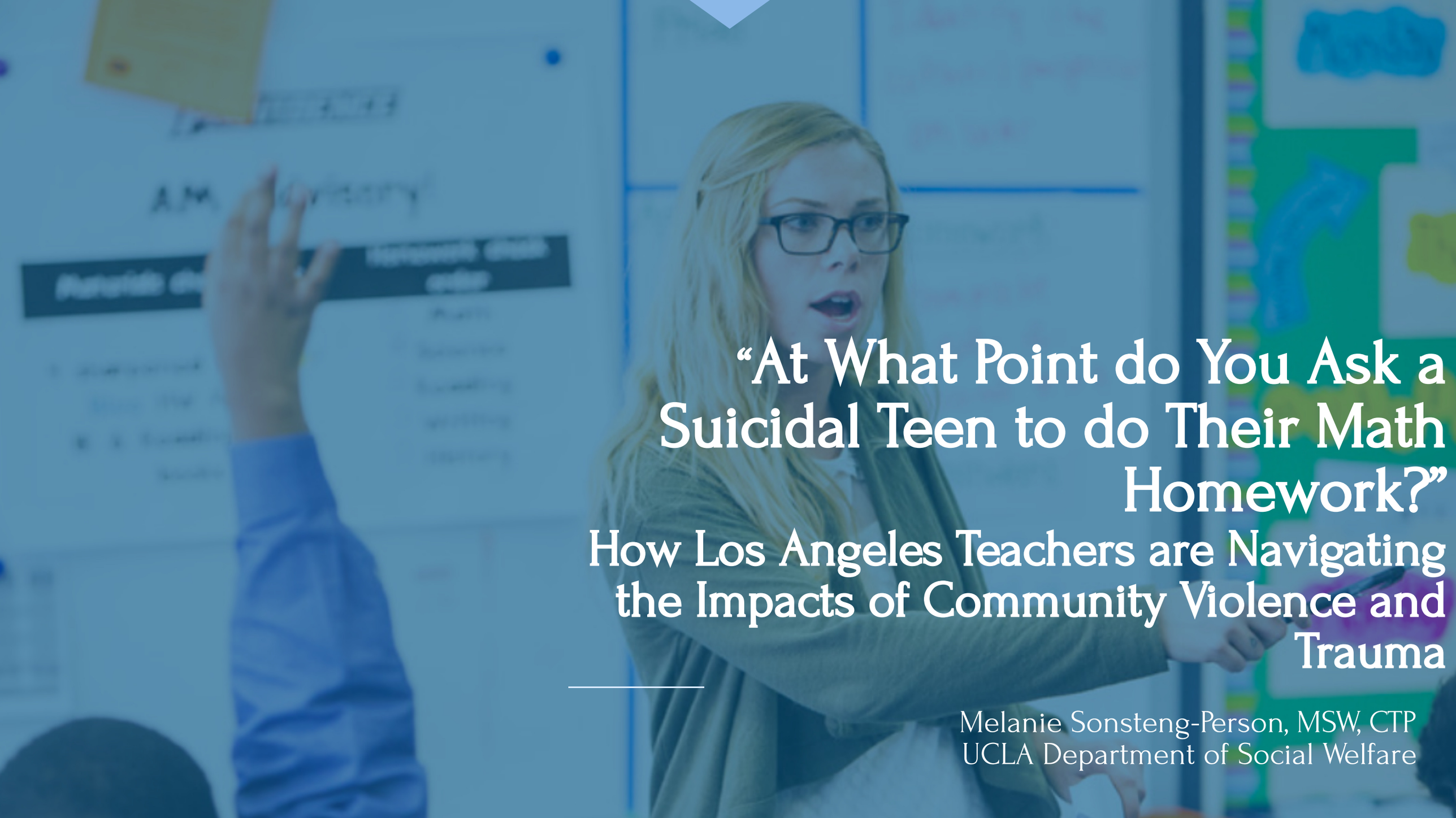


“At What Point do You Ask a Suicidal Teen to do Their Math Homework?”

How Los Angeles Teachers are Navigating the Impacts of Community Violence and Trauma

Melanie Sonsteng-Person, MSW, CTP
UCLA Department of Social Welfare

AGENDA

- Activity #1
- Background & Theory
- Methods
- Sample
- Limitations
- Results
- Activity #2

1 Case Example #1

An easy going, happy, and loving 9 year old girl lives with her father, mother, and two brothers. She was out from school for a week. When she returns back to school you notice that she screams when her mom tries to leave her, she does not look at any adults, and she has moved her chair away from the window. During transitions the little girl refuses to leave her desk and you have to have support come in and move her outside for recess. This behavior worsens throughout the week, so much so that you cannot keep the little girl in class any more. After her third send out her mom calls you. She informs you that her father was murdered in their home.

Questions

1. How do you think the little girl is feeling after this?

2. In your role (social worker/teacher/staff) how would you respond to the little girl after the call from her mom?

3. What ways do you think you could connect with and support the student?

4. What are your school's (or organization's) current policies that would reinforce or inform the teacher’s response?

2 Research Questions

1. What are teachers' self-identified level of difficulty when supporting students after they have been exposed to violence?

2. What factors impact teachers' level of difficulty when working with traumatized students?

3. How aware are teachers of trauma and trauma-related educational needs in the classroom?

4. What factors predict teachers' awareness of trauma and trauma-related educational needs in the classroom?

5. How do teachers describe their strengths and difficulties when working with violence and trauma exposed students?

3 Background

Statement of the Problem

High rates of exposure to community violence among youth:

- **Nationally**
  - 60% exposed to violence within a year.
  - 59% within their lifetime.
- **Los Angeles**
  - 22,000 violent crimes within the last year
    - 218 murders
    - 12,054 aggravated assaults

Puts children at risk for:

- Agression
- Traumatic Stress
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Substance Use
- Delinquency

These outcomes extend to school performance:

- Misbehavior
- Low GPA
- Decreased standardized test scores
- Poor school attendance
- Higher likelihood for suspension and expulsion
- Decreased rate of high school graduation

Impacts

Community Violence Exposure

- **Internalizing Behavior**
  - anxiety, sadness, traumatic stress, depression, withdrawal, etc.
- **Externalizing Behavior**
  - aggression, getting along with other, lack of concentration, substance use
- **Higher Rates of PTSD**
- **Low educational attainment**

Post Traumatic Stress Symptoms

- Difficulty regulating emotions
- Development of new fears
- Loss of interest in activities
- Difficulty concentrating
- Sleep disturbances
- Anger, and irritability
- Inability to think logically and rationally
- Lower attention, verbal recall, and working memory tests.

Educational Outcomes

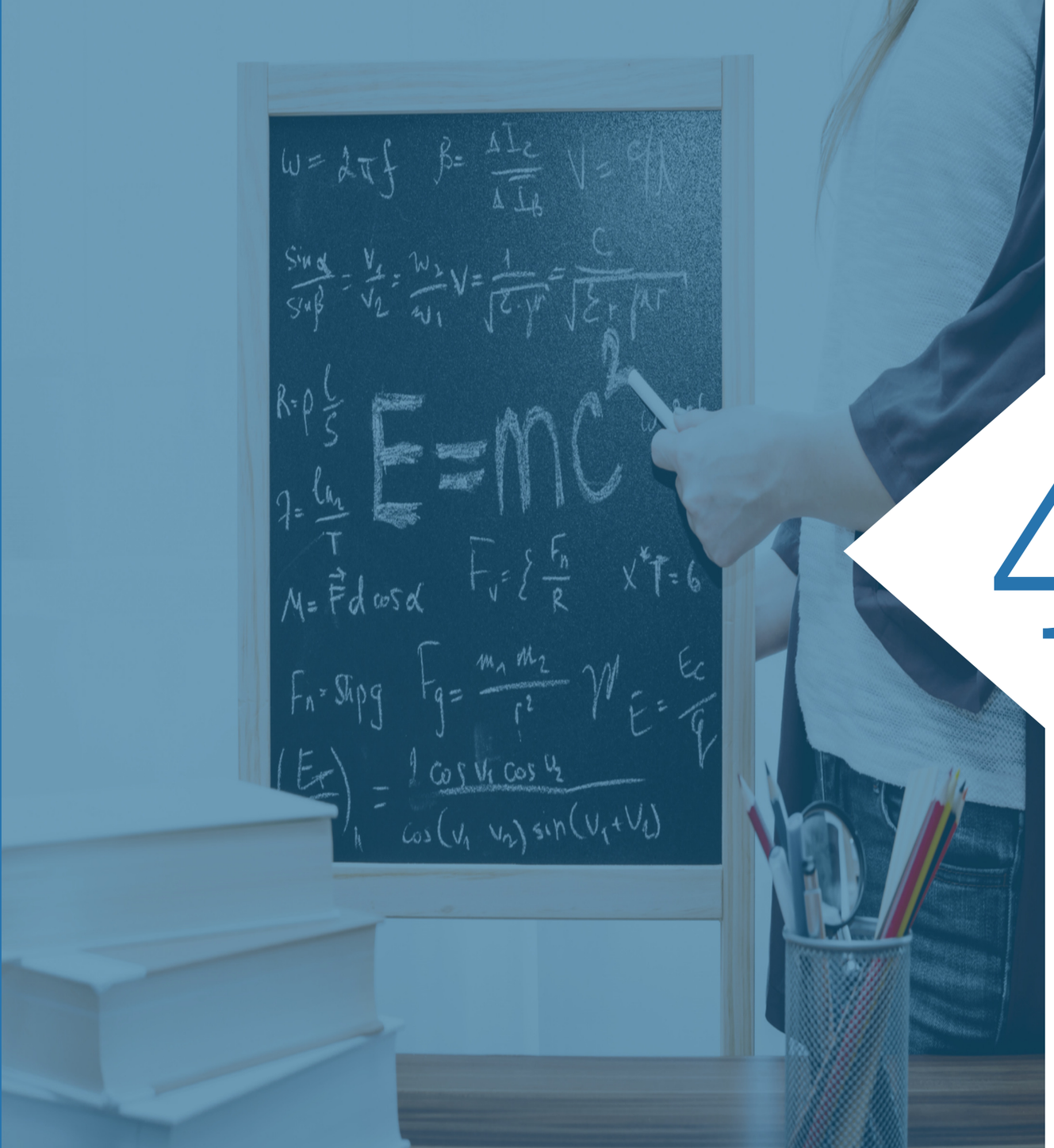
- Underperformance on standardized test scores.
- Lower GPA
- Lower school attendance
- Decreased rate of high school graduation.
- Higher likelihood for suspensions and expulsions.

Why Schools?

- Schools can be a critical buffer for environmental stress and act as main entry point into the mental health system.
- Children exposed to violence and trauma can present to be a significant challenge for teachers.
- Elementary school teachers provide academic skills, serve as role models, facilitate interactions among students, and provide emotional support.
- Relationships with Kindergarten teacher predicts student elementary school grades/test scores, work patterns, and disciplinary performance.

Why Teachers?

- Interact with students daily and are trusted by their students
- Can aid in recovery
- Ability to ID trauma response may facilitate rapid response
- Due to lack of guidance and knowledge elementary school teachers reported being unclear on their role and how to assist children following traumatic exposure.
  - 9% of the teachers reported receiving trauma training.



4 Theory

Social Cognitive Theory

Self-Efficacy

1

Cognitive Process (Forethought)

Predicting events

Regulating control over the events

2

Motivational Process

Beliefs about what you can do

3

Affective Process

Belief in coping capabilities

4

Selection Process

Avoid or approach challenging situations

5 Methods

Recruitment

1

1. **Sampling Frame**
    1. K-12 Teachers in Los Angeles County
2. **Non-probability, convenience sampling**
    1. Teacher Education Program
    2. Principal Leadership Institute
    3. UTLA Meetings
    4. Known Network
3. **Incentive**
    1. Amazon Giftcard

Survey

2

1. **Survey Mode:**
    1. Qualtrics, Internet based, Self-administered
2. **Teaching Traumatized Students Scale (Crosby, Summers, Day & Baroni)**
    1. Evaluate teacher's readiness for working with traumatized students
3. **Teacher's Difficulties Helping Children after Traumatic Exposure Scale** (Alisic et al.)
    1. Teacher's difficulty supporting students after trauma exposure
4. **Demographics**
    1. Age, Race/Ethnicity, Gender, Grades Taught, Type of School
5. **Predictors**
    1. Level of training, type of school, years of experience, neighborhood teacher grew up, zip code of school, % of students exposed to violence/trauma

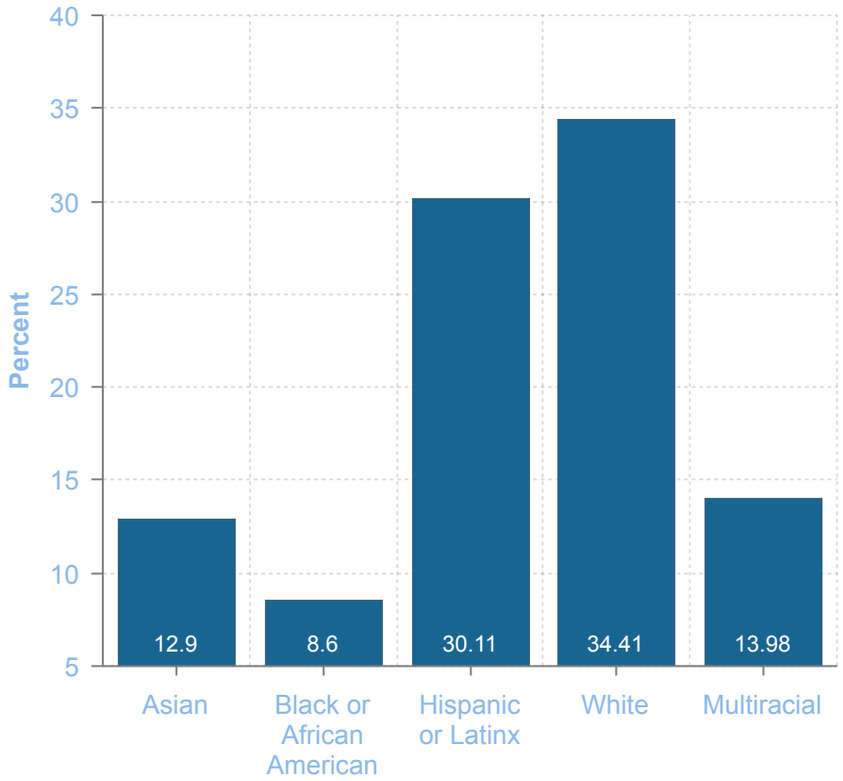
Analysis

3

1. **Survey Questions**
    1. Descriptive Analysis (n=85-94)
        1. Predict: How much training do you think teacher's received?
    2. Multiple Regressions (n=79, n=77)
        1. Predict: What factors influence teacher awareness of trauma?
        2. Predict: What factors influence teacher's difficulty when working with students exposed to trauma?
2. **Open-Ended Questions**
    1. Qualitative Content Analysis (n=90)

6 Sample

Race/Ethnicity

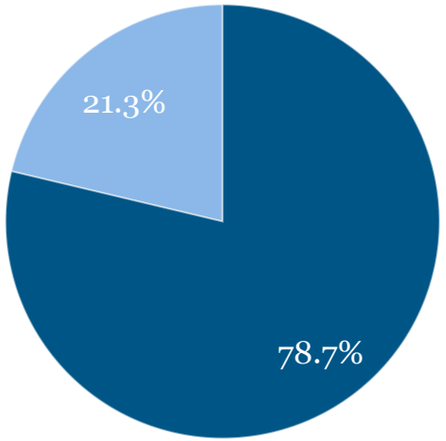


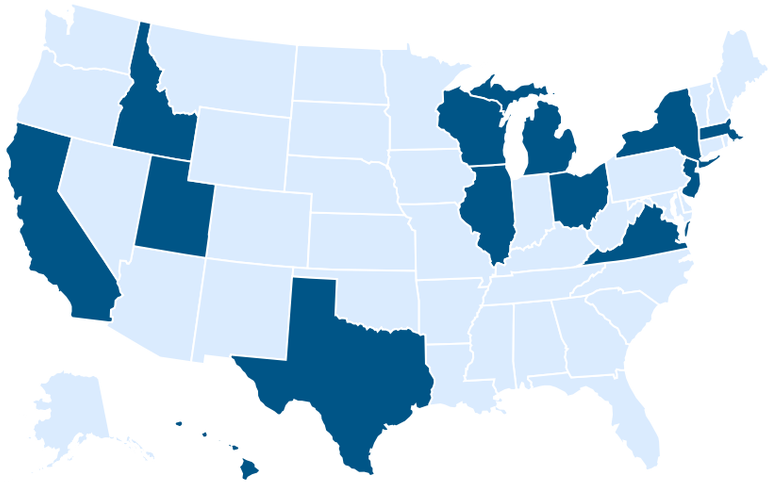
Average

39

YEARS OLD

Gender



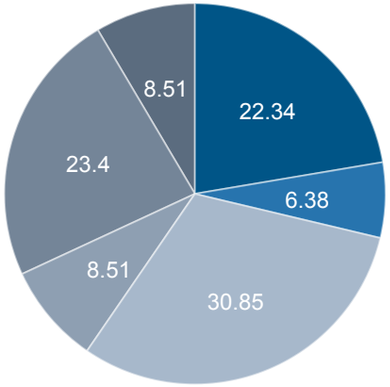


Who is in our data?

82%

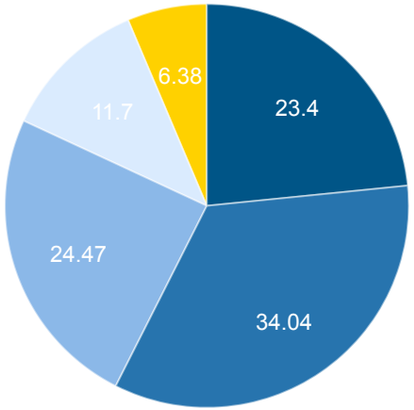
of the sample teach at public schools

Grade Levels Taught (%)



Elementary School	22.34
Middle School	6.38
High School	30.85
Elementary/Middle	8.51
Middle/High	23.4
Multiple Grade Levels	8.51

Years of Experience (%)



1-5	23.4%	6-10	34.0%
11-15	24.5%	16-20	11.7%
21 or more	6.4%		

59%

Average percent of student body exposed to trauma, based on teacher's perception.

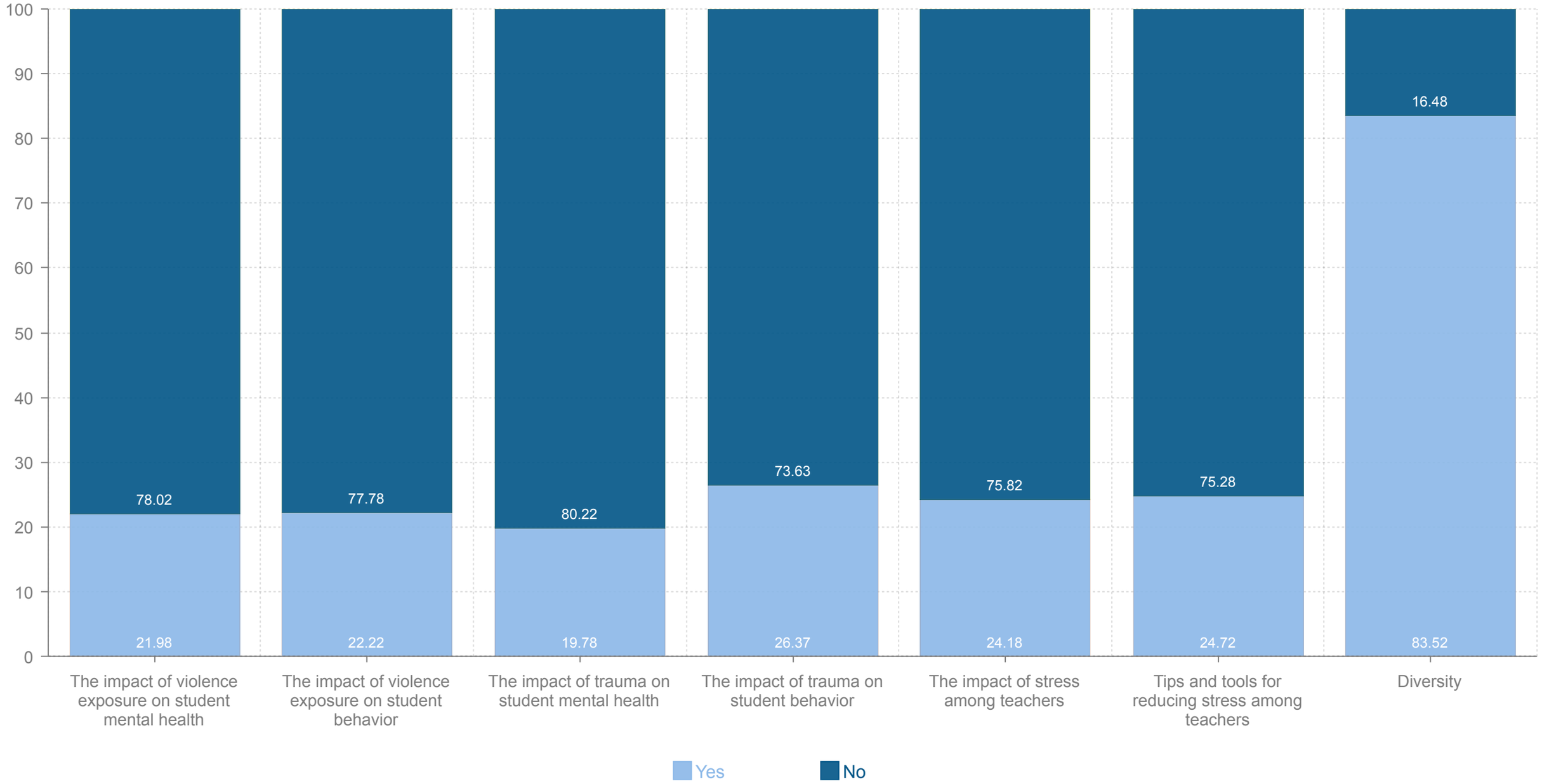
53%

Average percent of student body exposed to community violence, based on teacher's perception.

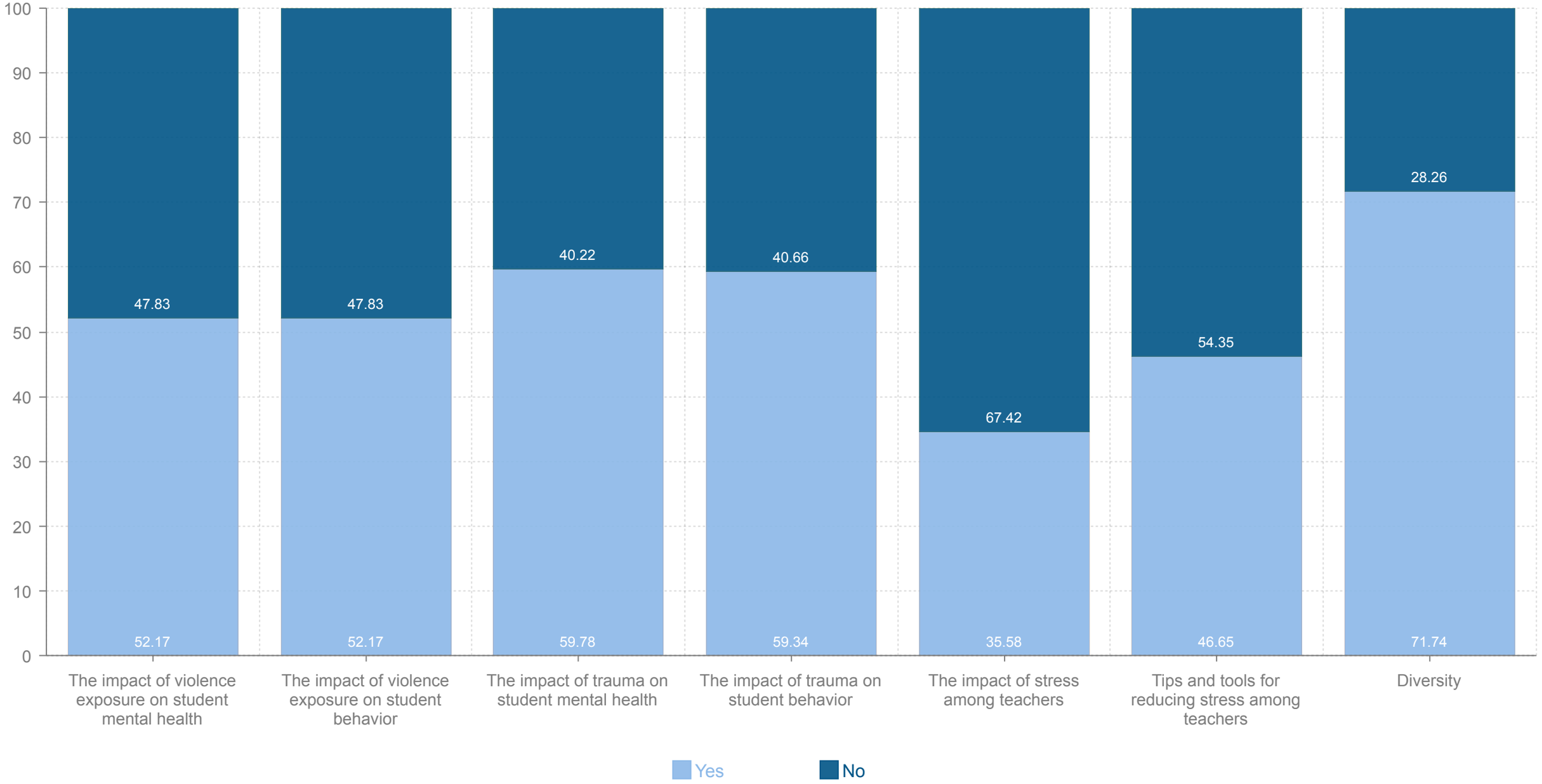
Who is in our data?

7 Results

Training Received Pre-Service

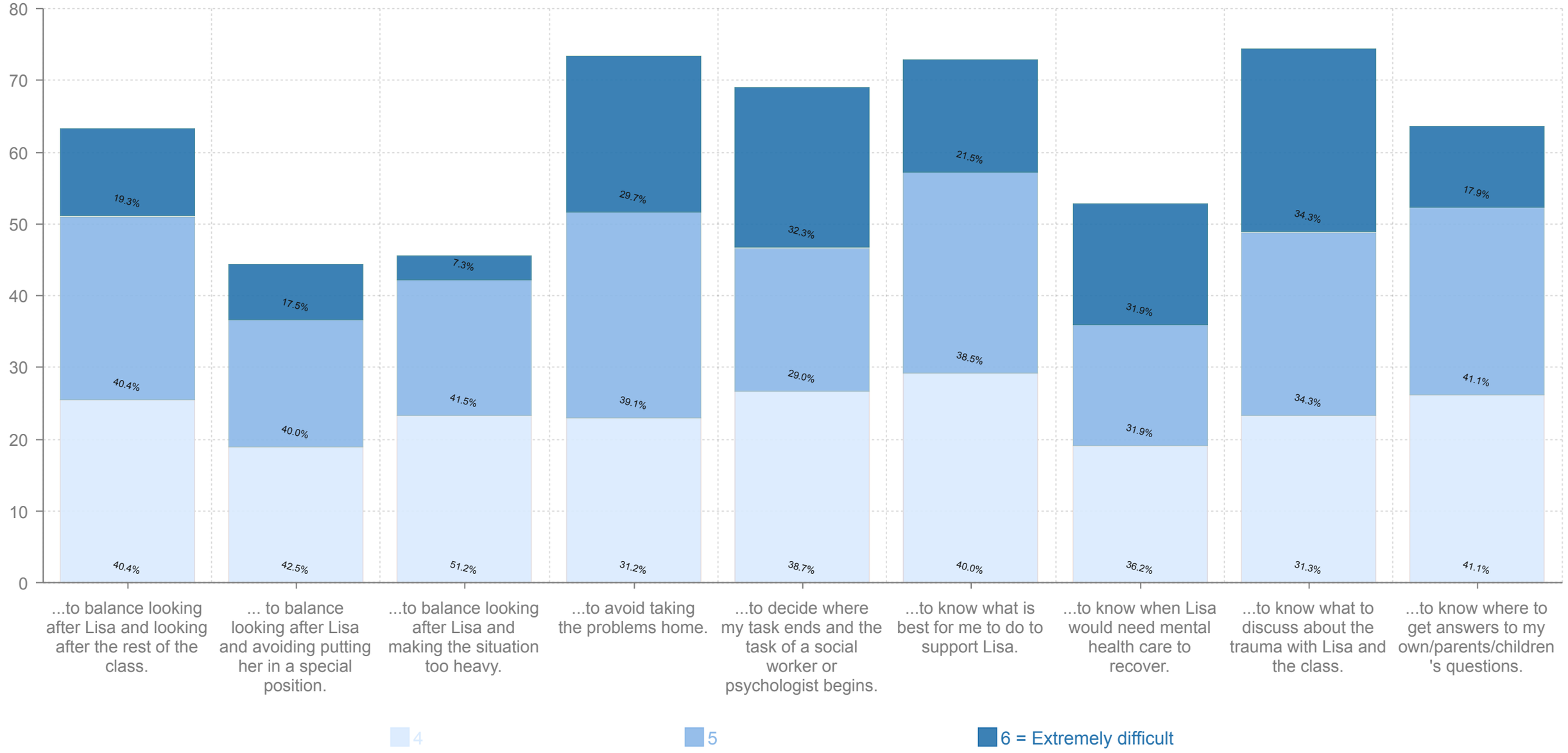


Training Received In-Service



Descriptive data and and ratings for Teachers' Difficulties with Supporting Children After Trauma Scale

For me, with children like Lisa it is (not difficult at all to extremely difficult)...



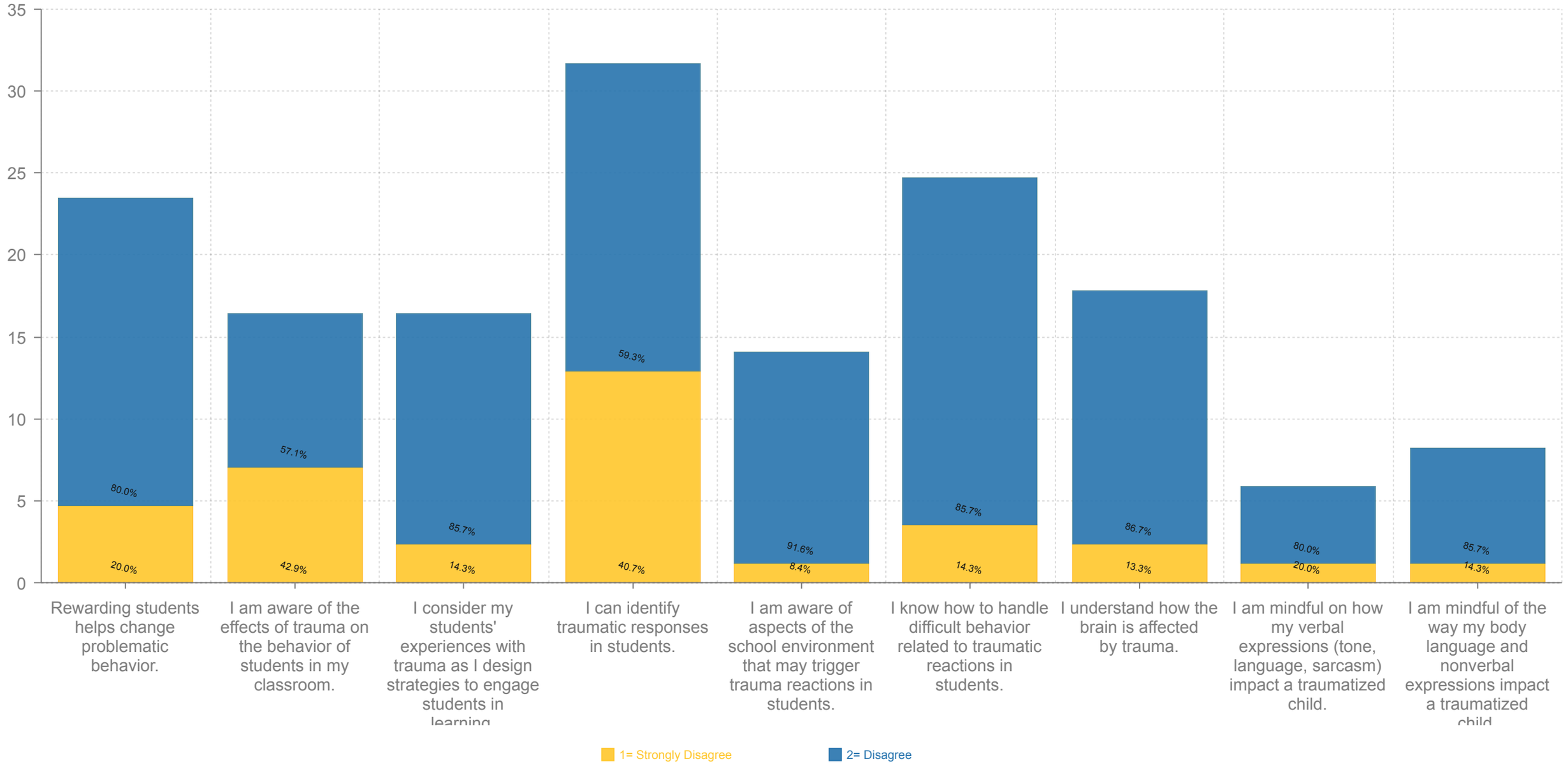
Multiple Regression Analyses for Teachers' Difficulties with Supporting Children After Trauma ***(N = 77)***

	Teacher Difficulty			
Variable	*β*	*SE B*	*t*	*p*
Teacher Awareness	-0.51	0.18	-2.90	.005**
Pre-Service Training	0.06	0.05	1.33	.187
% of students exposed to trauma	-0.01	0.00	-1.52	.133
Race/Ethnicity (White)				
Asian	0.70	0.34	2.10	.04
Black or African American	-0.02	0.48	-0.03	.97
Hispanic or Latinx	0.29	0.25	1.13	.26
Multiracial	-0.05	0.32	-0.17	.87
Constant	5.14	0.83		
Adjusted R^2		.10		
F		2.32*		

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Descriptive data and ratings for Teaching Traumatized Students Scale

1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree



Multiple Regression Analyses for Teachers' Awareness of Traumatized Students Scale Trauma *(N = 79)*

	Teacher Difficulty			
Variable	*β*	*SE B*	*t*	*p*
Pre-Service Training	0.37	0.04	0.97	.34
In-Service Training	-0.09	0.02	-3.02	.004**
Years of Experience				
6-10	0.32	0.21	1.56	.12
11-15	0.22	0.23	1.00	.32
16-20	0.02	0.26	0.09	.93
21 or more	0.41	0.36	1.15	.25
Race/Ethnicity (White)				
Asian	0.69	0.23	3.05	.003
Black or African American	0.24	0.27	0.90	.37
Hispanic or Latinx	0.14	0.17	0.80	.42
Multiracial	0.31	0.21	1.44	.16
Gender (Male)				
Female	0.244	0.16	1.55	.13
Constant	3.56	0.42	8.52	.00
Adjusted R^2		.12		
F		2.04*		

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Open Ended Questions

1. **What do you believe are your greatest strengths when working with students exposed to violence or trauma?**
    1. Theme: *"My role as an educator is more than just teaching."*
        1. Category: building relationships, personal attributes
2. **What do you believe are your greatest challenges when working with students exposed to violence or trauma?**
    1. Theme: *"What can I do given my role?"*
        1. Category: Role overload/confusion, lack of resources and support
3. **What information do you think is necessary for teachers to receive in either pre-service or PD to make them successful working within violent communities or with traumatized students?**
    1. Theme: *"A toolkit of manageeable strategies. "*
        1. Category: in class techniques and relationship building.

"My role as an educator is more than just teaching."

What do you believe are your greatest strengths when working with students exposed to violence or trauma?

"Knowing how to deal with trauma is somewhat meaningless if the student doesn't trust you."

"Having experienced childhood trauma, I am empathetic and can model coping strategies to my students and peers."

"What can I do given my role?"

What do you believe are your greatest challenges when working with students exposed to violence or trauma?

"In a school with a high percentage of students experiencing trauma, the amount of need in a single classroom can make it hard to meet the needs of each student and also promote learning and engagement with the course material. With students who experience continual trauma who are receiving services but also continuing to experience the effects of trauma in their daily lives, it can be hard to know when it's time to push a student academically versus give them space."

"The greatest challenge is when the role of educator begins and stops. At what point do you ask a suicidal teen to do their math homework? "

Role Overload/Confusion

"What can I do given my role?"

What do you believe are your greatest challenges when working with students exposed to violence or trauma?

"The biggest challenge is a lack of access to mental health professionals. Our school has one mental health professional who is tied up with IEPs and does not have time to service the general population on a regular basis. When we contact outside agencies, they are inundated with requests for services and our children often go far too long without proper care."

"Where to find support, since it wasn't at school. We had over 5000 kids at this school, highly traumatized. I had over 200+ kids each semester."

Lack of Resources/Supports

"A toolkit of manageable strategies."

What information do you think is necessary for teachers to receive in either pre-service or PD to make them successful working within violent communities or with traumatized students?

"To better understand the importance of creating safe and loving classroom environments that will support all student's growth and development, and how actions and lesson plans can contribute to a student feeling valued, respected and part of a team with positive, working relationships, so that s/he is ready and engaged to learn."

"Ways to deescalate situations within the classroom that can be exacerbated by trauma or stress."

In Class Techniques & Relationship Building

8 Conclusion

What does this all mean?

- Not much training on:
  - the impact of violence exposure and trauma on student mental health and behavior
  - teacher stress and coping
- Teacher difficulty working with traumatized students is predicted by their level of awareness of trauma related behaviors in the classroom.
- Teacher level of awareness is predicted by in-service training.
- Teachers identified:
  - personal attributes as their greatest strength.
  - overload and lack of resources as their greatest challenges.
  - The need for trainnings on behavioral techniques and the need for curriculum development that promotes safety.

9 Limitations

1

Nonprobability sampling methods

2

Small sample size

3

Sensitive topics that hold a variety of meanings

4

Topic of violence and/or trauma as significant

10 Case Example #2

A 15 year old boy lives in a neighborhood that has high crime rates. Last week there was a shooting. He knows all about what happened because students have been talking about it in school, he has heard about it on the news, and his mom has been talking to him about it. He knows that the victim was a student at his high school. The victim was walking on his way to school and got shot because he refused to give up his cell phone. The 15 year old now carries a gun with him as he walks to school. One day, outside of the school building, the 15 year old sees a stranger staring at him for too long and goes to reach for his gun. The school police see this happen and detain the kid for carrying a concealed weapon.

Questions

1. Why do you think the 15 year old took his gun out?

2. Was this stranger a threat to the 15 year old?

3. Without knowing what is going on with the student what consequences do you think the school will give to the 15 year old?

4. If the school knew the impact of trauma, in what way could they respond to help the student?

5. Create a plan of action to respond to the student for your school. Include what school and community resources you have available to you.
    a. As a teacher how would you respond?
    b. As a school social worker how would you respond?

Questions?

For questions about this study, future collaboration, or just to chat feel free to email me!

Melanie Sonsteng-Person

masonsteng@ucla.edu

melaniesonsteng.com

References

Alisic, E., Bus, M., Dulack, W., Pennings, L., and Spinter, J. (2012). Teachers' experiences supporting children after traumatic exposure. Journal of Traumatic Stress, 25, 98-101.

Ansolabehere, S., and Schaffner, B. F. (2014). Does survey mode still matter: findings from a2010 multi-mode comparison. Political Analysis, 22(3), 285-303.

Bell, H., Limberg, D., and Robinson, E. (2013). Recognizing trauma in the classroom: A practical guide for educators. Childhood Education 89(3), 139-145. doi:10.1080/00094056.2013.792629

Boxer, P., Sloan-Power, E., Piza, E., and Schappell, A. (2014). Using police data to measure children's exposure to neighborhood violence: A new method for evaluating relations between exposure and mental health. Violence and Victims 2(1), 24-33.

Brick, J. M., and WIlliams, D. (2013). Explaining rising nonresponse rates in cross-sectional surveys. Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 645, 36-59.

Cambridge Health Alliance (n.d.). Common reactions to violence. Retrieved from: https://www.challiance.org/cha-services /common- reactions-to-violence

Center for Adolescent studies (n.d.). Trauma and the brain: an introduction for professionals working with teens. Retrieved from: http://centerforadolescentstudies.com/trauma-and-brain/

Crosby, S. D. (2015). An ecological perspective on emerging trauma-informed teaching practices. National Association of Social Workers. doi: 10.1093/cs/cdv027.

Crosby, S. D., Somers, C. L., Day, A. G., and Baroni, B. A. (2016). Working with traumatized students: a preliminary study of measures to assess school staff. Journal of Therapeutic Schools and Programs, 8, 65-76. doi: 10.19157/JTSP.issue.08.01.08

FBI (2017). 2016 Crime in the United States. Retrieved from https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2016/crime-in-the-u.s.-2016/tables/table-1.

References

Finkelhor, D., Turner, H., Shattuck, A., Hamby, S., & Kracke, k. (2015). Children's exposure to violence, crime, and abuse: an update. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Retrieved October 20, 2017, from https://www.ojjdp.gov/publications/PubResults.asp?sei=94

Fowler, P. J., Tompsett, C. J., Braciszewski, J. M., Jacques-Tiura, and Baltes, B. B. (2009). Community violence: a meta-analysis on the effect of exposure and mental health outcomes of children and adolescents. Development and Psychopathology, 21, 227-259. doi: 10.1017/S0954579409000145.

Gramlich, J. (2017, February 21). 5 facts about crime in the U.S. Retrieved October 20, 2017, from http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/02/21/5-facts-about-crime-in-the-u-s/

Groves, R.M., Fowler, F. J., Couper, M. P., Lepowski, J. M., Singer, E., and Tourangeau, R.(2009). Survey Methodology, 2nd edition. New Jersey: Wiley.

Hsieh, H. F., and Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. Qualitative Health Research, 15(9), 1277-1288. doi: 10.1177/1049732305276687.

Isaacs, M. R. (1992). Violence: the impact of community violence on African American children and families. Arlington, Va. National Center for Education in Maternal and Child Health. LAPDonline.org (2018). CompSTAT citywide profile. Retrieved fromhttp://assets.lapdonline.org /assets/pdf/cityprof.pdfLind, L. H., Schoeber, M. F., Conrad, F. G., and Reichert, H. (2013). Why do survey respondents disclose more when computers ask the questions? Public Opinion Quarterly, 77(4), 888-935. Massey, D. S. and Tourangeau, R. (2013). Where do we go from here? Nonresponse and social measurement. Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 645, 222-236.

Mathews, T., Dempsey, M., and Oversetreet, S. (2009). Effects of exposure to community violence on school functioning: The mediating role of post traumatic stress symptoms. Behaviour Research and Therapy, 47(7), 586-591.

References

McGill, T. M., Self-Brown, S. R., Lai, B. S., Cowart-Osborne, M., Tiwari, A., LeBlanc, M., andKelley, M. L. (2014). Effects of Exposure to Community Violence and Family Violence on School Functioning Problems among Urban Youth: The Potential Mediating Role of Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms. Frontiers in Public Health, 2.

Mullinix, K. J., Leeper, T. J., Druckman, J. N., and Freese, J. (2015). The generalizability of survey experiments. Journal of Experimental Political Science, 2, 109-138.Pew Research Center. (n.d.). Collecting Survey Data. Retrieved fromhttp://www.pewresearch.org/methods/u-s-survey-research/collecting-survey-data/

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (n.d.). Community Violence. Retrieved from http://www.nctsn.org/trauma-types/community-violence

Ohio Domestic Violence Network. (n.d) Trauma-informed care: Best practices and protocols for ohio's domestic violence programs. Retrieved from: http://www.ncdsv.org/images/ODVN_Trauma-InformedCareBestPracticesAndProtocols.pdf

Royse, D., Thyer, B.A., and Padgett, D. K. (2010). Program evaluation: an introduction (5thed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.Rubin, A. and Babbie, E. R. (2014). Research methods for social work (8th ed). Belmont, CA: Brooks.

Sterrett, D., Moalato, D., Benz, J., Tompson, T., and English, N. (2017). Assessing changes inc overage bias of web surveys in the united states. Public Opinion Quarterly, 81, 339-356.

Sweeton, J. (March 13, 2017). This is your brain on trauma: an inside look at the traumatized brain and how you can heal. Psychology Today. Retrieved from: https://www.psychologytoday.com/ blog/workings-well-being/201703/is-your-brain-trauma

Tourangeau, R. and Yan, T. (2007). Sensitive questions in surveys. Psychological Bulletin, 133(5), 859-883. doi 10.1037/0033-2909.133.5.859.

References

U.S. Department of Justice, Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence. (2012). Report of the Attorney General's National Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence. Retrieved from https://www.justice.gov/defendingchildhood/cev-rpt-full.pdf

Voisin, D., Patel, S., Hong, J. S., Takahashi, L., and Gaylord-Harden, N. (2016) Behavioral health correlates of exposure to community violence among African-american adolescents in chicago. Children and youth services review 69, 97-105.

Yeager, D. S., Krosnick, J. A., Chang, L., Javitz, H. S., Levendusky, M. S., Simpser, A., and Wang, R. (2011). Comparing the accuracy of RDD telephone surveys and internet surveys conducted with probability and non-probability samples. Public Opinion Quarterly, 75(4), 709-747.