

# Effectiveness of Teaching Mental Health Sessions on Medical Student Comfort with Teaching Wellness and Considerations for Global Pandemics



## Introduction

Protective factors for mental health are important to understand in the context of global pandemics, as the increased stressed and heightened social isolation from physical distancing has a negative impact on mental health. Rising Youth is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that aims to teach and de-stigmatize mental health to adolescents. The group consists of passionate medical students who believe that mental wellness skills should be taught, grown, and emphasized during the crucial adolescent years. They guest speak at two local high schools, Oviedo and Econ River high school and teach a group of 10-20 high schoolers mental wellness topics. Topics include mindfulness and meditation, healthy nutrition, anti-bullying, anxiety, depression, etc.

## Intervention – Mental Wellness Session

UCF College of Medicine students volunteered to lead mental wellness sessions at Oviedo or Econ River high school during the Spring and Fall of 2019. Each session focused on one mental wellness topic; topics can include Mental Health Myths & Realities, Mindfulness and Meditation, Stress, Anxiety, Depression, and Anti-Bullying. Session begins with a brief formal lecture of the topic followed by breaking into small groups with 4-5 high school students with 1-2 medical student facilitator (s) for more collaborative discussion.

## Research Objective

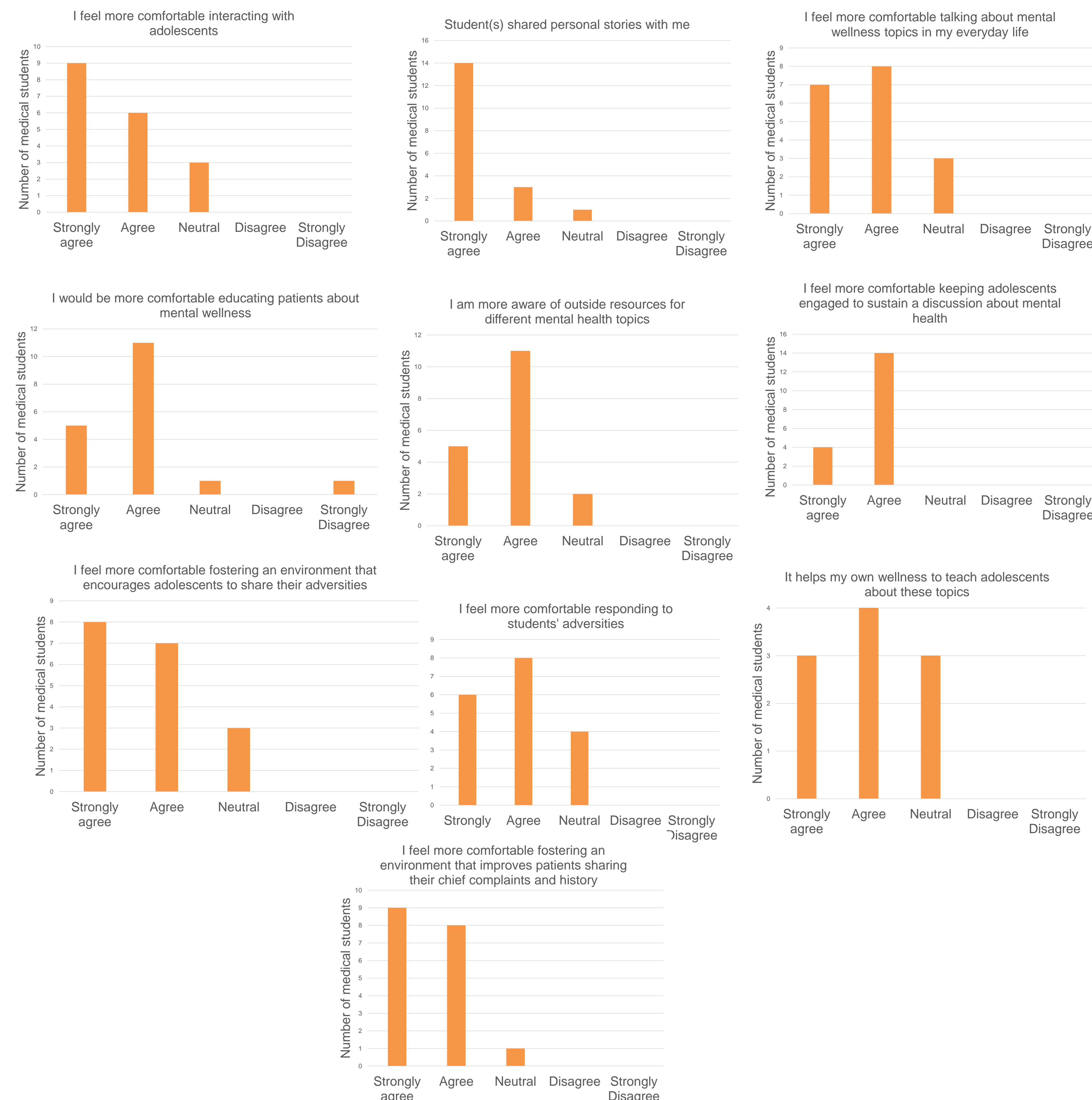
The objective of this study is to determine the impact of teaching mental health sessions on the comfort level of medical students with teaching mental wellness topics. This study aims to find out whether participating in mental health discussions with adolescents during the teaching sessions can help improve comfort and confidence of medical students in discussing tough mental health topics with patients in the future. It is our goal that students retain the skills they learn during these teaching encounters and apply them when they face patients with mental health complaints.

## Methods

Participants consisted of volunteer medical students from all four years (n = 18): M1 students (n=7), M2 students (n=2), M3 students (n=5), M4 students (n = 4)

After a semester of teaching, medical students were sent a survey with various questions regarding how their teaching experience impacted their comfort level dealing with adolescents and topics of mental health.

## Results



## Discussion

Most of the medical students who participated as a facilitator in the Rising Youth mental health awareness high school outreach program found it a positive experience. Through this experience, medical students felt more comfortable educating adolescent patients about mental wellness; they learned about the outside resources for different mental health topics in the local area; they also learned how to better handle discussing sensitive mental health topics with their patients in the future. Additionally, majority of medical students found the teaching experience rewarding, and it helped improve their own comfort level to discuss mental wellness topics in their everyday life.



## Considerations for Global Pandemics

- Virtual education
- Role of mental health
- Need for connecting youth with mental health resources via telehealth

## Limitations

- A major limitation to this study of the mental health workshops effectiveness at increasing medical student comfort with teaching about mental health topics is the small number of students studied (n=18). Our results cannot be generalized to other volunteer educators.
- Another limitation is that the primary outcomes were survey items assessing self-reported level of with various statements instead of more objective measures.
- Furthermore, we only provided the questionnaire after the year of teaching about mental wellness but future studies should provide the questionnaire both before and after participation in Rising Youth.

## Conclusion

The preliminary data from the surveys showed that the effects of volunteering as a mental health outreach teacher were largely beneficial to the medical student volunteers.

