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Deterring Substance Use in Grade School Children through Mental Health Awareness and Coping Skills Training

James Mason

Pete Jones

Nicole Ceausu

Grayson Aldridge

Zac Forbes

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Deterring Substance Use in Grade School Children through Mental Health Awareness and Coping Skills Training

Grayson Aldridge, Nicole Ceausu, Zac Forbes, Peter Jones, James Mason – Medical Students: Quillen College of Medicine

Abstract

A Ballad Health “Community Health Needs Assessment” of Hawkins County, TN identified mental health and substance abuse among the county's top 3 health priorities for 2021. With input from community stakeholders, a 3-part intervention was developed to target 6th grade students (n=43) and test the hypothesis that individuals with competent coping skills and mental health awareness are less likely to turn to substances to manage life stress. Lesson plans were designed, and pre/post surveys assessed for levels of awareness, self-efficacy, perceived stress, and feedback. Significant improvements were found in participant awareness of positive and negative coping skills and self-efficacy. Continuation of the study with longitudinal assessments of student behavior is needed to prove the hypothesis and indicate the effectiveness of the intervention as a tool for reducing substance use in the region.

Introduction

- During the pandemic, there have been over 100,000 overdose deaths indicating a need for mental health education and the necessity of coping skills.
- Ballad Health's 2020 "Community Health Needs Assessment" indicated mental health and substance abuse among the top 3 priorities for the county.
- There is currently a lack of mental health resources found in the middle schools.
- Students at Rogersville Middle School are at high risk of adverse childhood experiences (ACE).
- Existing literature indicates optimal substance abuse and mental health education achieved by incorporating life skills and targeting coping skills development.

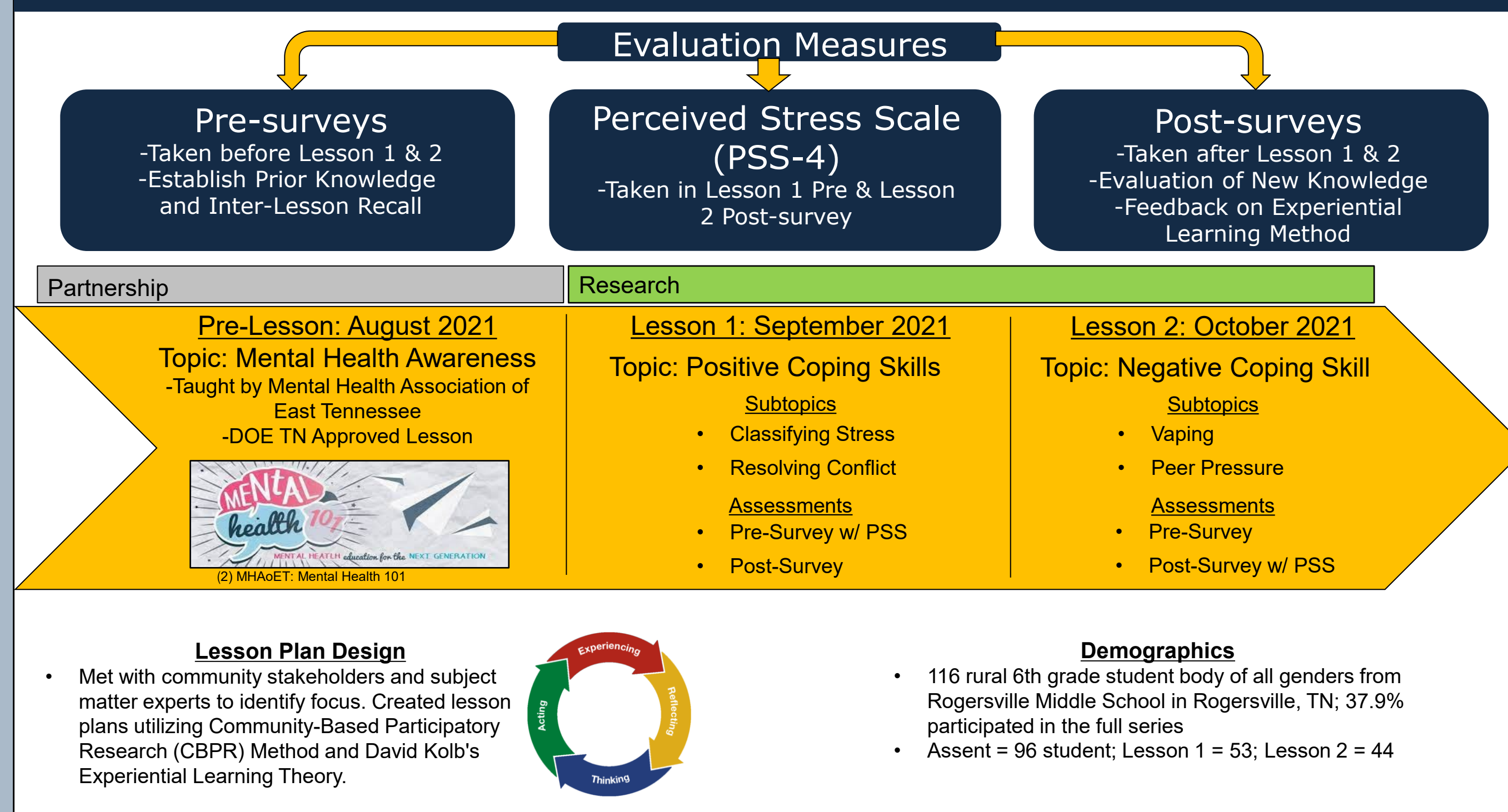
Goal and Plan

- Quantitative goal: Achieve significant improvements in student's mental health and coping skills knowledge, and self-efficacy toward using coping skills.
- Qualitative goal: Improve student attitudes regarding mental health and use of good coping skills.
- Plan: Create a 3-part, 3-day, in school intervention during the 1 hour related arts class periods with logistical help from school counselor.

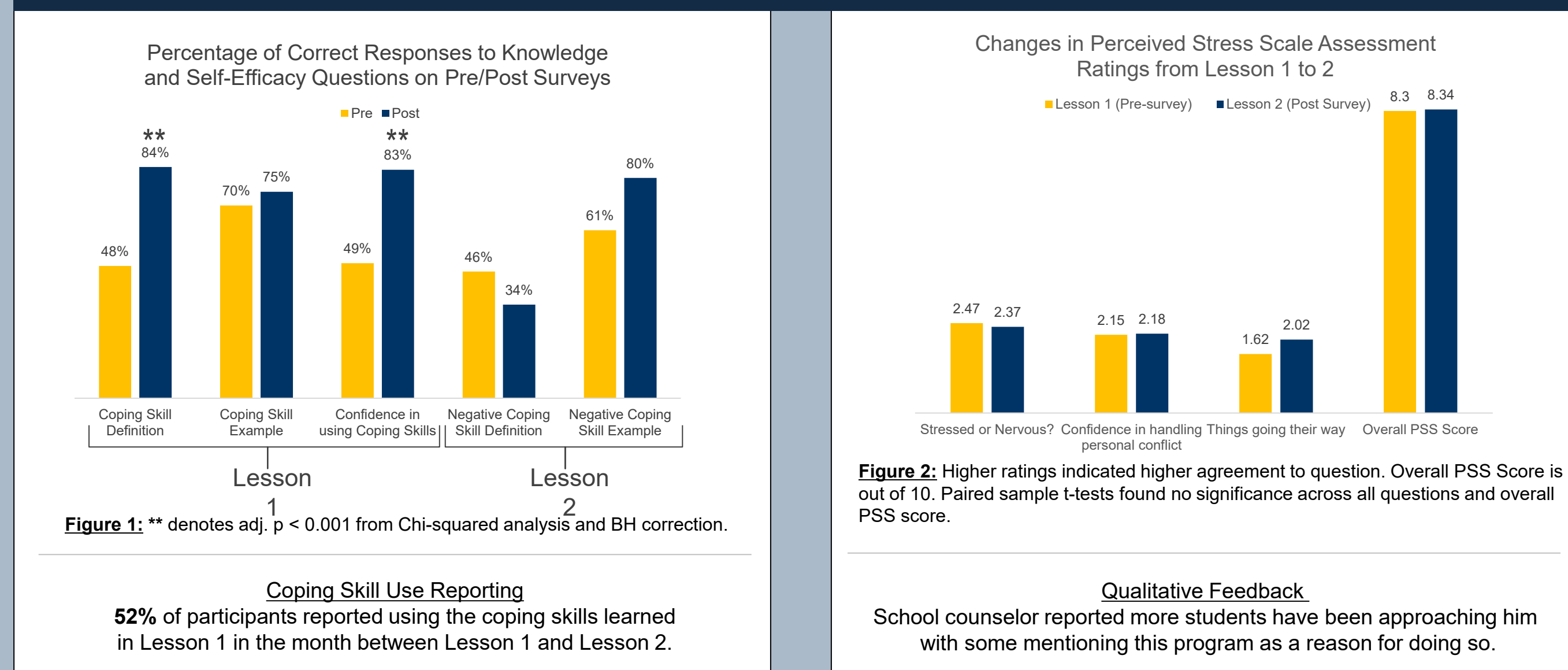


(1): Sitting, Research Team; Standing, RPCT Director and coordinator.

Methods



Results



Results Continued

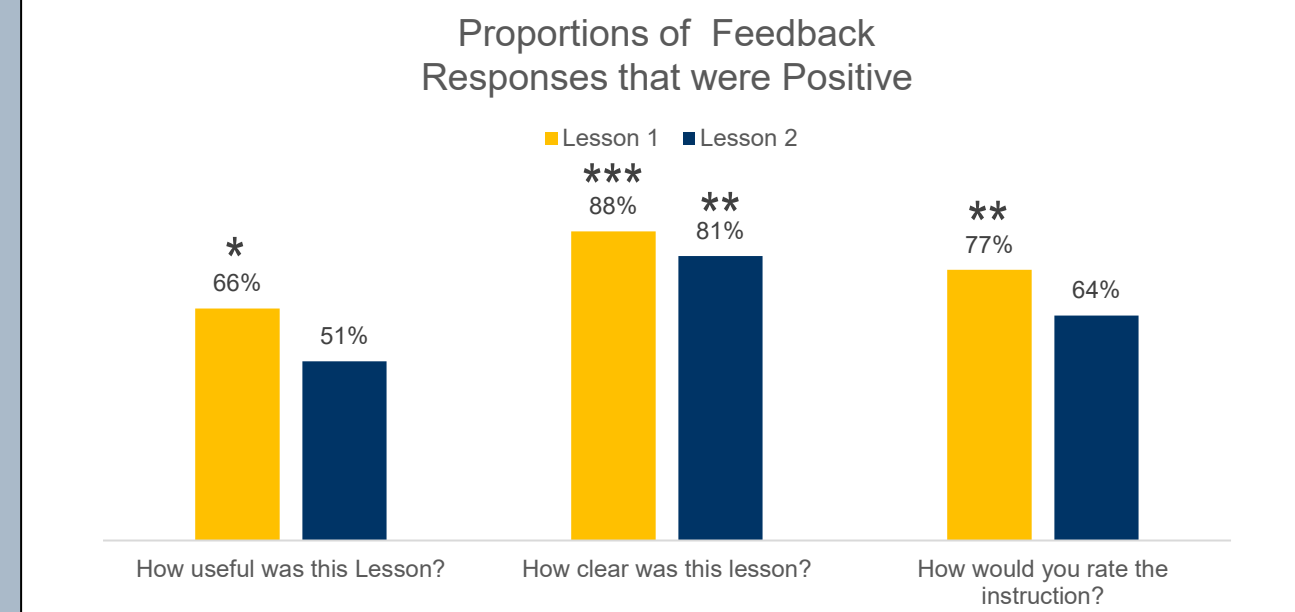


Figure 3: * denotes p < 0.05; ** p < 0.001; *** p < 0.000001 using Chi² analysis and BH correction

Discussion

Lesson 1 sought to improve awareness and self-efficacy around positive coping skills with significant improvements made toward both goals.

Lesson 2 sought to determine if students are using coping skills learned in Lesson 1 and to improve awareness of negative coping skills. 52% reported use of their new skills. Improvements in awareness of negative coping skills were inconclusive. Adjustments to survey questions likely needed.

Perceived Stress Scale assessment was insignificant and would have had stronger validity if collected weeks after lesson 2 rather than the same day as lesson 2.

Overall student feedback was favorable with lesson 1 showing more favorability over lesson 2.

Main study limitations: lack of a long-term assessment for benefits not immediately measurable and small sample size.

Conclusions

- Students and professionals are invited to continue and adjust this intervention as it can improve the health and wellbeing of its participants while contributing to regional and national dialogue on methods of substance abuse deterrence.

Acknowledgements

- **Rogersville Middle School:** Dr. Christian Johnson (School Counselor), Jason Roach (principal)
- **Hawkins County Coordinate School Health Director:** Erika Phillips
- **Mental Health Association of East Tennessee:** Emily Wells
- **Addiction Medicine Specialists:** Dr. Joyce Troxler and Associates
- **Study Mentor:** Dr. Jose Velasco