



Rebuilding the PA Pathway: Addressing Barriers to Entry and Factors that Affect the Well-Being of Marginalized PA Students

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INTRODUCTION

Despite the PA profession's continued growth, a lack of diversity remains a concern. This dynamic landscape calls for a closer examination of the increasingly competitive application & admission process, prompting considerations for the well-being of future PAs. Guidry and colleagues' study addresses the lack of diversity in the PA workforce, attributing it to insufficient diversity in student enrollment. This disparity underscores the challenges in achieving diversity in PA programs and emphasizes the need to identify and adopt best practices to address this issue.

AIM

We sought to explore the association between stress and well-being, considering intersections of sex, race or ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

METHODS

This retrospective cohort study used the Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA) 2019 Matriculating Student Survey data. Intersectional marginalization identity scores (IMI scores) were calculated using the following demographic variables: age, gender identification, sex assigned at birth, sexual orientation, and UR in medicine status. IMI Scores: 0 = non marginalized, 1-2 = Low Marginalization, 3+ = High Marginalization Score. The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-4) was used to evaluate perceived stress among students. The Quality of Life (QOL) scale measured the following over the last week: overall quality of life, mental well-being, physical well-being, emotional well-being, level of social activity, and spiritual well-being. Levels of fatigue, social support from family and friends, and financial concerns over the last 30 days were also assessed. Acceptance rates were calculated based on the percentage of programs accepted after the interview. Cross-tabulations were used to calculate demographic variables by IMI status. Descriptive statistics and the Kruskal-Wallis H test were performed to evaluate differences in age, matriculation rates, financial concerns, perceived stress, and quality of life by IMI status. Correlations were analyzed using a two-tailed Spearman's rho coefficient. Data were analyzed using SPSS 28.0 (Chicago, IL). Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

On average, non-marginalized students were more likely to decide to become a PA at an earlier phase of life (Figure 1 & 2). Marginalized students submitted fewer PA school applications and were less likely to receive acceptance letters (Table 1). The prevalence of financial concerns was significantly higher among marginalized populations. These individuals were most likely to have outstanding pre-PA education loans and have pre-PA education scholarships or awards from colleges/universities. Marginalized students were more likely to feel fatigued, and report having a lower overall quality of life, lower levels of physical and emotional well-being, and lower levels of social activity. In addition, they were less likely to feel satisfied with their social support (Table 2).

Figure 1. Demographics

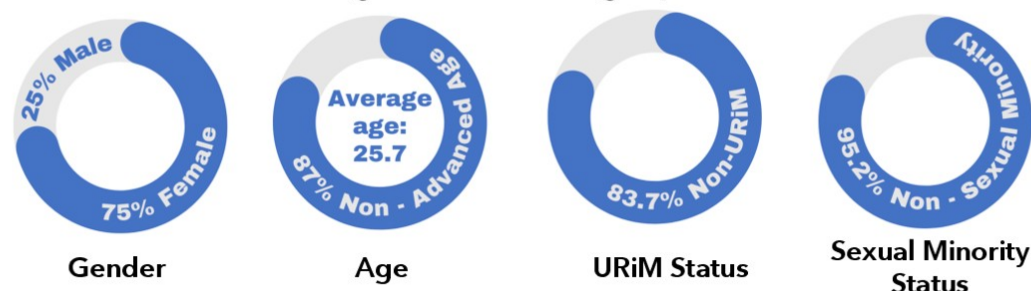
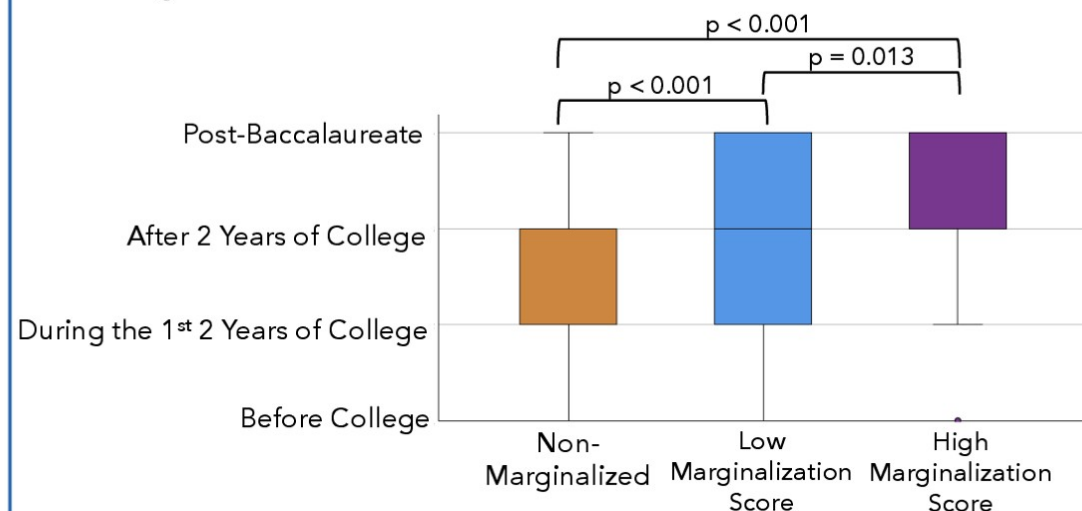


Figure 2. When Did You Decide To Become A PA?



*p-values derived from the Kruskal-Wallis test. Post-hoc comparisons were conducted using Mann-Whitney Tests with a Bonferroni-adjusted alpha level of 0.016 (0.05 ÷ 3). Solid horizontal lines denote the median. Boxes represent the interquartile range (25th to 75th percentiles), and whiskers mark the minimum and maximum values. Dots denote mild outliers (Q1 - 1.5 * IQR or Q3 + 1.5 * IQR) and asterisks denote extreme outliers (Q1 - 3 * IQR or Q3 + 3 * IQR).

Table 1. PA Admissions Data

	Non-Marginalized (n = 3733)	Low Marginalization Score (n = 1086)	High Marginalization Score (n = 51)
	Mean ± SD		
Application Submitted	7.83 ± 5.36	7.38 ± 5.97 ^a	5.16 ± 3.92 ^{b,c}
Interviews Granted	3.35 ± 2.31	3.04 ± 2.40 ^a	2.08 ± 1.06 ^{b,c}
Acceptance Letter	1.71 ± 1.13	1.61 ± 1.53 ^a	1.27 ± 0.62 ^b

^ap-values derived from the Kruskal-Wallis test. Post-hoc comparisons were conducted using Mann-Whitney Tests with a Bonferroni-adjusted alpha level of 0.016 (0.05 ÷ 3).

^ASingle marginalized identity significant compared to non-marginalized, ^bMultiple marginalized identities significant compared to non-marginalized, ^cMultiple marginalized identities significant compared to single marginalized identity

Table 2. Correlation Coefficient Matrix

			Past Week			Past 30 days		
n = 5640	Pre-PA Loans	Pre-PA College Scholarships (%)	Overall Quality of Life	Overall Physical Well-Being	Level of Social Activity	Fatigue	Satisfaction with Social Support	Financial Concerns
Correlation Coefficient	.048	.033	-.037	-.041	-.065	.050	-.057	.103
Significance	**	**	**	**	***	**	**	**

Values represent Spearman's correlation coefficients.

***Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed), **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study underscore significant disparities in the experiences of marginalized and non-marginalized students pursuing a career as a Physician Assistant (PA). Addressing the inequalities and inequities in early exposure, educational access, and financial support is crucial for promoting equity and diversity within the PA profession. Initiatives to enhance representation, provide targeted financial aid, and foster a supportive environment can contribute to a more inclusive and equitable landscape for aspiring Physician Assistants.

REFERENCES

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