

# (Un)safe Spaces: Lasting Impacts of How Adolescents Perceive School Safety

Emily N. Anderson, M.A., M.Ed. & Kate Jansen, Ph.D.

## Introduction

- Recent studies have indicated feeling unsafe in school is linked to mental health difficulties and poorer academic performance in students (Mori et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2020).
- The purpose of this study is to examine if perceptions of school safety and perceptions of teacher support in adolescence impact academic functioning and have lasting impacts on stress and anxiety in adulthood.
- To our knowledge, this is the first study to longitudinally examine the lasting impacts of perceived school safety and teacher support into adulthood.
- With the rising concerns about school safety in the United States, this study is important because it helps to predict the lasting impacts attending school while feeling unsafe and unsupported may have on today's youth in the future.

## Research Questions

- Does perceived school safety in adolescence relate to academic performance, days absent from school, total completed years of education, and anxiety and perceived stress in adulthood?
- Does perceived teacher support in adolescence relate to academic performance, days absent from school, total completed years of education, and anxiety and perceived stress in adulthood?

## Methods

- Archival data from The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health) were used.
- Participants were a nationally representative sample of over 20,000 adolescents who were in grades 7-12 in the 1994-1995 school year and were followed into adulthood with interviews in 2008-2009.
- Statistical significance was determined using independent samples t-tests.

## Methods (cont)

- The Adult Anxiety Scale was created by summing 4 variables rated on a likert scale. This scale had a maximum score of 20 indicating high anxiety and a minimum score of 4 indicating no anxiety at all.
- The Adult Perceived Stress Scale was created by summing 4 variables rated on a likert scale. This scale has a maximum score of 16, indicating high stress and a minimum score of 0 indicating no stress at all.

## Results

- Significant differences were found for perceived school safety across multiple variables. Significant differences were found between adult perceived stress, academic performance, absences from school, educational level, and adult anxiety. (Figure 1)
- Significant differences were found for perceived teacher support across multiple variables. Significant differences were found between adult perceived stress, academic performance, absences from school, educational level, and adult anxiety. (Figure 2)
- Specific statistical results available upon request.

Figure 1. Impact of School Safety

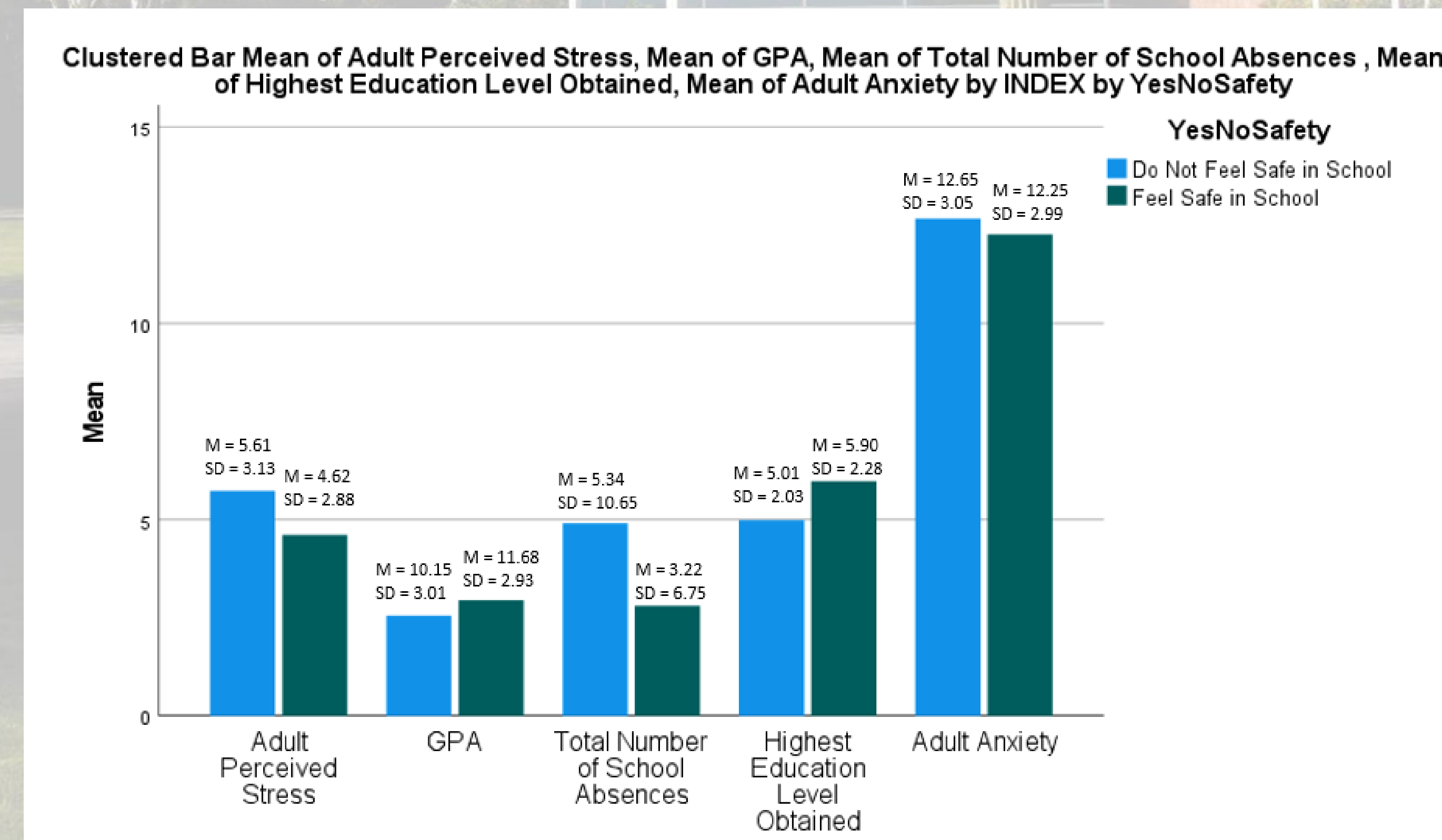
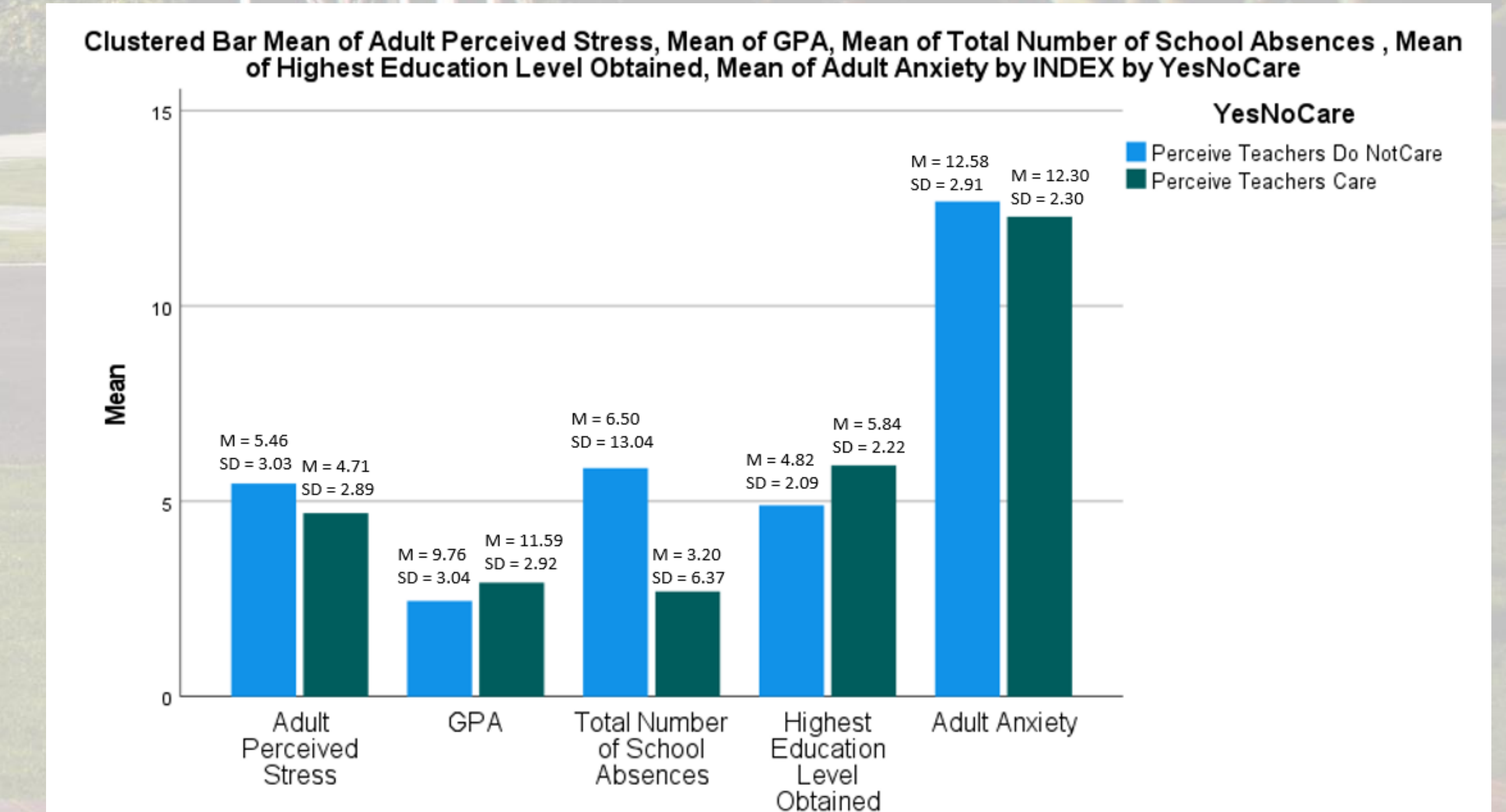


Figure 2. Impact of Teacher Support



## Conclusion and Recommendations

- Participants who perceived school to be unsafe reported lower grades, more absences from school, fewer total years of education, and higher levels of anxiety and perceived stress in adulthood than those who perceived school to be safe.
- Participants who perceived low teacher support reported lower grades, more absences from school, fewer total years of education, and higher levels of anxiety and perceived stress in adulthood than those who perceived their teachers to support them.
- It is recommended that psychologists treating children and adolescents consider perceptions of school safety in treatment planning to help prevent the potential negative impacts of feeling unsafe at school on children's academic and psychological functioning.
- It is further recommended that psychologists treating adults address historical perceptions of safety in school to potentially provide insight into clients' symptoms and clients' perceptions of the world.



MIDWESTERN UNIVERSITY

Educating Tomorrow's Healthcare Team