

DIVERSITY IN THE PA PIPELINE: STUDENT EXPERIENCES AND BARRIERS IN ADMISSIONS AND PA SCHOOL

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Disclosures

- There are no disclosures to report

Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, attendees should be able to:

1. Identify barriers to applying to PA school that are cited by PA students nationwide, with additional insights on how students from underrepresented groups experience the application process
2. Identify disparities among underrepresented PA student groups in belonging as well as social and educational support

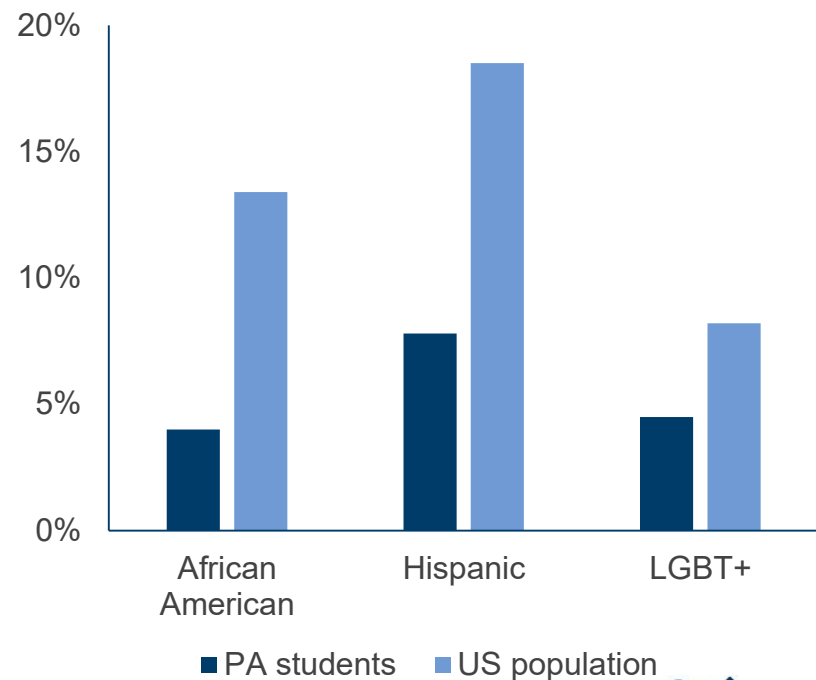
Provider Diversity and Patient Benefits

- URM healthcare professionals are more likely to care for minority and medically underserved populations
- Physicians who come from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to provide care for underserved patients
 - Findings persist after factoring in physician race, gender, and ethnicity
- There is a recognized negative culture in medicine towards sexual and gender minority patients
- Providers with pre-existing disabilities are more likely to understand the challenges their patients with disabilities face and have an overall higher cultural competence



Demographic Profile of the PA Profession

Health professions, and specifically the PA profession, are not representative of the US population



Barriers to Entering Health Professions

Barriers for URM students

- Cost of education
- Lack of academic preparation
- Lack of mentorship
- Stereotype threat
- Limited exposure to the profession
- Insufficient advising

Sociocultural Factors

- Absence of role model
- Lack of peer/community support
- Programs in geographic areas that lack diversity



Barriers to the PA Profession*

- State/local policies
- Low undergraduate GPA
- Absence of role models
- Limited financial resources
- Lack of outreach
- Few minority faculty members

*identified by PA program faculty

Objective and Aims

- **Current study:**
 - Objective: The purpose of this study is to identify barriers faced by PA students who identify as URM-med, SGM, low SES, or who have a disability
 - Aim: Empower PA pipelines and graduate programs to implement strategies to better recruit and support students during their time in PA educational programs and beyond

Methods

- 2020 AAPA Student Survey, including didactic and clinical PA students from across the United States
- Selected Measures
 - **Personal demographics:** URM-med, SGM, low SES, and disability status
 - **Questions about PA school applications:** perceived bias in the admissions process, application support from close others, and financial support
 - **Questions about the PA school experience:** whether students have communities or groups they feel they belong to, whether they have encountered faculty, staff, and students who they can identify with, whether students have considered leaving PA school, and students' perceived preparation to provide care to diverse patients

Participants (~2,800*)

77% Female

2,139 (77%) were female, 637 (23%) were male, and 2 (<1%) preferred to self-describe

14% URM-med

14% were **underrepresented minorities in medicine**

2,282 (83%) identified their race as white and 212 (8%) of respondents reported their ethnicity as Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish origin

6% SGM

152 (6%) were **sexual or gender minorities**

13% Low-SES

346 (13%) were from a family that received or had themselves personally received public assistance

1% Disability

28 (1%) had a diagnosed physical or mental impairment that substantially limits participation in educational experiences and opportunities offered by a college

The gender and racial composition resembled the makeup of PA students in the United States as measured by other data sources

53% were in the didactic phase of their academic studies

*All questions were optional: sample ns vary slightly from question to question

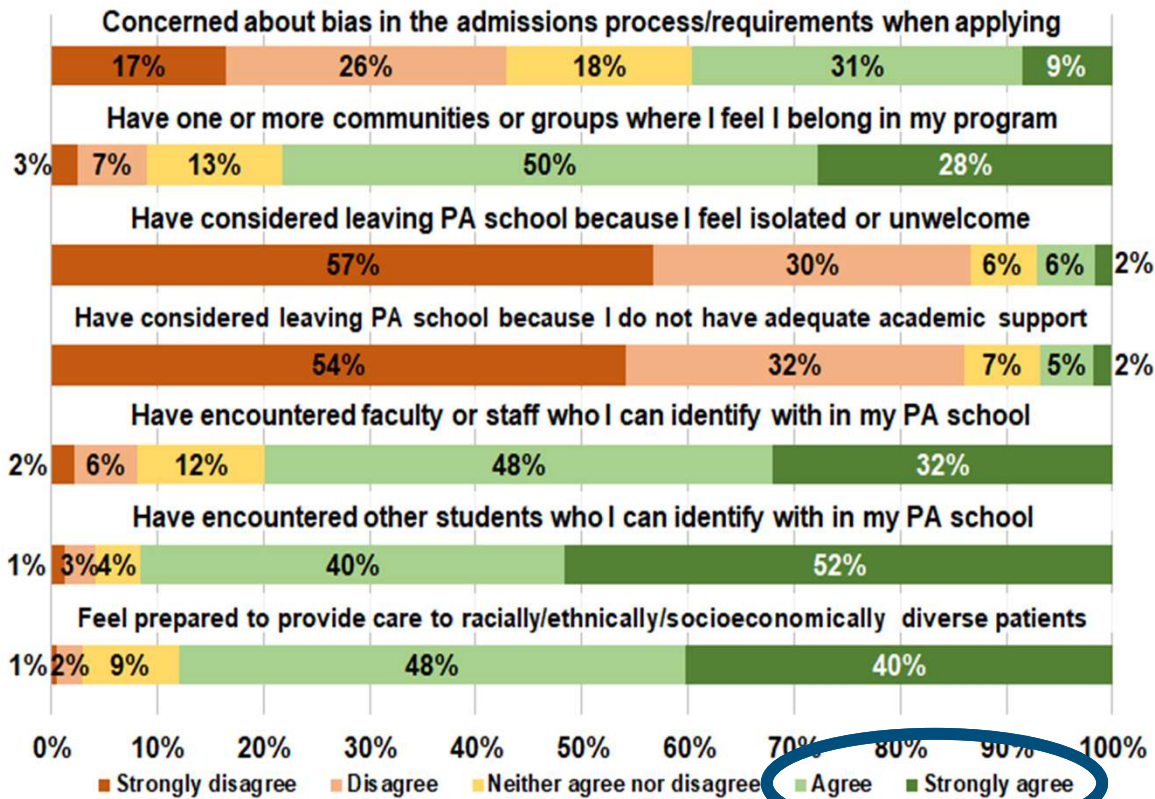
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Statistical Analysis

- Descriptive statistics on the full sample of PA students for frequency of experiencing barriers and other events
- Ordinal logistic regression analyses to examine odds of experiencing a variety of barriers or experiences in applying to PA school and post-matriculation experiences

Concerns and Experiences Overall



40%
78%
8%
7%
80%
92%
88%



Odds of Concerns and Experiences by Group

URM-med

Lower odds of:

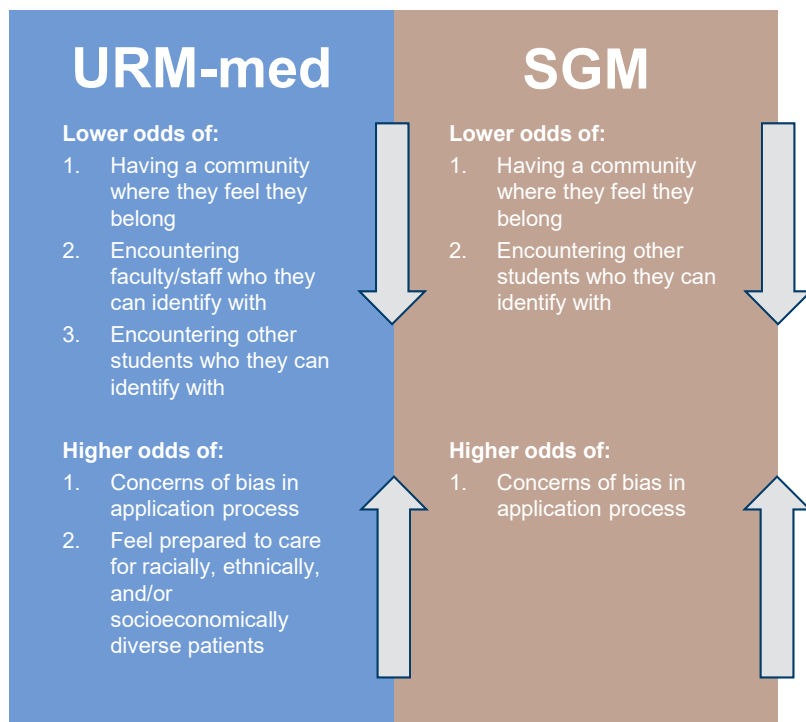
1. Having a community where they feel they belong
2. Encountering faculty/staff who they can identify with
3. Encountering other students who they can identify with

Higher odds of:

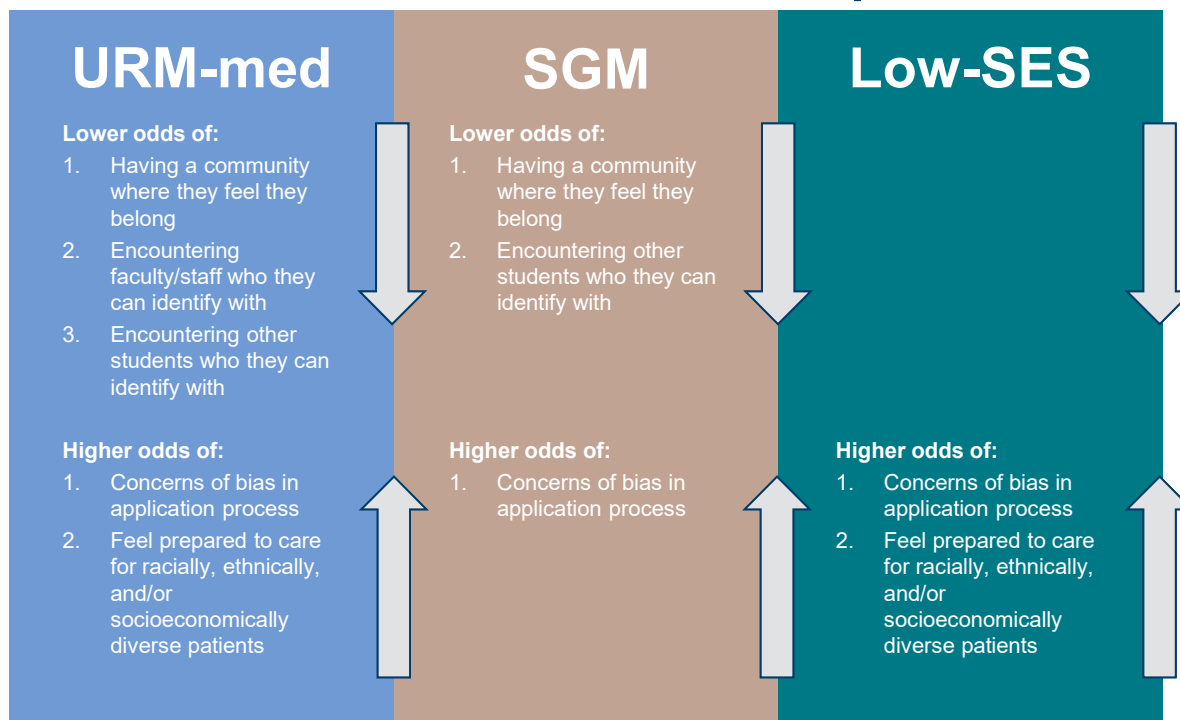
1. Concerns of bias in application process
2. Feel prepared to care for racially, ethnically, and/or socioeconomically diverse patients



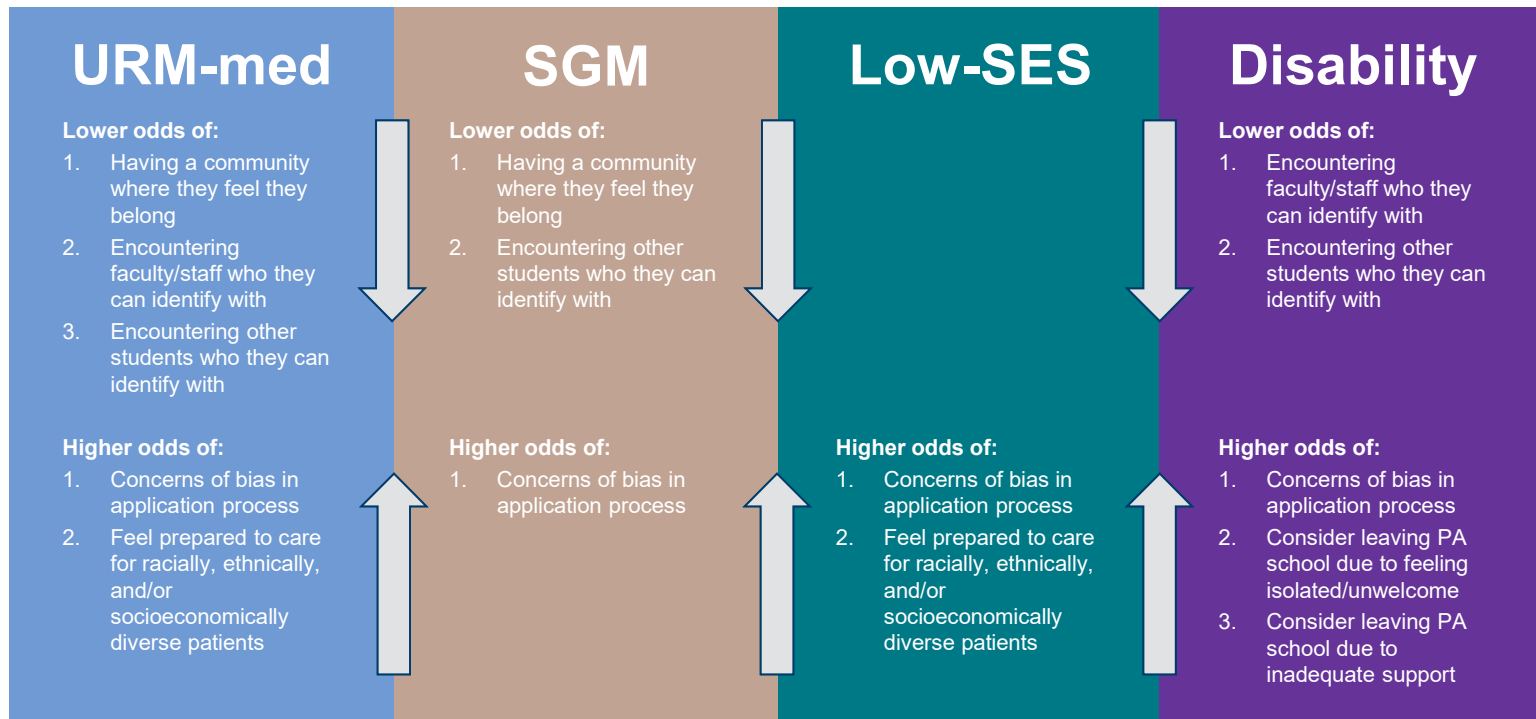
Odds of Concerns and Experiences by Group



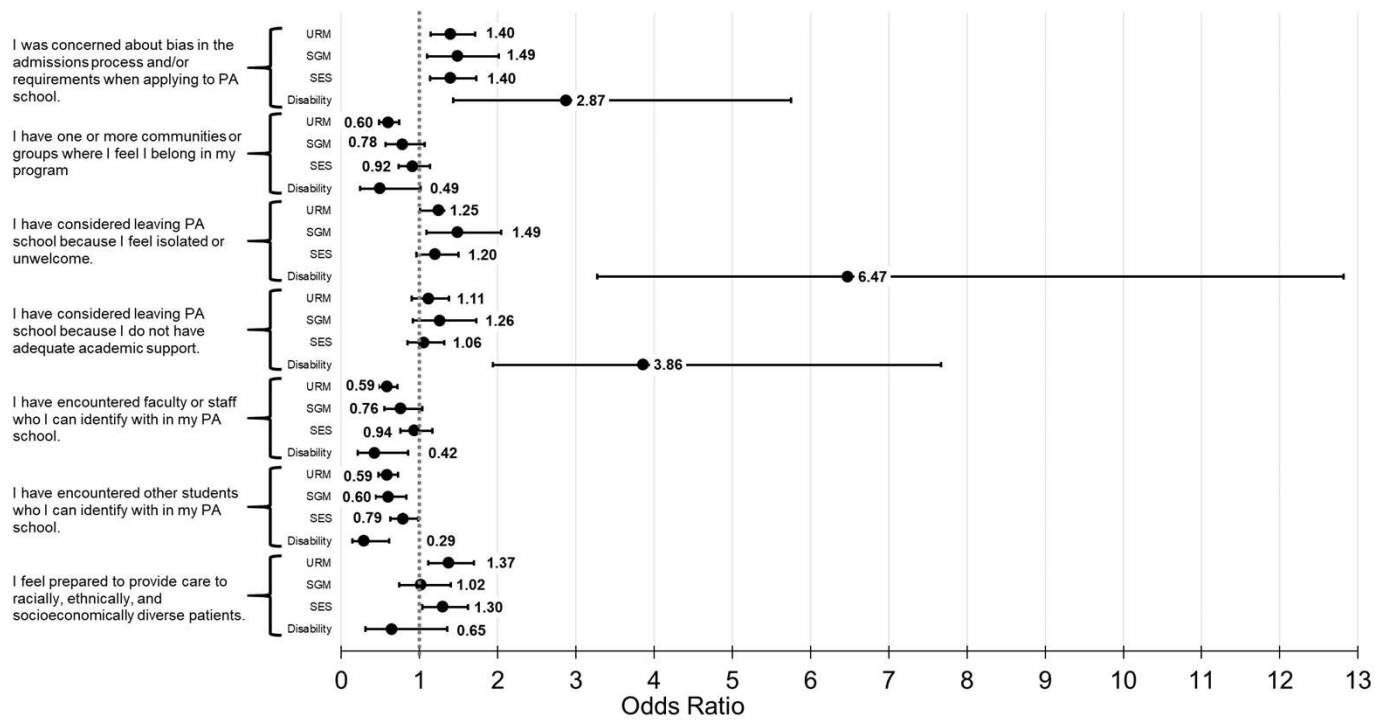
Odds of Concerns and Experiences by Group



Odds of Concerns and Experiences by Group



Results: Concerns and Experiences by Group



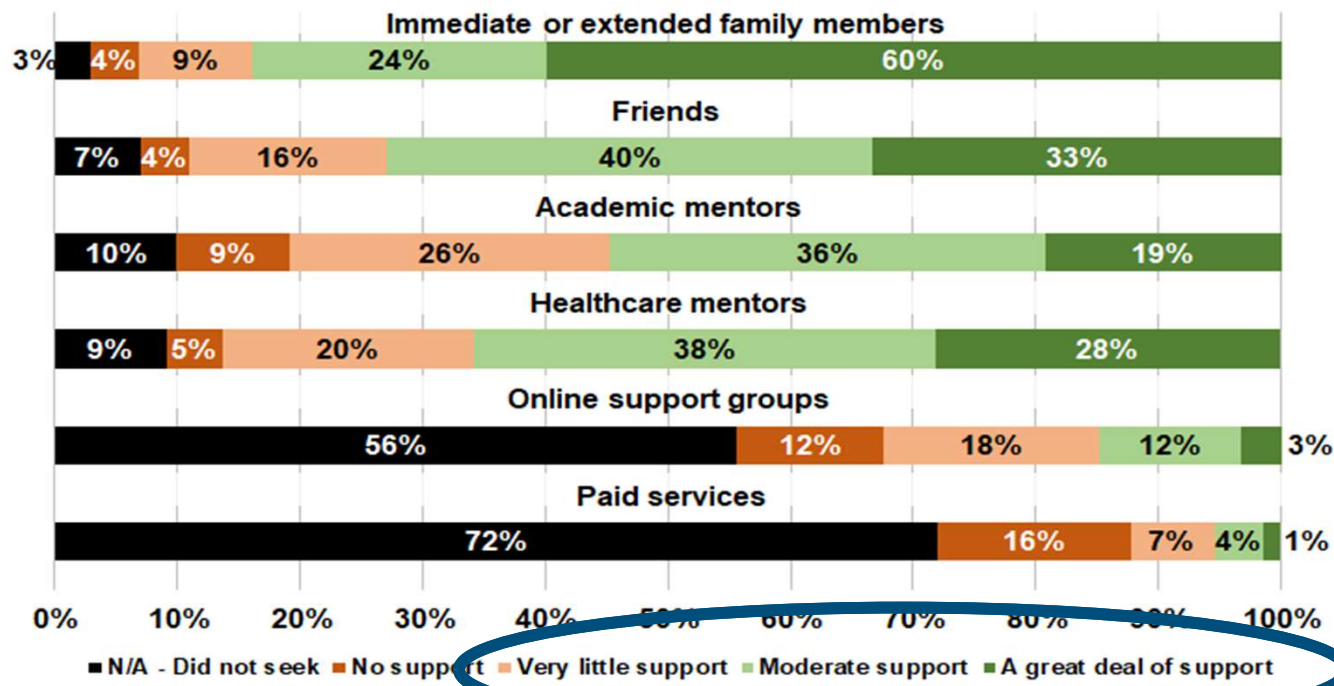
Odds ratio > 1: this group has higher odds...

Odds ratio < 1: this group has lower odds...

...if 1 is not inside confidence interval



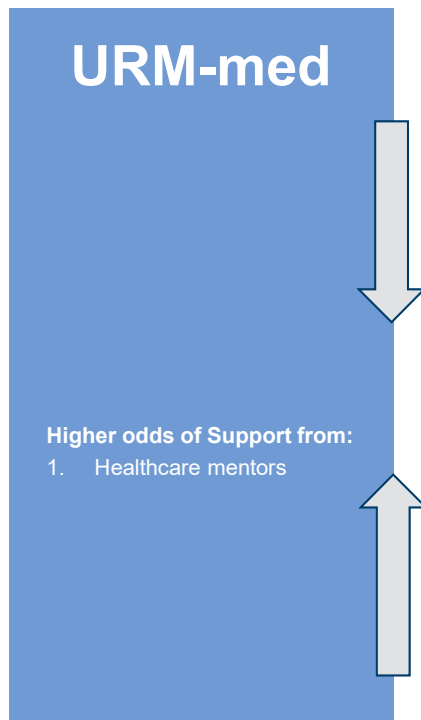
Support Received Overall



93%
89%
81%
86%
32%
12%



Odds of Support Received by Group

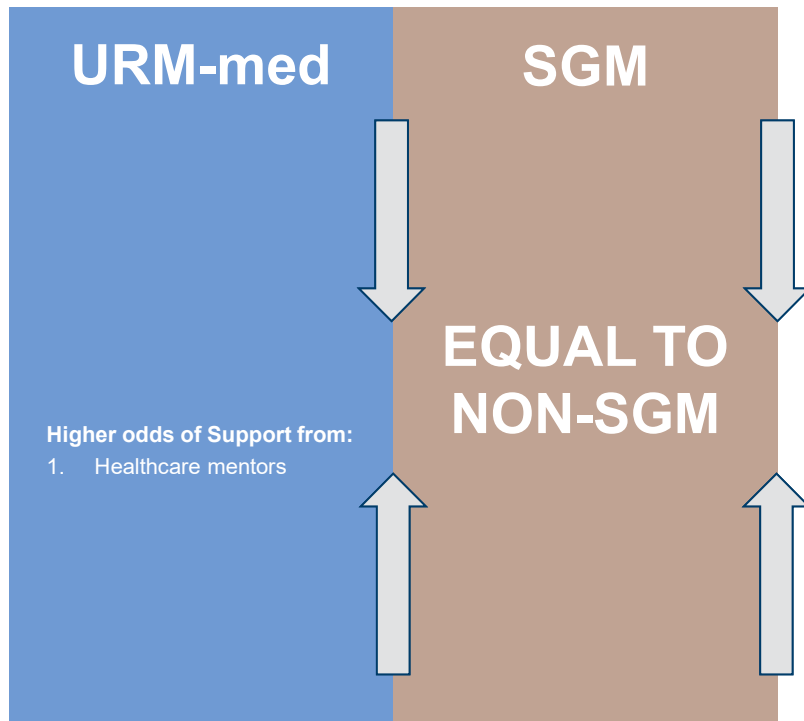


Support categories measured: immediate or extended family members, friends, academic mentors, healthcare mentors, online support groups, and paid services

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Odds of Support Received by Group

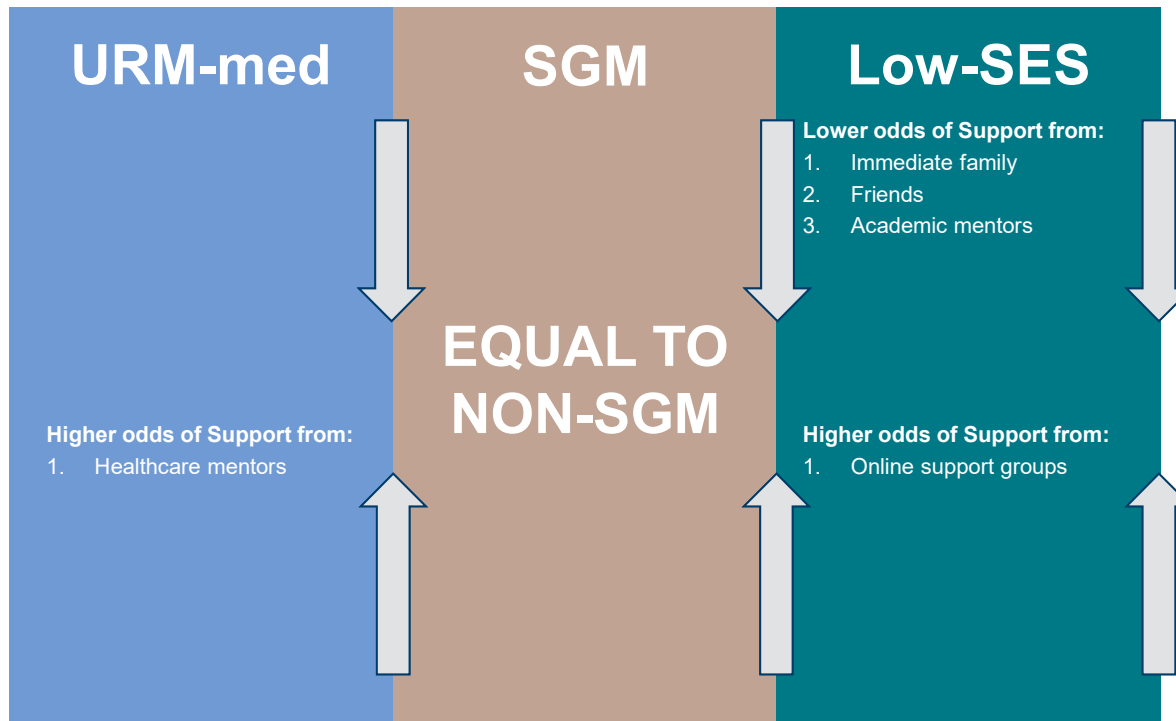


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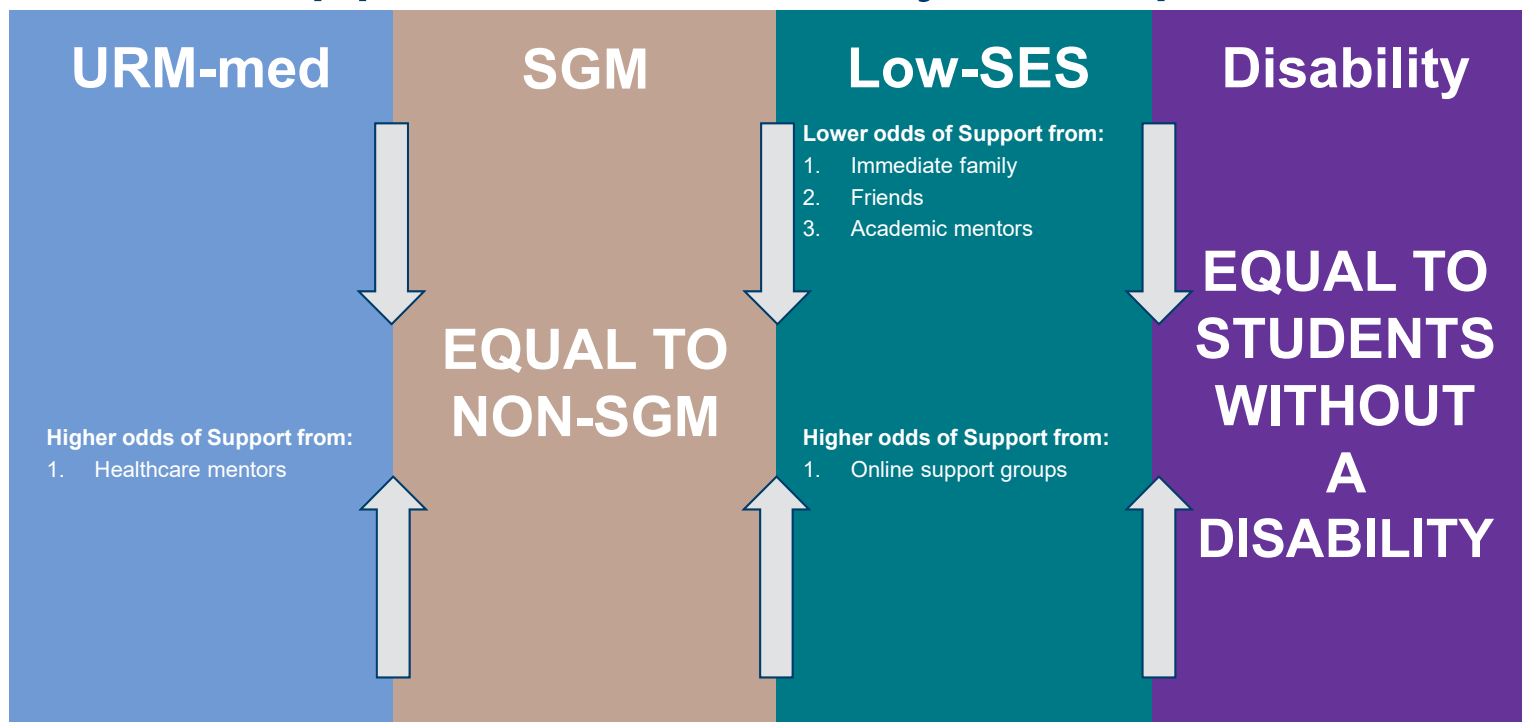


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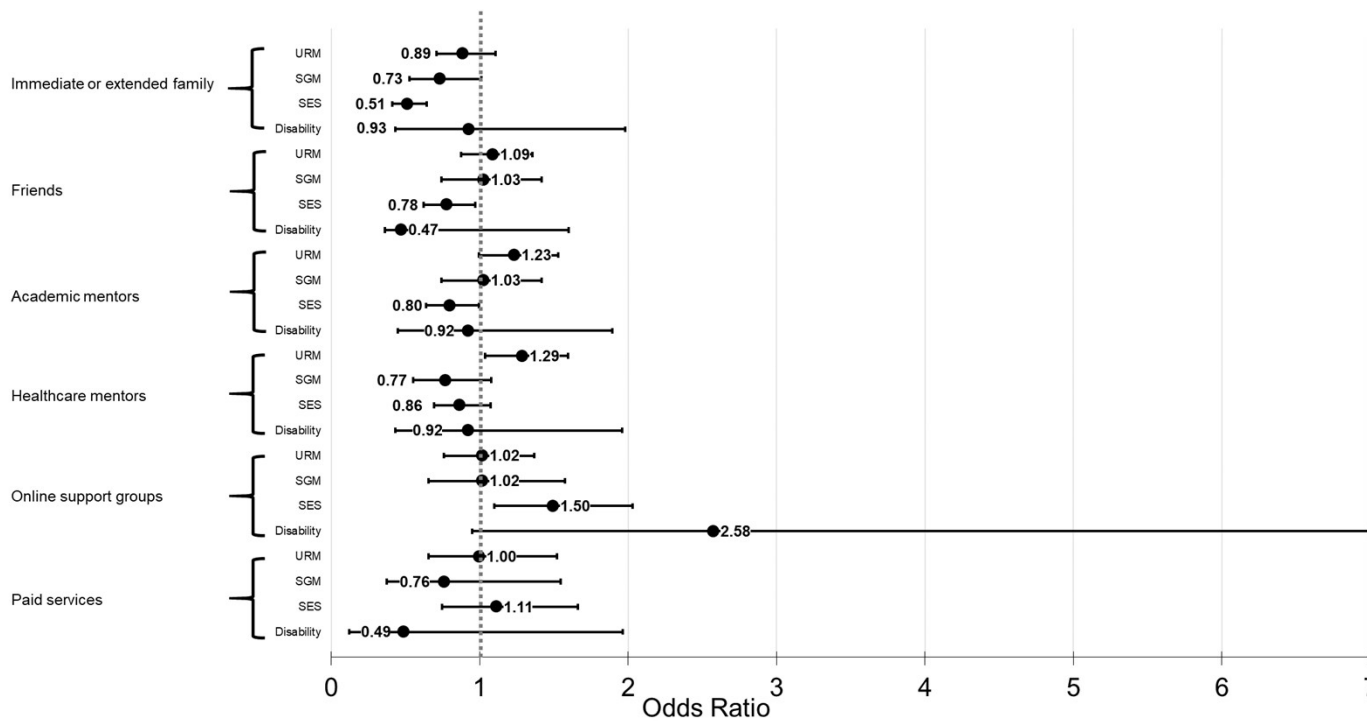
Odds of Support Received by Group



Support categories measured: immediate or extended family members, friends, academic mentors, healthcare mentors, online support groups, and paid services



Results: Support Received by Group



Odds ratio > 1: this group has higher odds...

Odds ratio < 1: this group has lower odds...

...if 1 is not inside confidence interval



Limitations

- Sample included only current PA students who have already overcome the admissions barriers this study attempted to identify
 - Studying all applicants, not just matriculants, would provide a more comprehensive picture of the barriers to application and matriculation
- Self-reported data based on PA student perceptions
 - Cannot be objectively measured; two students with the same objective level of support may view the effectiveness of this support very differently
- Analysis (ordinal regression) grouped participants as URM/non-URM, SGM/non-SGM, low SES/not low SES, and as students with disabilities versus not
 - Groups not mutually exclusive, so participants may have fallen into multiple categories



Next Steps / Policy Implications

- Require PA programs to increase transparency about admissions and efforts to address diversity
- Move toward standard prerequisites and holistic admissions may create more opportunity for equitable admissions practices
- Involve social, academic, and familial support early in the pipeline, ideally in elementary and middle school
- Emphasize diversifying PA program faculty and minority mentorship programs
- Academic and social support for minority students during PA school



Future Directions

- Understanding bias that PA students face both in school and during clinical encounters
- Evaluating the debt burden of PA students, how it varies based on background, and its impact on career choices



Take Home Points

- PA students who identify as URM, SGM, low SES, and/or with disabilities face barriers as they navigate the path to become a PA including bias in the application process, lack of belonging, and the lack of academic and social support
- To decrease these barriers, emphasis on raising awareness and interest in pursuing a career as a PA should occur early in the pipeline
- When discussing diversity, it is also important to highlight intersectionality of diverse identities
- Ultimately, increasing the diversity of healthcare providers has the potential to increase access to and quality of care for patients
- It is incumbent on current PA students and PAs to advocate for our URM colleagues and actively seek to create pipeline and mentorship programs to further recruit and support URM students on their journey to the PA profession

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Questions? Thank you!

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