

Bamboo Ceilings within Medicine

What is the “Bamboo Ceiling?”

- First coined by Jane Hyun in her book *Breaking the Bamboo Ceiling: Career Strategies for Asians*, the Bamboo Ceiling refers to the barriers that keep qualified Asians from attaining leadership positions in the United States
- Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI)-identifying individuals appear disproportionately underrepresented in leadership roles across different industries, and medicine is not an exception

Representation of Asian Americans in Medicine

- AANHPI-identifying individuals made up 6.2% of the U.S. population per the 2020 census, and as of 2019, AANHPI-identifying individuals made up 17.2% of the physician workforce.
- These data may seem to suggest that Asian Americans* are “overrepresented” in medicine. However Asian Americans remain underrepresented in leadership positions in medicine.
- At present, individuals identifying as AANHPI constitute approximately 20% of all medical students, a representation that persists through residency and into full-time faculty roles at medical schools. However, this level of representation declines when considering the number of AANHPI individuals who advance to positions of full professors or department chairs.

Invisibility of the “Bamboo Ceiling” Issue

- A [recent report](#) made by the AAMC highlighted the racial makeup of U.S. Medical School Deans. The data grouped AANHPI and white physicians together to conclude that white or Asian Americans hold over 90% of medical school dean positions, making it seem like there are large numbers of Asian American deans
- In reality, between 1997 and 2008, there was not a single Asian American dean.
- The issue of the “Bamboo Ceiling” continues to remain largely invisible within the realm of medicine

Conclusions

- The notion that AANHPI-identifying individuals are overrepresented masks the fact that AANHPI-identifying individuals remain underrepresented within leadership positions, preventing further efforts to improve this disparity.

References

1. Bureau UC. 20.6 Million People in the U.S. Identify as Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. Census.gov. Published May 25, 2022.

*These statistics do not account for ethnicities within AANHPI that may be underrepresented/overrepresented in medicine. Further efforts should be made to disaggregate these data

<https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/05/aanhpi-population-diverse-geographically-dispersed.html#:~:text=20.6%20Million%20People%20in%20the>

2. <https://www.aamc.org/data-reports/workforce/data/figure-18-percentage-all-active-physicians-race/ethnicity-2018>
3. Choi AMK, Rustgi AK. Diversity in Leadership at Academic Medical Centers: Addressing Underrepresentation Among Asian American Faculty. JAMA. 2021;326(7):605–606. doi:10.1001/jama.2021.12028
4. Odei BC, Jagsi R, Diaz DA, et al. Evaluation of Equitable Racial and Ethnic Representation Among Departmental Chairs in Academic Medicine, 1980-2019. JAMA Netw Open. 2021;4(5):e2110726. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.10726
5. Asian American doctors, overrepresented in medicine, are largely left out of leadership. STAT. <https://www.statnews.com/2023/07/26/asian-american-doctors-medicine-leadership/>. Published July 26, 2023.

<https://www.aamc.org/data-reports/faculty-institutions/data/us-medical-school-deans-trends-type-and-race-ethnicity>

- A recent study demonstrated that White individuals were overrepresented in departmental chair positions across all specialties compared with the proportion of White faculty, except in family medicine. Asian individuals were underrepresented as departmental chairs across all specialties except in otolaryngology, psychiatry, and dermatology. Among Black and Hispanic individuals, there was proportional representation in departmental chair positions among all specialties, except in family medicine, where there was overrepresentation of Black individuals.

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