

# Mental Health Services: Do They Help?

Allison Johnson, Blake Penland, and  
Monte Butler



## Abstract

The effect of mental health services at a Northern California non-profit was evaluated. Twenty two children and/or youths were divided into two groups: those who attended 10 or fewer counseling sessions and those who attended 11 or more sessions. Children and/or youths attending more sessions had better outcomes in all but one outcome area.

Mental health agencies across the country have been providing children and family services as an essential part of social work for many years. In spite of this, their effectiveness has been called into question. While trying to receive legislative funding it is important to keep in mind that legislators are increasingly focused on holding social service programs, including mental health programs, accountable (Martin, 2003). One way of measuring the effectiveness of a program is by receiving feedback from clients on the changes that services have made in their lives. As a result, mental health agencies have come to see consumer satisfaction research as a valuable tool in program assessment and improvement (Martin, 2003; Nabors, Weist, Reynolds, Tashman, & Jackson, 1999).

ALDEA Children and Family Services provides foster care, advocacy for parents, educational services, residential and outpatient psychiatric and counseling services, and independent living services. Without knowing the outcomes of clients that have received services, there would be no way of measuring the programs' quality. The assessment of quality of life is increasingly important in the process of monitoring the care and improving services for people with severe mental illness (Heflinger, Sonnichsen, & Brannan, 1996). Information about ALDEA Children and Family Services gathered from parental/guardian satisfaction surveys play an important part in providing youth with proper counseling services. At the same time, client feedback can identify strengths and help administrators focus on program areas most in need of attention. Consumers also feel respected and empowered when their input is sought and used to improve services (Martin 2003).

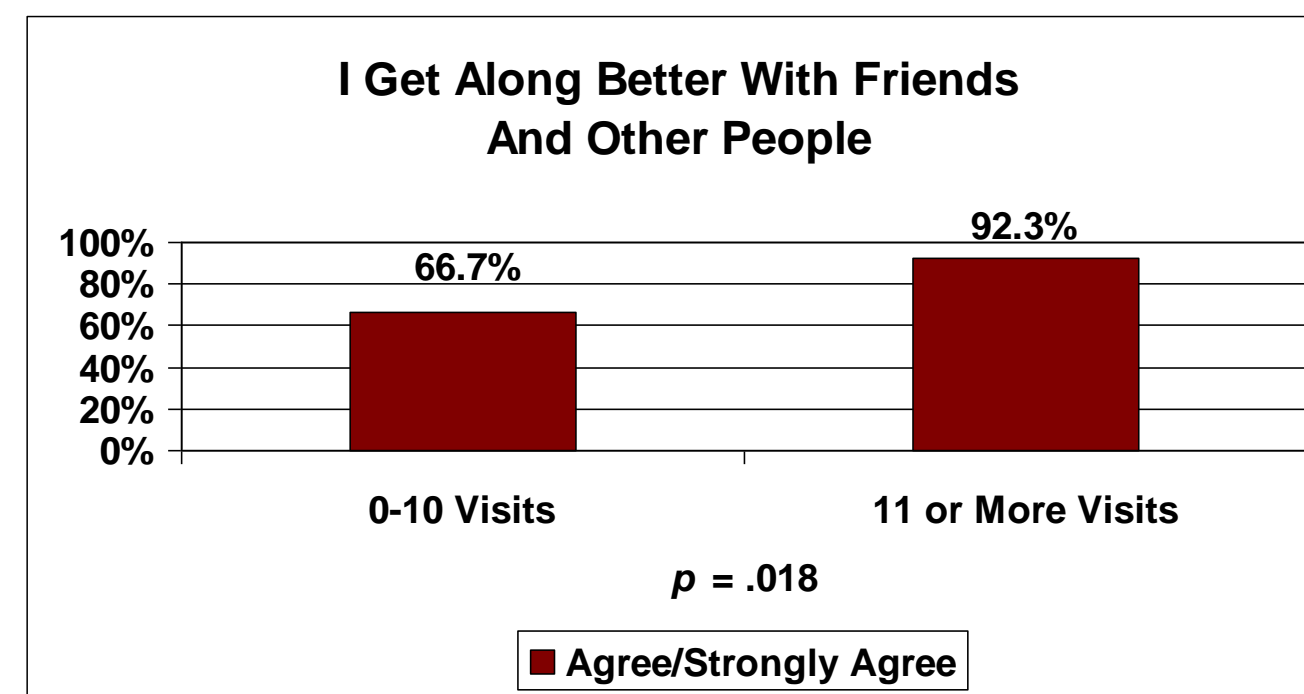
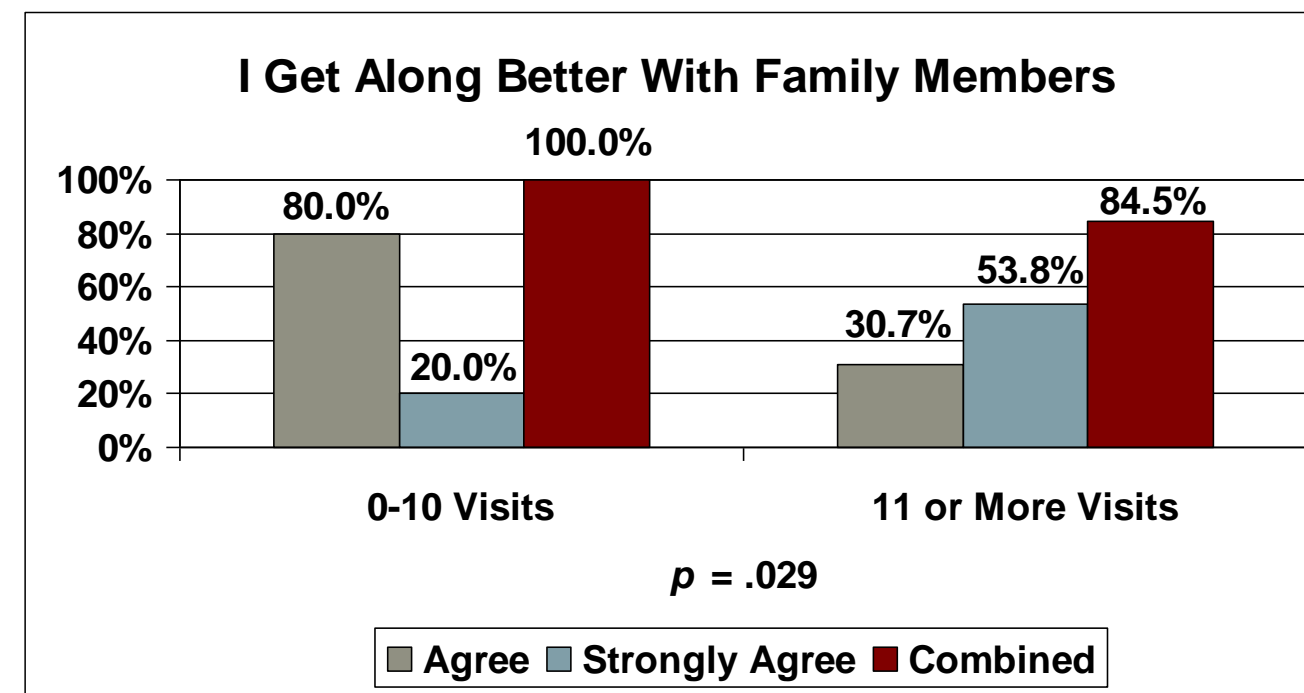
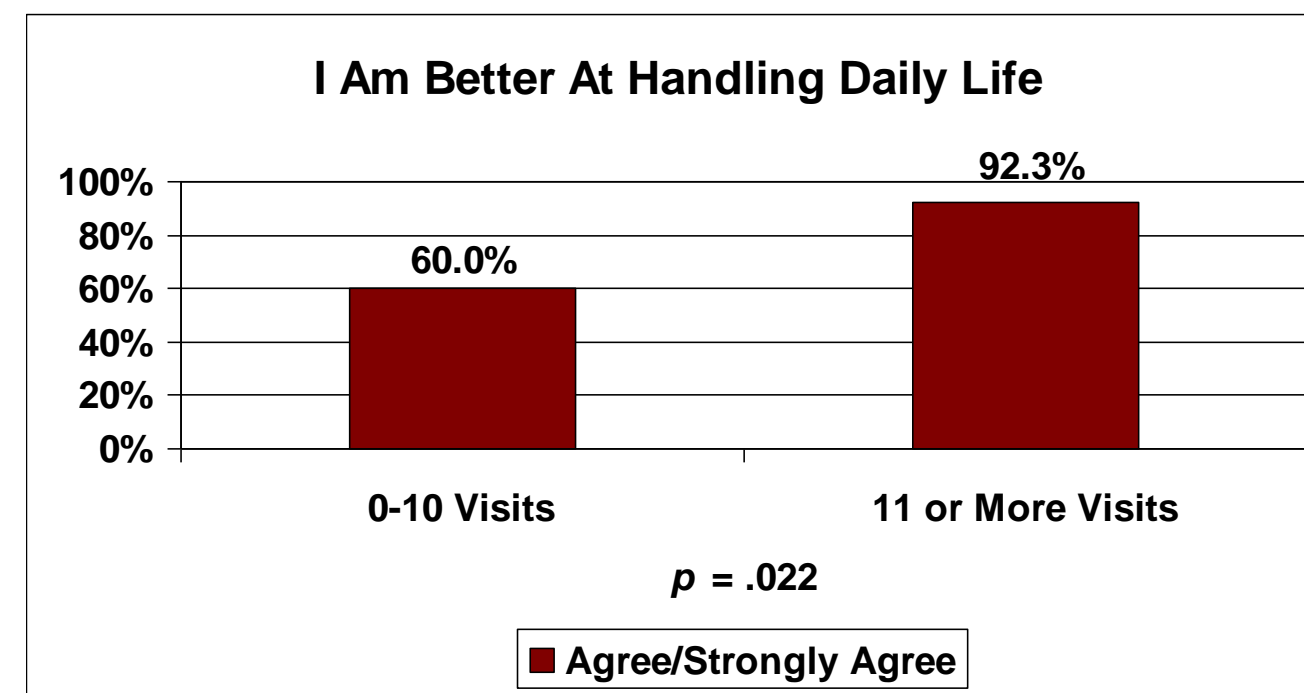
### Method

#### Participants

The participants were 22 children and/or youths who received counseling services from ALDEA clinicians. Of the 22 clients, 8 (36.3%) attended 0-10 sessions and 14 (63.6%) attended 11 or more sessions.

#### Apparatus

Surveys printed in English and Spanish were used to collect outcome data from all participants. We focused on responses to five positive statements



included in the surveys: (a) I am better at handling daily life, (b) I get along better with family members, (c) I get along better with friends and other people, (d) I am doing better in school and/or work, and (e) I am better able to cope when things go wrong. Responses available to clients were: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree and not applicable.

#### Procedure

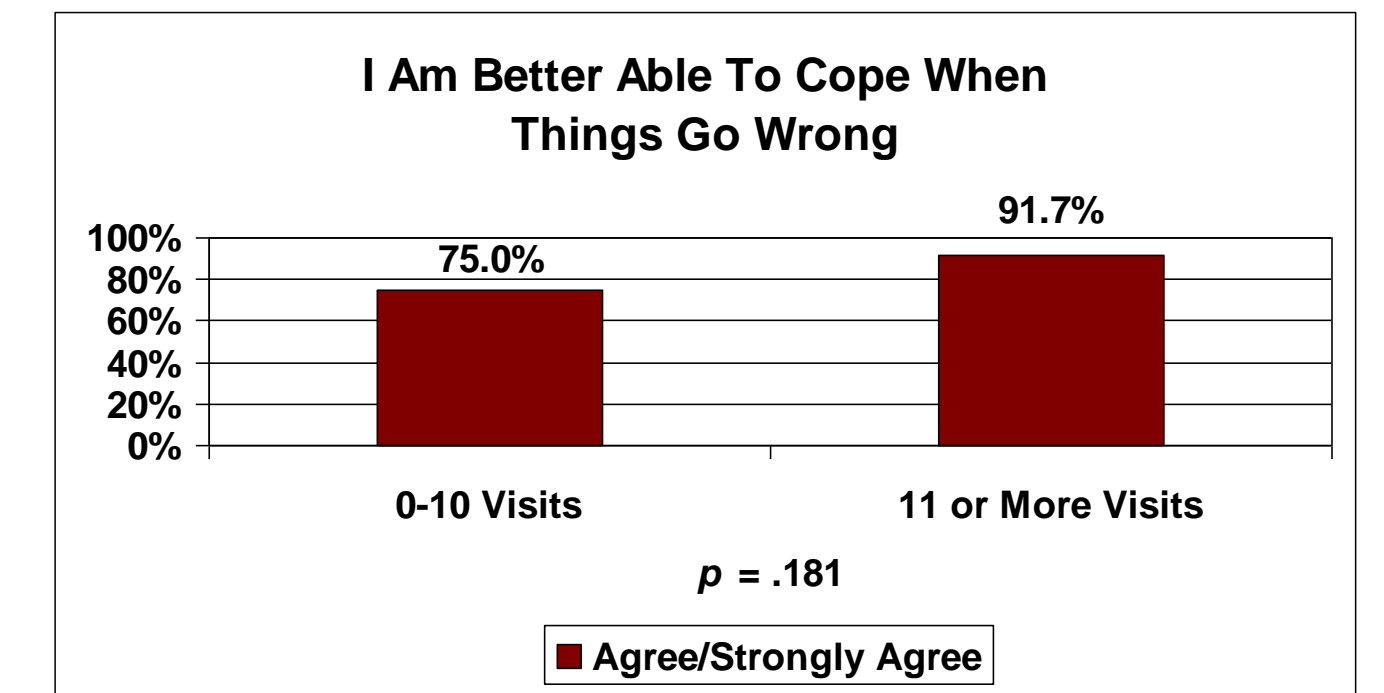
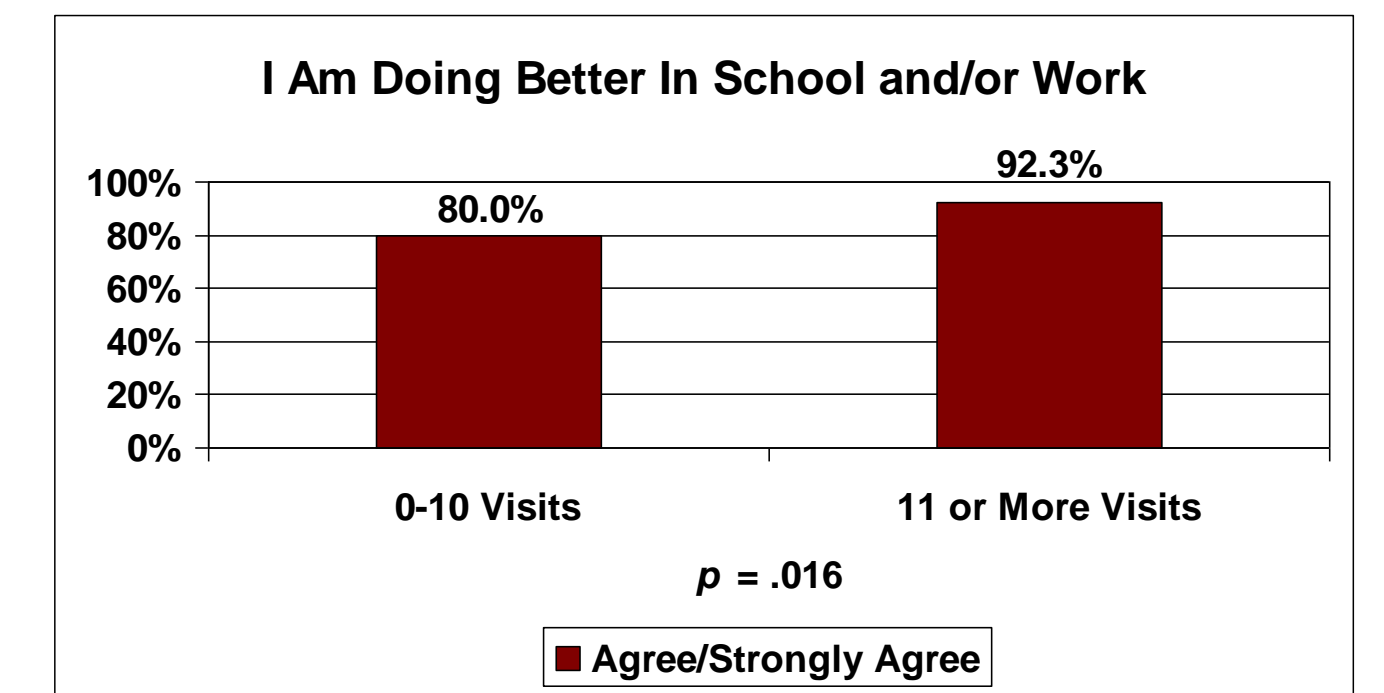
Surveys were completed prior to each client's appointment. If the client was above the age of 12, the secretary gave the client the survey to complete. If the client was under the age of 12, the secretary gave the child's parent(s) the survey to complete.

### Results

Clients who had attended 11 or more sessions reported better outcomes in all areas except being better able to cope when things went wrong: (a) I am better at handling daily life,  $\chi^2(1, N = 22) = 5.24, p = .022$ , (b) I get along better with family members,  $\chi^2(1, N = 22) = 4.75, p = .029$ , (c) I get along better with friends and other people,  $\chi^2(1, N = 22) = 5.58, p = .018$ , (d) I am doing better in school and/or work,  $\chi^2(1, N = 22) = 5.75, p = .016$ , and (e) I am better able to cope when things go wrong,  $\chi^2(1, N = 22) = 1.79, p = .181$ . Mental health services at the agency are leading to positive changes in the lives' of clients. These benefits increased as clients attended more counseling sessions.

### Discussion

Clients who had a higher number of visits with an ALDEA therapist had better outcomes on four of our five outcome measures. However, more could be done to help ALDEA's clients cope when things go wrong in their lives (e.g. Identify and use crisis management resources). It will be important for ALDEA to continue monitoring the effectiveness of their mental health services, but they need to work on getting feedback from a higher percentage of clients.



### References

- Heflinger, C. A., Sonnichsen, S. E., & Brannan, A. M. (1996). Parent satisfaction with children's mental health services in a children's mental health managed care demonstration. *The Journal of Behavioral Health Services and Research, 23*(1), 69-79.
- Martin, J. S., Petr, C. G., & Kapp, S. A. (2003). Consumer satisfaction with children's mental health services. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 20*(3), 211-226.
- Nabors, L. A., Weist, M. D., Reynolds, M. W., Tashman, N. A., & Jackson, C. J. (1999). Adolescent satisfaction with school-based mental health services. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 8*(2), 229-236.