

## The Shape of Youth Mental Health in Virginia

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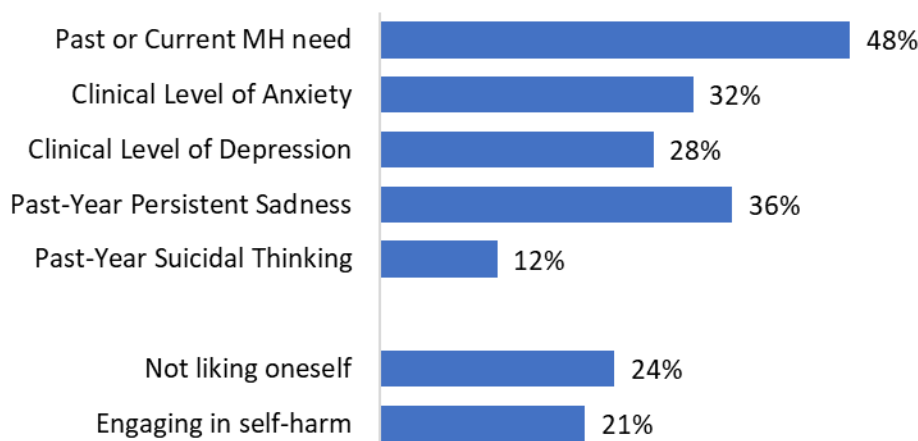


Half (47%) of the students who attend public middle or high school in Virginia reported a current or past-year mental health need. See **Figure 1**.

- While it is normal to occasionally feel tense, worried, depleted, or bored, ~ 1 in 3 Virginia public school students report these feelings at a frequency in the clinical range: in the past 2 weeks, 32% felt tense, nervous, or uncontrollable worry more than half of the time (a frequency that would constitute a positive screen for Generalized Anxiety Disorder) and 28% felt sad, down, depressed, or loss of interest more than half of the time (a positive screen for Major Depressive Disorder).
- 36% reported feeling so sad or hopeless for at least two weeks in the past year that they stopped engaging in some of their usual activities; 12% had seriously considered taking their own life

In addition to these markers of current and past-year mental health need, one in four high school students (24%) reported not feeling good about themselves, and one in five (21%) have engaged in self-harm.

Figure 1. Rates of Mental Health Concerns among Virginia Middle (MS) and High School (HS) Students

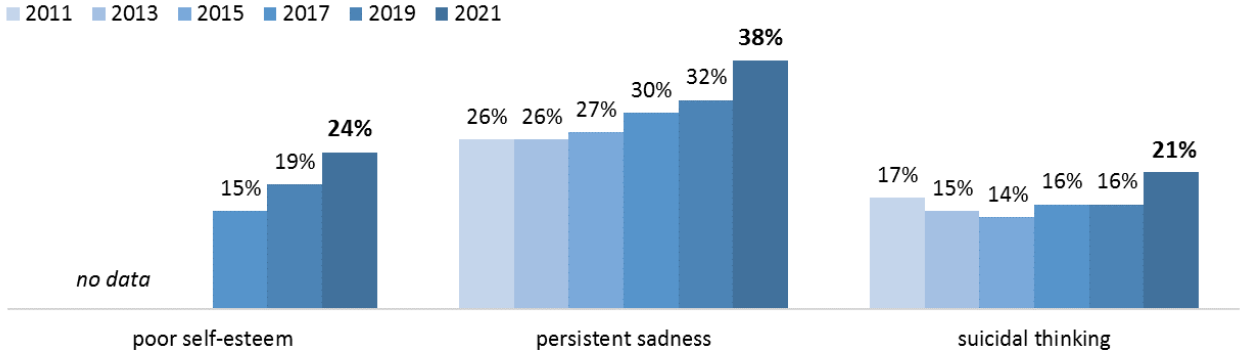


**Source:** (1) Insight Region® analysis of data from the Virginia Survey of School Climate and Working Conditions (VSS), school years 2022-23 (high school) and 2021-22 (middle school), obtained through FOIA request from the Virginia Dept of Criminal Justice Services; (2) Virginia Youth Survey (VYS), school year 2021-22, high school students only



While these mental health concerns *increased* during the pandemic, not liking one self (poor self-esteem) and persistent sadness have been trending upward for years. Suicidal thinking appears to be elevated considerably above pre-pandemic levels. See **Figure 2**.

Figure 2. Rates of Mental Health Concerns among HS Students in Virginia

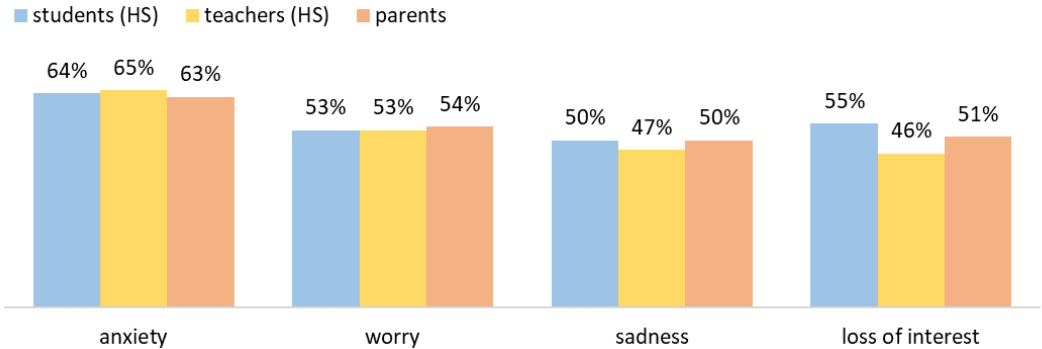


**Source:** Insight Region® analysis of data from VYS. All data collected in October-November of the reference year.

Among those with a current/past-year mental health need, around half report that there is an adult in their lives whom they could go to when sad; the remaining 48% of students do not have this resource. An even greater share of students reported feeling like adults at their school cared about them, and around half felt that other students are their school cared. Around one in four reported that they had participated in a mental health or suicide prevention training. (See Appendix for detail).

It is important to note that young people’s traditional support systems—parents and teachers—have likely been affected in recent years by stress, anxiety, and depression. For example, **Figure 3** illustrates how these groups report comparable rates of anxiety, worry, sadness, and loss of interest to teenagers. Further, 32% of HS students who completed the VYS 2021-22 reported having lived with someone who was depressed, mentally ill, or suicidal, and 58% of HS teachers who completed the VSS 2021-22 reported feeling “definitely” or “completely” burnt-out; just 11% enjoyed their work with no symptoms of burnout.

Figure 3. Rates of Mental Health Concerns among HS Teachers, HS students, and Parents in Virginia



**Source:** Insight Region® analysis of VSS and CDC Household Pulse Survey, winter 2023

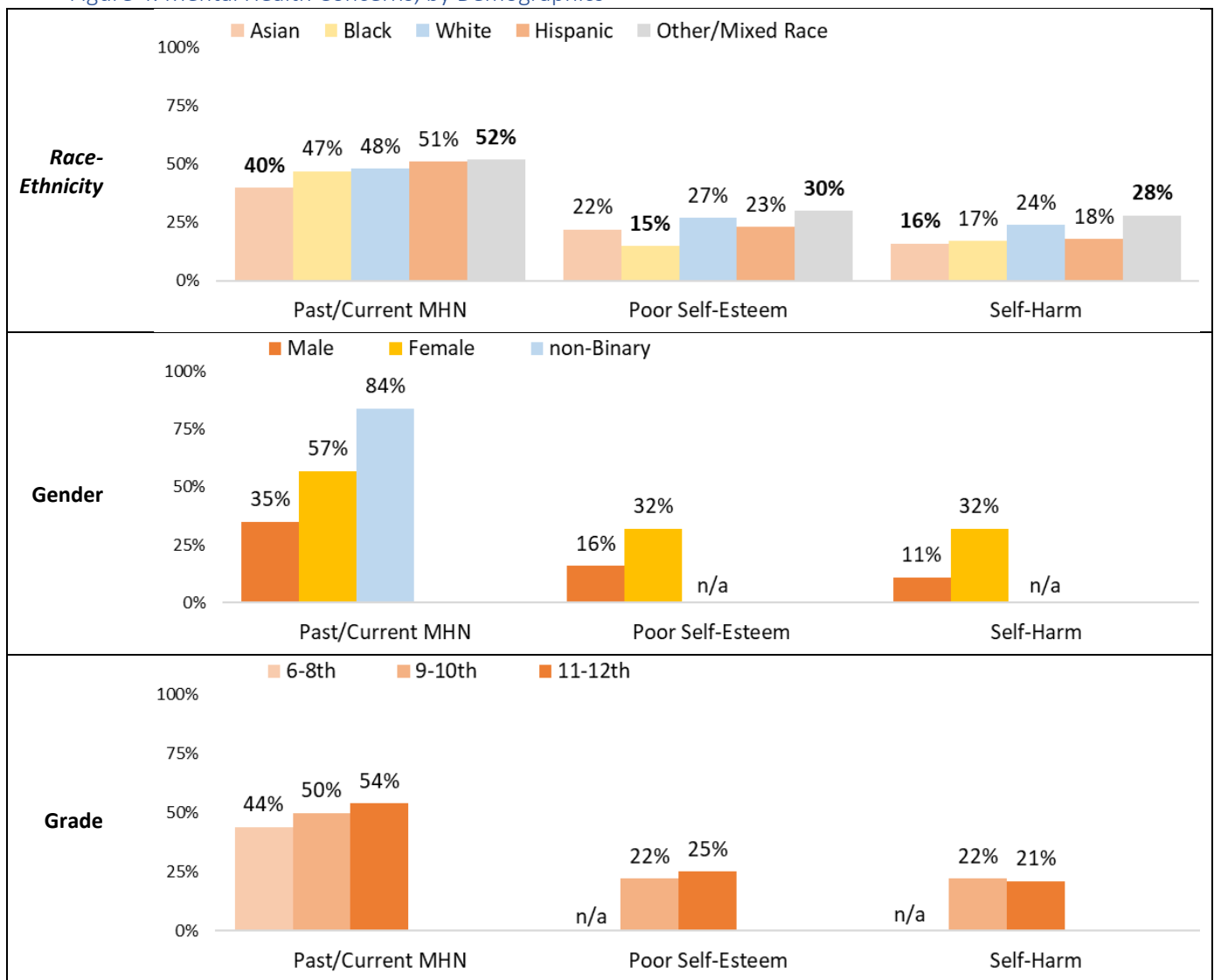


## The Intersection of Demographics and Mental Health

When examined by student demographics, the highest levels of current or past need occurred among Hispanic students and those who identify as “other” or mixed race. White and other race students were the most likely to report poor self-esteem and to engage in self-harm. In contrast, Asian and Black students had the lowest rates of mental health concerns, with particularly *low* rates of mental health need among Asian students and poor self-esteem among Black students. See **Figure 4**.

Girls were more likely than boys to report a mental health concern, and those who identified as non-binary had exceptionally high rates. Upperclassmen (high school juniors and seniors) had higher rates than younger peers.

Figure 4. Mental Health Concerns, by Demographics



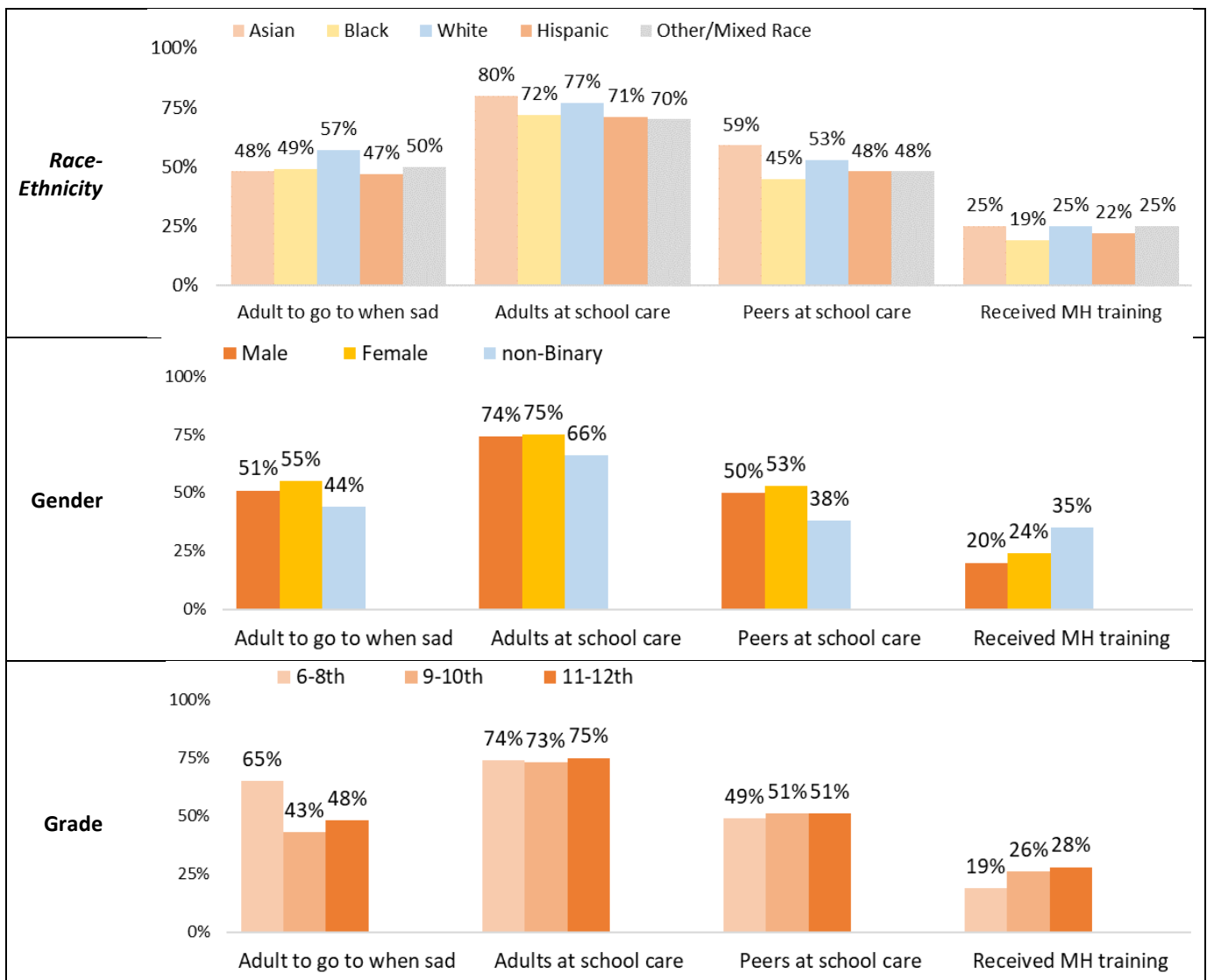
Source: Insight Region® analysis of VSS (2021-22; 2022-23) and VYS data (2021-22)



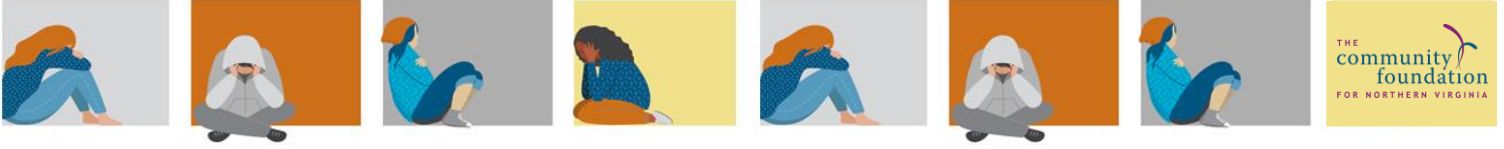
White students who were struggling with a mental health need were the most likely to report having an adult to whom they could go when sad; Hispanic students had the lowest rate of having this adult resource. Asian students were the most likely to report that adults and peers at their school cared about them, compared to students of other/Hispanic/Black identity who reported the lowest rates of adults and other students caring about them. Black students were also the least likely to have received a training in mental health or suicide prevention. See Figure 5.

Male and female students struggling with a current or past-year mental health need reported *minimal* variation in available resources and supports. Middle school students struggling with a mental health need were much more likely than their older peers to report that there was an adult whom they could seek out when sad, and were less likely to have participated in a suicide prevention/ mental health training.

Figure 3. Mental Health Supports and Resources in Virginia among Students with Current or Past MHN



Source: Insight Region® analysis of VSS (2021-22; 2022-23)



Appendix. Mental Health Concerns and Resources among Virginia Youth  
*Disaggregated by Race-Ethnicity, Gender, and Grade*

	ALL	RACE-ETHNICITY					GENDER			GRADE*		
		W	B	A	H	O	M	F	NB	6-8	9-10	11-12
<b>CONCERNS</b>												
Past or Current MH need <sup>1</sup>	48%	48%	47%	40%	51%	52%	35%	57%	84%	44%	50%	54%
Clinical Level of Anxiety	32%	34%	27%	25%	31%	34%	19%	41%	67%	27%	34%	38%
Clinical Level of Depression	28%	27%	28%	21%	29%	31%	19%	32%	62%	24%	29%	32%
Past-Year Persistent Sadness	36%	35%	36%	28%	40%	40%	26%	43%	71%	33%	38%	42%
Past-Year Suicidal Thinking	12%	11%	12%	8%	13%	14%	8%	13%	40%	11%	13%	13%
Not liking oneself <sup>2</sup>	24%	27%	15%	22%	23%	30%	16%	32%	-	-	22%	25%
Engaging in self-harm <sup>2</sup>	21%	24%	17%	16%	18%	28%	11%	32%	-	-	22%	21%
<b>RESOURCES</b>												
Adult to go to when sad <sup>1</sup>	52%	57%	49%	48%	47%	50%	51%	55%	44%	65%	43%	48%
Adults at school who cares <sup>1</sup>	74%	77%	72%	80%	71%	70%	74%	75%	66%	74%	73%	75%
Peers at school who cares <sup>1</sup>	50%	53%	45%	59%	48%	48%	50%	53%	38%	49%	51%	51%
Received MH training <sup>1</sup>	24%	25%	19%	25%	22%	25%	20%	24%	35%	19%	26%	28%

**Source:** (1) Insight Region<sup>®</sup> analysis of data from the Virginia Survey of School Climate and Working Conditions (VSS), school years 2022-23 (high school) and 2021-22 (middle school), obtained through FOIA request from the Virginia Dept of Criminal Justice Services; (2) Virginia Youth Survey (VYS), school year 2021-22, high school students only