Excessive anxiety/worry (more days than not) for >6mo

Difficult to control worry

Three or more of the following symptoms

- Restless
- Easily fatigued
- Difficulty concentrating
- Irritability
- Muscle tension
- Sleep disturbance



Suicidal Ideation

Part of a spectrum
of depression

- Hopelessness
- Suicidal Ideation
- Suicidal Plan
- Suicidal Means
- Suicidal Intent



Suicide Protective Factors

Access to mental health and
being proactive to treatment

Feeling connected to family
and community support

Problem solving and coping
skills

Cultural and religious beliefs



Suicide Risk Factors

Health

Environment

- Prolonged stress
- Stressful life events/transitions/crisis
- Exposure to another person's suicide

History



Reaching Out to Struggling Colleagues

- Remove your supervisor cap
- Discuss privately
- Reach out to them from the heart
 - Listen
 - Empathize
 - Let them know you will be there and there are resources



Resources for Help

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
 - 1-800-273-8255
 - 988 - three digit code goes live July 16th 2022
- Crisis text line
 - Text TALK to 741741
- Not sure what to say to someone?
 - <https://afsp.org/what-to-do-when-someone-is-at-risk>
- State specific suicide prevention/crisis hotline
- State medical associations
- AAPA

Take Home Points

- PAs and PA students are at risk for depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation
 - Symptoms may be overlapping and easy to miss
- PA and PA student suicidal ideation rates are similar to physician and medical students
- Recognizing symptoms of depression and anxiety in ourselves may be challenging
- Reach out for help and tell someone if you are experiencing symptoms – You are not alone!

Contact Us!

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