

# Phase 2 of BeSustained Research: Public Defender Lawyer Well-being Benchmarking and Movement to Action

MATTHEW S. THIESE, PHD, MSPH

MATT.THIESE@HSC.UTAH.EDU

ROCKY MOUNTAIN CENTER FOR OCCUPATIONAL  
AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

UNIVERSITY OF UTAH SCHOOL OF MEDICINE



# Disclosures

- ▶ Professor at University of Utah School of Medicine
- ▶ Conducted Lawyer research with multiple states and organizations
  - ▶ Utah
  - ▶ New Jersey
  - ▶ Missouri
  - ▶ Washington State
  - ▶ Hispanic National Bar Association
- ▶ Board member of the Institute for Well-being in Law (IWIL)
- ▶ Committee member on the Utah Bar Well-being Committee
- ▶ Research on several other populations including Firefighters, Truck Drivers, Manufacturing, Healthcare Providers and others over 24-year career in Occupational Epidemiology

# Phase 2 of the BeSustained study

## From measurement to action

- Benchmark public defenders against national data and comparison groups
- Identify what is already being done to support well being
- Highlight evidence-informed opportunities for improvement

Self

Service

System

BeSustained frames public defense well being across three spheres that can guide interpretation and recommendations.

*This study may show both where public defenders are and what can realistically be improved.*

# Phase 2 Aims

## Aim 1

### **Quantify where public defenders stand**

- Compare with national numbers
- Compare with other professional populations
- Show the magnitude and pattern of well being challenges

## Aim 2

### **Identify what can improve well being**

- Document what offices and defenders are already doing
- Identify evidence informed strategies and rationales
- Prioritize actions that fit public defense realities

# Phase 2 specifics

- ▶ University of Utah Institutional Review Board approved Study
- ▶ Methodology
  - ▶ Questionnaire
    - ▶ Validated question sets
  - ▶ Subsequent Focus Group Interviews
- ▶ Rigorous analyses
- ▶ Comparisons with other populations



# Want to participate?

Enrollment will begin in the summer.

- Online questionnaire
- Option to participate in focus groups

Online sign-up form at  
<https://rmcoeh.com/besustained-survey>



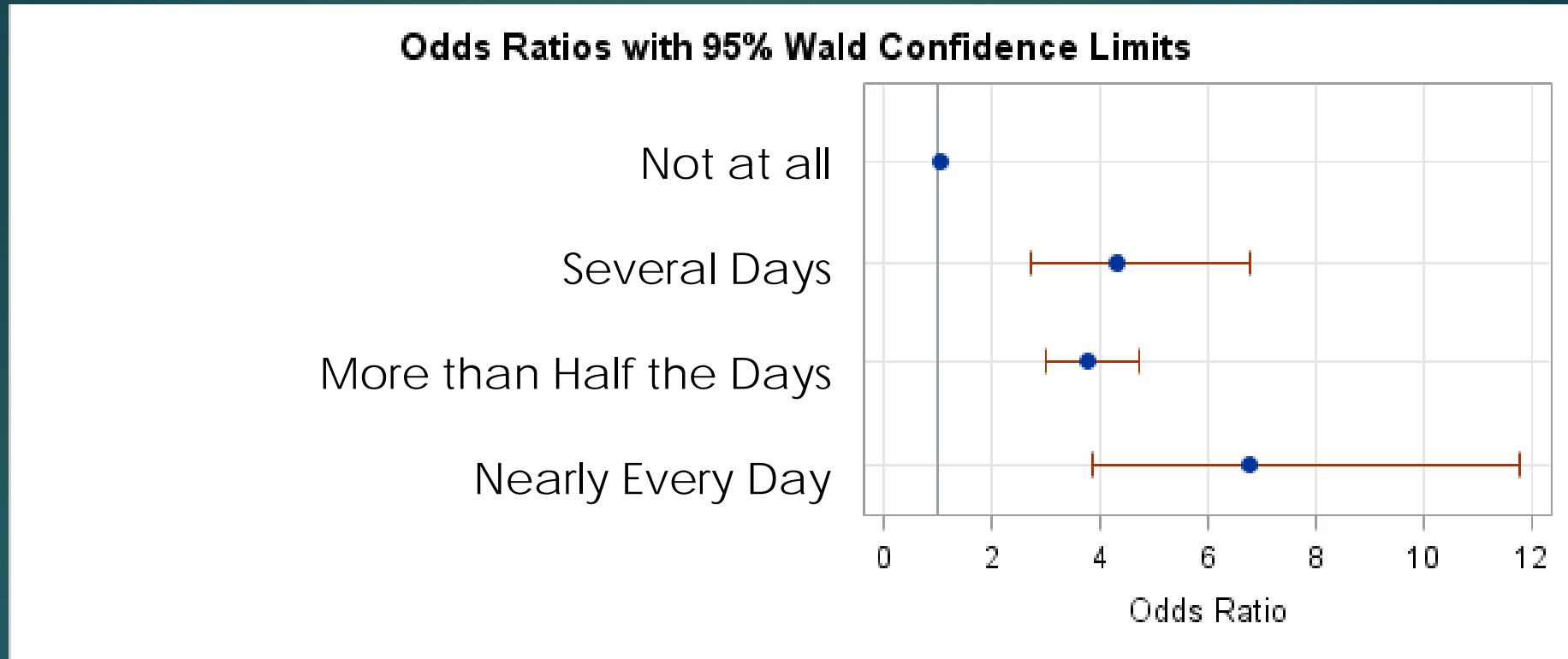
# NATIONAL HEALTH AND NUTRITION SURVEY (NHANES) DATA

7

- ▶ Publicly Available Data
- ▶ Collected since 1960s
  - ▶ 2 year time blocks
- ▶ NHANES (n=2305) subjects included if:
  - ▶ currently employed, working >30 hours per week
- ▶ Each NHANES participant represents 50,000 people
- ▶ Adjusted for age and gender differences between the populations

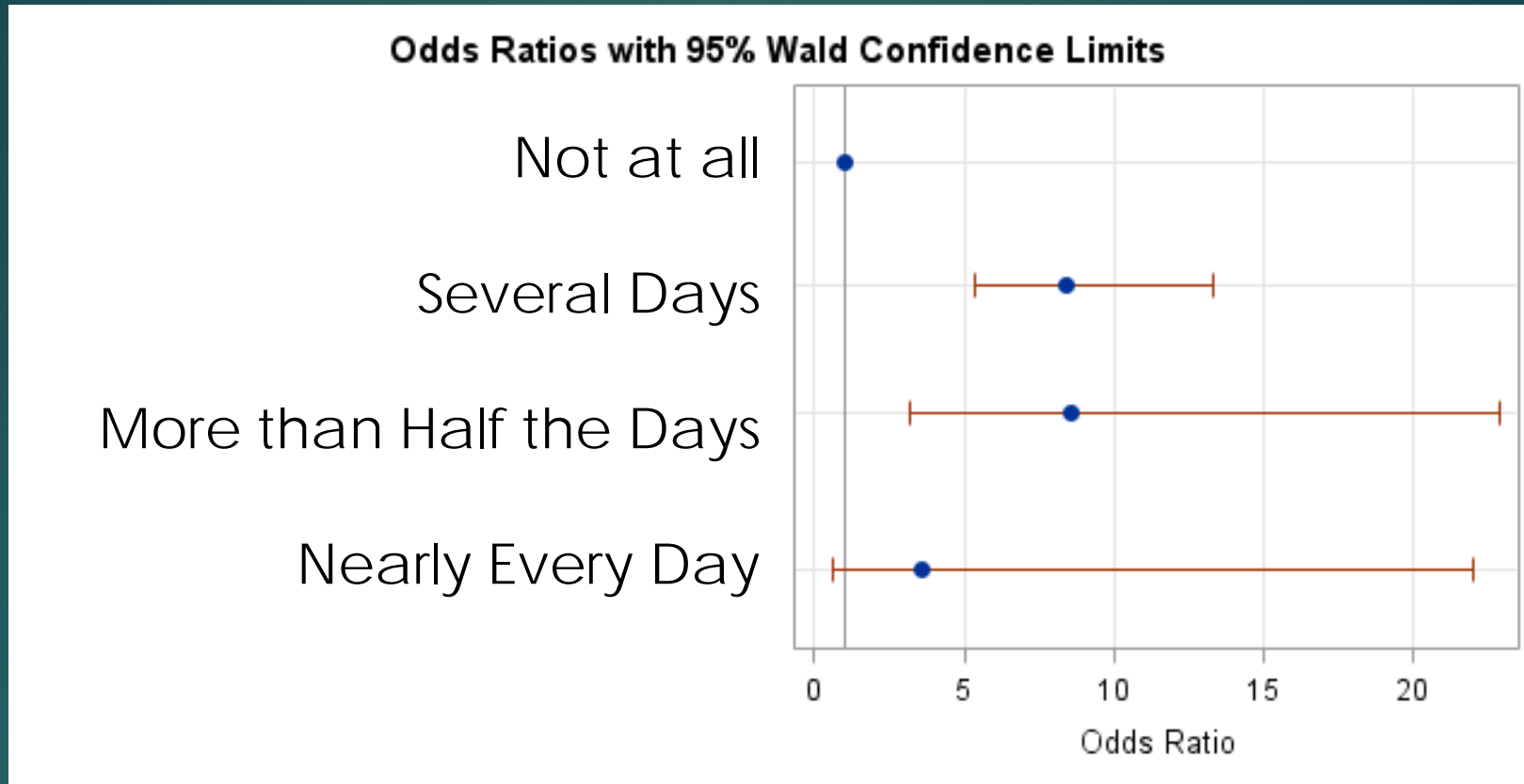


Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you felt down, depressed, or hopeless



Lawyers in this study are 4.3, 3.7 and 6.7 times more likely to report feeling down, depressed or hopeless as compared to the general working population.

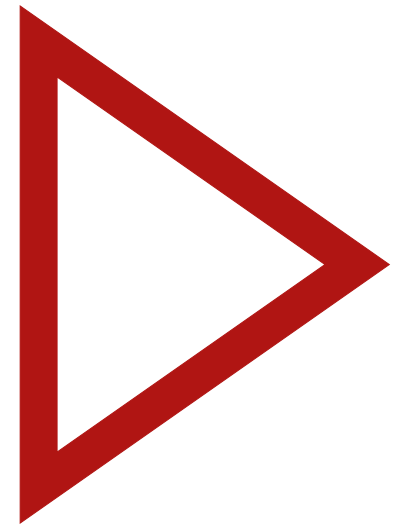
Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you had thoughts that you would be better off dead or of hurting yourself in some way



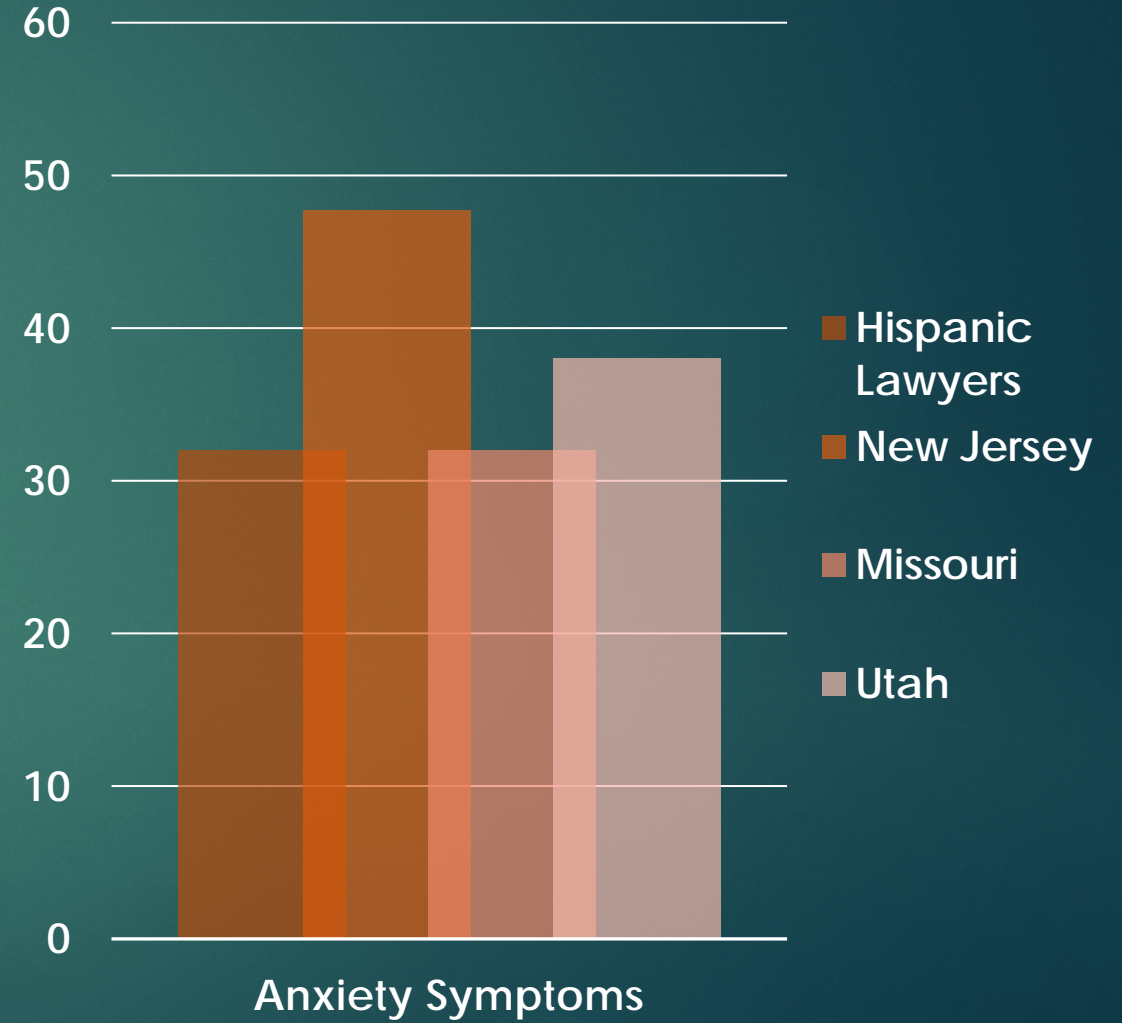
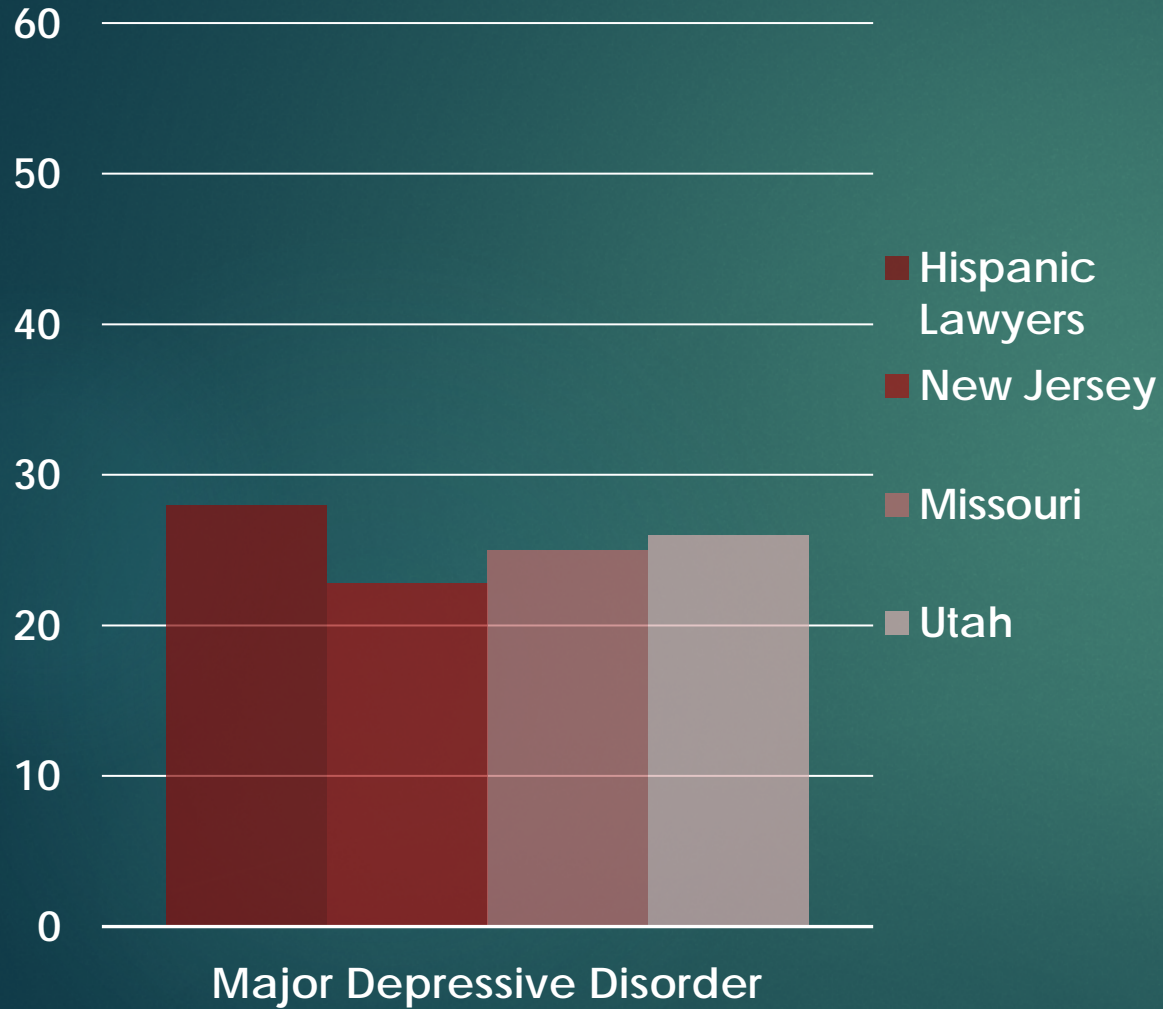
Lawyers in this study are 8.5 times more likely to report thoughts of being better off dead or hurting themselves as compared to general working population

# Comparisons within Lawyer Populations

- ▶ Comparing between and within multiple groups
  - ▶ Utah Lawyers
  - ▶ New Jersey Lawyers
  - ▶ Missouri Lawyers
  - ▶ National Hispanic Bar Association Lawyers



# Challenges – Depression and Anxiety



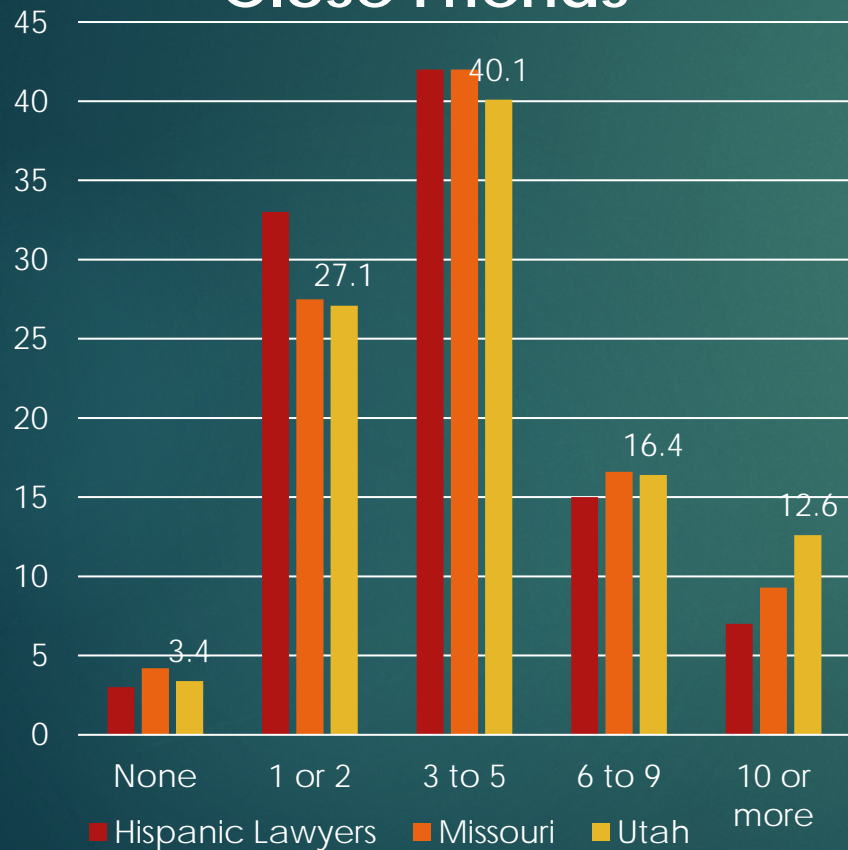
# Public Defender Specific Data

Outcome	OR 95% CI
Drug misuse	2.34 (1.28, 4.28)*
Depressive Symptoms	1.23 (0.80, 1.89)
Feeling isolated	2.04 (1.35, 3.07)*
Leaving the profession	1.73 (1.07, 2.79)*
Problem drinking	0.78 (0.51, 1.19)
Secondary trauma	5.68 (3.65, 8.85)*

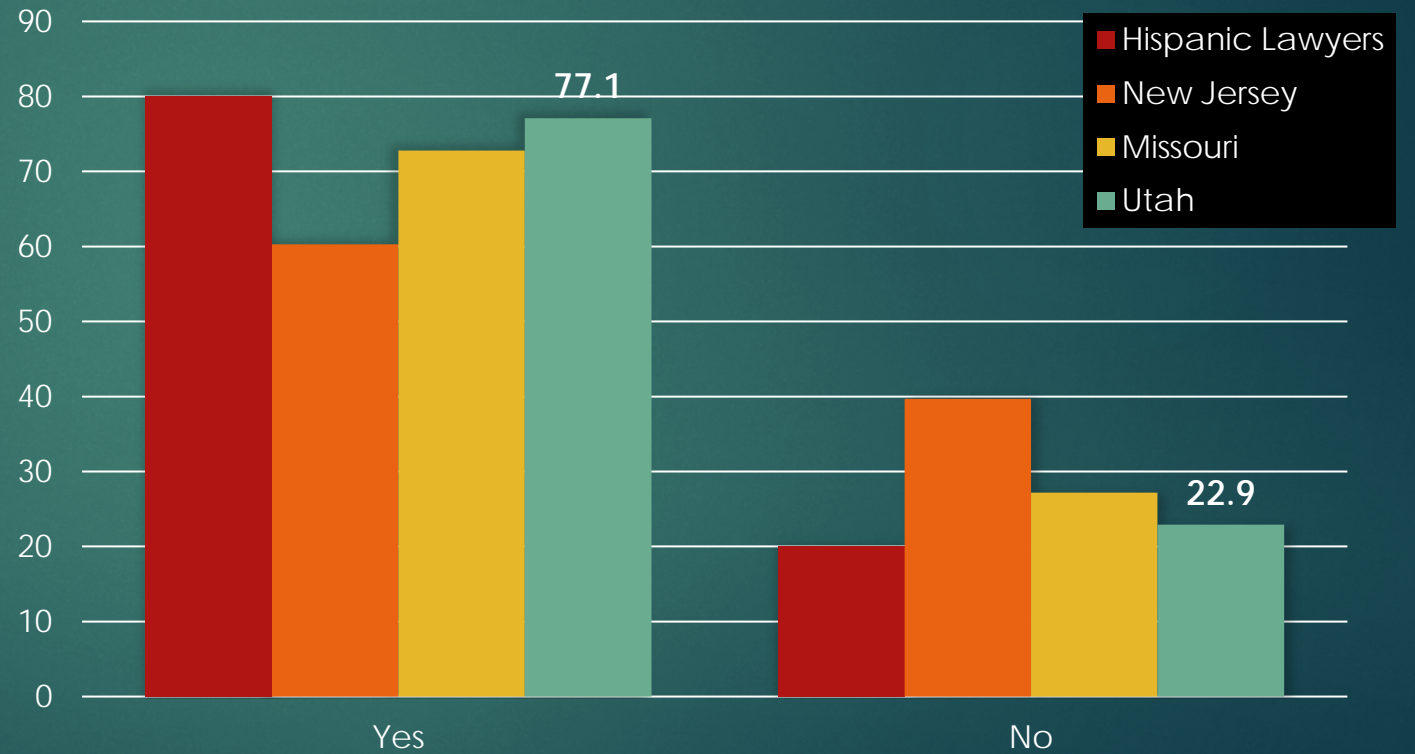
# Ways to Maintain Well-Being

13

## Close Friends



## Engaged In Activities To Improve Mental Health And Well-Being (In%)



# Mental Health Outcomes AND ...

## Close Friends

▶ A Lawyer who has **3-5 close friends** is :

- **5** times less likely to have anxiety
- **5** times less likely to have burnout
- **7** times less likely to have depression

▶ A Lawyer who has **6-9 close friends** is :

- **8** times less likely to have anxiety
- **7** times less likely to have burnout
- **8** times less likely to have depression

Thank you for your time

Any Questions?

matt.thiese@hsc.utah.edu



<https://rmcoeh.com/besustained-survey>