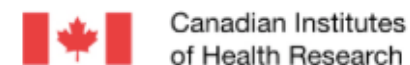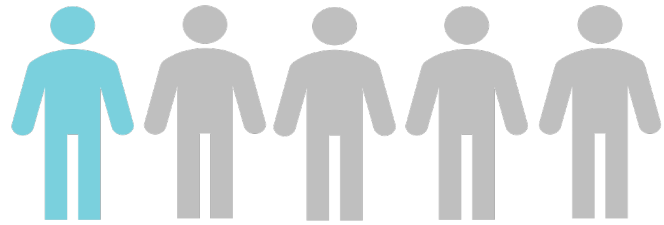halladje@mcmaster.ca

@Jill_Halladay

Teacher-Student Relationships and Mental Health Help Seeking Behaviours Among Elementary and Secondary Students

Jillian Halladay, RN, MSc, PhD(c)

Kathyrn Bennett, Mark Weist, Michael Boyle, Ian Manion, Matthew Campo, Katholiki Georgiades

Canadian Institutes of Health Research

Offord CENTRE FOR CHILD STUDIES

McMaster University
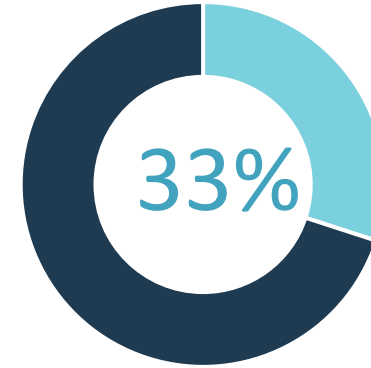
HEALTH RESEARCH METHODS, EVIDENCE, AND IMPACT

Early intervention for youth mental health concerns is critical, but in Ontario…

Approximately **20%** of children and adolescents in Ontario met criteria for a mental disorder

BUT

33%
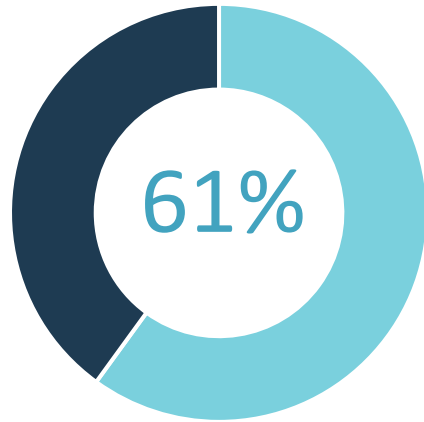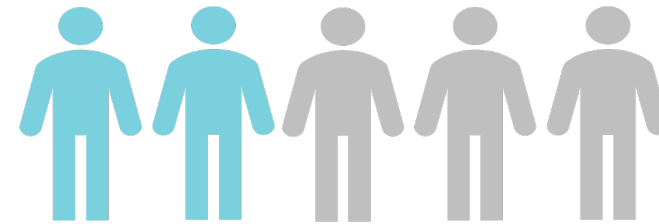
Less than **1 in 3** had contact with a mental health provider (i.e., psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker, consellor)

School Mental Health Surveys

Georgiades K, et al. (2019). Six-Month Prevalence of Mental Disorders and Service Contacts among Children and Youth in Ontario: Evidence from the 2014 OCHS. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, 64*(4), 246-255.

Schools are the most common settings where youth get help for their mental health

61%

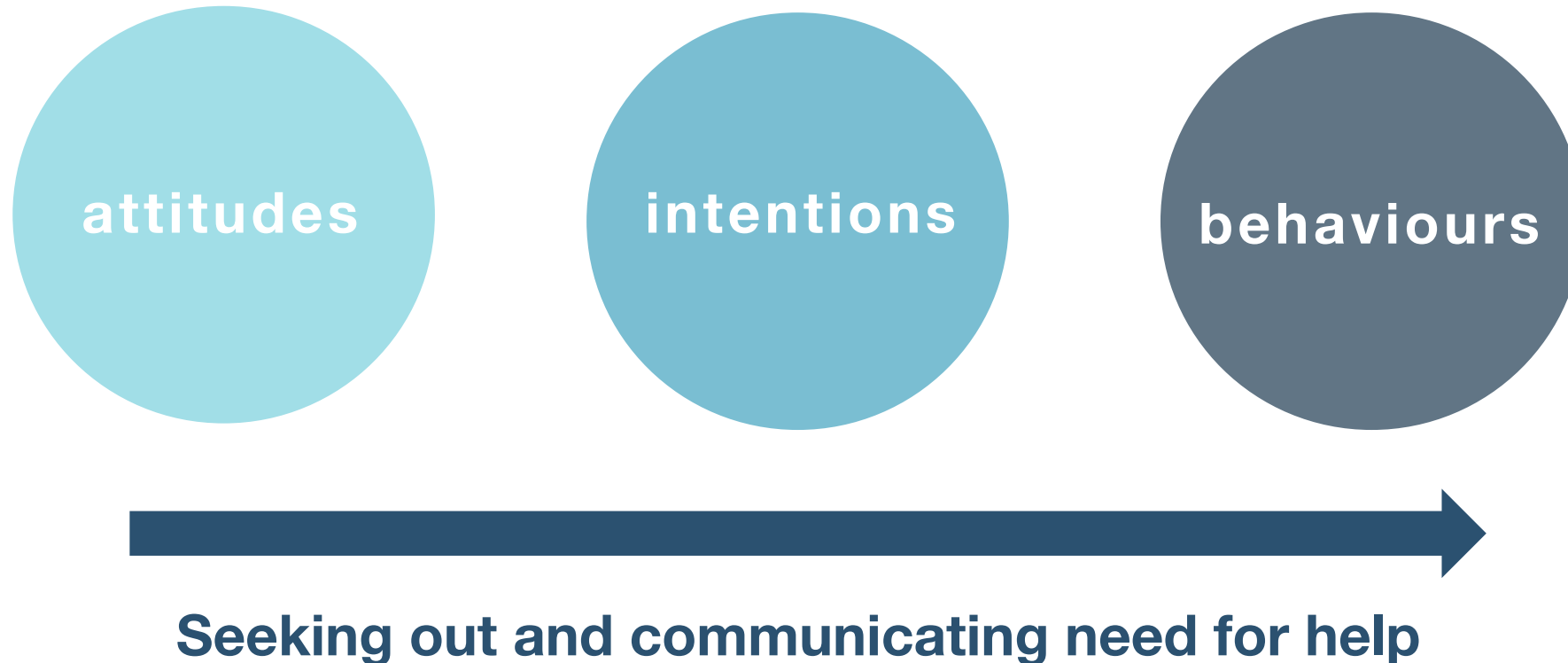**3 in 5** youth have some form of service contact (Family Doc, Mental Health Provider, Complementary or Alternative Medicine)

2 in 5 (43%) youth access school-based services

Georgiades K, et al. (2019). Six-Month Prevalence of Mental Disorders and Service Contacts among Children and Youth in Ontario: Evidence from the 2014 OCHS. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, 64*(4), 246-255.

School Mental Health Surveys

Defining help seeking

attitudes

intentions

behaviours

Seeking out and communicating need for help

Rickwood, D. J., et al. (2005). Young people's help-seeking for mental health problems. Australian e-Journal for the Advancement of Mental Health, 4(3), 218–251.
Rickwood, D. J., et al. (2007). When and how do young people seek professional help for mental health problems? The Medical Journal of Australia, 187(7), S35–S39.

School
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Surveys

What do youth say gets in the way of mental health help seeking?

- Stigma
- Embarrassment
- Shyness
- Fear
- Problems recognizing symptoms
- Lack of knowledge of services

Social support and encouragement from others can facilitate help seeking

School Mental Health Surveys

Gulliver, A., et al. (2010). Perceived barriers and facilitators to mental health help-seeking in young people: A systematic review. BMC Psychiatry, 10, 113
Yap, M. B., et al (2013). Where would young people seek help for mental disorders and what stops them? Findings from an Australian national survey. Journal of Affective Disorders, 147(1–3), 255–261.
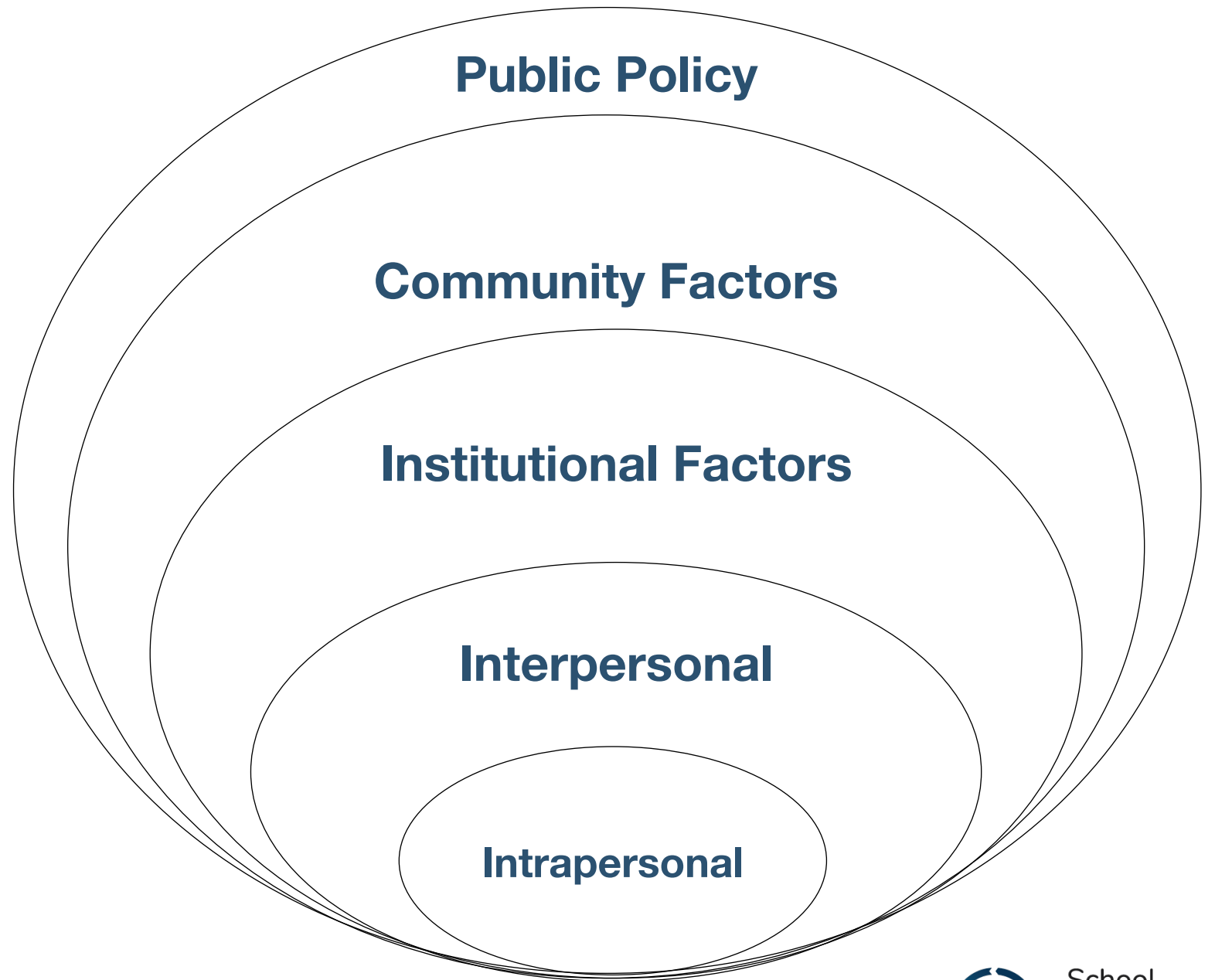
Teachers are in a unique position to facilitate youth access to help

- **First to see early signs**

- Could minimize many of the stated barriers by helping:
  - youth identify concerns
  - navigate services and make referrals
  - reduce fear & perceived stigma

- Previous research has shown higher help seeking when teachers:
  - Can identify student mental health concerns
  - "Get to know" students
  - Make students feel they can trust them
  - "Care about students, respect them, and want them to do well"

(Gasquet, Ledoux, Chavance, & Choquet, 1999; Eliot et al., 2010; Mariu et al., 2012; Sourander et al., 2001; Wu et al., 1999; Zwaanswijk, van der Ende, Verhaak, Bensing, & Verhulst, 2005).

School
Mental Health
Surveys

Help seeking is multifaceted and multilevel

McLeroy, K. R., Bibeau, D., Steckler, A., & Glans, K. (1988). An ecology perspective on health promotion programs. Health Education Quarterly, 15(4), 351–377.
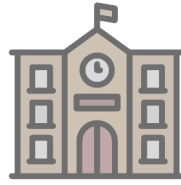
School Mental Health Surveys

Study Objectives

To examine associations between **teacher-student relationship** quality at school and **teachers' responsiveness** to students' emotional concerns in a classroom and:

1) students' **intention** to seek help at school for mental health concerns
2) mental health-related **service use**

School Mental Health Surveys

The Data

248 schools

180 elementary and 68 secondary

1,968 classrooms

31,124 students

19,130 elementary and 11,994 secondary

School Mental Health Surveys

Intentions to seek help at school

"If you felt that you needed help for concerns regarding your mental health, would you see or speak to a school social worker, child and youth worker/counsellor, psychologist, nurse, teacher or other staff person at the school about these concerns?"

School
Mental Health
Surveys

6-month mental health service use

1. "During the past six months, did you receive any individual or group counselling or any other help **at school** for concerns regarding your mental health?"

combined with...

2. "Did you see or speak to a doctor, counsellor or other professional outside of school for concerns regarding your mental health in the past six months including at a:
   a) doctor's office
   b) counsellor's office (e.g., psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker or other)
   c) walk-in clinic
   d) urgent care clinic or emergency room
   e) Hospital
   f) an agency.

School Mental Health Surveys

Teacher-Student Relationships
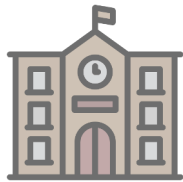
Do you feel teachers in the school…

- are respectful
- care about their students
- listen when students have problems

School Mental Health Surveys

Classroom Teacher Responsiveness

Do you feel your teacher…

- notices when you are upset
- provides you with an opportunity to discuss what is bothering you
- talks to you about ways to cope

School Mental Health Surveys

Covariates

- Student age, gender, race/ethnicity, SES, immigrant status
- School SES & size
- Internalizing symptoms
- Externalizing symptoms
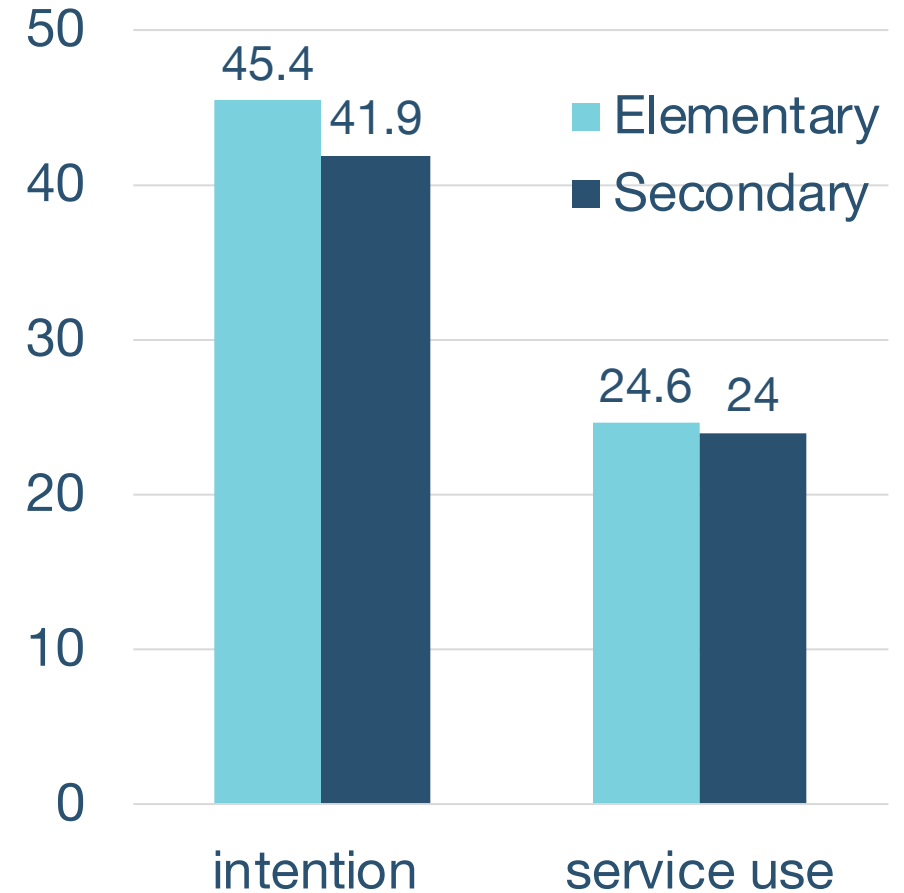- Perceived mental health or behavioural problem and need for help

School Mental Health Surveys

Analysis

- 3 level (student, classroom, school) logistic regressions
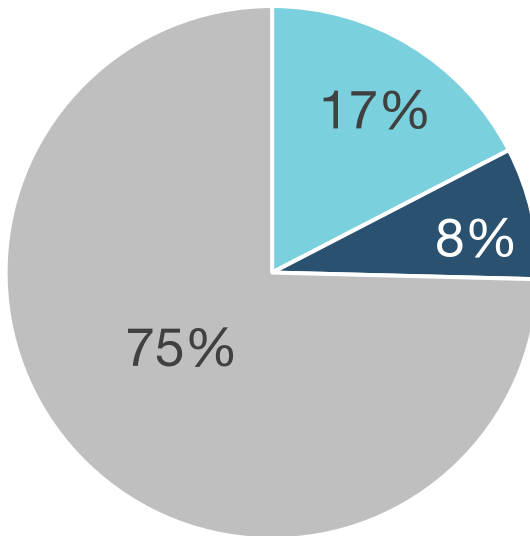- Split by school level

School Mental Health Surveys

RESULTS

- Teacher-student relationship quality and Teacher responsiveness was higher among elementary students compared to secondary students
  - Relationships 9.5 vs. 8.7
  - Responsiveness 7.4 vs. 5.6

- Intention to seek help at school and past 6 month service use was similar between school levels
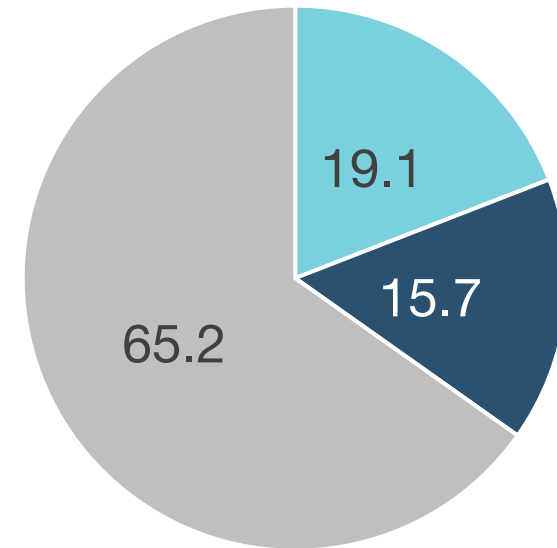

School Mental Health Surveys

RESULTS – Teacher Variables

	Elementary		Secondary	
	Intention	**Service Use**	**Intention**	**Service Use**
Teacher Student Relationships (School Level)	Not related	Not related	Not related	**+**
Teacher Responsiveness (Class Level)	Not related	Not related	Not related	Not related
Teacher Student Relationships (Student level)	**+**	Not related	**+**	Not related
Teacher Responsiveness (Student level)	**+**	**+**	**+**	**+**

School Mental Health Surveys

RESULTS – Select Covariates

	Elementary		Secondary	
	Intention	Service Use	Intention	Service Use
Male	-	+	-	-
Perceived problem and need for help	++	+++	++	+++

School Mental Health Surveys

Summary

1. Teacher-student **relationship quality** in a school and **teachers' responsiveness** to students' emotional concerns in a classroom were each associated with increased odds of **intentions to seek help** at school for mental health concerns

2. Teachers' **responsiveness** to students' emotional concerns in a classroom was associated with an increased likelihood of mental health-related **service use**

3. Perceptions of teacher-student **relationship quality at the school-contextual level** also contributed independently to the prediction of mental health-related **service use among secondary students**

4. Student **perceived need was the strongest predictor of help seeking**

School
Mental Health
Surveys

Limitations

- Cross-sectional data

- Intentions to seek help only for school supports

- Gender was binary

School
Mental Health
Surveys

Teachers play an important role in whether students seek out and receive mental health treatment, inside and outside the classroom.
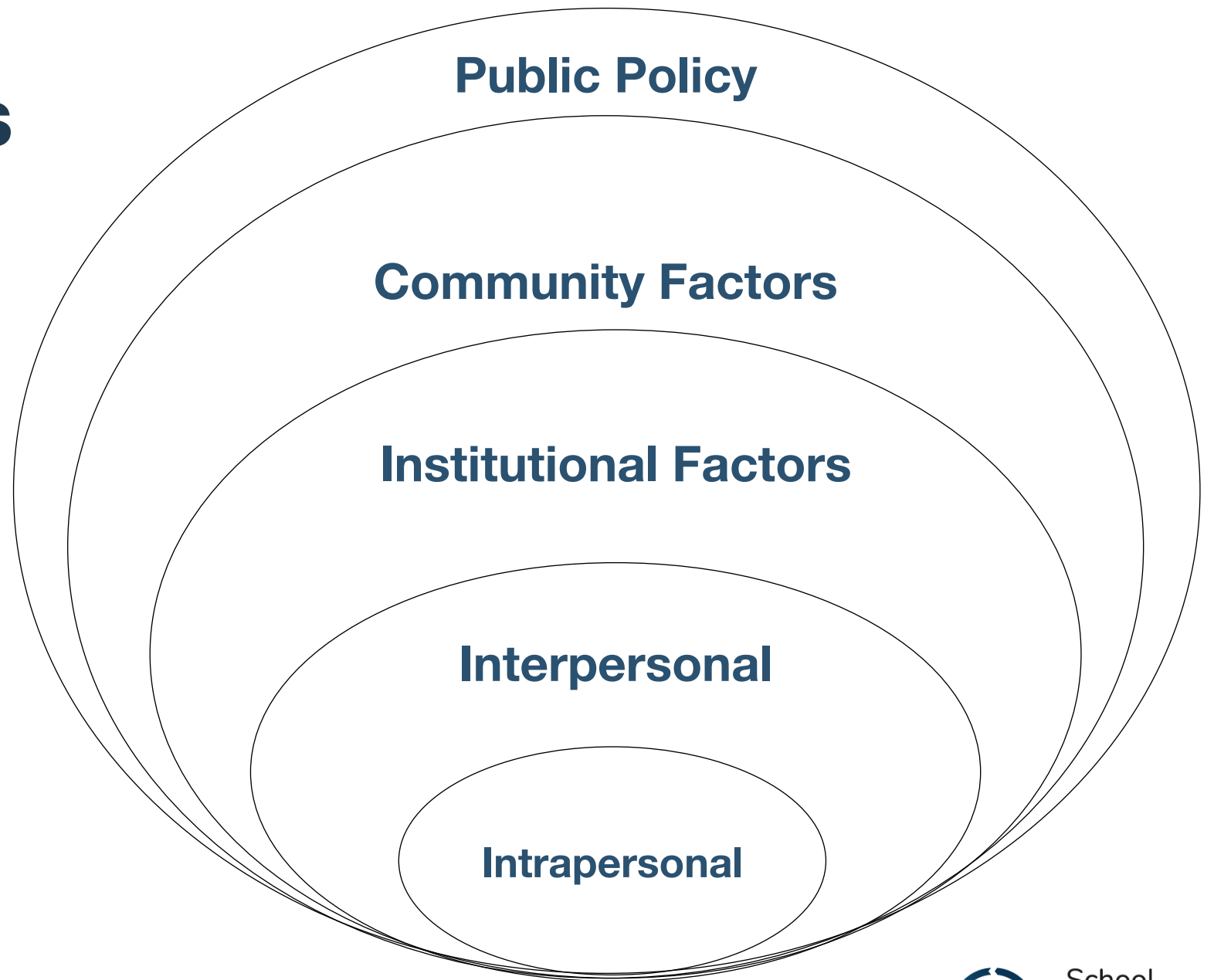
School Mental Health Surveys

COVID-19 Considerations

1. How to optimize school wide teacher-student relationships and general school climate (particularly in secondary schools)?

2. How to promote teacher and student mental health literacy?

   - Of note, what "warning signs" should teachers look for if in an online space?

3. How to enable and facilitate one on one teacher-student interactions – particularly for teacher to express concern and engage in discussions?

4. Ensure up to date and easily accessible referral pathways for various mental health resources.

School Mental Health Surveys

COVID-19 Considerations

- School delivery
- What services are available
- Strength of student social networks
- Individual access to virtual options

Public Policy

Community Factors

Institutional Factors

Interpersonal

Intrapersonal

School Mental Health Surveys

McLeroy, K. R., Bibeau, D., Steckler, A., & Glans, K. (1988). An ecology perspective on health promotion programs. Health Education Quarterly, 15(4), 351–377.

Thank you

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School
Mental Health
Surveys