



A Study of the Environment of Physician Assistant Students and its Positive and Negative Effects on Stress Outcomes

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Research Question

Do modifiable environmental factors including religious affiliation, program characteristics, home life, and personal circumstances have a significant impact on the stress levels of physician assistant (PA) students during didactic year?

Background & Purpose

- PA students experience significant levels of stress that contribute to burnout and depression.^{1,2}
- In addition to curriculum, environmental factors impact students' stress levels.
- The purpose of this study is to determine if modifiable environmental factors have a positive or negative effect on stress during PA school.

Methods

- This quantitative study is a cross-sectional analysis that was conducted through an electronic survey through SurveyGizmo.
- The survey was distributed to Texas PA students who had completed at least 90 days of didactic training.
- The survey collected demographic information using a thirty-four-item questionnaire that was presented in a six-point Likert scale format.
- Survey questions measured which variables contribute to the participant's level of stress and determined if coping strategies are sought by each participant.
- Three dependent variables of stress were determined using Cronbach's alpha score. Each survey was given an overall stress score based on these variables.
- The stress-dependent variable was analyzed against fourteen independent Likert-scale variables and demographic information using multiple regression.
- Using the p-value, this data was assessed for significance in order to reject or accept the null hypothesis.

Results

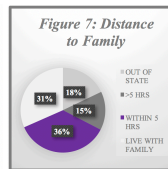
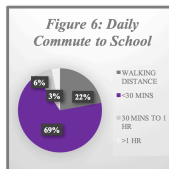
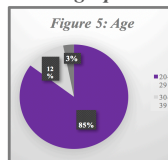
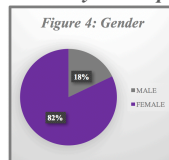
- 95 responses that met the study criteria were evaluated and analyzed.
- Three survey questions directly measured stress (Table 1).
- Regression analysis of the 14 variables revealed 4 variables that showed factors contributing to stress levels (Figure 2) and alleviating stress (Figure 3).

Dependent Variable

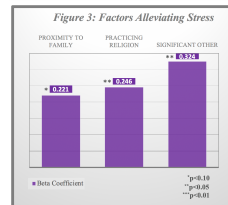
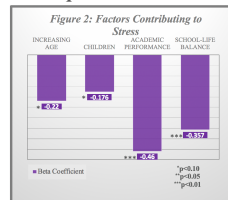
Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha Score of Dependent Variable

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
Throughout my didactic training, I experience high levels of stress daily.	0.729
I often find myself feeling like I can never catch up on school work	
Overall, my stress level has significantly increased since beginning PA school	

Survey Participant Demographics



Independent Variables



Conclusion

- Variables contributing to stress include unhappiness with didactic academic performance, inability to meet demands of coursework, and inability to balance coursework and personal life.
- Variables alleviating stress include living near family members, having a relationship with significant other, and practicing religious beliefs.
- Through this study, it can be inferred that when PA students are able to allocate time for their personal life, they are better able to cope with stress.
- The results of this study may allow faculty to develop methods to mitigate stress levels of students.

Limitations

- Small sample size of participants that does not capture full scope of PA students across the country.
- This study did not have an established tool to directly measure stress levels.
- Factors, such as alcohol and stimulant use to cope with stress, were evaluated; However, the reliability of these responses could not be accurately measured.
- The use of "not applicable" on the survey skewed results as this did not provide a reliable answer.

References

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