

MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT OF THE GULF OIL SPILL: EFFECTS ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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Expectable Symptoms and Behaviors following the oil spill based on Prior Research

- Anger, anxiety
- Suspiciousness and distrust
- Acute stress reactions
- Symptoms of depression
- Arguing and fighting
- Increased use of alcohol and drugs
- Domestic violence
- Child abuse/neglect

Most Challenging Concerns for Children and Families

- Uncertainty with technological disaster
- Multiple layers of destruction to environment, property, marine life, livelihoods / economy
- Fears about toxic exposure and future health
- Long term impact unclear
- Lingering traumatic stress from past hurricanes and flooding, compounded by current economic concerns
- Psychological effects of the disastrous oil spill for an already vulnerable population supports a critical need for assistance to individuals from these communities.

Community Recovery Prior to the Deepwater Horizon Event

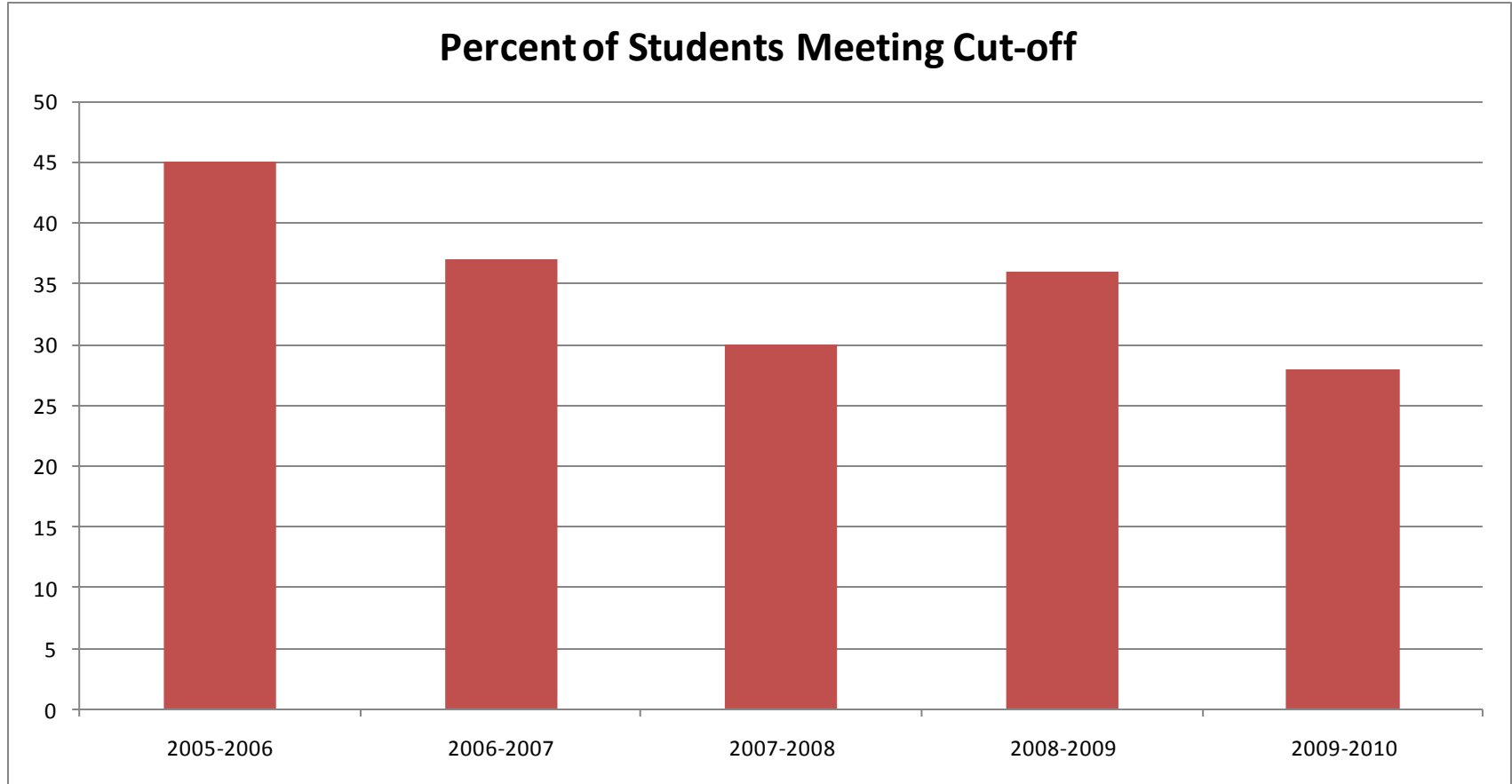
- Already vulnerable population
- Existing relationships in impacted parishes based on previous work
- Issue of cumulative trauma with prior loss and slow recovery
- Importance of training and consultation to support local community resources, responders, and infrastructure

Child Mental Health Needs Assessment

- Approximately 35,000 students have been screened annually since Hurricane Katrina for trauma exposure and mental health symptoms in collaboration with schools using modified NCTSN screener
- Many have trauma or loss histories:
 - 20% experienced a prior trauma
 - 21% experienced a trauma since Katrina
 - 25% reported that a family member or friend was injured or died due to Katrina
 - 79% reported that their house was damaged or destroyed

(Funded by Baptist Community Ministries, Louisiana Spirit, National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, United Way/Red Cross)

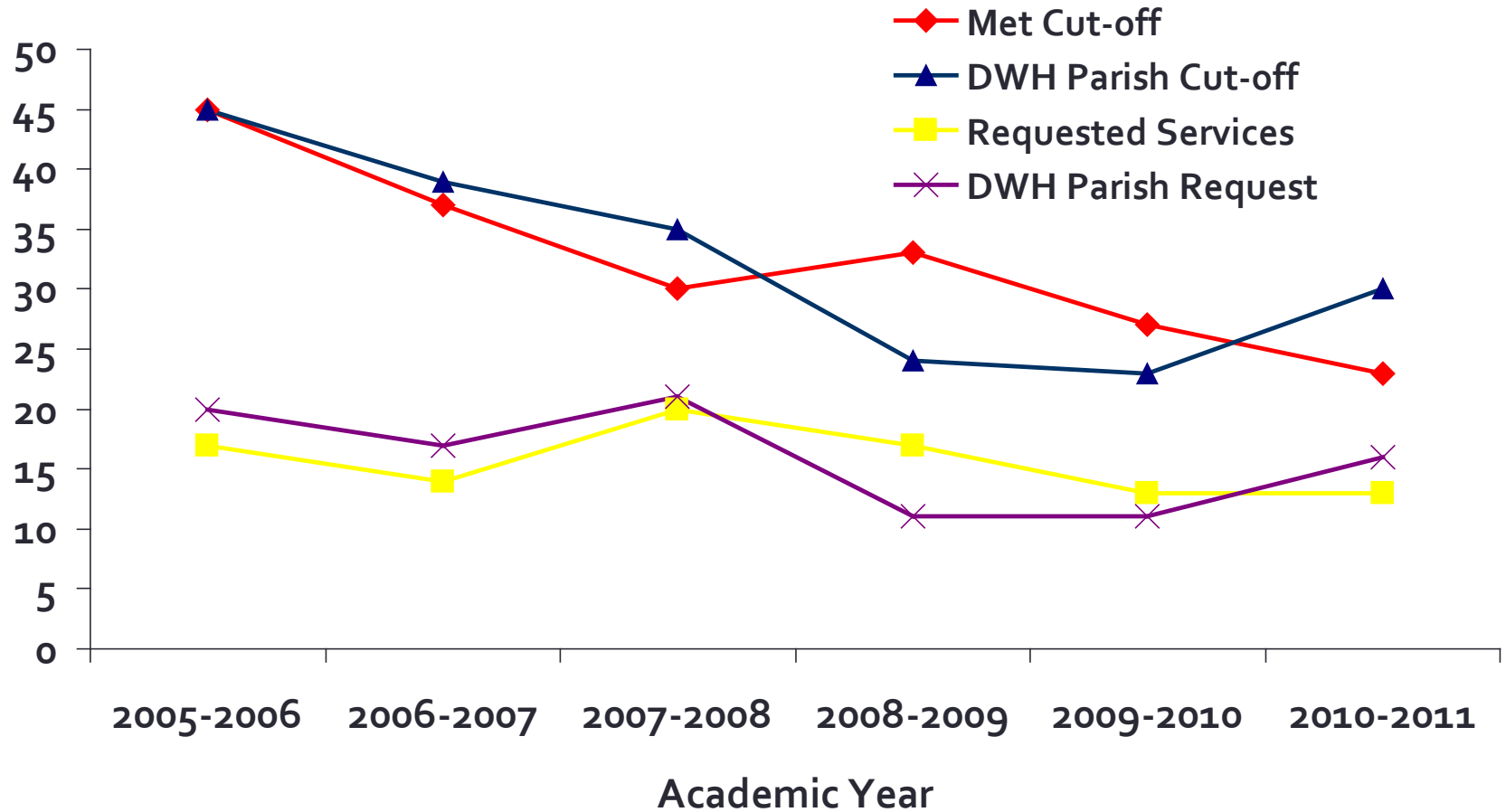
Post-Katrina Trauma Symptoms Over Time



Child and Adolescent Data

- Data entry is continuing for the 2010-2011 with approximately 5,000 assessments from Orleans, Plaquemines, and St. Bernard
- Overall data shows stability with post traumatic symptoms, however trends suggest an increase in populations impacted by oil spill

Child and Adolescent Oil Spill Data



Adult Mental Health Needs Assessment

- Initial assessment (Phase 1) developed under grant from Louisiana State Department of Social Services
- Preliminary data from continuing assessments (Phase 2) supported with funding from Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, Office of Behavioral Health
- Evidence-based needs assessment and evaluation modified from those following the hurricanes
- Assessment developed in consultation with government, university, and NCTSN colleagues

Adult Data – Oil Spill Concerns

Oil Spill Concerns	Phase 1	Phase 2
	%	%
Health concerns about food sources from local waters	74	78
Damage to wildlife and the natural environment	84	76
Loss of usual way of life	66	72
Loss of job opportunities	60	72
Loss of tourism	55	54
Personal health effects	50	59

- **70%** said the oil spill has caused at least moderate disruption in their work, social life, and/or family responsibilities.
- **44%** applied for financial assistance following the oil spill,
- **13%** received compensation.

Adult Data – Mental Health

Mental Health Symptoms	Phase 1	Phase 2
	%	%
Serious Mental Illness (K-6)	18	16
PTSD (PCL-C)	16	16
Depression (CESD)	--	33

Note. Cutoff scores: K6 ≥ 13 ; PCL ≥ 50 ; CESD ≥ 11 . These data and results are preliminary. Further analyses are needed before formal conclusions can be drawn.

Adult Data Physical Health

Physical Symptoms	Phase 1	Phase 2
	%	%
Headaches	73	60
Feeling tired out or low in energy	75	60
Back pain	65	58
Trouble sleeping	68	54
Pain in your arms, legs, or joints	67	53
Stomach pain	52	43

Note. Phase 1 numbers are with in-person interviews only *N*=378

Trainings

- Trainings to address increases in behavior problems in schools reported by teachers and administration following the oil spill
 - Helping Children through Disasters
 - Recognizing Symptoms in Trauma-exposed Children
 - Using Screenings to Assess for Mental Health and Resiliency in Schools
 - Positive Discipline Strategies
 - Bullying
 - Anger Management
 - Psychopharmacology for Children and Adolescents
 - Psychological First Aid
 - Grief and Loss in Children
 - Vicarious Traumatization and Self Care

Directions for the Future

- Continuing needs assessments for mental health issues
- Applying needs assessments to resource coordination and service needs
- Attention to and support for children and families
- Attention to potential for risk taking behaviors in adolescents
- Linking medical and behavioral health interventions
- Interventions to strengthen resilience
- Further development of Youth Leadership Program to enhance resilience, positive behaviors, and active contributions to the school and community

Recommendations to Promote Mental Health

- Anticipating and preparing for future challenges
- Recognizing compassion fatigue
- Supporting individual self-care
- Monitoring and screening
- Providing access to professional resources

Online Resources

SAMHSA DTAC: general disaster fact sheets, oil spill resources page, and oil spill fact sheets (in development)

<http://www.samhsa.gov/disaster>

NCTSN: disaster, abuse, and self-care fact sheets for parents, teachers, and providers (materials also in Spanish)

<http://www.nctsn.org>

NCPTSD: disaster fact sheets (Oil spill fact sheet in development)

<http://www.ncptsd.va.gov/professional/pages/fslist-natural-disasters-terrorism.asp>

National Wildlife Organization: child friendly information about oil spill

<http://www.nwf.org/Kids/Ranger-Rick/People-and-Places/Ranger-Rick-on-The-Big-Oil-Spill.aspx>

Psychological First Aid <http://www.nctsn.org/content/psychological-first-aid>