



# HIGHER ED SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGERS AND THEIR MENTAL HEALTH

CASE SOCIAL MEDIA AND COMMUNITY  
#CASESMC



A man, Tony Dobies, stands on a rocky cliff edge, arms raised in a celebratory gesture. He is wearing a black t-shirt and grey pants. The background is a vast, dense forest of trees with vibrant autumn foliage in shades of red, orange, and yellow. The sky is overcast with soft, grey clouds. The image has a semi-transparent dark overlay on the right side where the text is placed.

# **Tony Dobies**

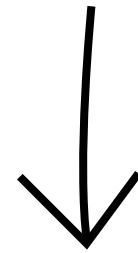
**Senior Director of Marketing  
West Virginia University**

**@DOBIEST**





**This is why I was  
inspired to do a  
research project.**



## Our timeline

### **FEBRUARY 3 (12:13 A.M.)**

Shots fired near campus. No injuries.

### **FEBRUARY 28 (4:02 A.M.)**

Shots fired at a University Apartment complex near campus. One student died.

### **MARCH 10 (1:35 P.M.)**

Barricaded gunman near campus (close proximity to location of Feb. 28 shooting).  
No injuries.

### **MARCH 25 (2:49 P.M.)**

Announced May Commencement will be held virtually; ceremony also in December for May graduates.

### **APRIL 8 (1:00 P.M.)**

Announced summer terms would be taught online only due to COVID-19.

### **APRIL 17 (5:26 P.M.)**

Announced plan for additional emergency financial assistance for students.

### **MAY 6 (9:05 A.M.)**

Announced retrieval process of belongings from residence halls.

### **FEBRUARY 10 (4:06 P.M.)**

A rock slide fell onto a main road near campus, striking a vehicle, a PRT car and injuring three students.

### **FEBRUARY 29 (1:38 A.M.)**

Shots fired off-campus. One student injured.

### **MARCH 10 (9:31 P.M.)**

Suspended classes for a week for online-instruction prep due to COVID-19.

### **MARCH 18 (6:39 P.M.)**

Announced alternate delivery of classes for the remainder of the spring semester due to COVID-19.

### **APRIL 7 (10:09 A.M.)**

Announced plan for emergency financial assistance for students.

### **APRIL 8 (8:37 P.M.)**

Announced more than a dozen WVU students tested positive for COVID-19.

### **APRIL 12 (9:34 P.M.)**

Announced a student had tested positive for COVID-19 in a residence hall; testing procedures for the hall.

### **MAY 1 (3:50 P.M.)**

Announced that WVU has “every hope and expectation” of fall reopening







“ Every day has been  
a roller coaster. ”

**... so it's hard to know where to begin.**



## **BAD NEWS, ALL THE TIME**

“

After a week of putting out nothing but bad news, I was burned out and anxious whenever I logged onto social media platforms. The anxiety and frustration from our community was hard to escape, even if they understood the reasoning behind our actions.”

## LEADERS AND EMPATHY

“

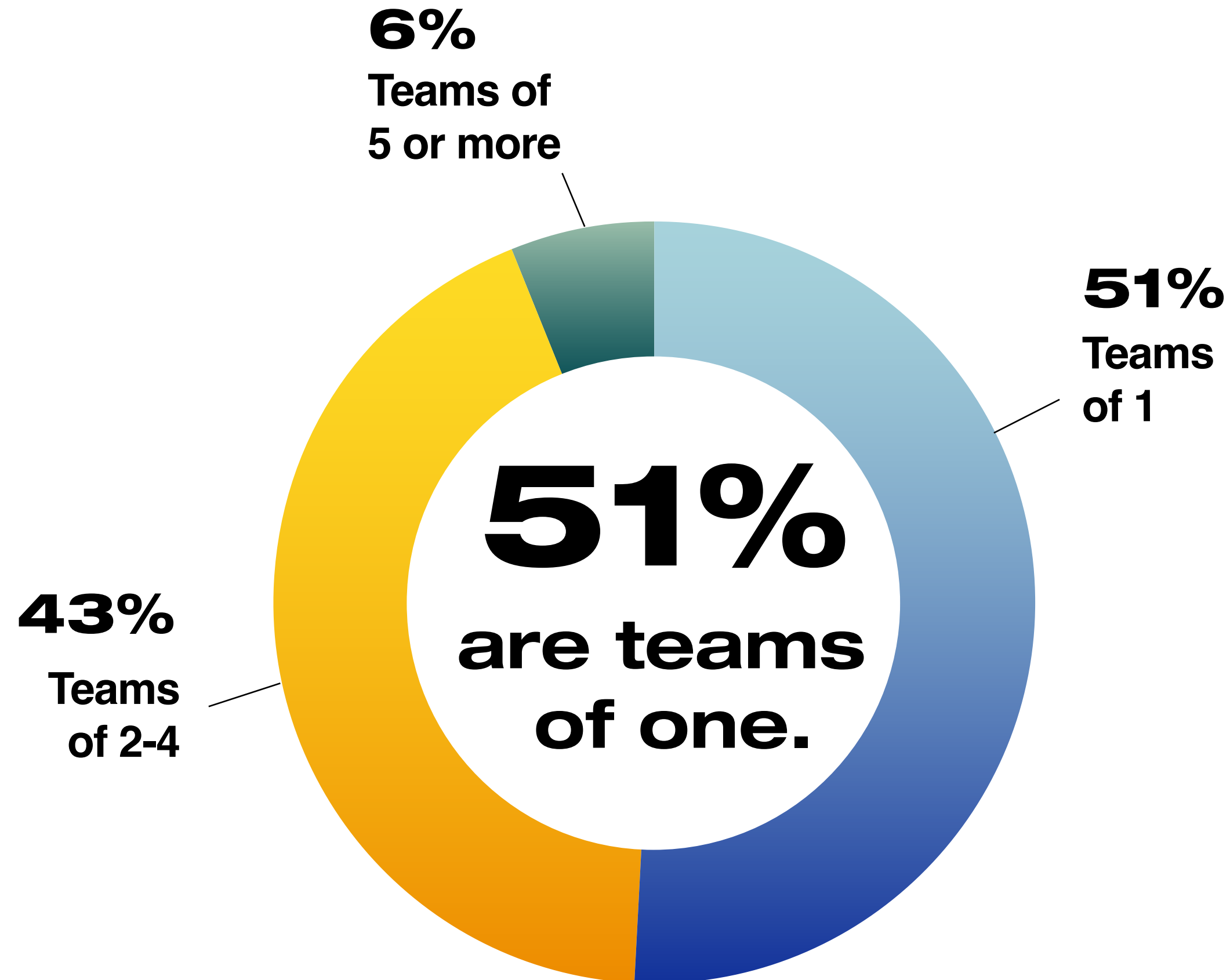
I am left to wonder if the leadership had to read all the horrible name calling and messages sent both publicly and privately that social media managers have to sift through if that would cause them to handle the situation differently or with more empathy.”



**WE SURVEYED HUNDREDS OF  
HIGHER ED SOCIAL MEDIA  
MANAGERS.**

**LET'S START BY LEARNING  
MORE ABOUT OUR COMMUNITY.**

# SIZE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TEAMS



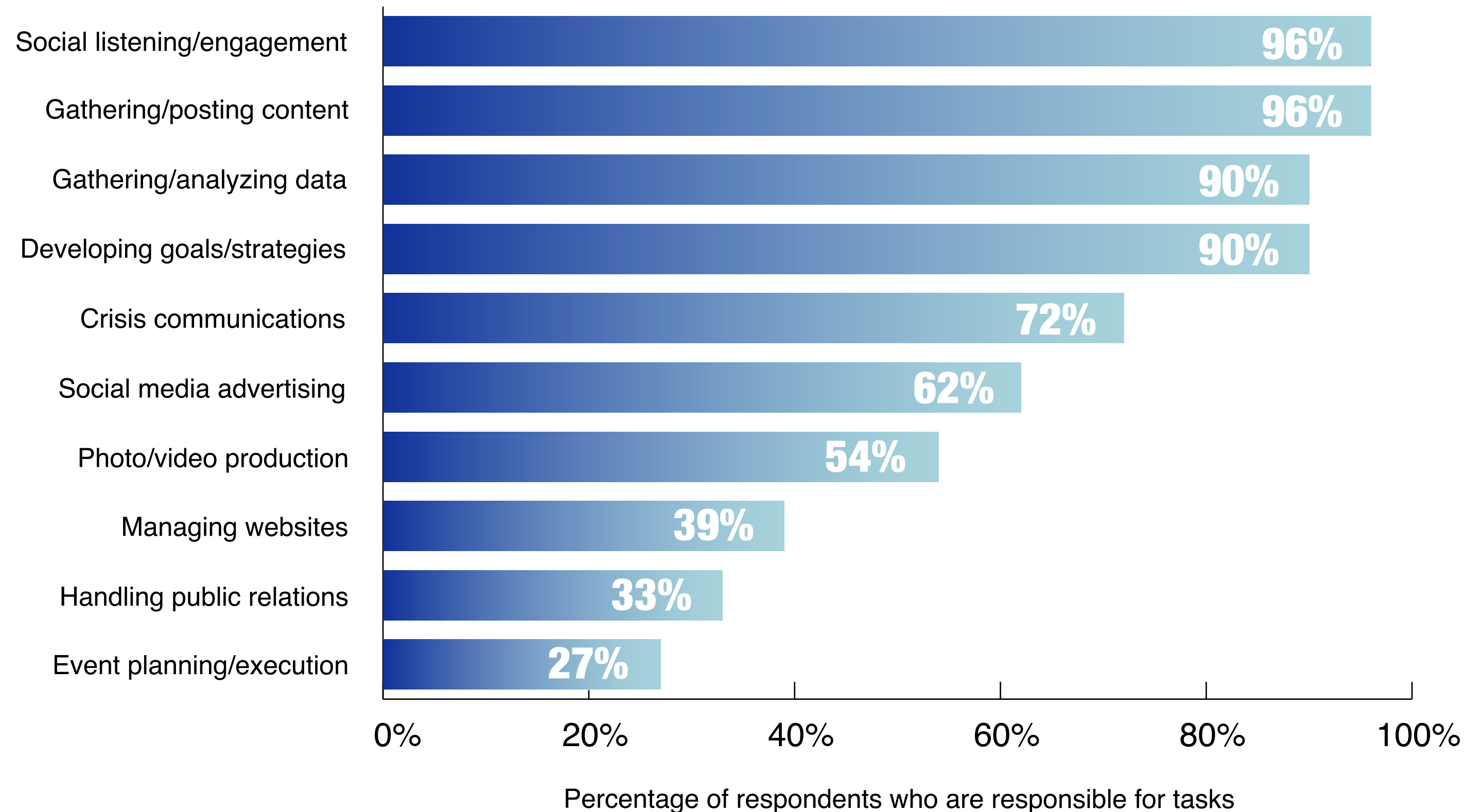
**67%**  
have worked  
in higher ed for  
less than 5 years.

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Most common titles: Social media specialist,  
social media manager, social media coordinator,  
assistant director, social media strategist.



# ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES





# FAVORITE THINGS



**74%**  
developing  
content



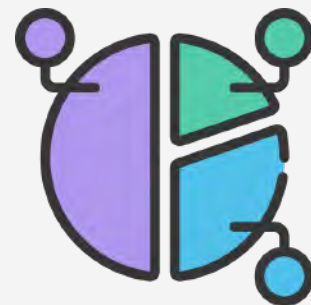
**63%**  
working with  
others



**45%**  
engaging with  
comments/mentions



**41%**  
ever-changing  
environment



**39%**  
analytics  
and data



**37%**  
new  
technology



**26%**  
fast-paced  
environment



# BIGGEST STRUGGLES



**79%**

receiving incomplete  
or late information



**73%**

having a  
24/7/365 job



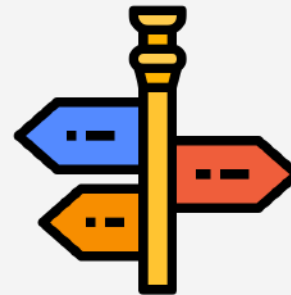
**70%**

lack of understanding  
of my role



**56%**

lack of  
resources



**49%**

not receiving clear  
direction or guidance



**48%**

being  
underpaid

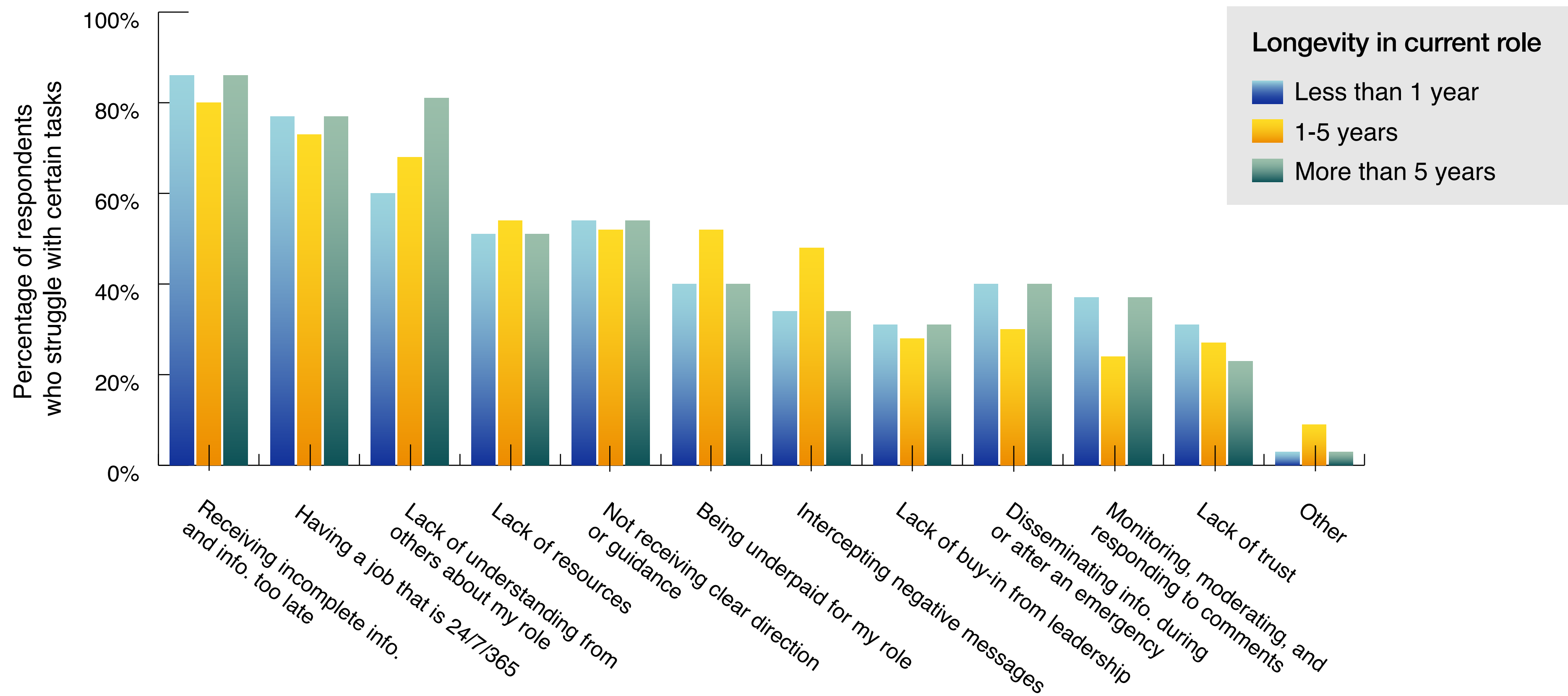


**44%**

intercepting  
negative messages



# GREATEST STRUGGLES OVER TIME



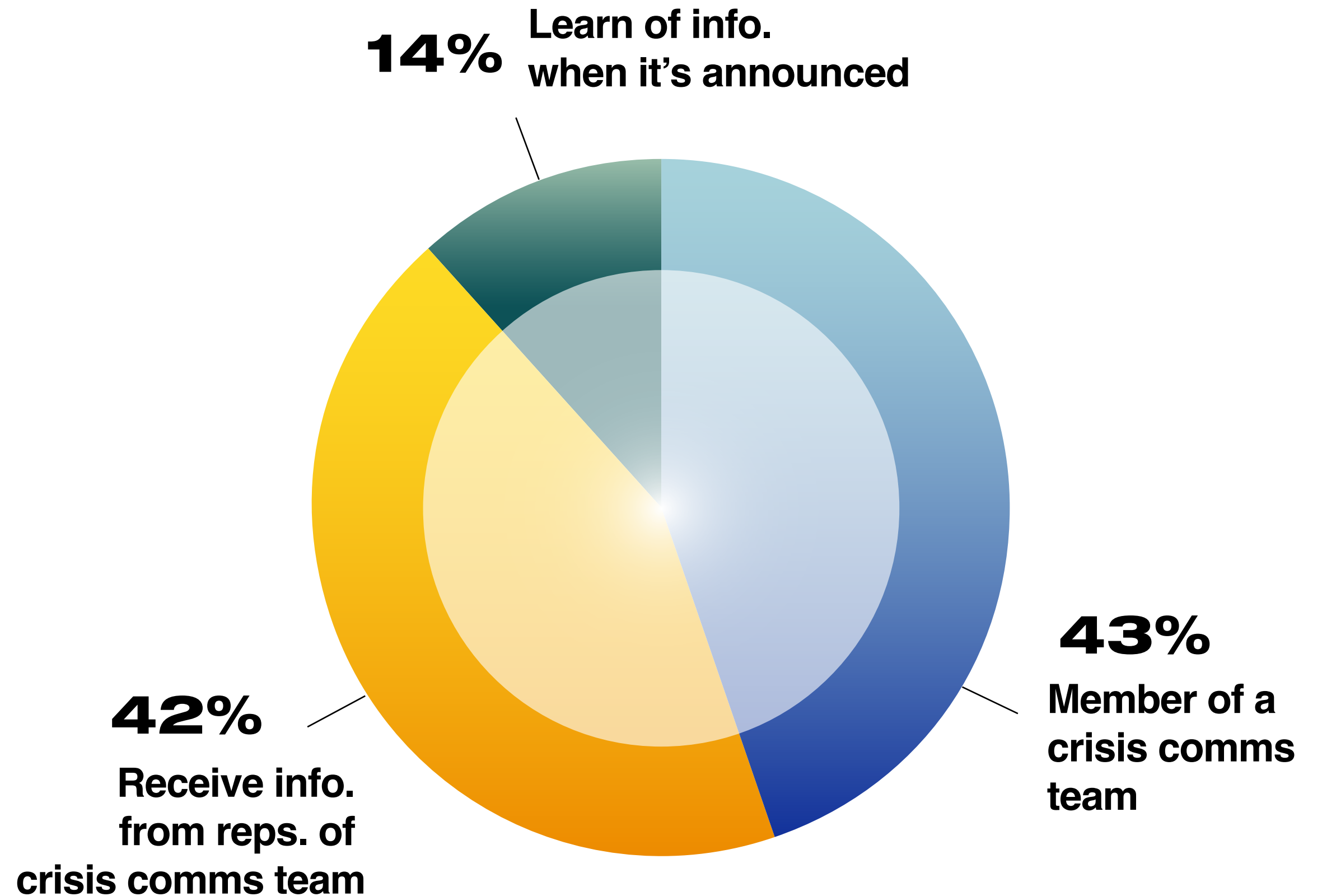


# CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS INVOLVEMENT

**57%**  
are NOT on  
a crisis comms  
team at their  
institution.

Individuals with 5 or more years of experience at an institution are more than two times more likely to be a member of a crisis team.

“Teams of 1” are less likely to be a member of crisis communications teams.





## RECEIVING INCOMPLETE INFORMATION

“

On the days when we've made our biggest announcements ... I've not been part of the message crafting but have been handed a finished product ... only to have people freak out once it's done that they don't like the way it looks or have issues with certain wording.”



## THE JOB IS 24/7/365

“

The feeling of never being able to turn off or put my phone down has been overwhelming.”





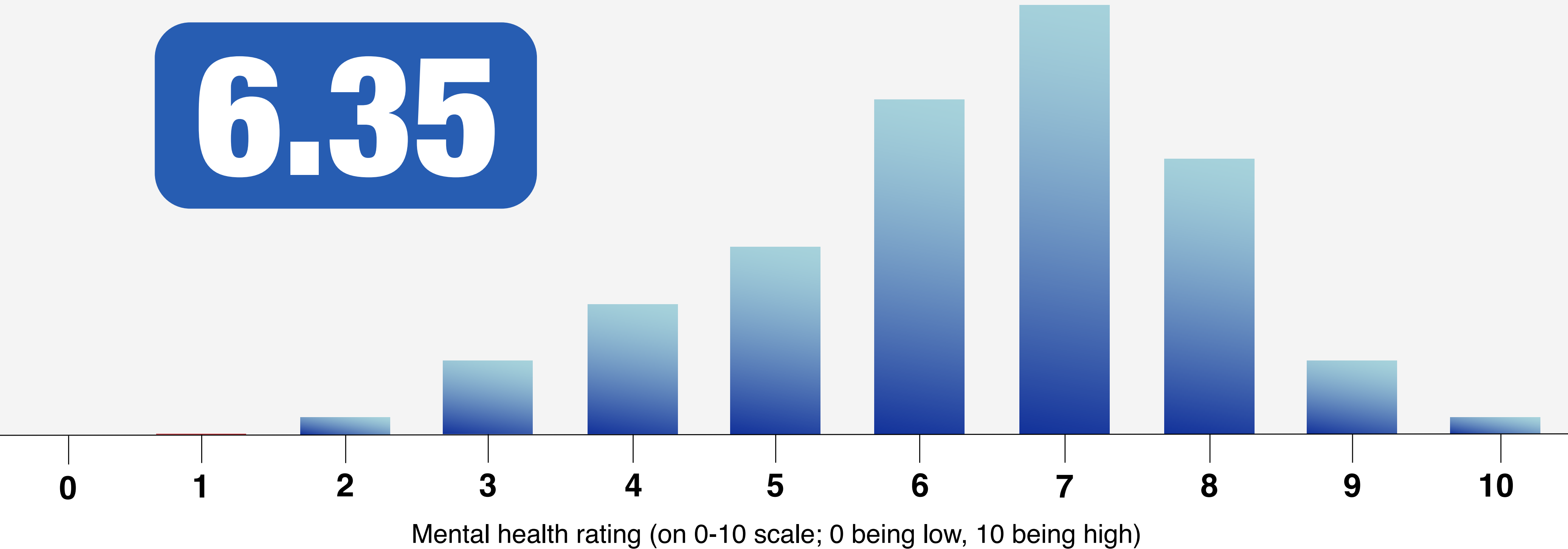
**NOW ...  
LET'S TALK MENTAL HEALTH.**

**#CASESMC**



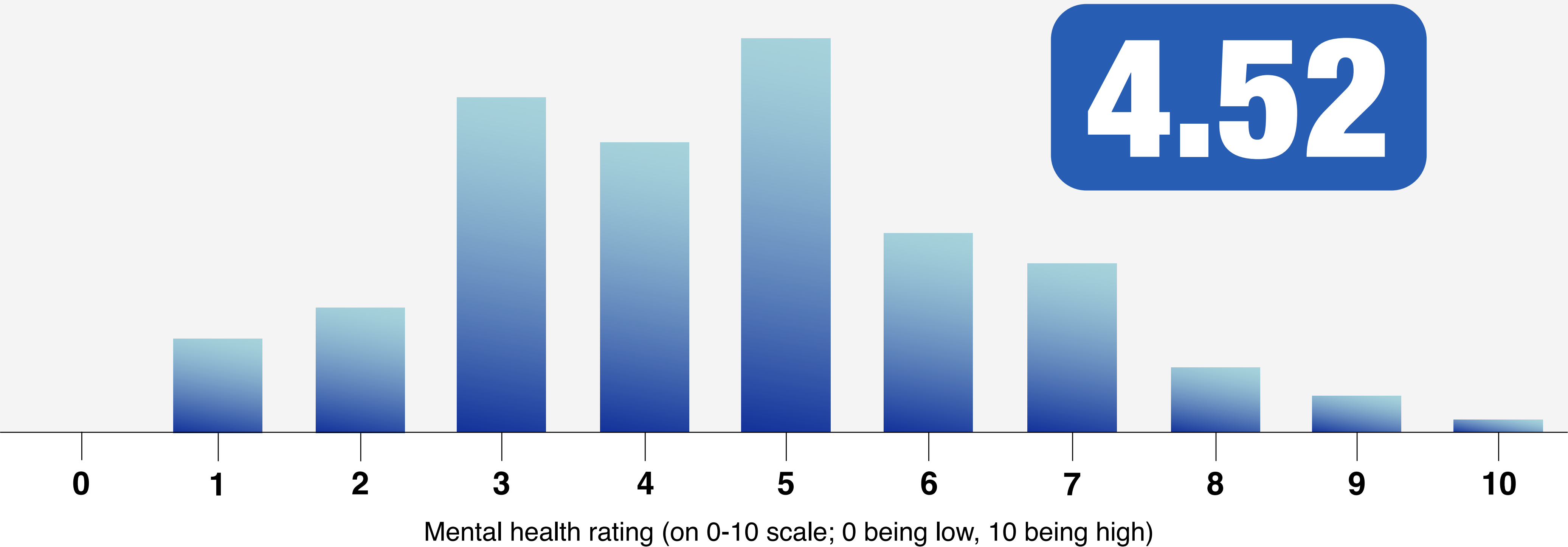
# ON AN AVERAGE DAY

6.35



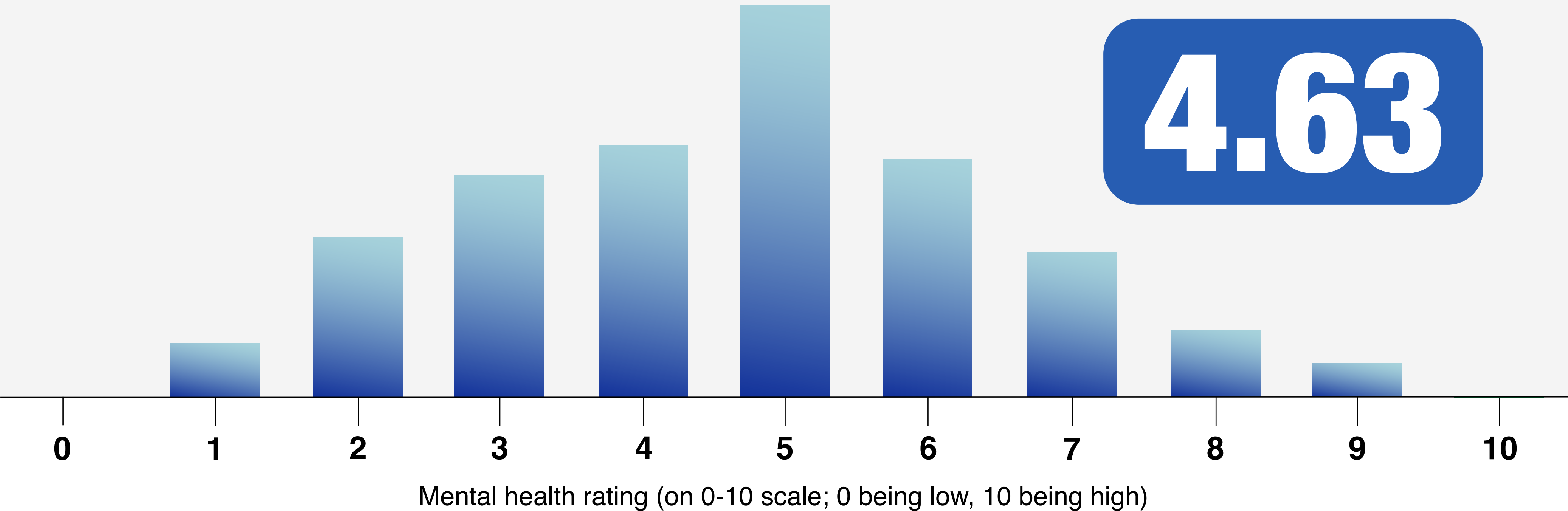
# DURING A CRISIS SITUATION

4.52

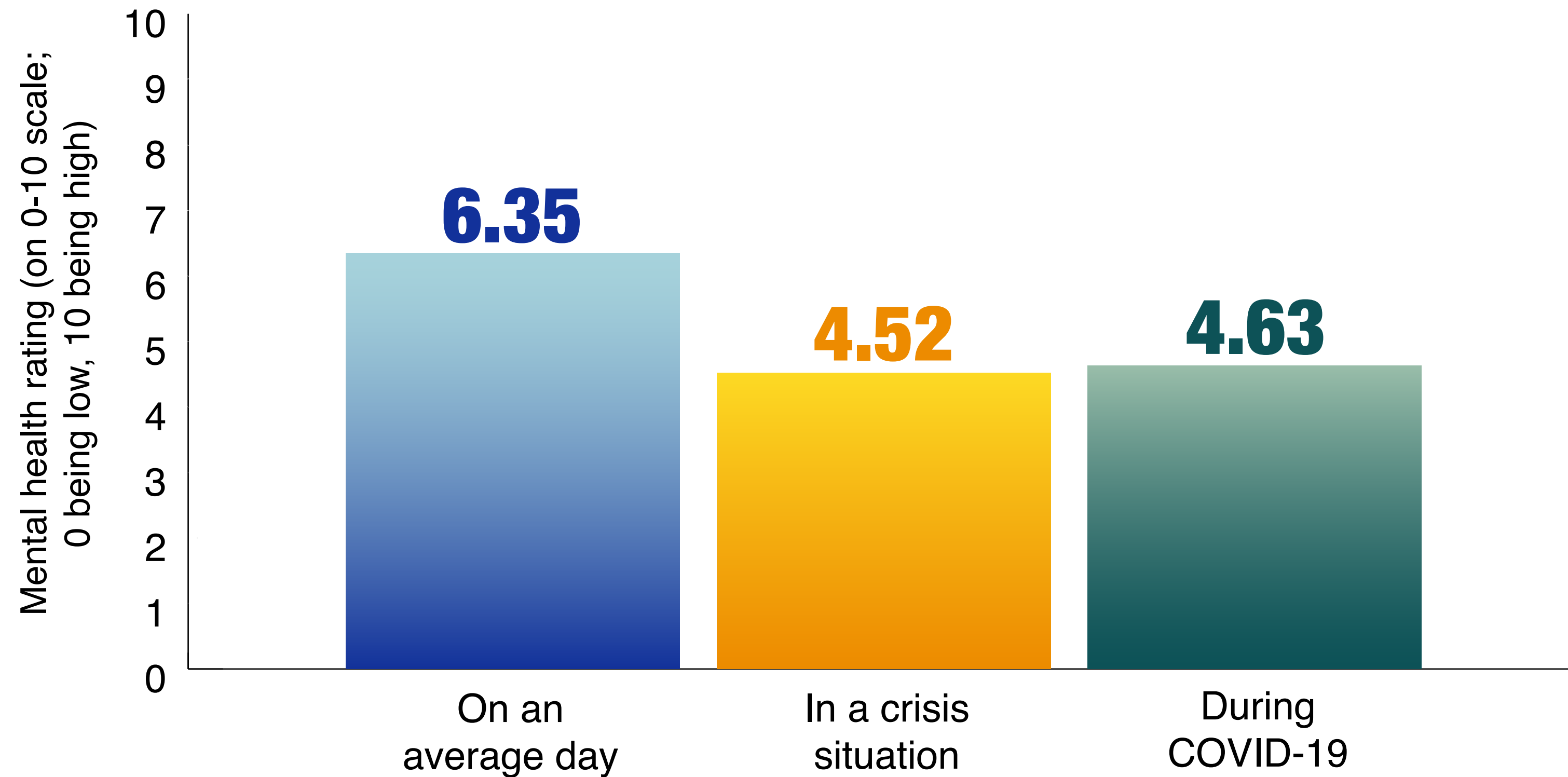




# DURING COVID-19



# MENTAL HEALTH COMPARISON





**INDIVIDUALS WHO ...**

**ARE PART OF THEIR  
CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS  
TEAMS ARE MORE LIKELY TO  
HAVE BETTER MENTAL HEALTH.**

# TEAMS OF ONE ARE MORE LIKELY TO STRUGGLE WITH THEIR MENTAL HEALTH.

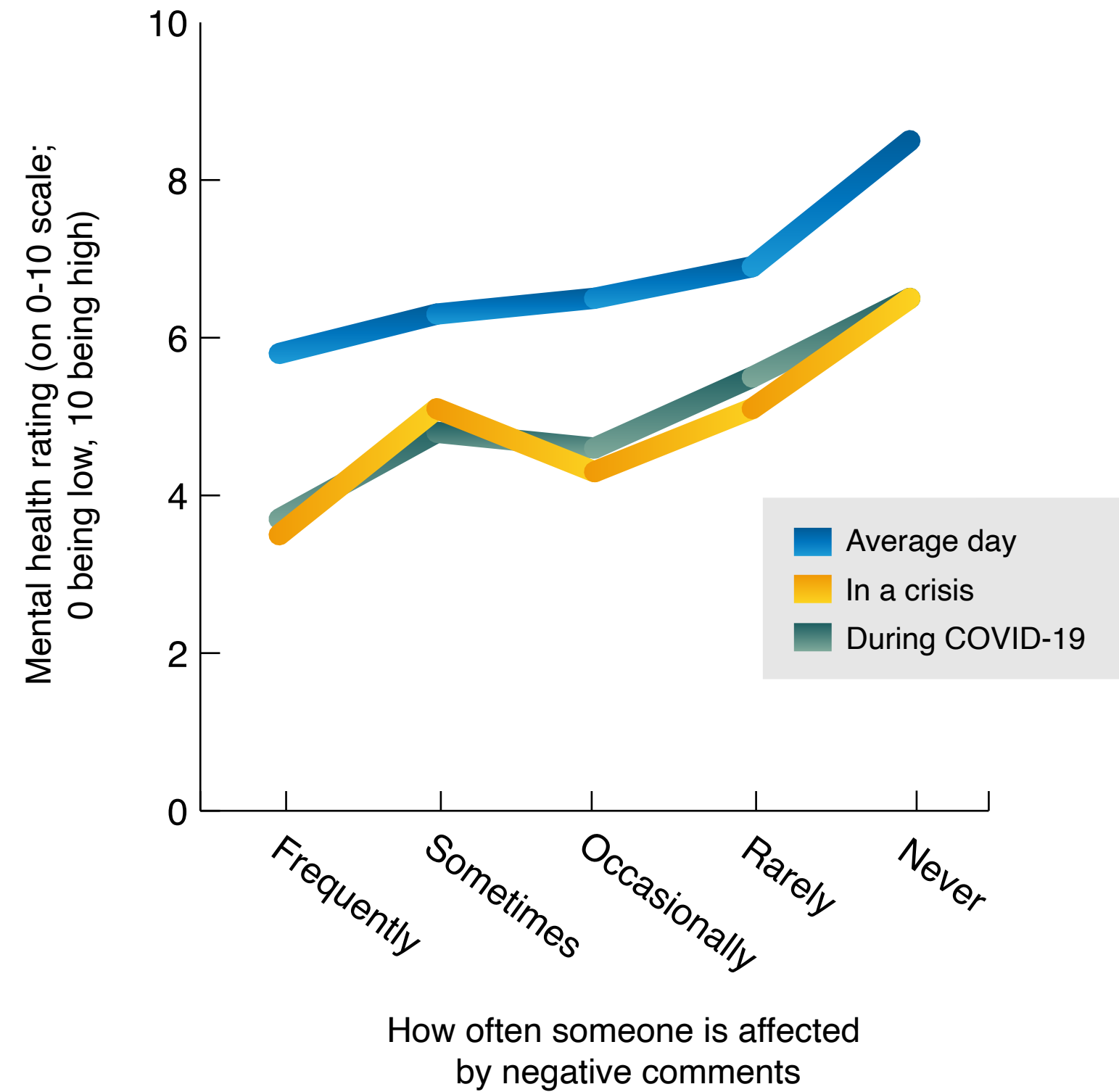
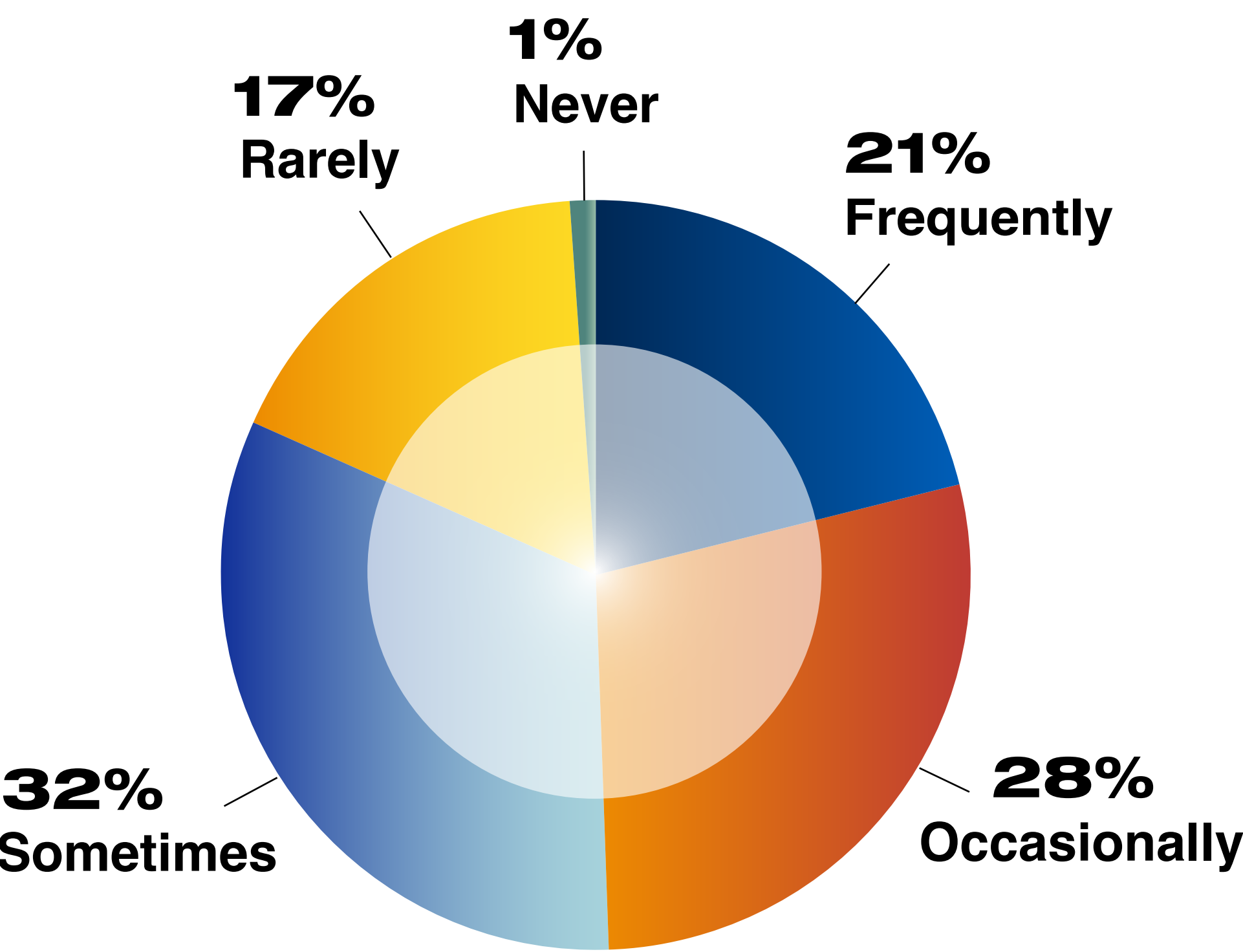


These people are less likely to receive frequent check-ins from their supervisors, as well.



# REACTIONS TO NEGATIVE COMMENTS

**82%** of social media managers are at least occasionally affected by negative comments.



# NEGATIVE COMMENTS TAKE THEIR TOLL OVER TIME.



Data tells us that the longer you're in your role, the more of an impact negative comments have on you.



# IT'S OK FOR YOU TO FEEL NOT OK.



Those who are frequently affected by negative comments have nearly a 3-point drop in mental health on a 10-point scale when compared to those who are never affected.



We need social media managers with feelings, because it's important we have empathy, understanding, passion, etc., as we run accounts and engage with our audiences.

# HOW HAS **COVID-19** AFFECTED HIGHER ED SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGERS?

#CASESMC



# WORK DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

**88%** believe handling social media during the pandemic has made life harder.

**52%** believe working in isolation has caused more of a challenge.

**45%** believe working in isolation has been beneficial to their work.

**57%** say frequency has increased in check-ins from supervisors.

**5%** say frequency has decreased in check-ins from supervisors.

## Why has life been harder?

- / There's more work to do
- / Lack of work-life balance
- / New approval/review process
- / Leaders lack knowledge and understanding of social media
- / Having to read constant negative posts and sentiment
- / Needing to develop completely new content
- / Work scrutiny has increased
- / Unable to provide answers to the many questions

## **MORE WORK, SAME AMOUNT OF TIME**

“ The texts, calls, chat pings, and emails have doubled. It’s a symphony of sounds if I don’t turn off the volume.”



## A BARRAGE OF NEGATIVITY

“

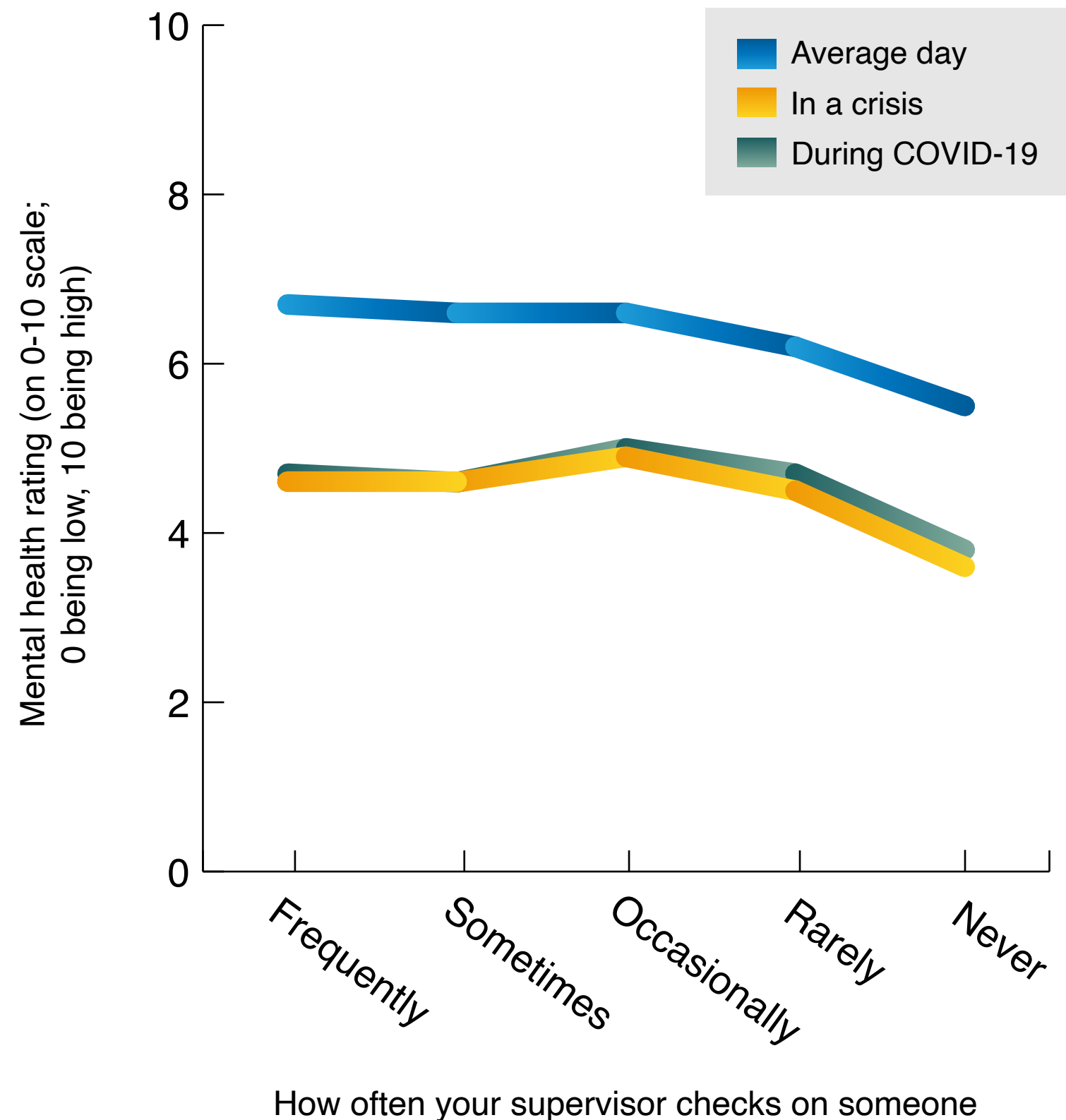
Social media is the first platform faculty, students, and parents turn to to complain about leadership decisions. When your job depends on answering these questions, it creates extreme anxiety.”



# HOW DO SUPERVISORS AFFECT SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGERS' MENTAL HEALTH?



# THOUGHTS ON SUPERVISORS



**34%**

**say their supervisors rarely or never check in on their mental health.**

**28%**

**say their supervisors check on them frequently. They have better than average mental health.**

**47%**

**say they do not have support and/or resources to ensure good mental health.**

**39%**

**of teams of one say their supervisor never or rarely checks on their mental health.**

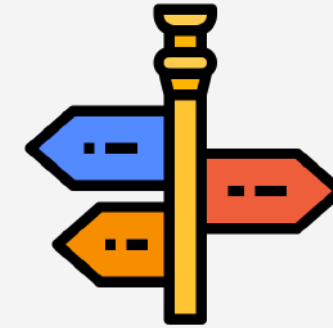
# HOW SUPERVISORS CAN HELP



**provide more  
updates/info.**



**more concise  
communications**



**clearer guidelines  
and expectations**



**more autonomy  
and trust**



**more full-time  
assistance**



**learn basics of  
social media**



**give breaks  
and time off**



# THOUGHTS FROM A MENTAL HEALTH EXPERT

**Yaping Anderson, Ph.D.**

**Licensed psychologist/Diversity coordinator  
West Virginia University Carruth Center for  
Psychological and Psychiatric Services**



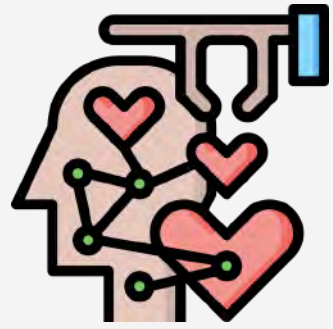
# ***“YOU’VE GOT TO TAKE OUT THE TRASH.”***



A certain amount of stress is good to stay motivated and energized. However, sometimes we go along with our lives, and emotional baggage adds up. It's tough to do this job on your own, especially if you don't have a place to vent.



It's normal to have negative mental health, but it's important to notice changes in yourself when you experience too much stress. Changes include: fewer hours of sleep, increase in irritability, lack of productivity, headaches, stomach aches, etc.



Have compassion and empathy for yourself. Intentionally check in with yourself and ask: “How am I really feeling?”



It's important to create a barrier between work and life to better balance yourself.



When it comes to negative comments, there's a lot to hold consciously and emotionally. It's important that you validate your initial reaction, find a way to calm down, and communicate with yourself not to take it personally.



When we're anxious, we think – a lot. It takes up so much space, so it's important for us to externalize things so they're more tangible and visible.



The background of the entire slide is a vibrant underwater photograph of a coral reef. In the upper right, a large, healthy-looking coral structure is covered with a dense school of blue tangs. Below this, and extending across the bottom, is a vast field of branching, light-colored coral, also populated by many blue tangs. The water is clear and blue. The text is overlaid on white geometric shapes: a large triangle on the left and a smaller one on the bottom right.

***“This community  
is resilient.”***

**It's clear we've adapted to  
the unknown and developed  
our own creative self-care  
strategies. And we can  
learn from each other.**

# FINAL THOUGHTS

## **We must take care of ourselves.**

Having to deal with crisis situations will elevate the mental pressures many of us already experience. Take breaks when you can. Balance work and life as best you can.

## **Supervisors have work to do.**

Social media is a job that most feel they understand, but rarely is that the case. Supervisors need to better learn the pressures and stressors of social media managers.

## **Teams of 1 need the most support.**

When you're feeling especially alone, remember that we're a community. Check out #HESM, #CASESMC, the #HigherEdSocial Facebook group and Slack channel, etc.

## **Social should be part of crisis comms teams.**

For the sake of productivity and mental health, social media managers should be a key piece of crisis communications teams. They should not be afterthoughts in the process.



**FULL RESEARCH STUDY RESULTS CAN  
BE FOUND AT [SOCIAL.WVU.EDU](https://social.wvu.edu).**

**QUESTIONS?**

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