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Students' Mental Health and Wellness: Issues Reported and Issues Using the Most Mental Health Resources

THE NOTRE DAME MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS SURVEY ALLIANCE FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION

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In the fall of 2009, principals representing over 400 schools—across 12 dioceses—participated in the Alliance for Catholic Education's Mental Health and Wellness Survey.

The purpose of the study was to examine data from a national sample of Catholic elementary and secondary schools in order to shed light on patterns of mental health service provision, staffing, needs, and barriers (Frabutt et al., 2010). While Foster et al.'s (2005) groundbreaking work provided descriptive

insight regarding the landscape of mental health services in public schools, an environmental scan of such efforts in the private education sector—and Catholic schools in particular—has been lacking.

This fact sheet focuses, first, on the most commonly reported mental health issues for male and female students at the elementary and high school levels and, second, on which of these issues use most of the mental health resources at schools, as reported by the principals.

Most Commonly Reported Mental Health Issues...

The focus of this component of the survey was to better understand the actual psychosocial and mental health issues among students in Catholic schools. Principals reviewed a list of 14 issues, originally developed by an expert advisory panel for a national public school mental health survey. The list covers a broad spectrum of concerns, from mild (e.g., adjustment issues) to severe (e.g., major psychiatric or developmental disorders). Principals indicated the three psychosocial and mental health problems—separately for males and females—that were observed most frequently at their school.



At both the elementary school level and high school level, and for both male and female students, the most commonly reported mental health problem category was *social, interpersonal, or family problems*. The percentage of schools identifying this issue as preeminent ranged from 73% (high school males) to 90% (elementary females). The second and third most commonly reported mental health problems differed for male and female elementary school students.

“What mental health issues are most commonly reported, and what issues use the most mental health resources?”

Issues Most Commonly Reported (cont'd)...



For males, *aggressive/disruptive behavior or bullying* was reported as a top three concern by two-thirds of schools, and *behavior problems associated with neurological disorders* was reported by more than half (54%). For females, the second most commonly reported problem was *anxiety, stress, and school phobia* (57%), followed by *adjustment issues* (55%).

The elementary female pattern of common mental health problems was replicated identically at the high school level. After *social, interpersonal, or family problems*, the next two most common concerns among high school males were *adjustment issues* and *anxiety, stress, and school phobia*. Notably, Table 1 portrays that while *aggressive/disruptive behavior or bullying* was a top three concern for elementary boys (66%), it was mentioned frequently enough to rank among the top five problems among each of the four lists.

Table 1. Percentage of Schools Identifying the Following Mental Health Issues as among their Top Three Concerns, by School Level and Gender

	Elementary %		High %	
Females	Social, interpersonal, or family problems	90	Social, interpersonal, or family problems	81
	Anxiety, stress, school phobia	57	Anxiety, stress, school phobia	58
	Adjustment issues	55	Adjustment issues	54
	Aggressive/disruptive behavior, bullying	45	Depression, grief reactions	36
	Behavior problems associated with neurological disorders	34	Aggressive/disruptive behavior, bullying	20
Males	Social, interpersonal, or family problems	80	Social, interpersonal, or family problems	73
	Aggressive/disruptive behavior or bullying	66	Adjustment issues	46
	Behavior problems associated with neurological disorders	54	Anxiety, stress, school phobia	44
	Adjustment issues	43	Aggressive/disruptive behavior or bullying	31
	Anxiety, stress, school phobia	40	Alcohol/drug problems	31

Issues Using Most Mental Health Resources...

When asked to speculate on which issues in the problem list demanded most of the school's mental health resources, somewhat different patterns emerged for elementary versus high schools (see Table 2). Both school levels concurred that *social, interpersonal, or family problems* used the most resources overall. At the elementary level, *aggressive/disruptive behavior or bullying* followed by *behavior problems associated with neurological disorders* were high resource demand issues. Issues using most mental health resources at high schools were *adjustment issues* and *anxiety, stress, and school phobia*.

Table 2. Mental Health Issue Using the Most School Mental Health Resources

	Elementary % (n=308)	High % (n=59)
Social, interpersonal or family problems	50	44
Aggressive/disruptive behavior, bullying	17	0
Behavior problems associated with neurological disorders	15	5
Adjustment issues	10	17
Anxiety, stress, school phobia	5	14
Other	3	0
Depression, grief reactions	0	11

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References and Acknowledgments

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These efforts were supported by a 2009 Faculty Research Grant from the Office of Research, University of Notre Dame.