

Competencies of child mental health among government primary school teachers of Sammanthurai Educational Division of Sri Lanka in detecting child mental health issues

Group D.2.4

H. R. Ahamed, M.D.O.W. Disanayake, I.L.M. Wasith, A.D.L.S.D. Andagala, Jamuna Gajmer, H.M.D.K. Wijesinghe

Introduction

- Around 70% of children and youth who experience a mental health problem have not had appropriate interventions at a sufficiently early age. (Mental Health Foundation, 2019)
- School teachers have an important role to play in mental health and well-being of their students (McDonagh, 2010).
- Teachers' good knowledge in mental health, help to increase understanding and reduce stigma around issues and create a safer space for students. (McDonagh, 2010)



Objectives

1. To describe the attitudes on child mental health and the role of a teacher in promoting child mental health.
 2. To determine the competency to identify a child with mental health issues and need for referral.
 3. To describe the perceived challenges on identifying and intervening in child mental health issue.
- among government primary school teachers of Sammanthurai Educational Division of Sri Lanka in detecting child mental health issues.

Methodology

- **Design:** Descriptive cross sectional study
- **Study Setting:** Sammanthurai Educational Division
- **Study Population:** Teachers teaching in primary classes of the government schools in Sammanthurai Educational Division.
- **Sampling Size and Sampling:** All teachers teaching in primary classes of the government schools in Sammanthurai Educational Division ($N=134$) were recruited. Thus no sampling procedure employed.
- **Data collection tools and methods:** A self-administered containing open and close ended questions, developed with the help of a child psychologist, was used. Data was collected during the school hours without disturbing the teaching activities.
- **Data analysis:** Descriptive statistics was used to describe attitudes and competencies on child mental health and perceived challenges related to intervening.

Results

Description of Study Participants

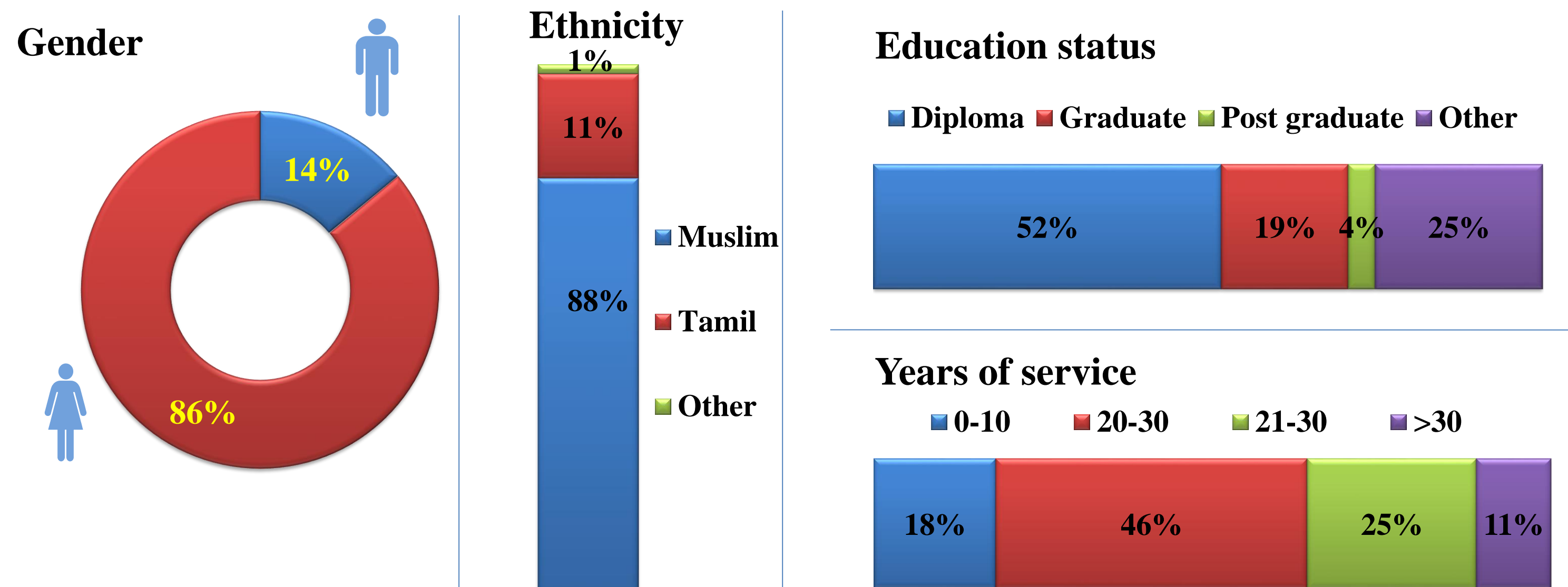


Figure 1: Distribution of sex, ethnicity, educational qualifications and years of service

Knowledge on Recognition and Management

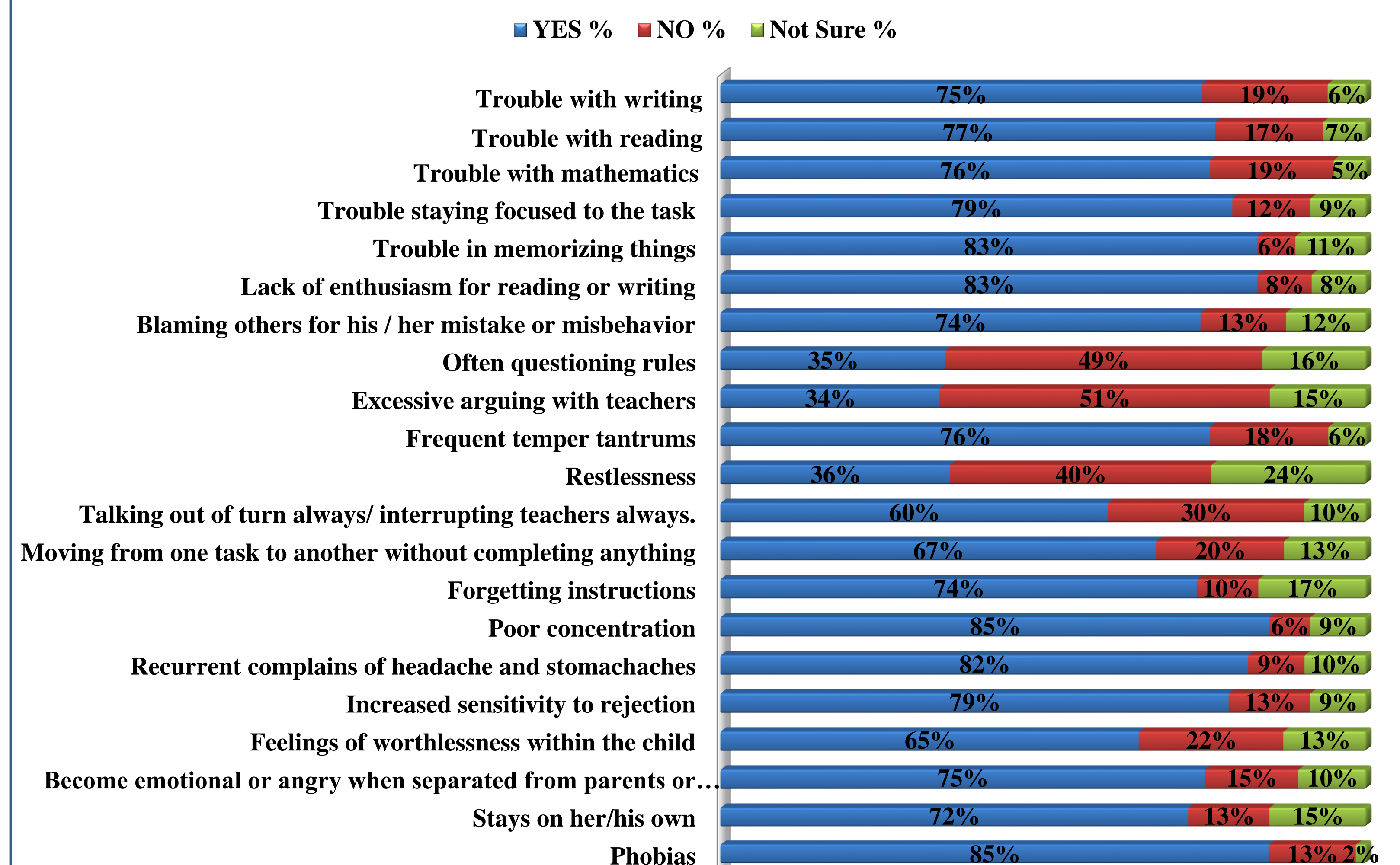


Figure 2: Distribution of knowledge related to child mental health issues

71% identified **18/21** behaviors reflecting mental disorders correctly.

Restlessness | Excessive arguing with teachers | Often questioning rules were identified by fewer participants.

Of the participants, **65%** didn't know about management of any child mental health issues and only **28%** mentioned referring to a counseling teacher or a doctor

Attitudes

98% Showed positive attitudes towards child mental health

100% Agreed that related knowledge is important

83% Believed that they have ability to recognize child mental health issues

Challenges

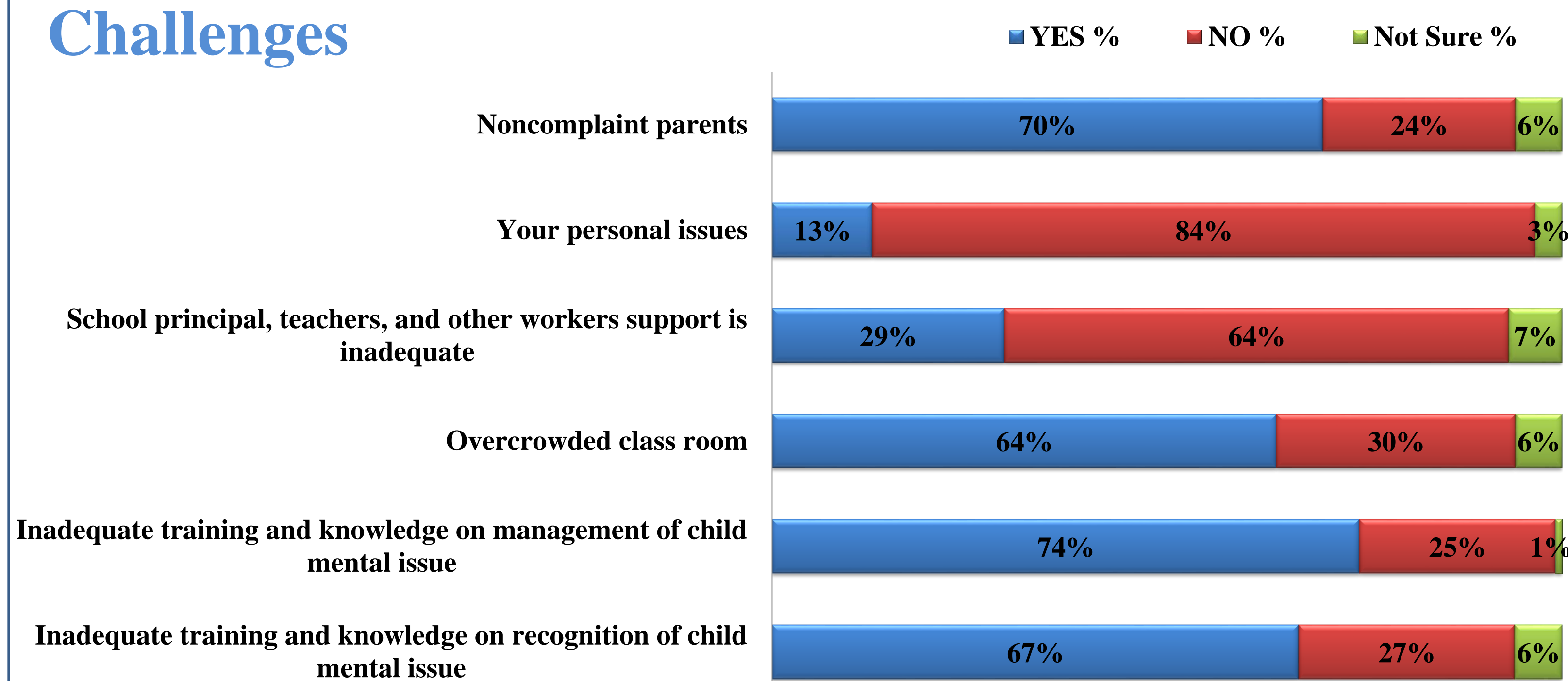


Figure 3: Distribution of perceived challenges

Common challenges:

Noncompliant parents, Over crowded classroom and Inadequate training and knowledge on recognition and management of mental health issues

Limitations

The questionnaire mainly contained closed ended questions to assess knowledge, thus may have generated information bias.

Conclusions

Even though primary school teachers of Sammanthurai had satisfactory knowledge and positive attitudes on child mental health, the knowledge on management of related issues was unsatisfactory.

The perceived reason for the knowledge gap was inadequacy of training.

Recommendation

Enhanced capacity building on child mental health with special attention on improving knowledge on management can improve the situation.

References

- Mental Health Foundation. (2019). *Children and Young People*. Retrieved May 25, 2019, from Mental Health: <http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/c/children-and-young-people>
- McDonagh, M. (2010, March 09). A teaching role in mental health. Retrieved May 25, 2019, from The Irish Times: <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-an-style/health-family/a-teacher-role-in-mental-health-1.635316>

Acknowledgment

- Department of Public health, Faculty of Medicine, UoK
- Dr. Aruni Hapangama, Department of Psychiatry, UoK
- Dr. Pavithra Godamune, Department of Medical Education, University of Kelaniya
- Zonal Director of Education, Sammanthurai.
- Principals and teachers of government school containing primary sections in Sammanthurai Educational division.