



Impacting Student Mental Health: Examining Teachers' Skills, Knowledge, and Needs



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ABSTRACT

Teachers are made responsible for many mental health interventions, yet research suggests teachers are not adequately trained to help students with mental health needs. This study examines middle school teachers' knowledge and skills in supporting students' mental health and compares novice and experienced teachers as well as teachers of core academic and elective classes. Outcomes will inform consultation, support, and advocacy directions for school psychologists to assist teachers in supporting students' mental health.

- Addresses Domains 4 (Mental Health Services) and 2 (Consultation) of NASP Practice Model

LITERATURE REVIEW

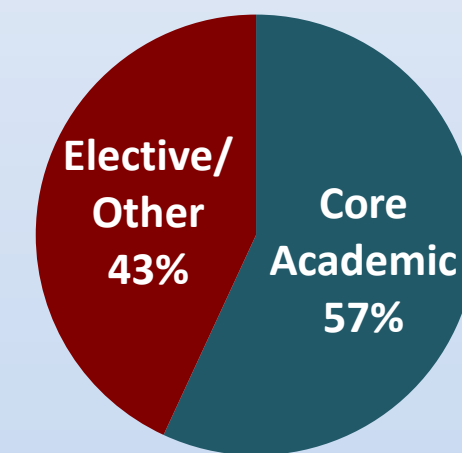
- Mental disorders affect 13-20% of children in a given year and nearly half of adolescents at some point in their lives (Merikangas et al., 2010). Over 70% of children who receive services for their mental disorders do so at school (Rones & Hoagwood, 2000).
- Many mental health interventions are administered solely by teachers, but research suggests that teachers are not adequately trained to help students with mental health needs (Rothi et al., 2008).
- Over half of elementary educators reported they lacked the knowledge and skills to meet students' mental health needs. They indicated the need for training in understanding mental health issues and in behavioral interventions (Reinke et al., 2011; Stormont et al., 2011).
- Teachers' skills in supporting mental health may be influenced by the courses they teach. Music and art teachers are less involved in IEP preparation than classroom academic teachers (NCES, 2000). Also, music and physical education teacher programs generally focus on the content area and do not include coursework on classroom management or behavioral accommodations (Hickey & Rees, 2002; Morley et al., 2005).

METHODS

Participants

- 58 middle school teachers (including 41 females and 16 males) from 6 school districts in Minnesota and Wisconsin completed the survey.
- An attempt to determine an adequate identification of novice and experienced teachers was not supported by the sample size.

Class Taught



Core Academic Classes:

- Math, English Language Arts, Science, Social Studies

Elective/Other Classes:

- Art, Business, Health, Music, Physical Education, Technology, etc.

Materials

- Participants completed an online Likert survey adapted from the measures designed by Walter et al. (2006) and Reinke et al. (2011) that asked participants about their **confidence**, **skills**, and **knowledge** in meeting students' mental health needs and managing mental health issues.
- For the **confidence** scale, teachers rated their confidence in completing 12 tasks, such as:
 - Managing students' reactions to trauma
 - Identifying a student who may have depression

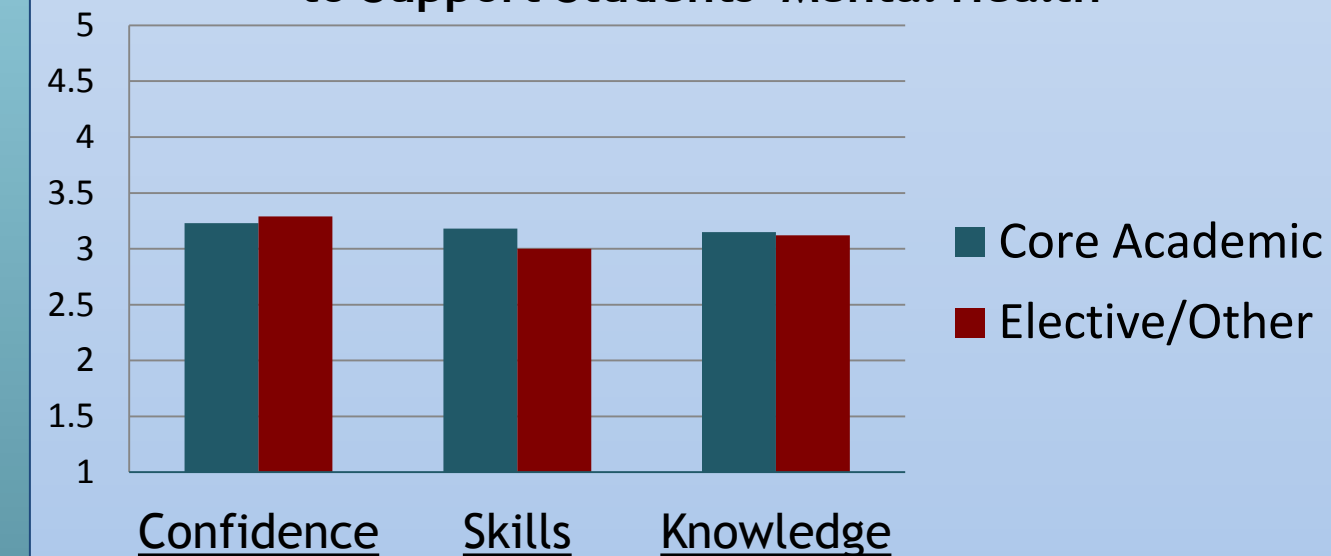
RESULTS

Areas (N=58)	Mean	SD	Min	Max	α
Overall confidence	3.26	.71	1.50	5.00	.91
Skills	3.10	.99	1.00	5.00	--
Knowledge	3.14	.94	1.00	5.00	--

RESULTS (continued)

- 76% of teachers "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that they should be involved in addressing students' mental health issues.
- Of the 35 mental health concerns that teachers indicated were most prevalent in their classrooms, the top responses were depression (N=40), anxiety (N=35), and ADHD (N=13).
- Three independent sample t-tests were conducted to identify differences between teachers of core academic and elective/other classes on their confidence, skills, and knowledge in supporting students' mental health.
- No significant differences were found.
 - Confidence: $t(56) = -.34, p = .74$
 - Skills: $t(56) = .69, p = .49$
 - Knowledge: $t(56) = .13, p = .90$

Teachers' Confidence, Skills, and Knowledge to Support Students' Mental Health



- Common responses of how teachers would feel more supported in helping their students with mental health concerns included:
 - Receiving in-service training on techniques for meeting their students' mental health needs (15% of responses)
 - Having increased information about the mental health issues of their students (i.e., fewer confidentiality restrictions) (15%)
 - Collaborating more with community professionals and school staff on effective and practical classroom strategies (11%)

DISCUSSION

- No significant differences were found between teachers of core academic and elective/other classes on confidence, skills, and knowledge to support their students' mental health.
- Three-fourths of middle school teachers indicated they think they should be involved in addressing their students' mental health needs, validating the necessity to provide appropriate training.
- Professional development for all teachers can focus on increasing knowledge and skills in completing tasks related to mental health, from understanding to referring and supporting. School psychologists may set up mentoring programs to increase teachers' confidence in doing so.

Implications for School Psychologists

- Teachers indicated their students' primary concerns were internalizing. This validates the need for mental and behavioral health specialists such as school psychologists to consult with staff on these concerns and to advocate for school-wide programs that address students' internalizing mental health needs, which is not adequately accomplished by PBIS alone (Cook et al., 2015).
- School psychologists can work with regional health authorities regarding confidentiality restrictions and can communicate regularly with teachers to ensure they are adequately informed of their students' mental health needs.

SELECTED REFERENCES

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Graduate Studies Office for support of this research project.