

**Recent Adverse Life Events, Mental Health, and Sources of
Professional and Non-Professional Support Among U.S. Adults:
Finding from the Understanding America Study**

Lingzi Luo, MSW, MPH

PhD Candidate

Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences
New York University School of Global Public Health
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Background

- Recent life/stressful events
 - Medical events or diagnoses, employment changes, major financial changes, bereavement
 - Very common (~20-30% in 12 months)
 - Negative affective states (anxiety/depression) > Biological process & behavioral patterns -> Disease risk
- Mental health support from professional and non-professional sources are central to resilience and recovery following adversity

Background

- Limitation of current research:
 - Lack of short-term sequential life events assessment
 - Lack of assessment of different types of mental health support among the general population

Measures

Past-month adverse life event :

- **Health Events**: incidence of assault, medical diagnoses, medical procedures/events: contracting shingles, arthritis surgery, or heart event.
- **Employment Changes**: working to not working; full-time to part-time.
- **Negative Financial Changes**: due to job change, investment losses, medical/dental expenses, home/auto repair, IRS-related issues, and a list of a few other expenses.
- **Bereavement**: loss of loved ones (started Dec 2024)

Mental health (depressive and anxiety symptoms):

- **PHQ-4**: A four-item validated ultra-brief screening instrument to assess depressive and anxiety symptoms over the past two weeks, with a composite score ranging 0-12

Items added to UAS Monthly

Measures

Mental health support from professional sources:

- Two-item assessment adapted from NSDUH
- List of professional – seen or talk to (yes/no) regarding mental health, nerves, or emotions

Mental health support from non-professional sources:

- One-item assessment adapted based on existing highly cited literature
- List of non-professional – seen or talk to regarding mental health, nerves, or emotions

Psychiatric Medication

- One-item assessment adapted from NSDUH

Unmet mental health needs and reasons

- Two-item assessment adapted from NSDUH

Study Design

Sample

Event exposed group

A three time point invited combined group (Sep, Oct, Nov 2025)

- At each time point, all UAS panel members who (1) completed the prior month's monthly survey and (2) reported experiencing any of the four types of past-month adverse life events

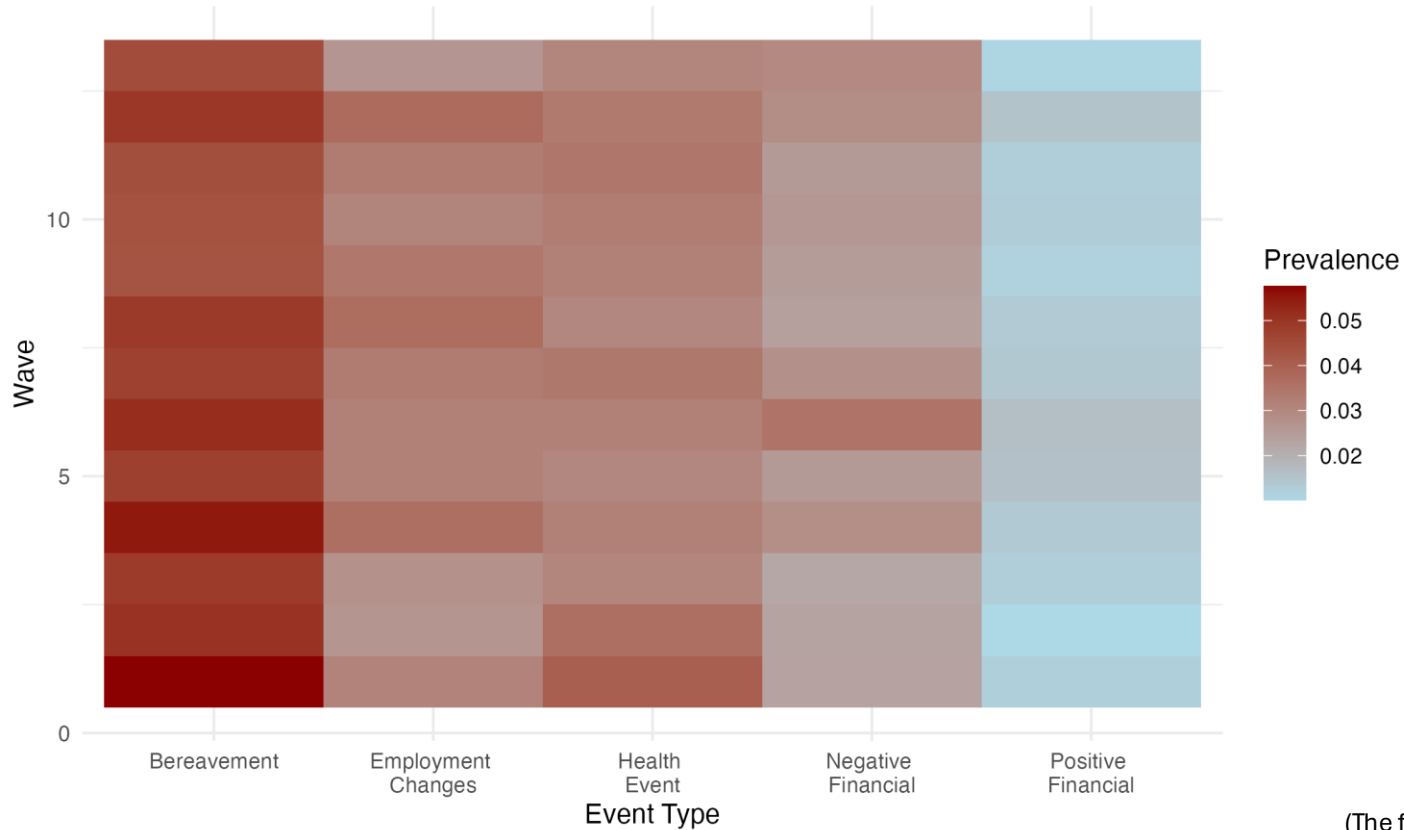
Event non-exposed group

- A one time point invited group (Oct 2025)
- Have not reported any of the four types of adverse events during the three consecutive months preceding Oct 2025

	Jul-25	Aug-25	Sep-25	Oct-25	Nov-25	Dec-25	Jan-26	Feb-26	Mar-26	Apr-26		
Event exposed group		Shock reported (n=1300)	FU1							FU2		
			Shock reported (n=1300)	FU1						FU2		
				Shock reported (n=1300)	FU1					FU2		
Event non-exposed group	No Shock reported	No Shock reported	No Shock reported	FU1					FU2			
	(n=3500)											

Life Events

Event Prevalence Heatmap



Wave 1 = Nov 2024
(The first UAS monthly survey that had bereavement measures)

Sample

Characteristic	Overall N = 5,091	Non-exposed N = 3,366	Exposed N = 1,725	p- value
Age	55 (16)	55 (16)	56 (16)	<0.001
Sex				<0.001
Female	2,980 (59%)	1,900 (56%)	1,080 (63%)	
Male	2,111 (41%)	1,466 (44%)	645 (37%)	
Race				<0.001
White Only	3,860 (76%)	2,569 (76%)	1,291 (75%)	
Black Only	524 (10%)	322 (9.6%)	202 (12%)	
American Indian or Alaska Native	71 (1.4%)	43 (1.3%)	28 (1.6%)	
Asian Only	369 (7.2%)	279 (8.3%)	90 (5.2%)	
Other	267 (5.3%)	153 (4.5%)	114 (6/6%)	
Hispanic/Latino				0.043
No	4,489 (88%)	2,990 (89%)	1,499 (87%)	
Yes	602 (12%)	376 (11%)	226 (13%)	
# of Members in Household				0.2
1	1,507 (30%)	970 (29%)	537 (31%)	
2	1,897 (37%)	1,257 (37%)	640 (37%)	
3	694 (14%)	477 (14%)	217 (13%)	
4	801 (16%)	542 (16%)	259 (15%)	
5 or more	192 (3.8%)	120 (3.6%)	72 (4.2%)	
Household Income				<0.001
<\$25,000	820 (16%)	503 (15%)	317 (18%)	
\$25,000–\$49,999	875 (17%)	558 (17%)	317 (18%)	
\$50,000–\$74,999	865 (17%)	555 (16%)	310 (18%)	
≥\$75,000	2,531 (50%)	1,750 (52%)	781 (45%)	

Analytical Sample

- Completed FU1
- Selected event exposure (“negative”)
- Non-missing on key variables

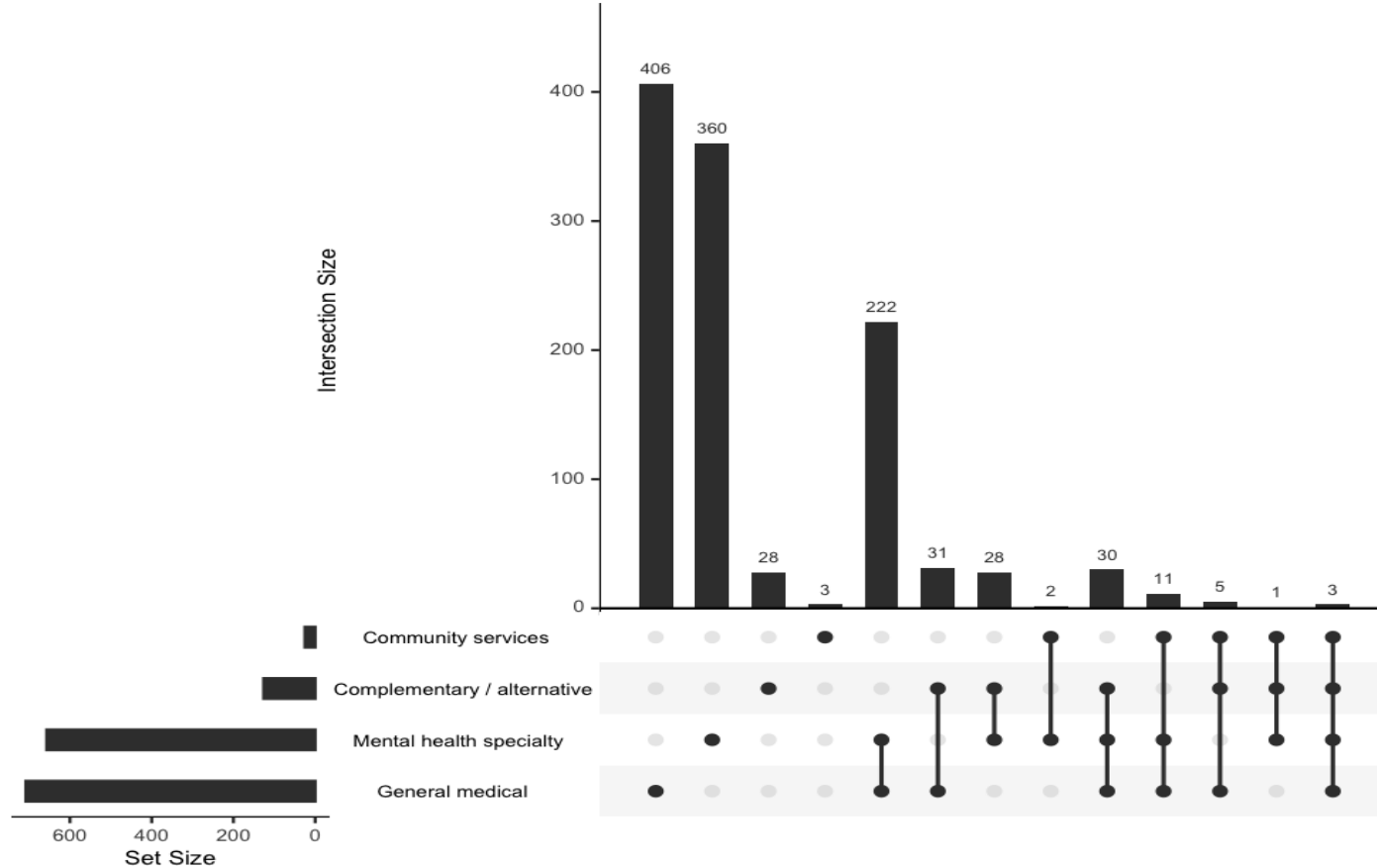
Sample (continued)

Characteristic	Overall N = 5,091	Non- exposed N = 3,366	Exposed N = 1,725	p- value
Professional Mental Health Support				<0.001
No	3,961 (78%)	2,730 (81%)	1,231 (71%)	
Yes	1,130 (22%)	636 (19%)	494 (29%)	
Non-professional Mental Health Support				<0.001
No	2,586 (51%)	1,808 (54%)	778 (45%)	
Yes	2,505 (49%)	1,558 (46%)	947 (55%)	
Baseline Mental Health (PHQ-4)	1.70 (2.57)	1.44 (2.39)	2.20 (2.81)	<0.001

Analytical Sample

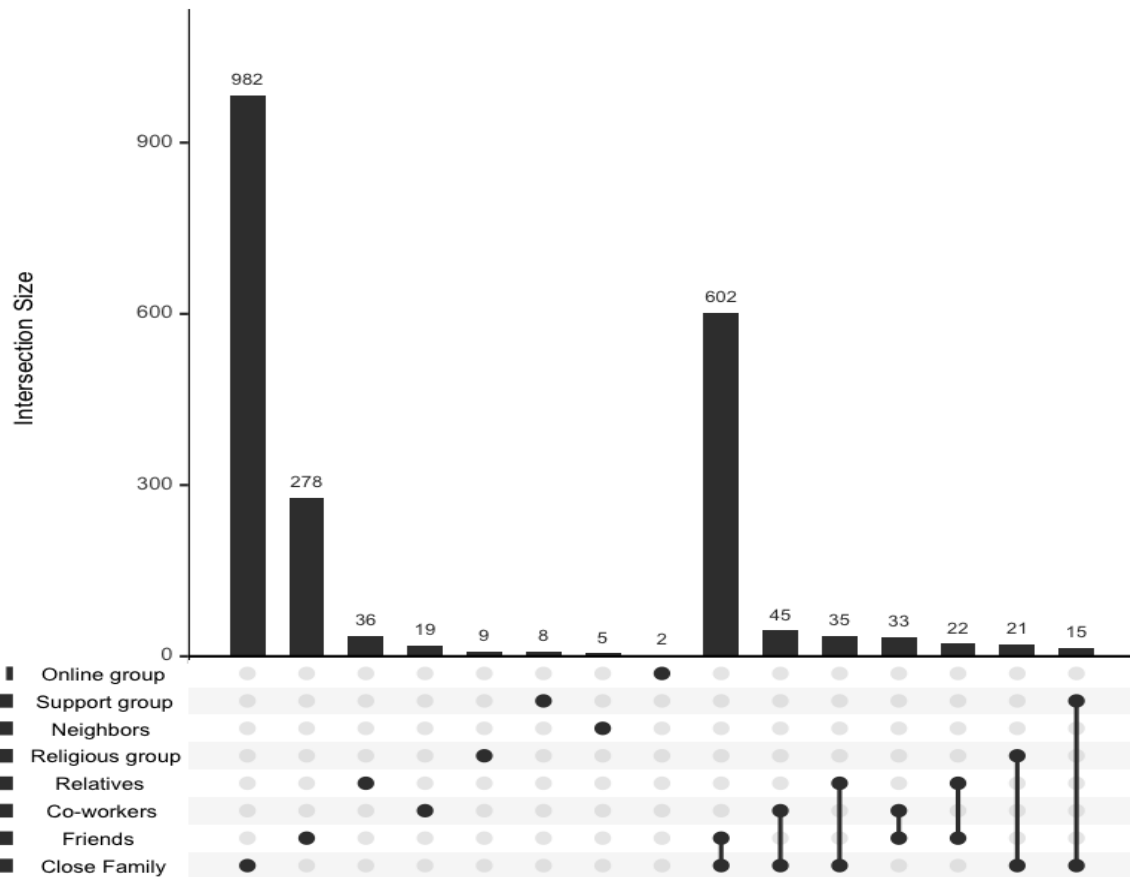
- Completed FU1
- Selected event exposure (“negative”)
- Non-missing on key variables

Support from Professional Sources (FU1)



Among 1,130
(22.2%)
reporting yes

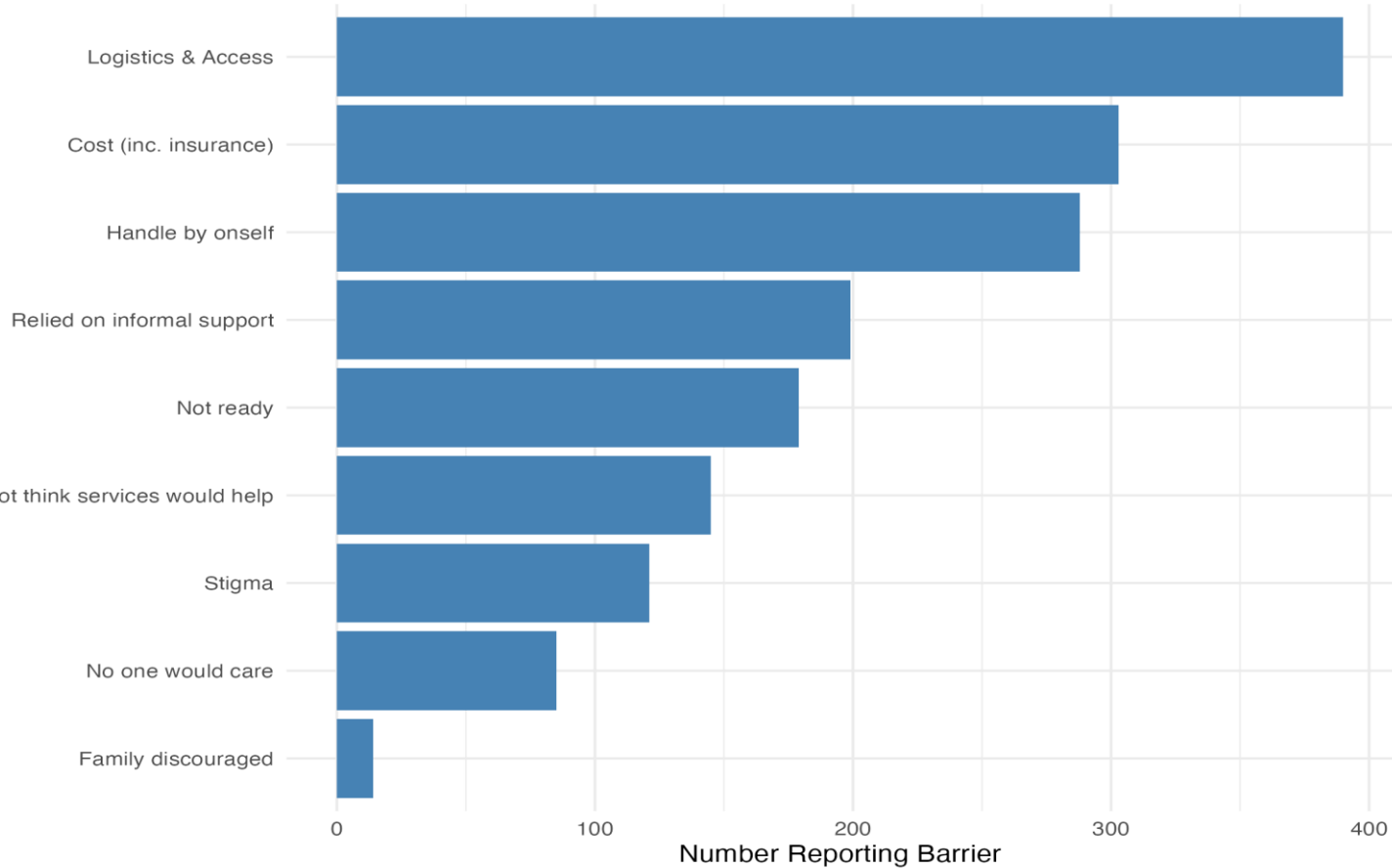
Support from Non-Professional Sources (FU1)



Among 2,505
(49.2%)
reporting yes

Unmet MH service needs (Baseline)

Unmet Need Barriers



Past-12 months,
Among 513
(11.2%)
reporting unmet
needs

Mental health after exposure

Outcome: PHQ-4 following exposure

Adjusted for demographic, insurance, and smoking status (n=5073)

Model 1 (no added items)

Exposure: $\beta = 0.12$ (SE 0.05)**

Baseline PHQ-4: $\beta = 0.78$ (SE 0.01) ***

$R^2 = 0.646$

Model 2 (+ support + unmet needs)

Exposure: $\beta = 0.07$ (SE 0.05)

Baseline PHQ-4: $\beta = 0.74$ (SE 0.01) ***

Prof support: $\beta = 0.22$ (SE 0.06) ***

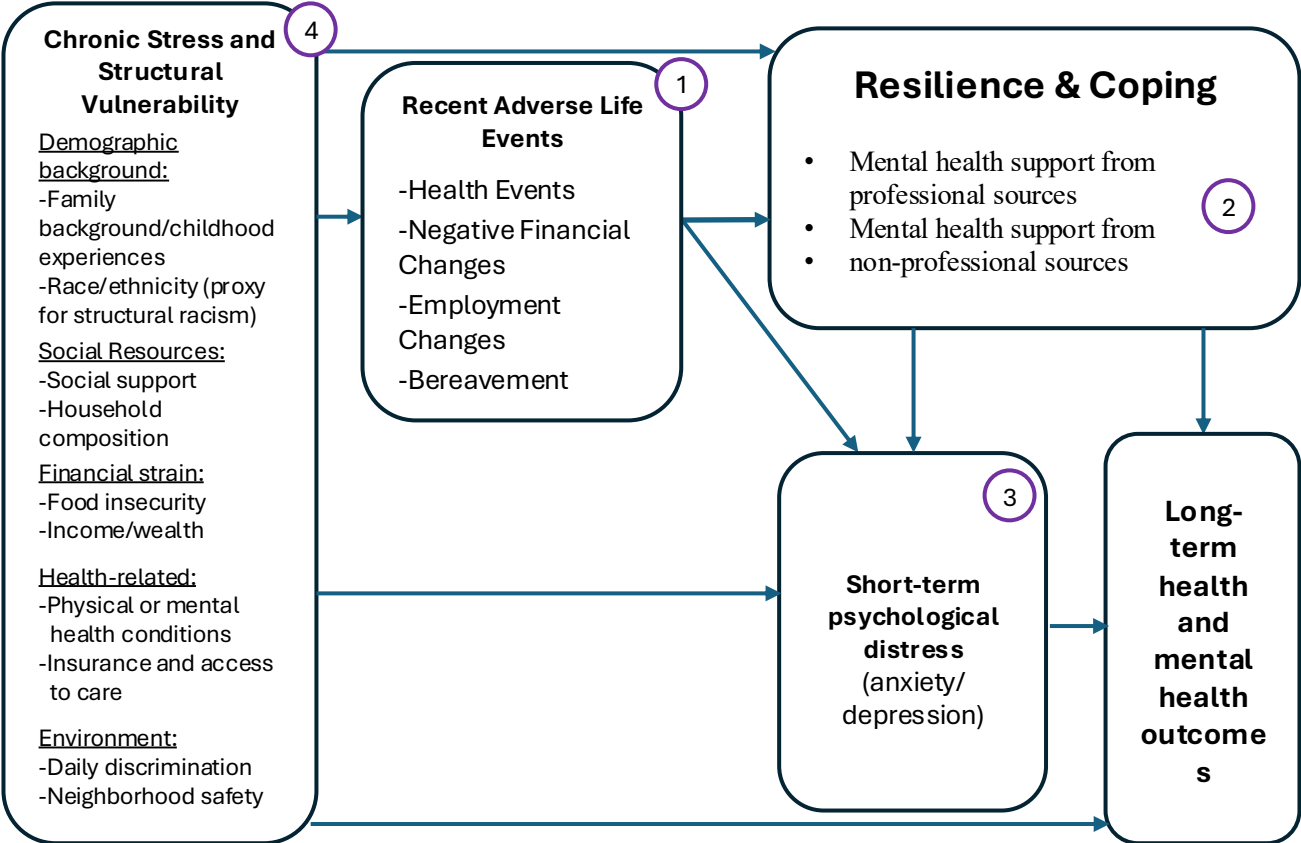
Non-prof support: $\beta = 0.15$ (SE 0.05) ***

Unmet mh needs: $\beta = 0.35$ (SE 0.08) ***

$R^2 = 0.653$

*** 0.001 ** 0.01

Limitations



1. Life events: Lack of event severity assessment
2. Mental health support: Weakness in comprehensive assessments & subject to individual attribution
3. Mental health: self-reported, ultra-short screening measurements
4. Structural vulnerability: lack of consistent operationalized methods; missing data

Take Aways

- Prevention angle – using data from a general, nationally representative sample is important
- Logistics and costs are among the most reported reasons for unmet mental health service needs
- One area for at-risk identification – engaged in professional support & reporting unmet needs

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Thank you !

Lingzi.luo@nyu.edu

Data

