



Social-emotional learning for underserved high school students: A collaboration between Upward Bound Math Science and MSW Programs at Ramapo College

Linda C. Johnson-MSW Student, Advisors: Dr. Colleen Martinez-Social Work Faculty, Dr. Sandra Suarez-Director of UBMS, and Brigid Nonas-Assistant Director of UBMS

Abstract

The Upward Bound Math Science (UBMS) Program is a federally funded program that supports high school students from Paterson, New Jersey by teaching academic skills and providing tools to help students graduate from high school and pursue a college degree in a STEM career. This program's participants, who are potential first-generation college students or from a low-income household, or at high risk for academic failure, are in high need of social and emotional education, as evidenced by the CYW Adverse Childhood Experiences Questionnaire (ACE-Q), Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale 10 (CD-RISC-10), Emotion Awareness and Emotion Regulation assessments.

Beginning in 2022, UBMS and the MSW Program at Ramapo College have been working collaboratively to provide Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) to UBMS participants, as well as to support the practicum learning needs of MSW students as interns. In the UBMS program, the MSW Intern is also referred to as the SEL counselor. Social Emotional Learning involves developing interpersonal and emotional regulation skills, providing emotional support, promoting positive relationships, building upon strengths, and developing skills to manage and thrive in academic endeavors.

In the MSW program, all students complete a practicum of 600-1,200 hours. The purpose is to provide social work graduate students with hands-on experience under the supervision of a practicum instructor so that MSW students can achieve the nine social work core competencies. As the SEL Counselor for UBMS, the MSW intern has facilitated a focus on the social and emotional needs of UBMS participants by providing a multi-tiered system of support, which includes assessments, 1:1 intervention with students, and small and large group interventions.

Upward Bound Math Science Program

The Upward Bound Math Science Program is a federally funded program that supports high school students from Paterson, New Jersey by teaching academic skills and providing tools to help students graduate from high school and pursue a college degree in a STEM career. This program's participants, who are potential first-generation college students or from a low-income household, or at high risk for academic failure, are in high need of social and emotional education, as evidenced by the CYW Adverse Childhood Experiences Questionnaire (ACE-Q), Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale 10 (CD-RISC-10), Emotion Awareness and Emotion Regulation assessments.

Master of Social Work Program Requirements

All MSW students complete a practicum of 600-1,200 hours, which in combination with coursework facilitates developing the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) social work core competencies (Ramapo MSW Program, 2024).

“**Competency 1** - Demonstrate ethical and professional behavior

Competency 2 - Engage diversity and difference in practice

Competency 3 - Advance human rights and social, economic and environmental justice

Competency 4 - Engage in practice-informed research and research-informed practice

Competency 5 - Engage in Policy Practice

Competency 6 - Engage with Individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities

Competency 7 - Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations and Communities

Competency 8 - Intervene with Individuals, families, Groups, Organizations and communities

Competency 9 - Evaluate Practice with Individuals, families, Groups, Organizations and communities” (CSWE, 2022).

The Social Emotional Learning Counselor/ MSW Intern

In UBMS, the social work student completes their practicum hours in the role of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Counselor/MSW intern. The role of the SEL counselor is to provide students with the knowledge and strength to manage their emotions. The SEL counselor teaches and guides UBMS participants to implement healthy coping skills. The overall focus is to address and regulate their emotions and thoughts. These strategies help students with their personal growth and resilience. Creating this foundation gives students interpersonal skills to prosper through their academics and personal life. The SEL counselor provides a multi-tiered system of support, which includes assessments, 1:1 intervention with students, and small and large group interventions.

Adverse Childhood Experiences

The CDC-Kaiser Permanente Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) study was a landmark study that found that childhood abuse, neglect, and certain household challenges are related to health and other well-being factors later in life. Various forms of the ACE questionnaire have respondents identify how many adverse experiences they have been exposed to, including; abuse, neglect, instability due to parental separation, parental incarceration, witnessing or experiencing violence, substance use problems, mental health problems, and suicide in the family. Multiple subsequent studies have found that individuals who report four or more ACEs are more likely to have certain risk behaviors and negative health outcomes later in life (CDC, 2024).

Adverse Childhood Experiences >4 and Academic Functioning

Studies have found that students who report four or more ACEs are more likely to experience absenteeism, lack of school engagement, and repeating a grade (Crouch, et al., 2019).

Profile of UBMS High School Participants (N=51)

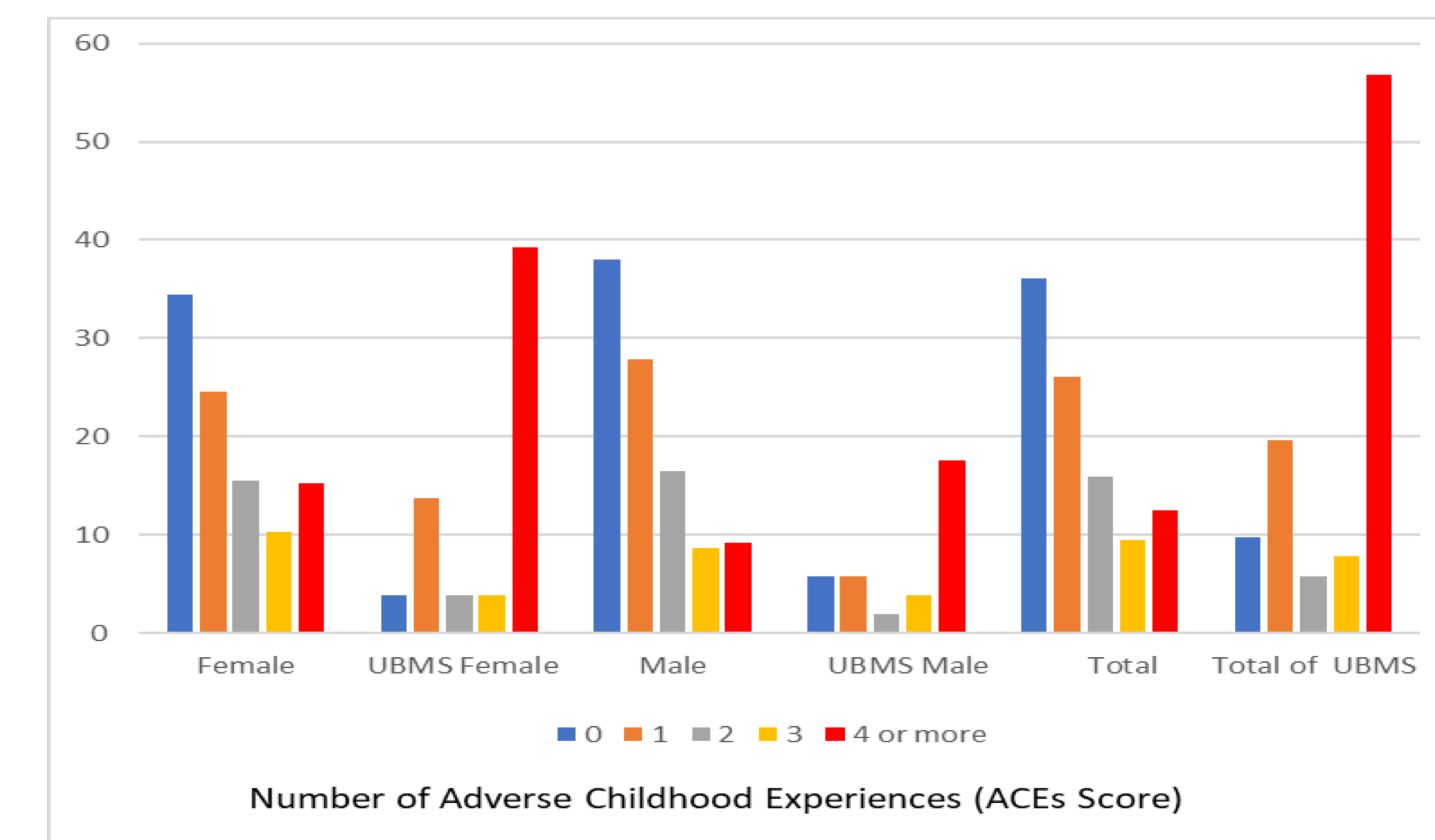
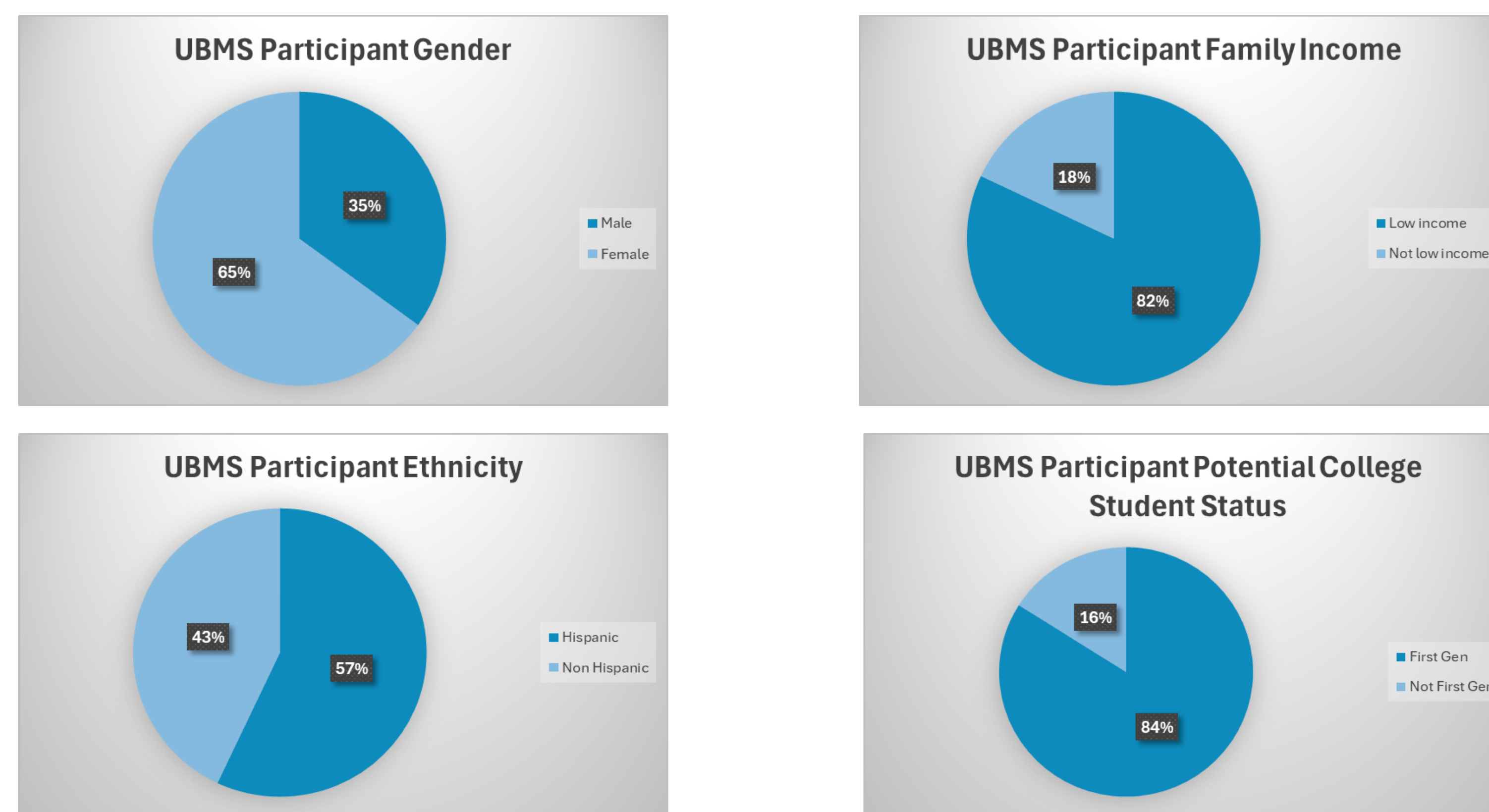


Figure: Comparison of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs Score) by percentage of population for males and females between National US population and Upward Bound Math Science 2023-24 participants (National data from ACEs too High, 2024)

Multi-Tiered Intervention System

Individual case example

A high school student from Paterson, New Jersey, has been provided with assessment, 1:1 and group intervention focused on social emotional learning, including stress management, and coping skills. They demonstrated overachievement in succeeding in high school. This individual has overcome obstacles through discipline and determination while completing their high school degree. Despite setbacks, this student has accomplished academic highlights that earned them recognition with outstanding accomplishments. The student showed dedication to persevering many challenges by engaging in coping techniques. Through the program, the student hasn't limited themselves and they utilize opportunities to be involved in resources that can position them for their future endeavors.

Group intervention example

Weekly small and large group sessions, both online and in person, at the high school in Paterson and on campus at Ramapo College were provided by the SEL counselor. Group sessions included activities focused on relationship building, emotional understanding and expression, and skills to support the management of academic responsibilities. Participants particularly enjoyed playful and physical activities that got them moving and having fun, such as a “Head, shoulders, knees and cup” activity that focused on listening and self control skills (Martin, 2020).

Conclusion

The bar graph shows that UBMS participants are more likely to have experienced four or more ACEs than the general public. Therefore, UBMS participants are at higher risk for problems in academic functioning.

UBMS program's focus on social and emotional learning through the SEL Counselor position benefits UBMS participants in improving coping skills, and resilience.

The position also benefits the MSW intern/SEL Counselor, as they gain valuable experience providing assessment and intervention to underserved high school students.

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