

Program Evaluation of Mississippi's CAST Initiative

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I ILLINOIS

CFRC | Children & Family Research Center

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

Child Advocacy Studies Training (CAST)

- National movement to improve the education of undergraduates and graduate students on child maltreatment
- Courses give young people the grounding needed to work in child protection and other children's services
- Some schools have...
 - CAST certificate programs - multiple courses
 - CAST minor programs – multiple courses and a capstone project
- Mississippi is pioneering the first statewide CAST initiative
 - Implemented CAST in more than a score of colleges and universities
 - Includes 2 year schools, 4 year schools, and graduate schools



Program Evaluation of Mississippi's CAST Initiative

- Two year study of implementation and outcomes: 2019-2021
- Research team from the University of Illinois, supported by Children's Advocacy Centers[™] of Mississippi
- Evaluation questions
 - How has CAST been implemented?
 - What are the outcomes of CAST for students?

Program Evaluation Components

Implementation Evaluation

- Interviews with CAST program directors and instructors and with CAST-trained faculty in non-CAST schools.
- Interviews completed January 2020.

Outcome Evaluation (see details in next slides)

Project Forecast Sub-Study

- Project FORECAST is a program at the University of Missouri - St. Louis' Children's Advocacy Services of Greater St. Louis (CASGSL) and the University of Illinois at Springfield, funded by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.
- A large subsample of the overall evaluation sample consists of CAST students from Mississippi.

CAST Graduate Pilot Interview Sub-study

- We interviewed 6 CAST students who had graduated or were in their last semester between October 2020 and May 2021.
- Questions gathered in-depth information about their experience of CAST.

CAST student outcome survey

- The survey was administered in the following semesters: Autumn 2019-2020 (post-survey only), Spring 2019-2020 (pre- and post-survey), Summer 2019-2020 (pre- and post-survey), Autumn 2020-2021 (pre- and post-survey), Spring 2020-2021 (pre- and post-survey).
- Students were offered a \$25 electronic Amazon ecode for participating in the survey.
- Non-CAST students were students in similar classes (e.g., social work, psychology) in non-CAST schools (who aspired to implement CAST)
- 11 CAST schools and 2 non-CAST schools: one school began to implement the CAST course in the middle of evaluation.
- Sample: total 750 responses (CAST=480 and non-CAST=260); nonduplicated 618 participants (CAST=375 and non-CAST=243); 109 repeated participants (CAST=101 and non-CAST=8).

How did program directors and
instructors view CAST program?

University and college administrations provided support and initiative

The AVPAA [Associate Vice Provost for Academic Affairs]... was the one who brought Victor Vieth [a national CAST leader] here.

The president of the university asked me to spearhead the efforts, and so that's what I've been doing since that time... They're very supportive.

Our associate dean of academics... had a heart for it as well. And so she was very, very interested, and actually immediately said anything that we needed to do to try to get it.

Our administration...encouraged us to attend the first training to begin with.

Multiple university departments are involved in implementing CAST

- Involvement of multiple departments makes CAST multidisciplinary and added expertise in relevant topics.
- Public policy, forensics, and alcohol and drug use were specific areas of expertise from other departments that were mentioned as adding value to CAST.
- [The different academic departments] *really are very welcoming to everything, and they all find it very interesting.*
- Some academic departments held back.

Instructors described a positive impact on students

I've been kind of overwhelmed at the interest in it...this is something that they're going to be able to look back on and say that there was something that they really were able to use out of this class.

[some] students...have taken the courses because they seemed interesting, or they'd heard positive things about them, and really weren't planning on going into work related to child advocacy and preventing child maltreatment, and [it] just really ignited a passion in them, and that is now...what they're pursuing.

whenever the first [student] takes it for the year, they come back so excited about it and tell all of their friends how it was the greatest thing that they've done.

Faculty plan to expand CAST...

Within academic departments

Going forward in terms of the proposal to make it a certificate, ...we really want to go in.

Across academic departments

we're trying to...take it beyond the walls of the medical school...we have a college of health sciences, which includes a nursing school, a pharmacy school, a physical therapy school, health information management...a huge school of education ...a huge psychology program...we've been talking about opportunities...[to] involve some of them in what we're doing...we've also reached out to the school of public health [at the university across the street].

Faculty plan to expand CAST...

Into the community

We really have an interest in being able to provide this training for existing professionals...that aren't going to have the time or the resources...to come back to school to finish a certificate, but who would really benefit from this content...we would love...to put together a certificate through extension that would be targeting existing professionals.

Into non-CAST schools [interviews with non-CAST faculty]

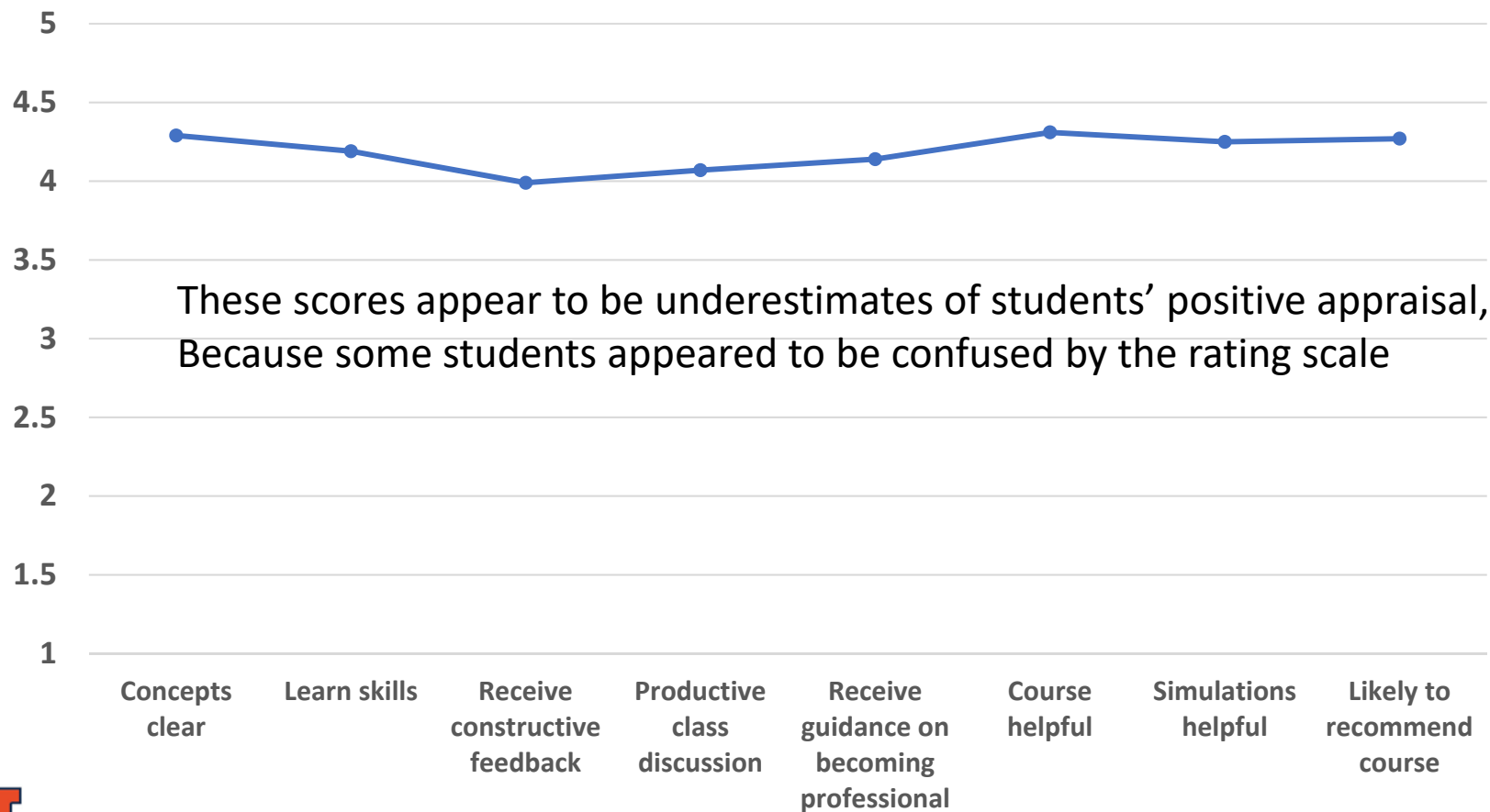
We've got to get it approved by our academic council..., but we're in the works of getting it all lined up...the two courses that are already being offered here will...have CAST content incorporated into them and we're gonna call them CAST courses for a certificate...the three CAST courses that we're gonna offer will be for a certificate that will only be available in the summer.

What did CAST students think
about their course?



CAST Students Rated their Courses Highly

Average Student Rating of their CAST Course
(5 = maximum positive score)



Students described their positive experience of CAST in text questions

- *This course shows the truth about child abuse and neglect without sugarcoating anything. This makes it a more eye-opening experience that helps me understand the importance of taking a course like this.*
- *This course opened my eyes to how child advocacy is all around me and how my day-to-day actions affect it.*
- *The simulations help students get the full picture; brings about awareness of child abuse; focuses on real life situations that happen every day.*

CAST can be emotionally demanding but rewarding

It's an emotional rollercoaster. But it was one of the best classes I have ever taken in my college career.

Don't lose your faith in people. Going through the material, it can be a little disheartening to realize this stuff really happens and how much falls through the cracks. But there are still good people and children are resilient.

Do not hesitate to take this class, but be prepared for the intensity of the subject material. Take it seriously, and share the knowledge you gain with family and friends who might not have an opportunity to take such a class.

It will be hard sometimes, and a lot of the things we talk about are harder to hear, but building a good relationship with your peers and your instructor will help you all be able to share the weight of this topic...

Hearing that others are feeling the same things I was made it easier to take in the experience at its fullest.



Findings from CAST graduate interviews

CAST increased their motivation to work with children and families

It [CAST] definitely grew my interests and actually wanting to be more hands on with kids, specifically ones who have experienced trauma.

CAST has had an impact on their career goals

before the CAST program I was [in] legal studies. I wanna be a lawyer, I wanna be a lawyer. Now I wanna be in social work, I wanna be a guardian ad litem.

Instructors have personal qualities and skills that are helpful to CAST students

The teacher that I have had [...] She is very honest when she teaches. But, you can also tell she cares about what she is teaching.

Findings from CAST graduate interviews

Instructors help students with the emotional demands of CAST

She [the faculty] lets us know that if anything we are going over is difficult or if anything is upsetting, we are allowed to have a break and leave the classroom if we need to. So I would say it is a very comfortable atmosphere because we know it's important but we can take a "breather" if we need to.

CAST gave them new perspectives on families

I always go back to the 12 core concepts [regarding trauma] ...Because, like for me, it's really easy to say "Why didn't that child say something happened to him?" or "Why can't that parent just get their life together and take care of their kids?" Like the 12 core concepts goes into like the struggles that maybe that parent is facing or like the brain development that's going on with the child [...] It gave me a whole lot of different perspectives to look into rather than my initial thought.

Findings from CAST graduate interviews

CAST has helped them in their work with families

I didn't go into work very like shocked about the cases that I heard because we did, um, case activities with different types of abuse [...] For the most part, I didn't go away completely blindsided by hearing about these different types of abuse .

Well, since I work with families [...] CAST [...] gave me a lot of different perspectives to look at—like does this parent have a job, do they have mental health issues—different stuff like that. So it's allowed me to sit down and like think about all the perspectives that one family is bringing in, so that I can know how to best meet their needs.

CAST has helped them deal with personal trauma

Did CAST students have better
outcomes than non-CAST students?



Self-Rating on Skills

I know how to identify possible instances of child maltreatment

I know my own role in responding to child maltreatment

I am able to advocate for children

I know how to respond to survivors of child maltreatment

I have an understanding of global child advocacy issues

I understand the history of child maltreatment and child advocacy in the United States

I understand the interpersonal dynamics of violence and abuse

I understand the short-term impact of child maltreatment

I understand the long-term impact of child maltreatment

I understand factors that help maltreated children be resilient

I understand the process of disclosure of child abuse

I understand how a multidisciplinary team responds to child maltreatment

I understand what kind of evidence can corroborate a true disclosure of child maltreatment

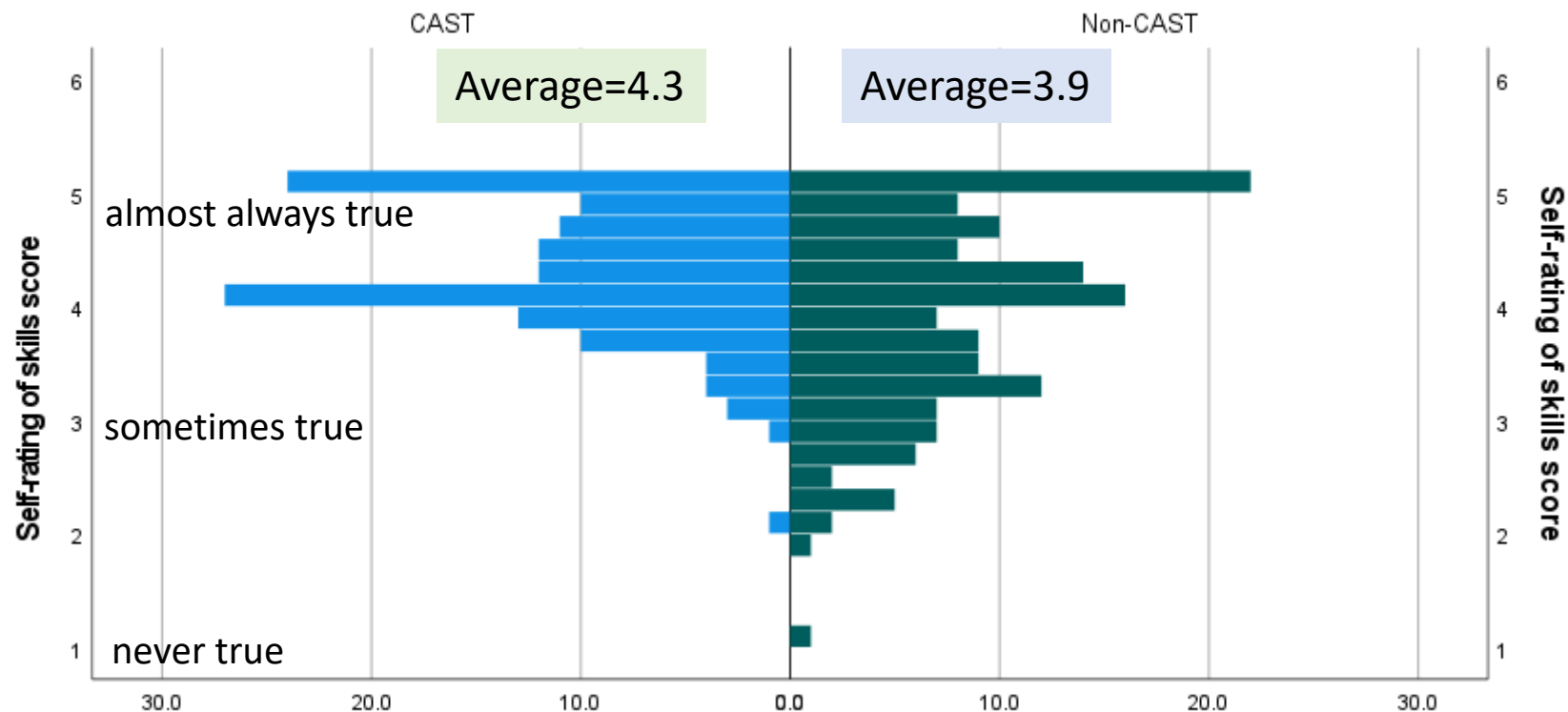
I understand how to work with non-offending caregivers of the child

I understand cultural and developmental factors affecting work related to child maltreatment



CAST students rated themselves significantly higher on skills related to child maltreatment

Comparison of CAST and Non-CAST Self-Rating of Skills Related to Child Maltreatment



Average score on 15 questions, such as
“I know how to identify possible instances of child maltreatment”

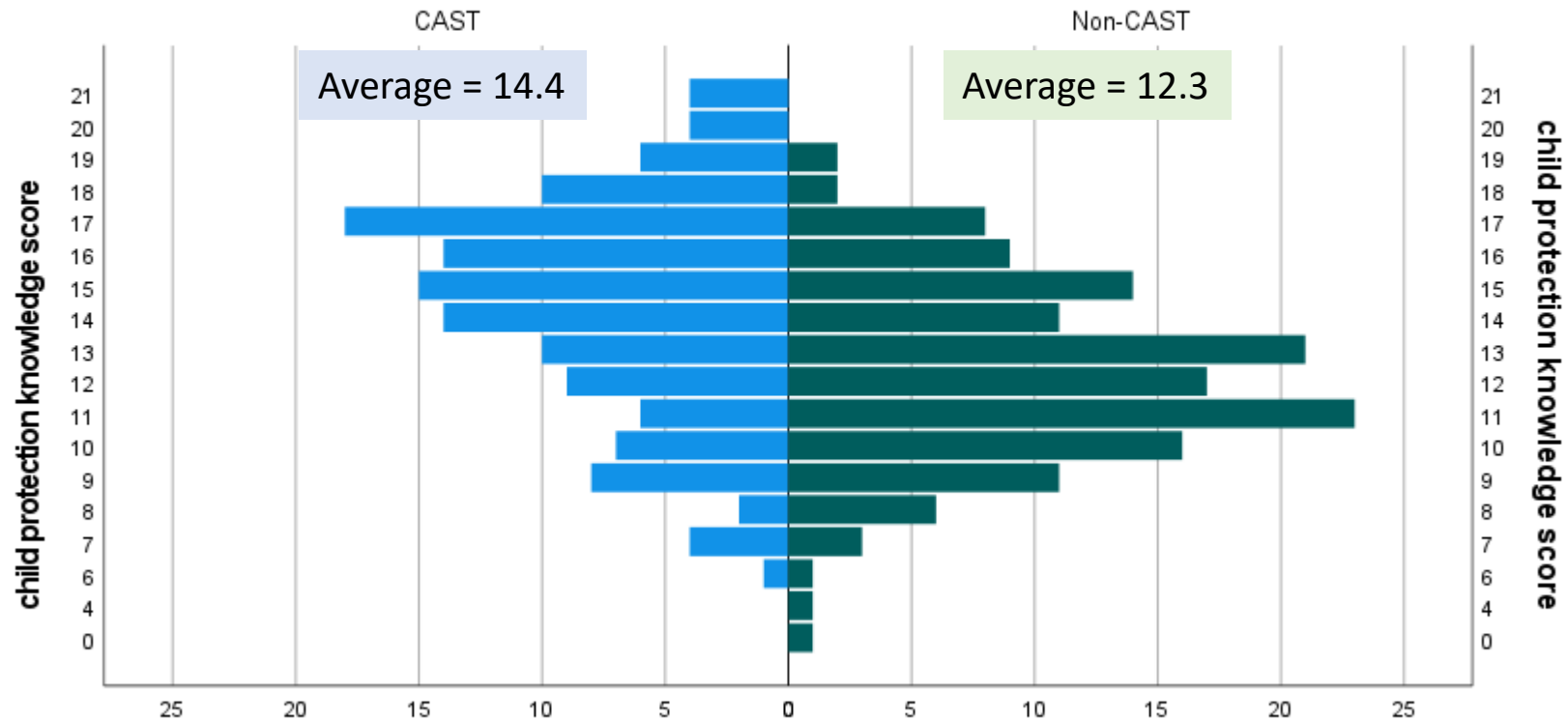
Child Protection Knowledge

Survey included child protection outcome measure assessing students' knowledge on the following topics:

- Out-of-home placement and foster care
- Short-term effects of child maltreatment
- Long-term effects of child maltreatment
- Perpetrators of child maltreatment
- Medical evidence of child sexual abuse
- Commercial sexual exploitation of children
- Children's disclosure of abuse
- Mandated reporting of child maltreatment
- Multidisciplinary teams and Children's Advocacy Centers
- Child protective service investigations

CAST students had significantly higher child protection knowledge scores

Comparison of CAST and Non-CAST Students on Child Protection Knowledge Score



Try some of the child protection
quiz questions yourself!



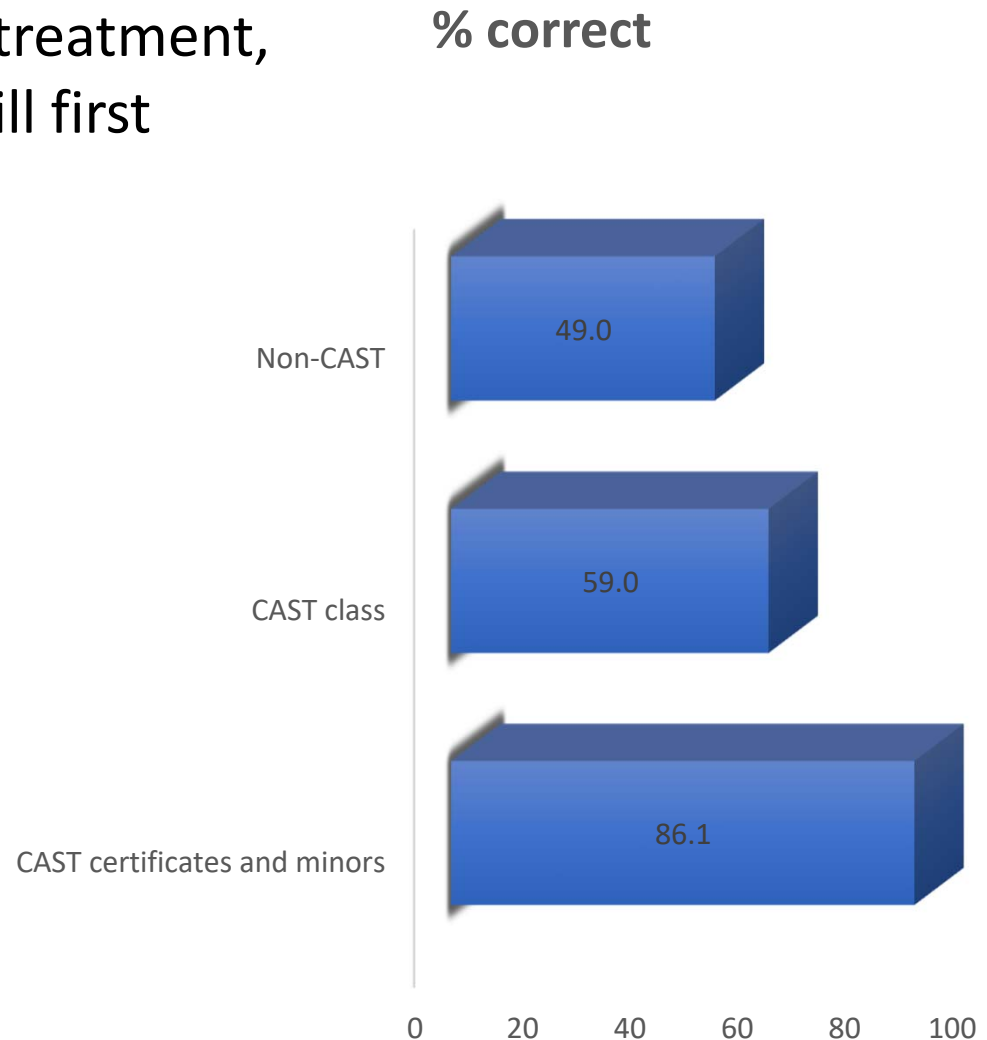
Question 1: If a child is removed from the home due to child maltreatment, child protective services will first attempt to place the child

- In a previously determined safe house
- In a monitored CPS facility
- With family members
- Either a or b



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Question 16: The main job of a Children's Advocacy Center is...

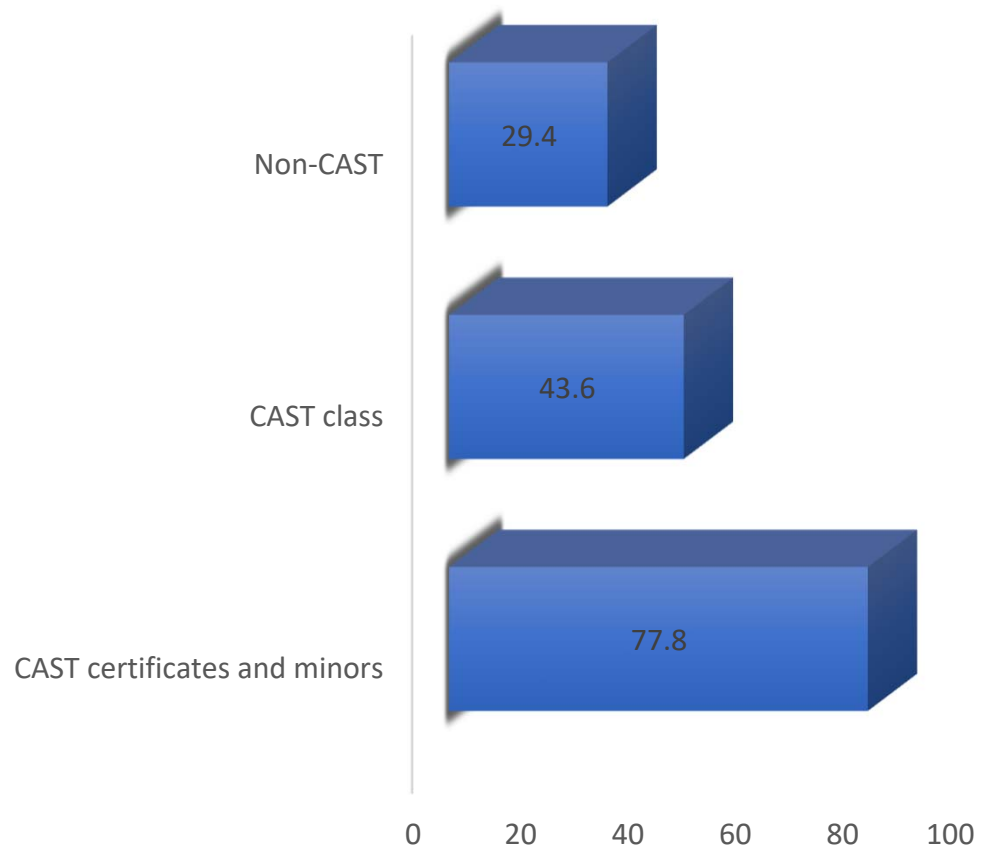
- To support and coordinate investigation and services in response to allegations of abuse
- To lobby for laws and government funds to help respond to and prevent child abuse and neglect
- To provide volunteers to support and advocate for children in foster care in youth court hearings and other situations
- To provide free or low-cost lawyers for children when their families cannot afford them.



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% correct



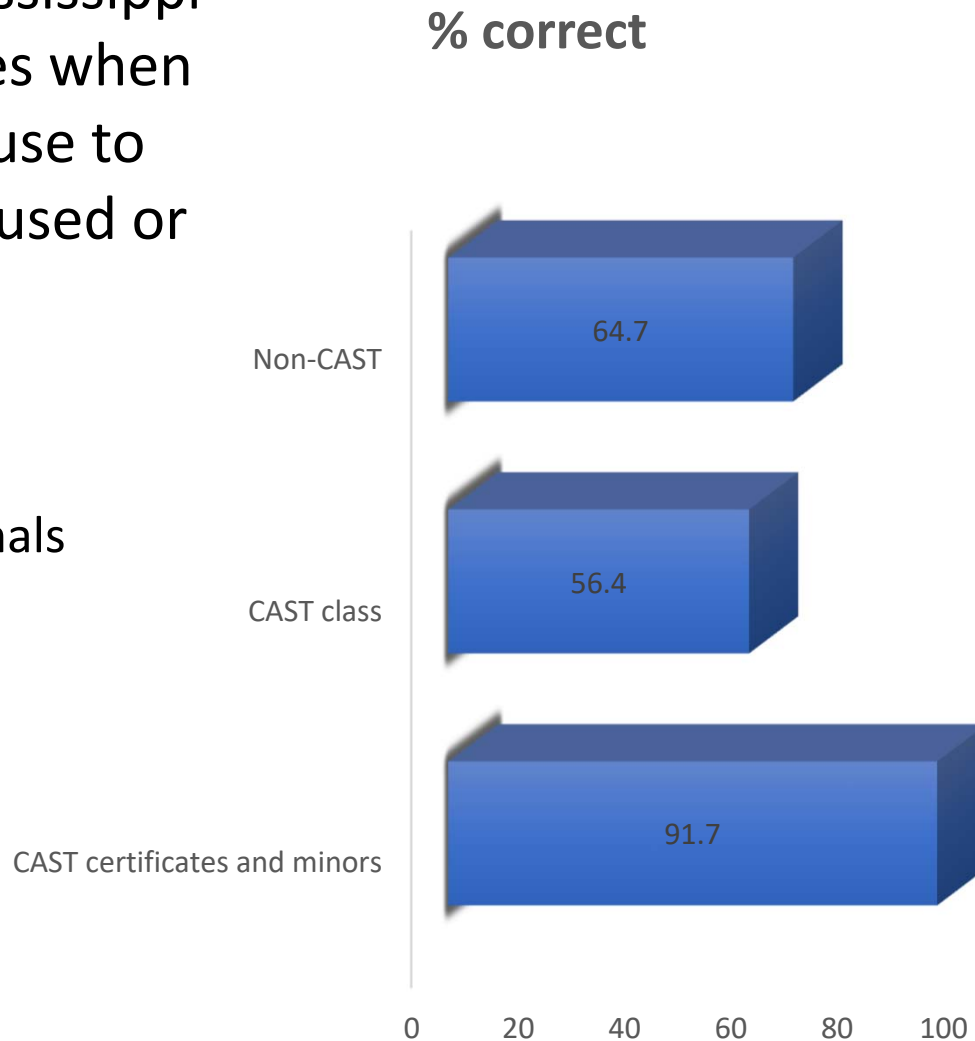
Question 13: Who in Mississippi must report to authorities when they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is abused or neglected?

- a) Medical, school and law enforcement
- b) A wide range of professionals who have professional contact with children
- c) Medical, school, law enforcement and mental health professionals
- d) Everyone



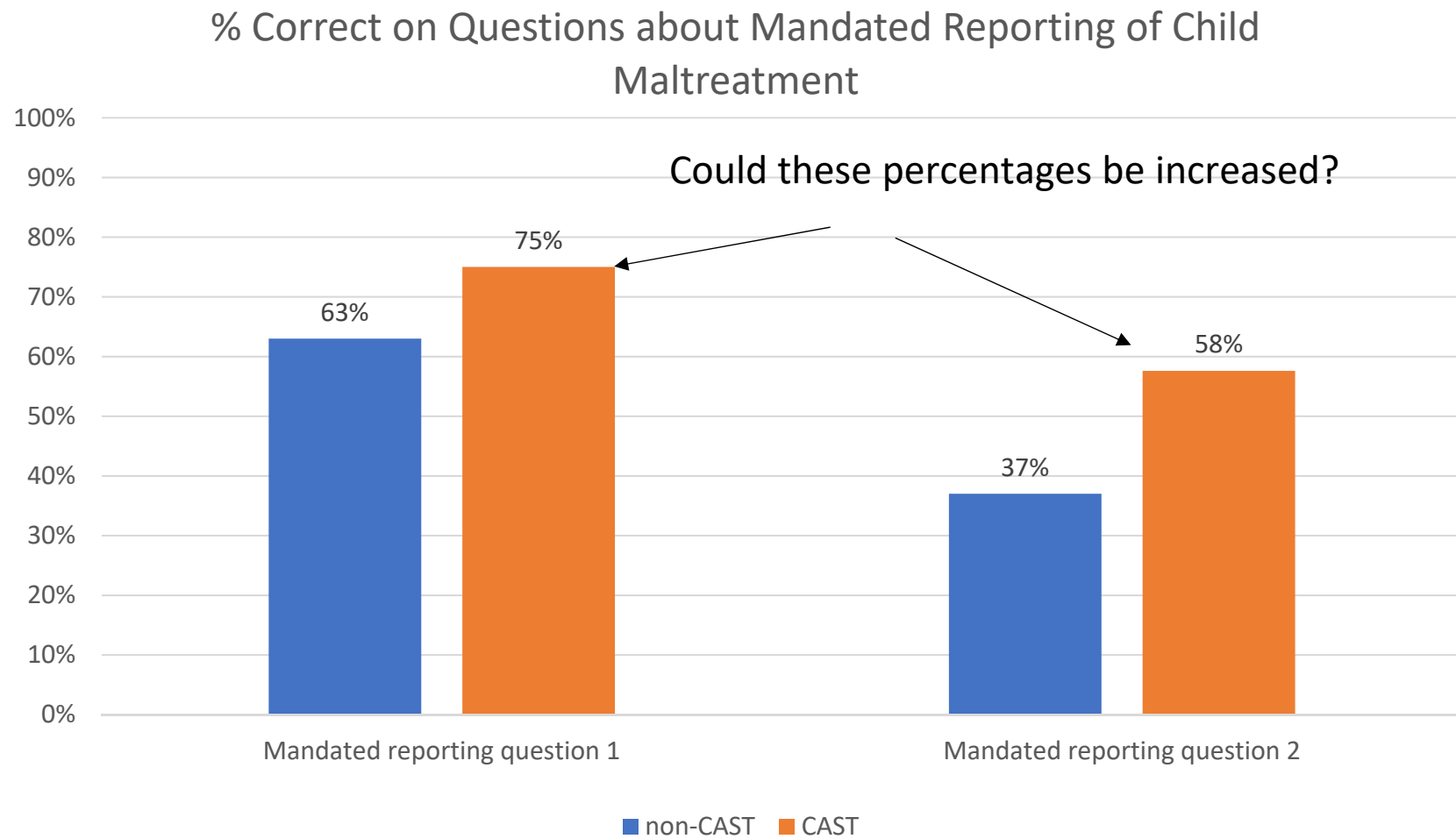
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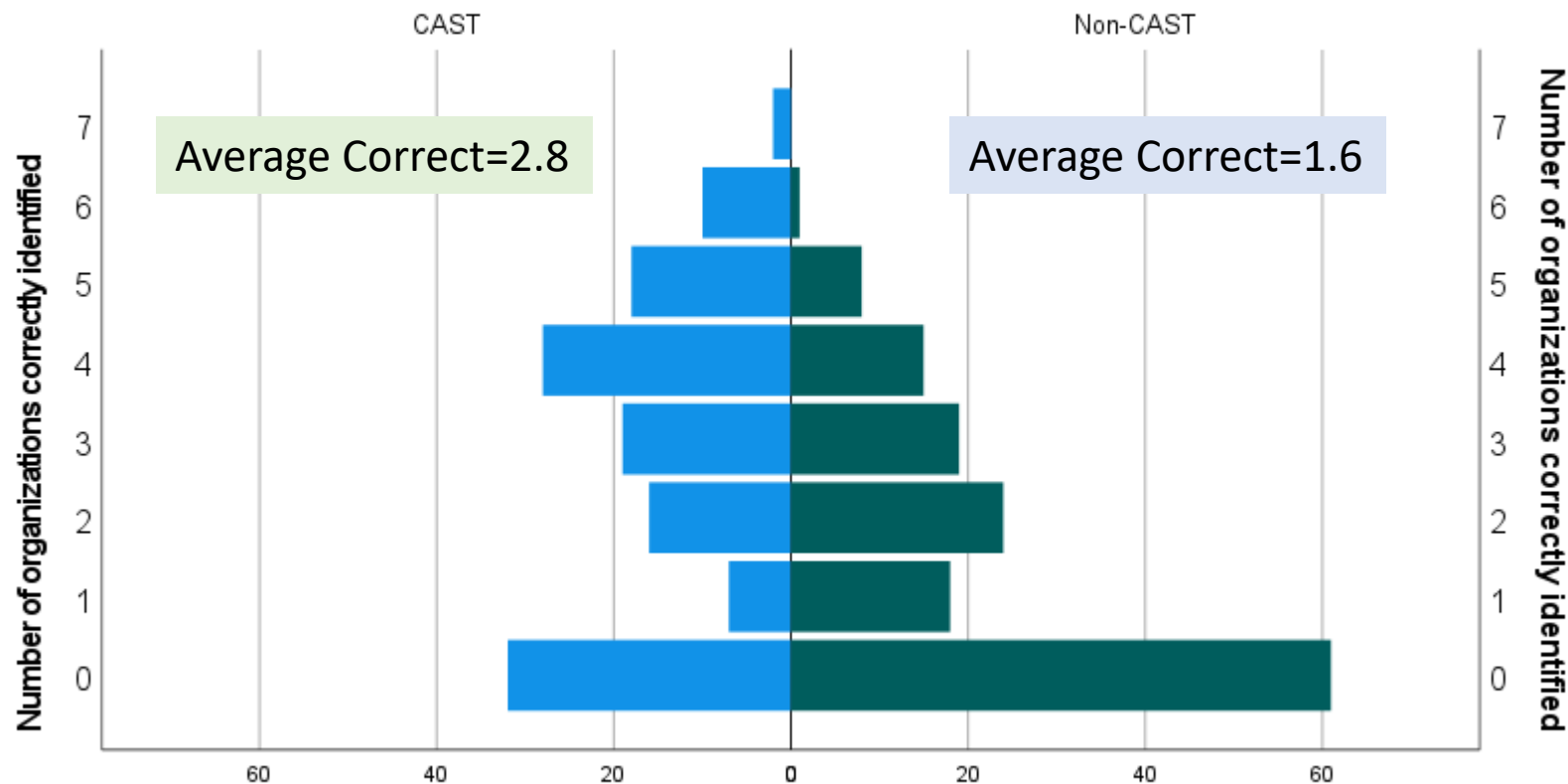
Is there room for improvement on child protection knowledge for CAST students?

An Example:



CAST students knew more of the organizations likely to be involved in a child sexual abuse investigation (7 possible correct answers)

Comparison of CAST and Non-CAST Students on Number of Organizations Correctly identified

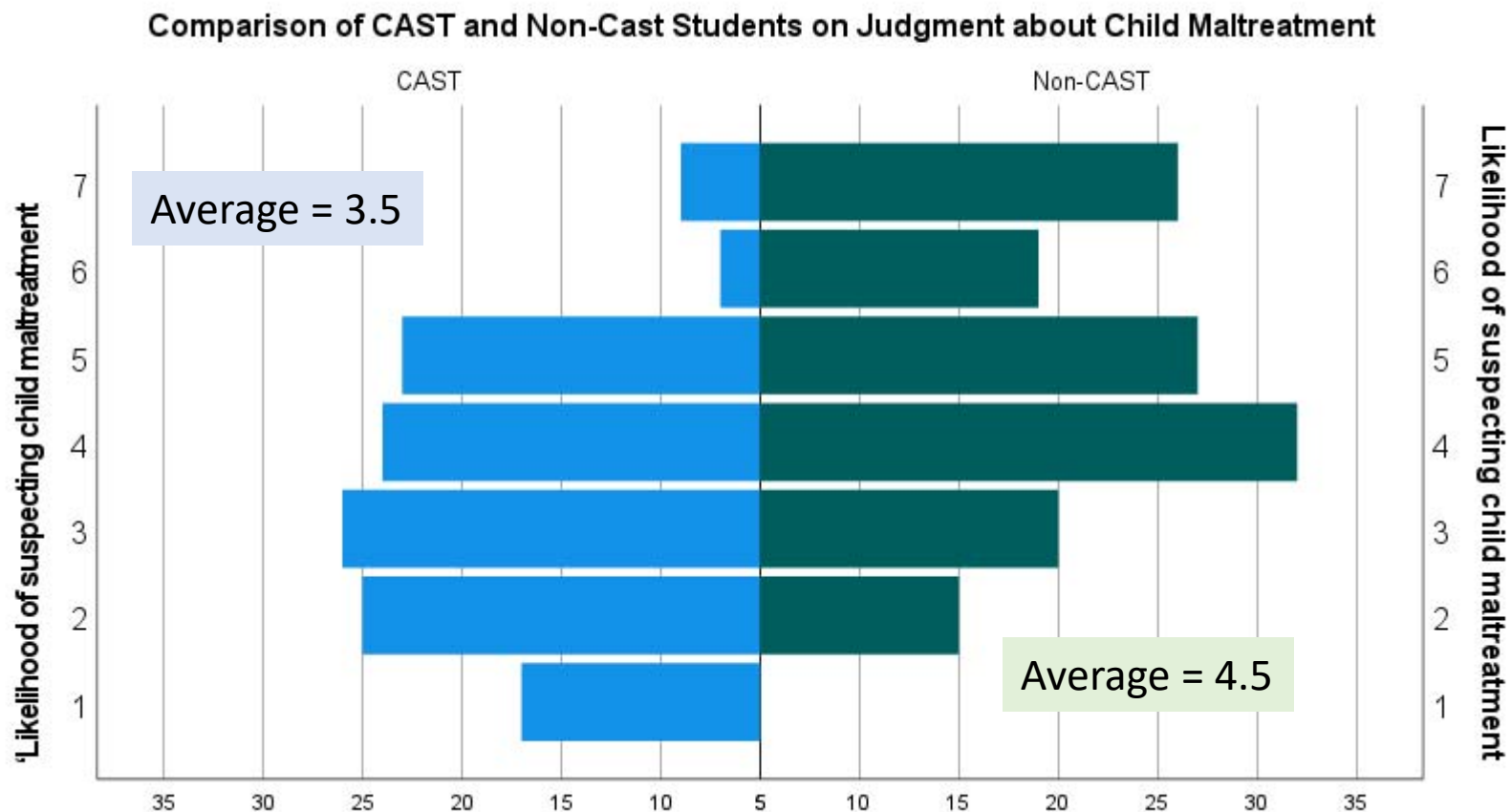


CAST students were significantly less likely to judge family behavior as maltreatment when there might be a better explanation

Shaunte is a 13-year-old female. You notice multiple scratches on her shoulder. You inquire about the scratches on her arm. She reports she was having an argument with her mother, and as she turned to walk out of the room, her mother grabbed her by the shoulder and “accidentally” scratched her. Her mother apologetically recounted the same story.

From the information provided, how likely are you to suspect child maltreatment?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

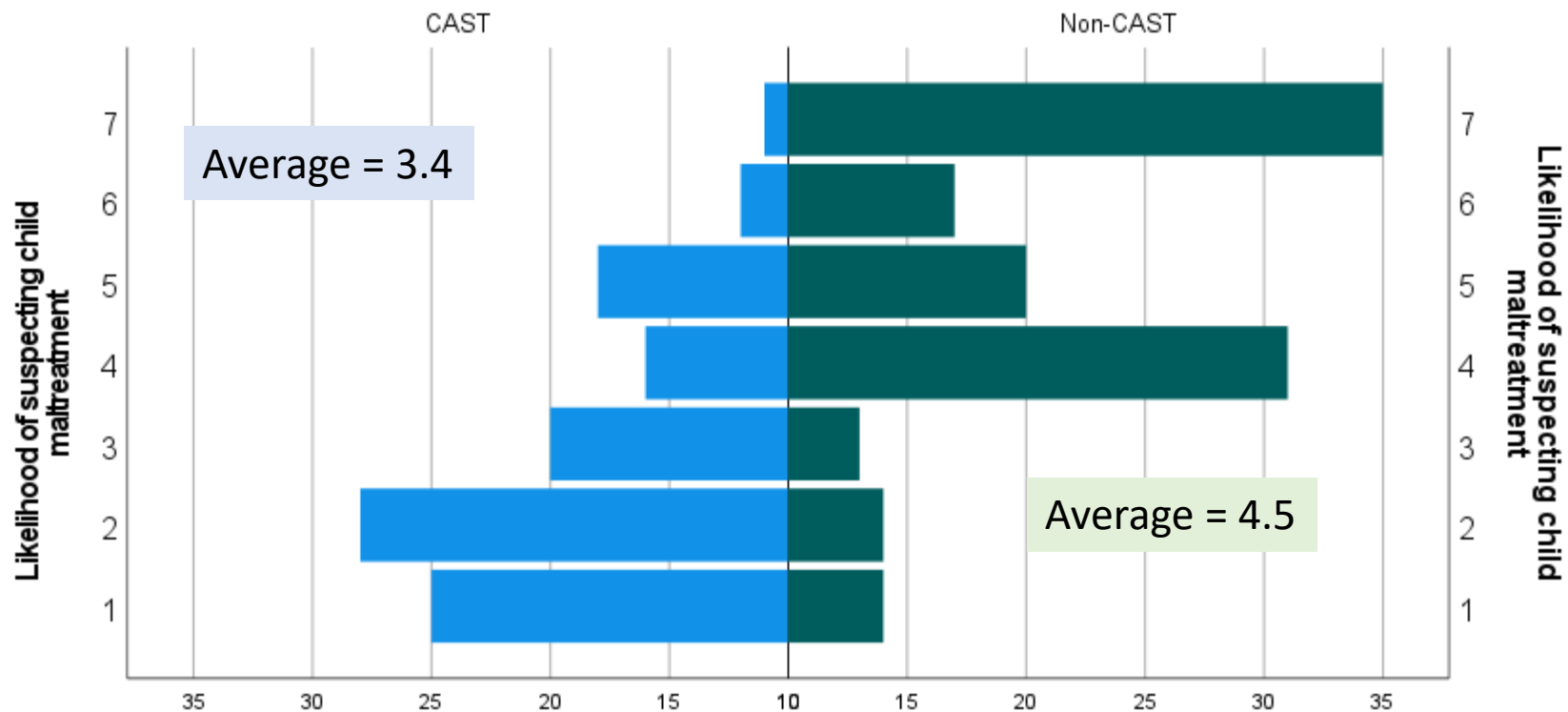


A toddler you know comes from a culture in which parents often swaddle young children. You learn that the toddler was wrapped tightly in a blanket so that she could not move. The child was left on the bed in this fashion for 15 minutes

From the information provided, how likely are you to suspect child maltreatment?

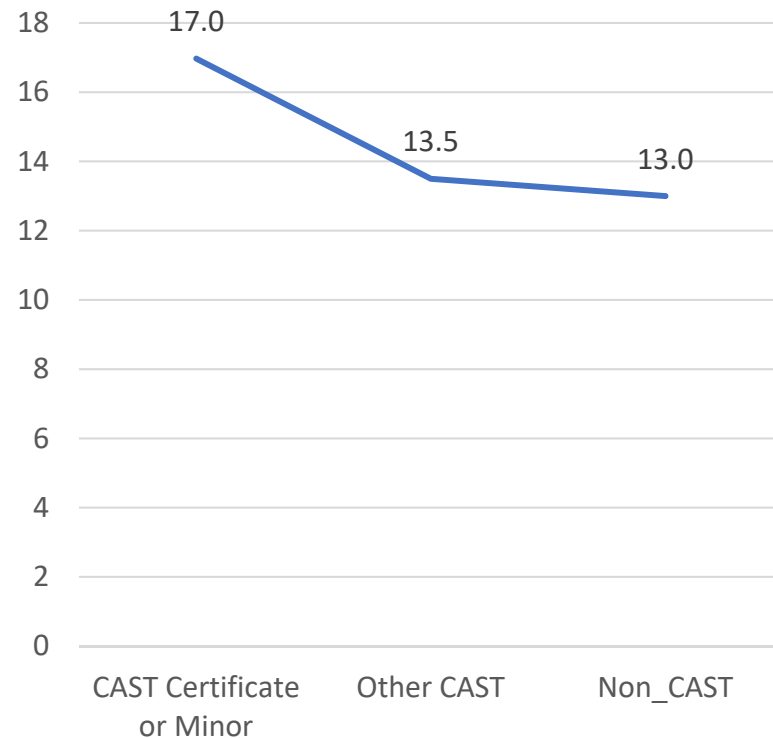
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Comparison of CAST and Non-CAST Students on Judgment about Child Maltreatment

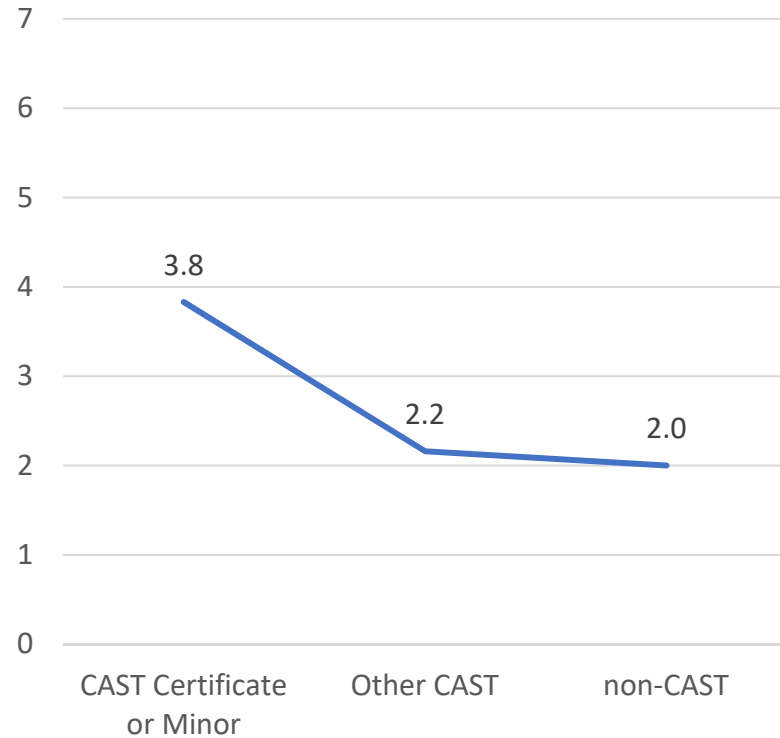


Students in CAST certificate and minor programs had the best outcomes

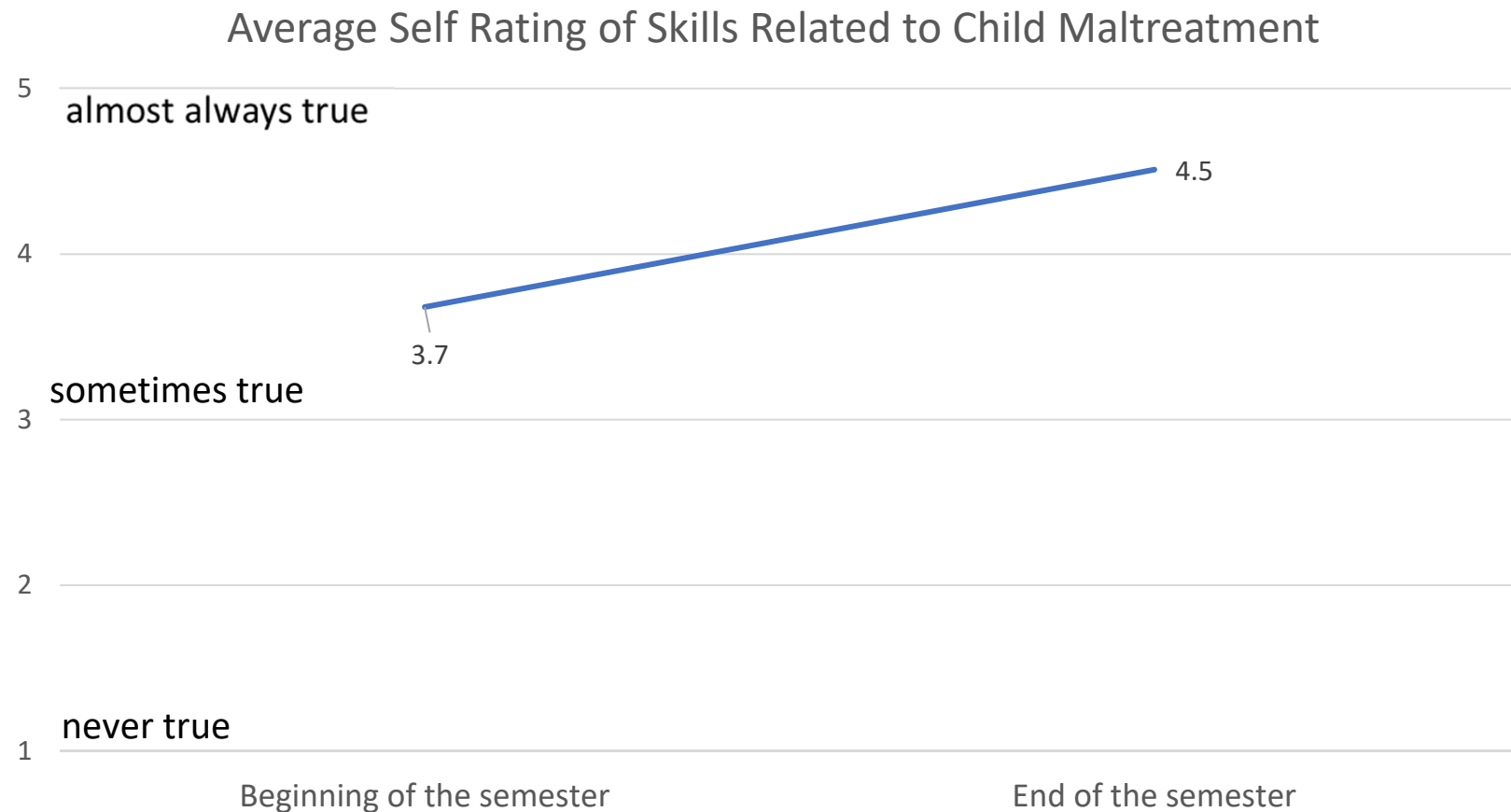
Average Child Protection Knowledge



Average Number of Organizations in a Sexual Abuse Investigation Correctly Identified



CAST certificate/minor students showed noticeable improvement during the semester (despite COVID)

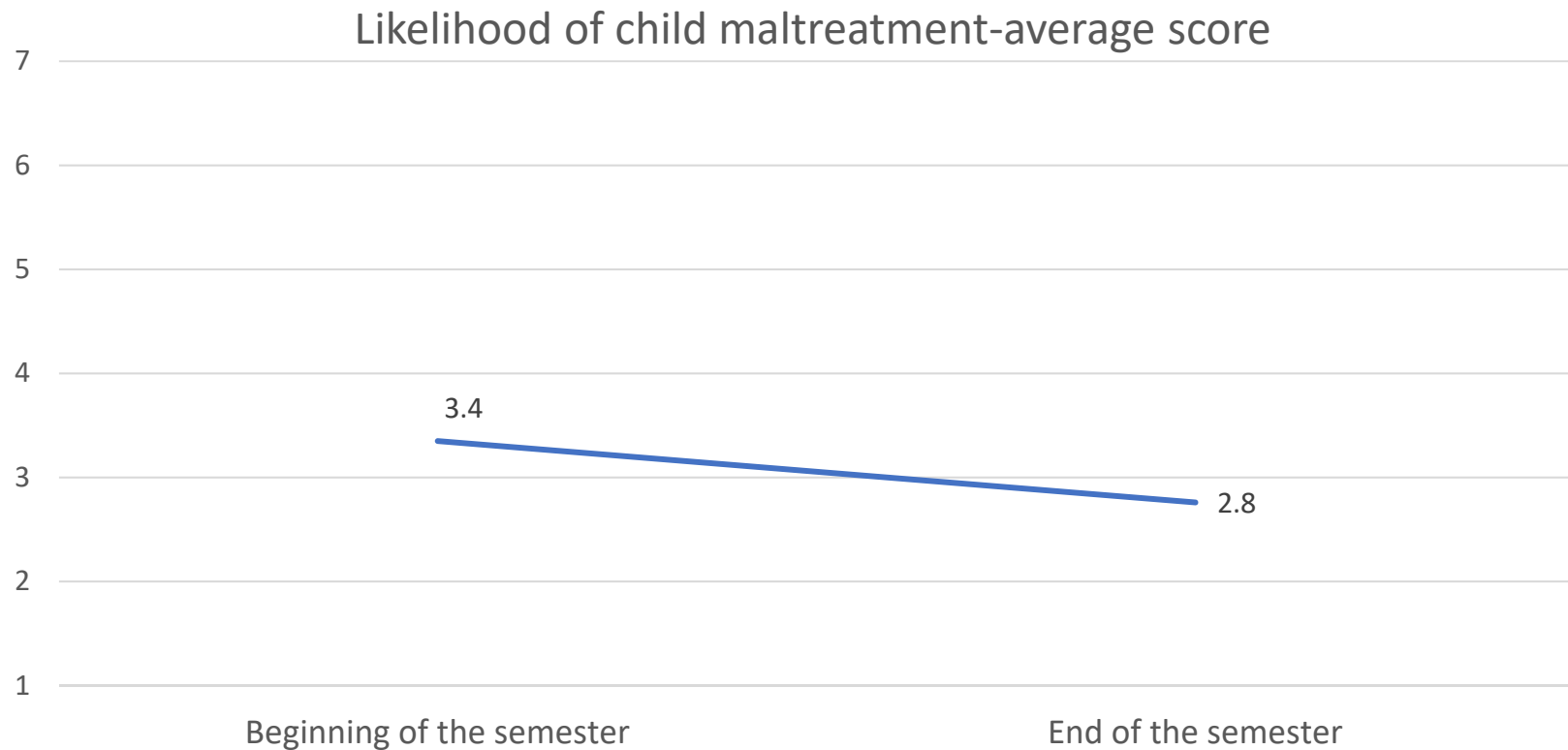


CAST certificate/minor students' judgment improved

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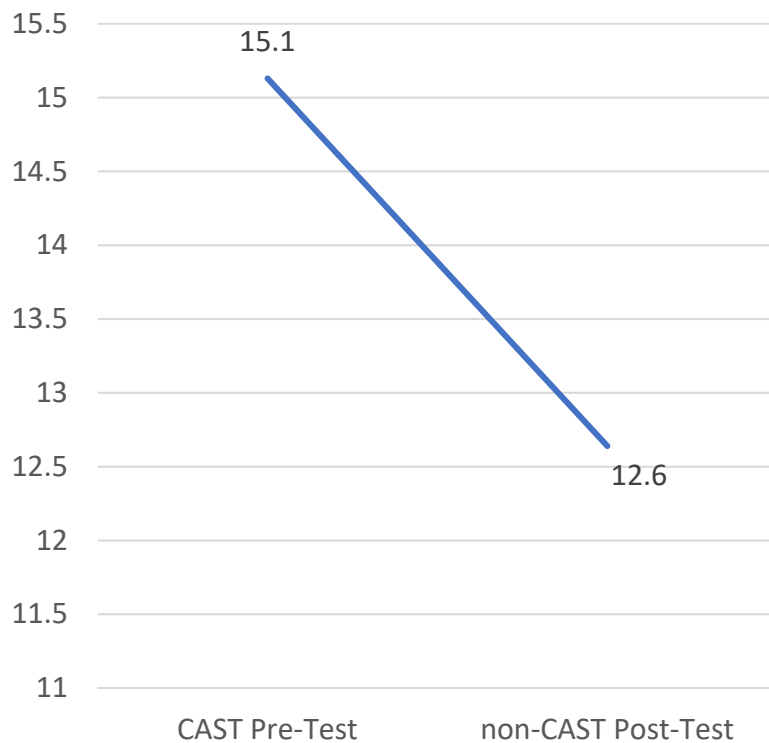
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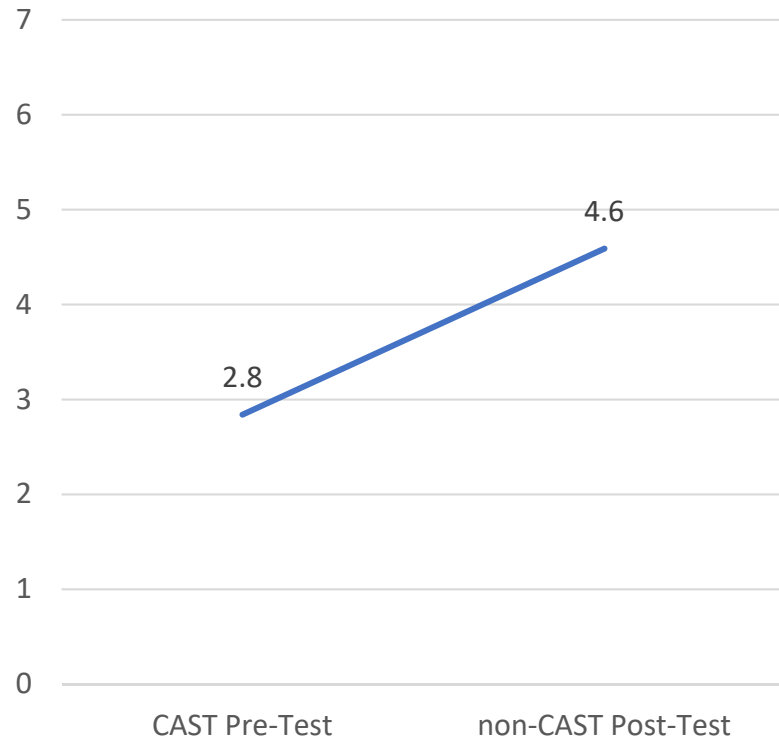


CAST students pre-scores were better than non-CAST post-scores

**Average Child Protection Knowledge
(4 year schools)**



**Vignette asking likelihood of toddler
swaddling being child abuse: 1: least
likely to 7: most likely**



CAST students knew more than non-CAST students even before they took the CAST course. Part of the CAST effect may be to attract students who already know more about child maltreatment than other students.

What Are Mississippi results from
Project FORECAST?

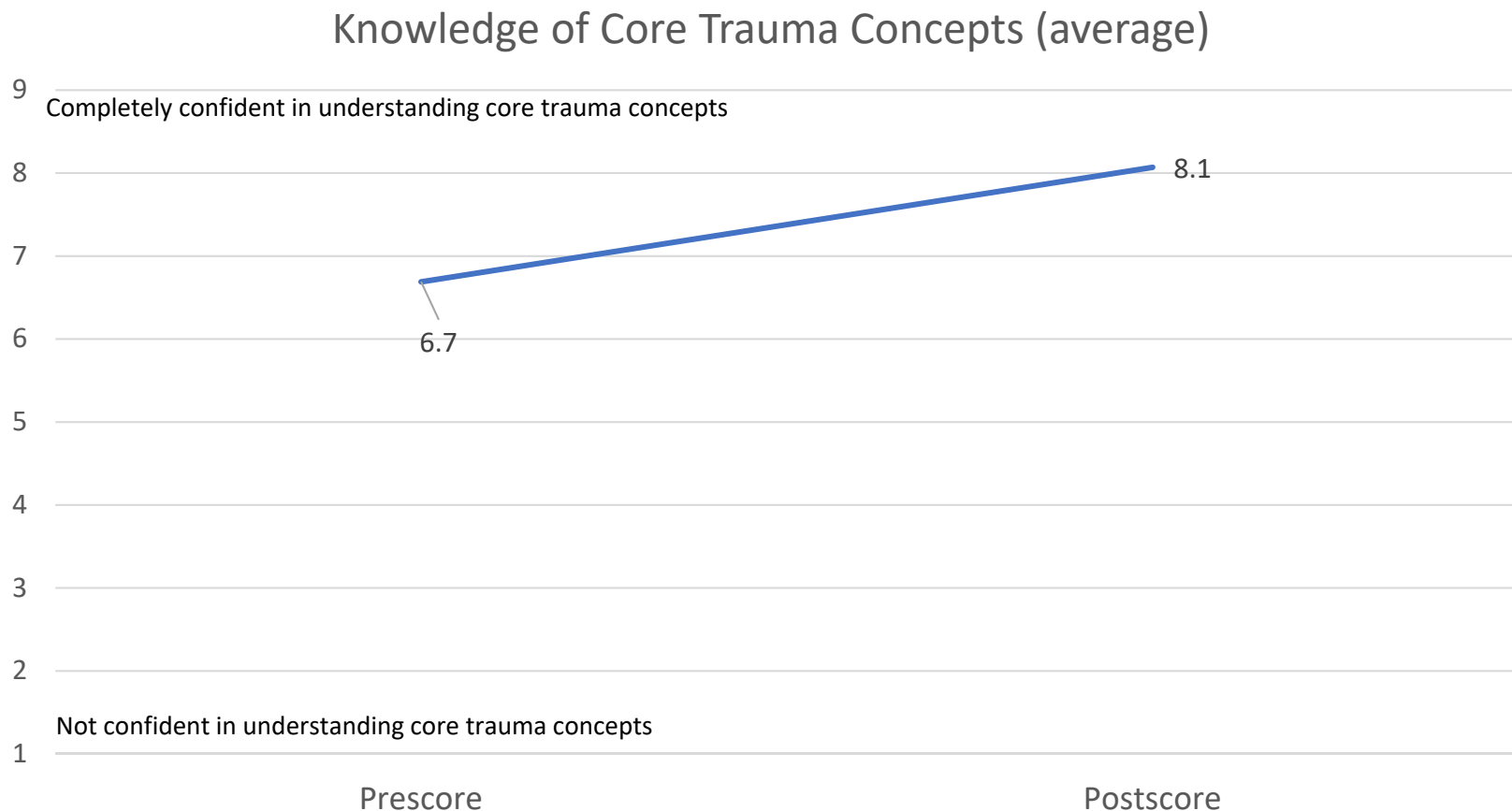


Mississippi results from Project FORECAST

- Project FORECAST implemented simulations in schools across the country
- Mississippi CAST schools were the most frequent participants in Project FORECAST
- Dr. Joel Epstein of the University of Missouri at St. Louis collaborated with us to analyze Project FORECAST data for Mississippi
- Data from 2017 to 2019, all pre-COVID

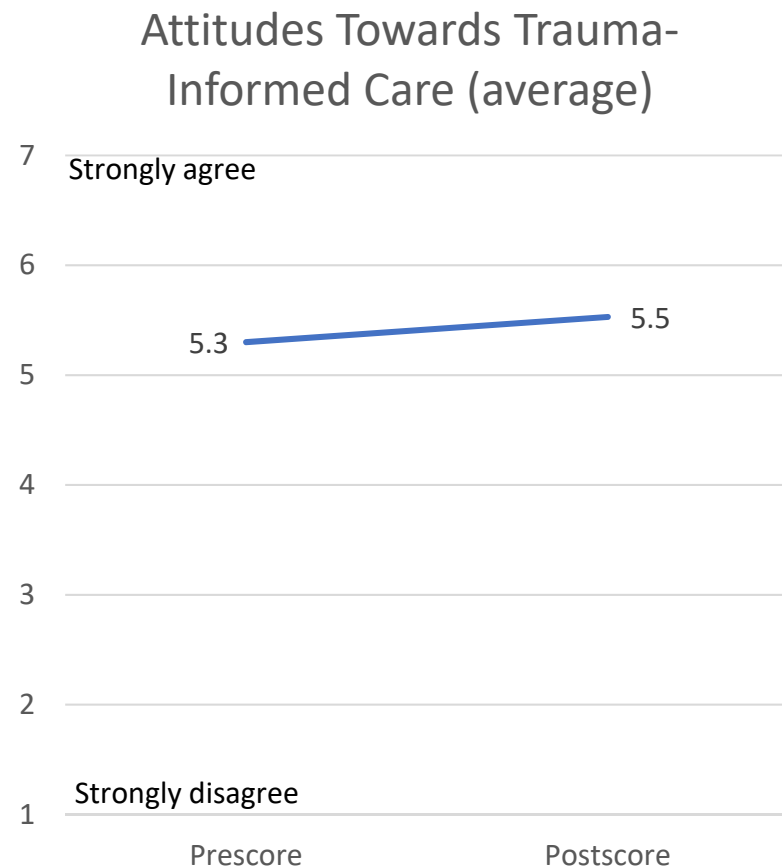
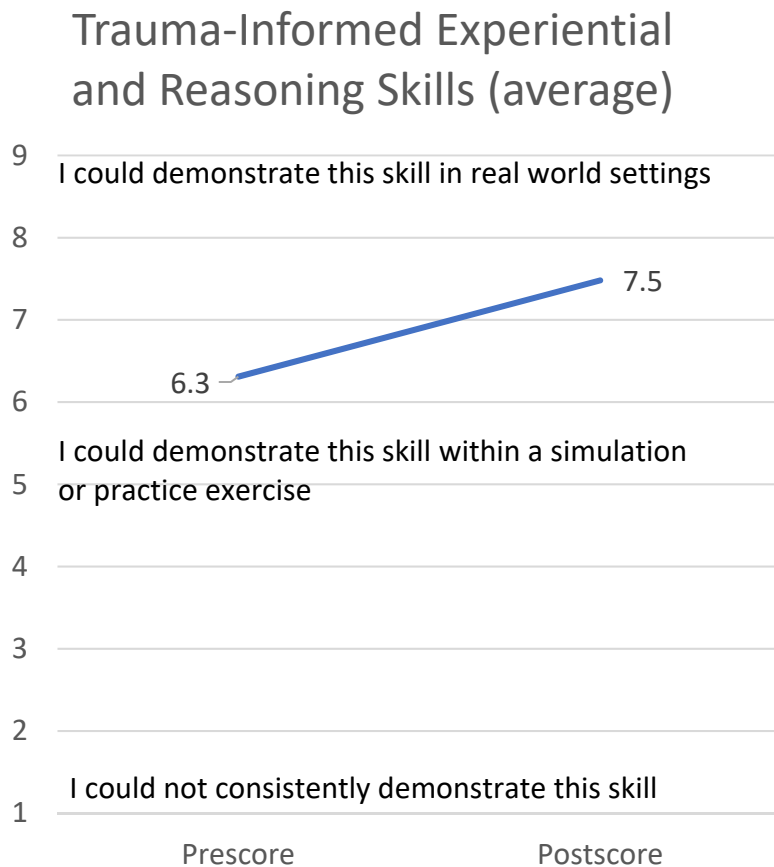
Mississippi students improved their capacity for trauma-informed care after completing Project FORECAST simulations

(from Dr. Joel Epstein)



Mississippi students reported improved capacity for trauma-informed care after completing Project FORECAST simulations (cont.)

(from Dr. Joel Epstein)



Results Support the Value of CAST

- Mississippi CAST students show evidence of having knowledge and skills that could help them be more prepared to function effectively in child-serving careers
- Mississippi CAST initiative is a promising program that deserves to be maintained and expanded
- Positive results in multiple schools of different types, support a broad approach to CAST education that includes both two-year and four-year institutions

Thank you!

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Kim Shackelford, Victor Vieth
- All the faculty from the CAST and non-CAST schools that supported the interviews and the student survey.
- All the students participated in the outcome survey and graduate interviews.



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