

# Creating a sense of belonging in physiotherapy minority ethnic students' experiences in their educational journey

(Hillier, Mahomedally, Kraimps & Ryan, 2023)

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Why did we do this study?

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP) released a strategy statement, called Equality, Diversity and Belonging (EDB), to create a more inclusive workplace within physiotherapy, promoting diversity and equality within sex, race, disability and ethnicity (CSP, 2021)

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Previous research (Naylor et al, 2014; Hammond et al, 2019; CSP, 2021) shows that minority ethnic physiotherapy students face challenges in education and this can affect their degree attainment. There is also little representation of minority ethnic populations in qualified roles, with approximately 7% of CSP members identifying as minority ethnic (CSP, 2021b)



# Belonging?



(Dreamstime, 2023)

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When we considered what 'belonging' meant, there was lots of definitions but a definition from the business world stuck out with us...

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Belonging is an employee's senses that their uniqueness is accepted and even treasured by their organization and colleagues.... Diversity is being invited to the party, inclusion is being asked to dance and belonging is dancing like nobody's watching because that's how free you feel to be yourself... (Bond, 2022).

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Diverse ethnic populations within the profession are growing but there is currently discrepancy in attainment and achievement rates in comparison to white counterparts. Statistics show that in 2017, 19% of physiotherapy undergraduate students identify as Black and Minority Ethnic (Hammond et al, 2019)

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Studies have highlighted that, environmental factors, social factors, lack of community, social prejudices and a lack of representation in the academic and professional environment all impacts on a student's success (Hammond et al, 2019; Williams et all, 2015; Yeowell, 2013)



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# Our study

- This study was designed to explore minority ethnic students sense of belonging and inclusivity throughout their educational journey, both on student placements and university.
- Participants included in the study were from final year BSc and MSc pre-registration physiotherapy cohorts and had at least one placement experience to be able to draw on their academic and practise experience.
- The combined potential total pool of minority ethnic students was 30 students from pre-registration cohorts, of which, 6 participants volunteered for the study
- Semi-structured, peer led, open ended interviews were carried out online over Microsoft Teams
- The interviews were digitally transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke (2006)
- The three major themes presented are **'feeling connected'**, **'being acknowledged on placement'** and **'personal growth'**.

Interview	Ethnicity	Year and course	Placement
1	Asian British (international student)	Physiotherapy BSc, 3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Cardiac rehab, acute stroke, MSK, neuro rehab
2	Chinese (International student)	Physiotherapy BSc, 3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Elderly medicine, neurology and stroke, intensive care medicine, MSK outpatient
3	Asian Indian (International student)	Physiotherapy MSc, 2 <sup>nd</sup> year	Trauma ortho, outpatient paediatric MSK and neuro outpatient
4	Mixed heritage (UK student)	Physiotherapy BSc, 3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Neuro, respiratory, MSK 2x
5	Arab, Muslim (UK student)	Physiotherapy BSc, 3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Community stroke, leadership, ortho, MSK
6	half Guyanese, half Jamaican, West Indian. (International student)	Physiotherapy BSc, 3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Neuro acute stroke rehab, acute respiratory, leadership, major trauma acute



### Theme one- Feeling connected.

Within university, participants indicated that staff and peer support enhanced their experiences, helping them to 'fit in' and gave them a sense of 'togetherness'. A supportive friendly cohort was beneficial to their sense of belonging but also their whole experience. The participants went on to say that once they found *"others sharing same interests with you"* (P5) and *"finding common things with other people"* (P1), they felt very *"included"* (P4, P5, P6).

### Theme two – Being acknowledged on placement.

Participants described how the social environment played a part in 'fitting in'. Many participants agreed that the teams and educators on placement *"really motivated me and encouraged me to step outside my comfort zone"* (P3) which would have enriched the experience for the participants, making them feel included in the profession and on placement. They also felt they were *"not treated differently or anything"* (P1), which really helped many *"feel you are part of this team"* (P5). Participants seemed surprised that ethnicity or *"colour never came up once"* (P6). However, one interaction with a patient did make one student feel like a *"foreigner"* (P5).

### Theme three – Personal growth.

Participants spoke of the challenges they faced and how personal factors played a role in a 'sense of belonging'. The Covid-19 pandemic had an impact on some of the students, as socialising was limited, which was *"the most difficult for me, especially when you couldn't meet with people"* (P1). Understanding the language and culture was also a significant factor as one student felt that they *"didn't get enough support with the English language"* (P5). Half of the participants spoke English as a second language but despite the challenges they concluded it *"made me who I am today"* (P3).

#### Feeling connected

Supportive university experience

Feeling included

Peer support and acceptance

Ethnic representation

#### Being acknowledged on placement

Consideration of the individual student

Importance of team dynamics

Challenging patient interactions

#### Personal Growth

Different understanding of culture and language

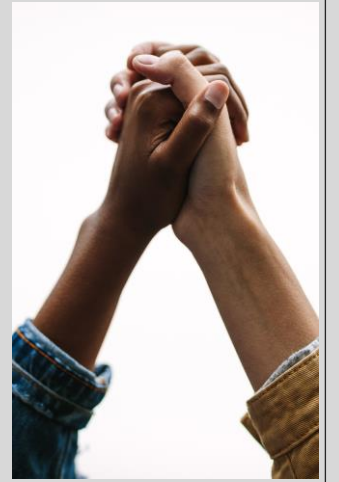
Personal Learning and development

Consequences of Covid



# What this means for practice?

- Current CSP statement highlights the importance of creating greater diversity and belonging in physiotherapy.
- Having a diverse and inclusive workforce that represents the society is beneficial for so many reasons.
  - For staff, its about feeling comfortable and able to express who they are at work.
  - And for patients, it means improved care –seeing themselves reflected in the workforce, not feeling marginalized and having the complexities of their needs to be understood.
- Future research should address the barriers in education which could help students enrolling into physiotherapy feel more included and have a sense of belonging
- Ways to support students at university and on placement, involving staff and patients should also be addressed as both these interactions can affect students' sense of belonging
- As each experience is unique and everyone faces different challenges and strengths in the journey, it can be difficult to share experiences, however it's important to keep sharing experiences, to recognize this and take steps towards achieving equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging.
- As October is Black History month, this topic is even more important and relevant within society today and the profession.



Thank you for listening

#### References

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