

Bridging the Gap: Improving Mental Health Services for Children and Adolescents in Mississippi Schools

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Background

- 1 out of 5 adolescents have a mental health diagnosis
- Mississippi has the second highest prevalence rate of mental health illness with the second lowest rate of access to proper care
- 47% of children ages 2-17 in Mississippi need mental health services, but do not receive them
- 50% of lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14
- 90% of individuals who die by suicide have a diagnosable and treatable mental illness

School Mental Health

- Coined as "expanded school mental health" in the 1990s
- The basic framework of expanded school mental health entails utilizing programs that emphasizes collaboration between the school, families, and community agencies
- Children and adolescents are more likely to utilize expanded school mental health programs and have higher reports of positive impacts than youth who receive mental health services in more traditional settings such as hospitals, outpatient facilities, or psychiatric centers

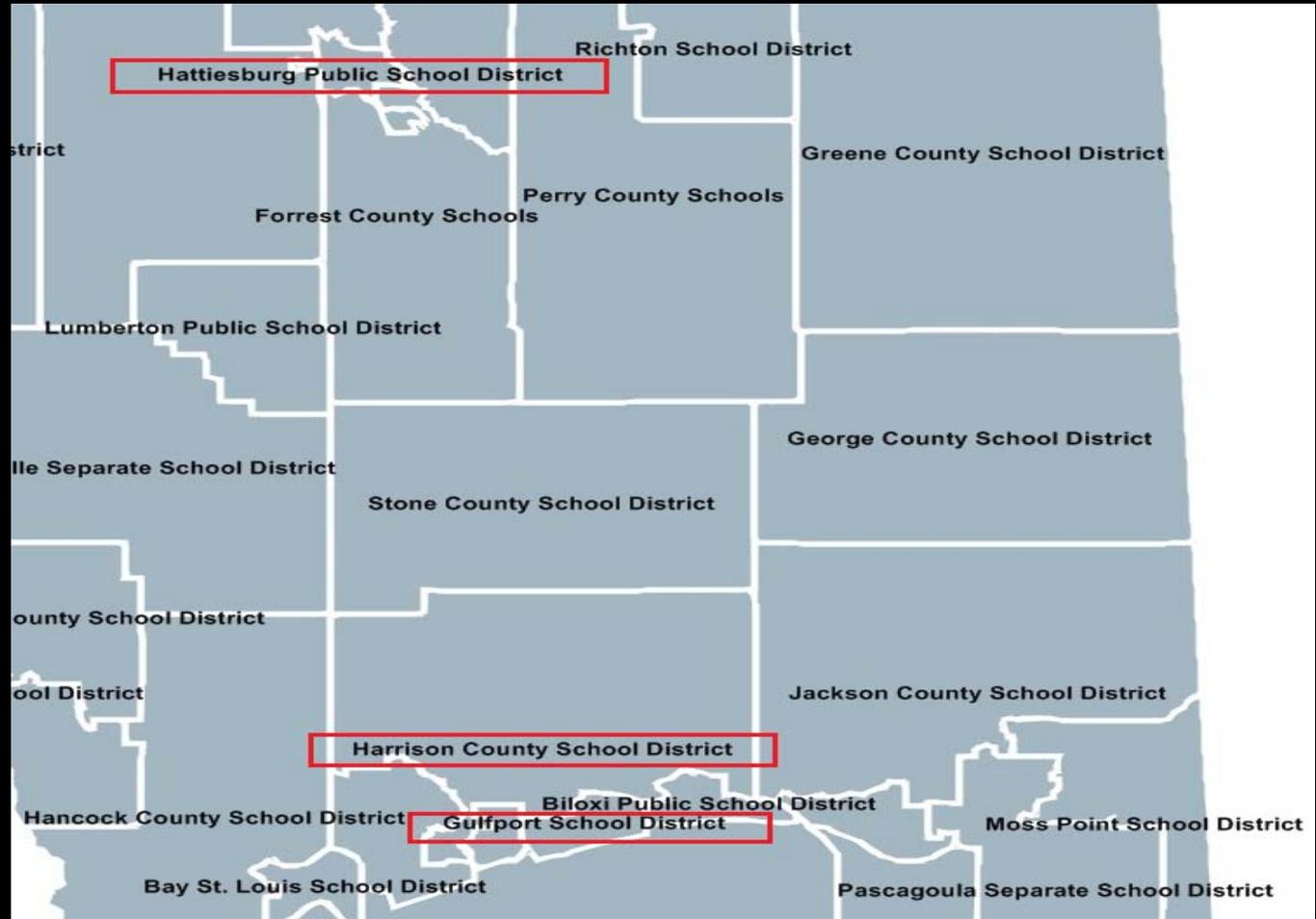
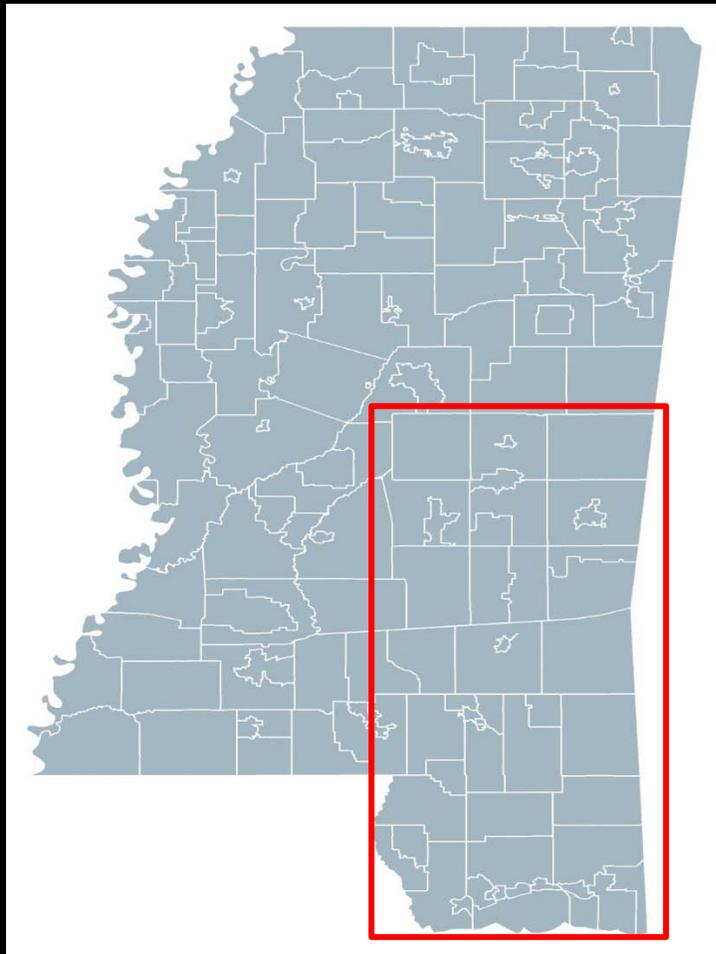
Benefits of School Mental Health

- Accessibility
- Multidisciplinary collaboration
- Improved academic performance
- Reduction in:
 - Discipline referrals
 - Suicide rates
 - High school dropout rates
 - Number of adolescents in the juvenile justice system

Research Question

Do the majority of schools in the southern region of Mississippi have accessible and effective mental health services for students to utilize?

Participants and Sample



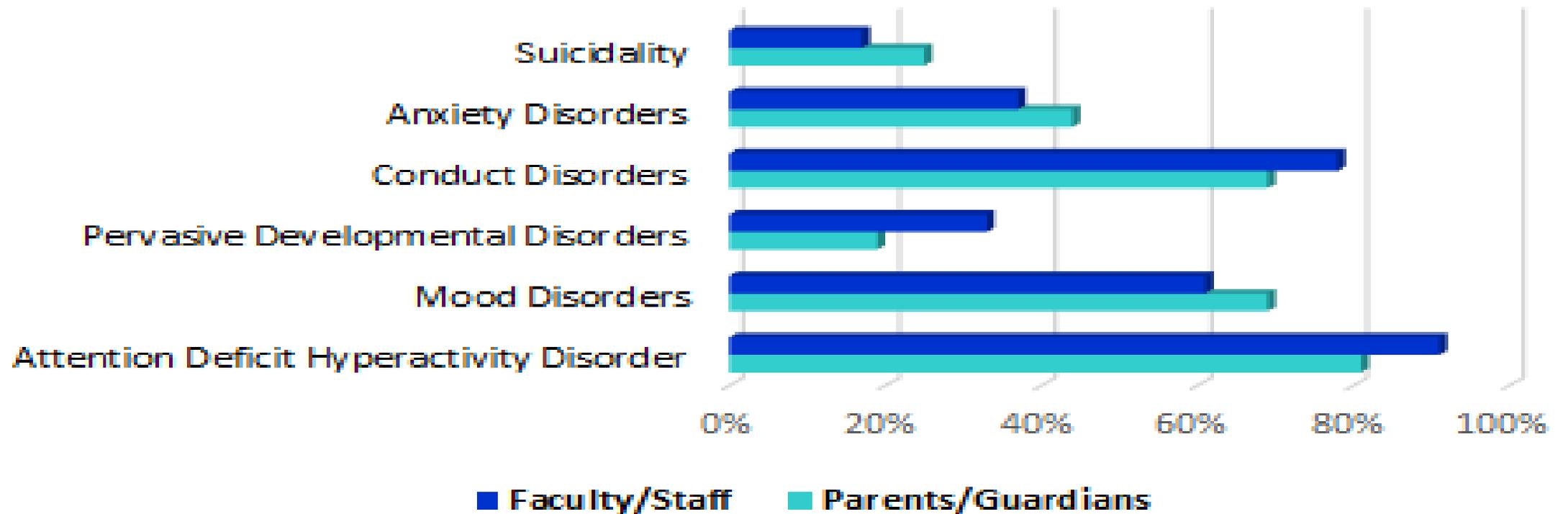
Methods

- Surveys

FACULTY/STAFF	PARENTS/GUARDIANS
104 participants	17 participants
81% female; 19% male	80% female; 20% male
72% Caucasian; 22% African-American; 4% Hispanic/Latino	85% African-American; 14% Asian/Pacific Islander
Average age group: 45-54 years old	Average age group: 25-34 years old
121 total participants	

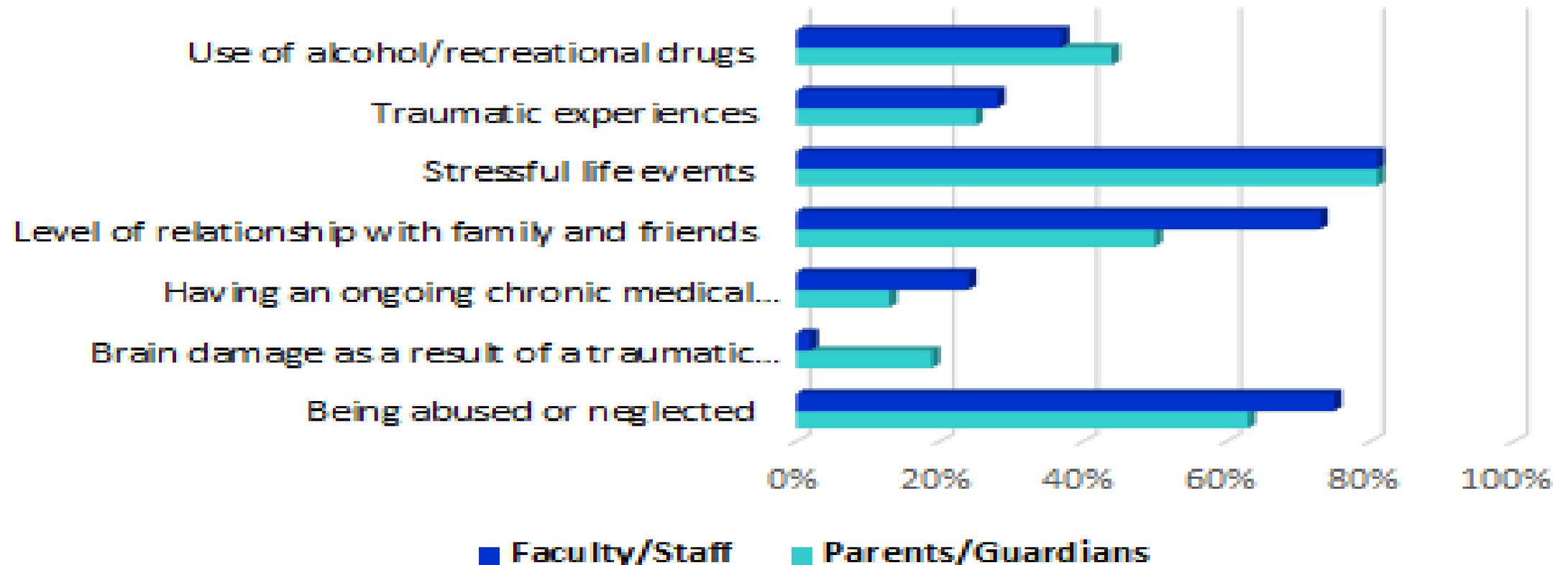
Results

Main Mental Health Illness/Disorders That Need to Be Addressed



Results

Risk Factors for Developing a Mental Illness



Results

QUESTION	FACULTY/STAFF	PARENTS/GUARDIANS
Do you know a student in grades K-12 who could benefit from services?	97% yes	83% yes
Do you feel academic performance would improve by incorporating school mental health resources	98% yes	100% yes
Does your school screen students through an early-identification program?	39% yes	80% no
Does your school's curriculum covers how to seek help for mental illness/disorder?	34% yes	25% yes
Does your school provide students with information regarding mental health?	45% yes	53% no
Do you feel that academic performance would increase by addressing mental health needs?	98%	100% yes
Do you feel that by addressing mental health needs truancy and dropout rates would decrease?	81% yes	100% yes
Do you believe every school should have a licensed professional to help students with mental health needs?	92% yes	100% yes
During the school year how many times does your school screen students for mental illness?	60% never	73% never

Policy and Practice Implications

- **Increase federal funding**
 - Resources are currently extremely limited
 - By increasing funding to schools, licensed professionals can be hired to conduct mental health prevention and treatment services for students

Policy and Practice Implications

- **Hire licensed professionals to implement services**
 - The National Association of School Psychologists, the School Social Work Association of America, and the American School Counselor Association recommend that there should be 250 students per counselor, 400 students per social worker, and 1,000 students per psychologist

Policy and Practice Implications

- **Hold mandatory training workshops for all faculty/staff**
 - Training in areas such as:
 - How to identify the symptoms of mental health disorders
 - How to interact with students with a mental illness/disorder
 - How to aid students in acquiring proper services

Policy and Practice Implications

- **Distribute information to parents/guardians**
 - Ways to distribute information:
 - E-mails
 - Flyers
 - Newsletters
 - Phone calls
 - PTA meetings

Policy and Practice Implications

- **Provide mental health screenings for students through the schools**
 - Ideally 2-3 times a year
 - Informal assessments:
 - Teachers record daily observations on how their students interact with others
 - Formal assessments:
 - Youth Risk Behavior survey
 - Collecting student satisfaction data

Conclusion

- The schools in south Mississippi are not currently meeting the mental health needs of their students
- With proper support, training, and resources the school system has the capability to provide effective and accessible mental health services for children and adolescents
- The establishment of a nationwide set of standards for practice and policies is needed to create a solid framework for school mental health

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