PA Program Mistreatment Policies:
A Descriptive Analysis from a National Survey

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BACKGROUND

Mistreatment of PA students is common, associated with negative effects, most often occurs in clinical settings, and is underreported by PA students.

Mistreatment can include behaviors including public humiliation, offensive remarks based on personal characteristics, preferential grading, sexual harassment, and physical assault.

PA programs are responsible for providing safe learning environments and longstanding accreditation standards require programs to have policy to address student grievances such as mistreatment.

PURPOSE

Describe the prevalence, content, and dissemination of program policies to assess and address mistreatment reported by students during supervised clinical learning experiences.

METHODS

10 new survey items were added to the 2019 Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA) Program survey as part of its Support to Advance Research (STAR) program.

De-identified data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Subgroup analysis using z-tests was conducted based on program characteristics.

RESULTS

Response Rate: 232 PA Programs

Programs with Policy: 76% (177/232)

No significant difference ($p < 0.05$) in policy presence between:
- public and private institutions
- academic medical centers and non-academic medical centers
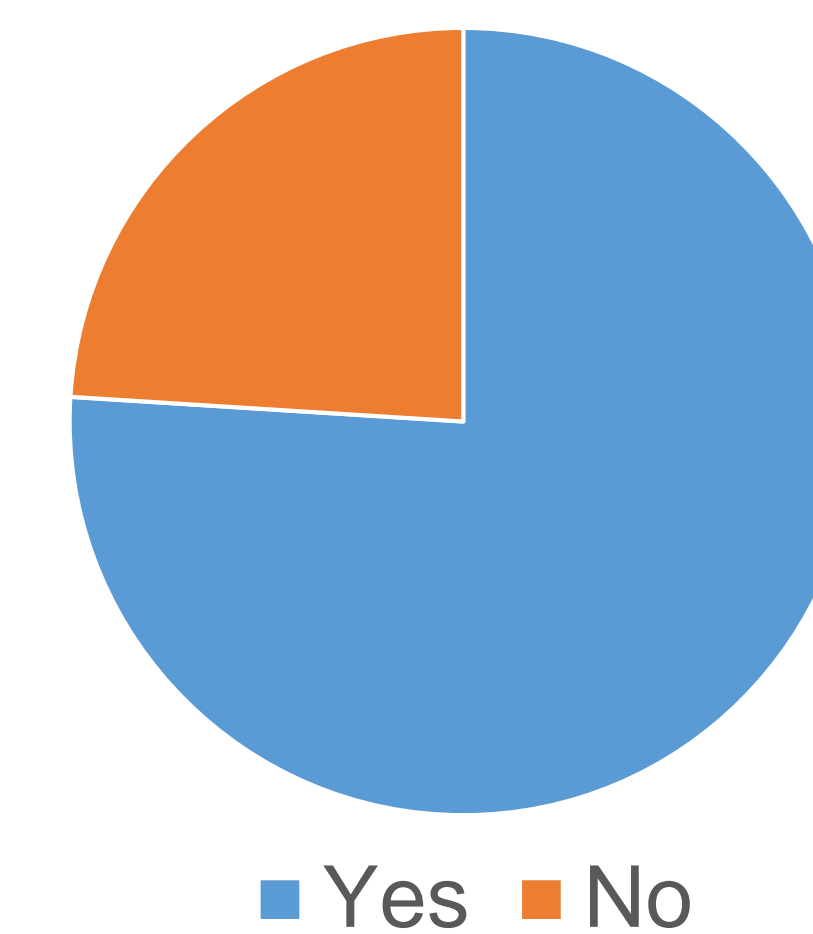

Mistreatment Policy
■ Yes ■ No

Table 1: Most Frequent Policy Content
n: 177

	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Student reporting mechanisms	172	97%
Investigation and review process by program and/or institutional administration	136	77%
Definition of professional conduct for clinical preceptors	110	62%
Approach to maintaining confidentiality/anonymity of the learner	103	58%
Action program and/or institutional administration may take with performers of negative events	99	56%
Definition of negative event	94	53%
Approach to minimizing risk for retaliation against learner reporting the negative event	88	50%
Protection of the rights of the accused performers of the negative event	85	48%
Examples of negative events	77	44%

Table 2: Most Frequent Reporting Mechanisms
n: 176

	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Program Staff	122	69%
Institutional Leadership	114	65%
Course Survey	113	64%
Preceptor	105	60%
Electronic Survey	88	50%
Office of Institutional Equity	67	38%
Human Resources	52	30%
Omsbudsperson	39	22%

Other Free Text Responses:
Title IX representatives; medical director; student advisors

Table 3: Entities Involved in Investigating and Addressing Reports
n: 174

	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
PA Program Director	158	91%
PA Program Clinical Faculty (i.e. Clinical Coordinator, Director of Clinical Education)	154	89%
Institutional Leadership (i.e. Dean, Department Chair)	120	69%
Institutional Entity (i.e. Committee, Human Resources, Office of Institutional Equity)	98	56%
Clinical Preceptors	67	39%

Other Free Text Responses:
Program Staff, Student Affairs; Title IX Representative; Medical Director; Assoc. Program Director

RESULTS

Table 4: Mechanisms to Assess for Mistreatment
n: 160

	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Clinical Course Evaluation	144	90%
End of Program Evaluation	88	55%
End of Clinical Phase Evaluation	87	54%
Routine Query of Students (In-Person)	77	48%
Graduate Survey	57	36%
Routine Query of Students (Email)	38	24%

Other Free Text Responses:
Advising Meetings; Focus Groups; Site Visits; Mid-Rotation Evaluations

Table 5: Frequency of Policy Dissemination
n: 176

	Number of Respondents	Proportion of Programs
Students: More Than Once Per Year (Monthly-Quarterly)	61	35%
Students: Once Per Year	114	65%
Students: Less Than Annually	1	<1%
Students: Never	0	0%
Preceptors: More Than Once Per Year (Monthly-Quarterly)	20	11%
Preceptors: Once Per Year	108	61%
Preceptors: Less Than Annually	38	22%
Preceptors: Never	10	6%
Faculty/Staff: More Than Once Per Year (Monthly-Quarterly)	39	22%
Faculty/Staff: Once Per Year	121	69%
Faculty/Staff: Less Than Annually	13	7%
Faculty/Staff: Never	3	2%

CONCLUSION

This study describes current policies and policy-driven practices across PA programs in 2019.

In 2020, a new accreditation standard required programs to have policy to address student reports of mistreatment - which should renew efforts write or revise policy.

Policy priorities and future research topics: mistreatment prevention, facilitating student reporting, student support, corrective action, and methods to evaluate policy effectiveness.

REFERENCES

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