

# Mental Health First Aid Research in the United States



Mental Health  
FIRST AID

from NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR  
MENTAL WELLBEING

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**identify**



**understand**



**respond**

**Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)** is a skill-based training that teaches people how to identify, understand, and respond to signs and symptoms of mental health or substance use challenges in adults 18 and older and youth ages 12-18. [Global research](#) and [evaluation](#) of these programs have contributed to a robust evidence base, which is crucial to highlight strengths and gaps across the program and to inform future program developments.



Over the past decade, there has been a growing body of research on the **processes, outcomes, and impacts** of **MHFA** across the United States.

## Overview

**97** peer-reviewed studies have been published since **2013**.



**82** were evaluation studies.



**15** were scoping reviews, systematic reviews or meta-analyses that included studies from the United States.





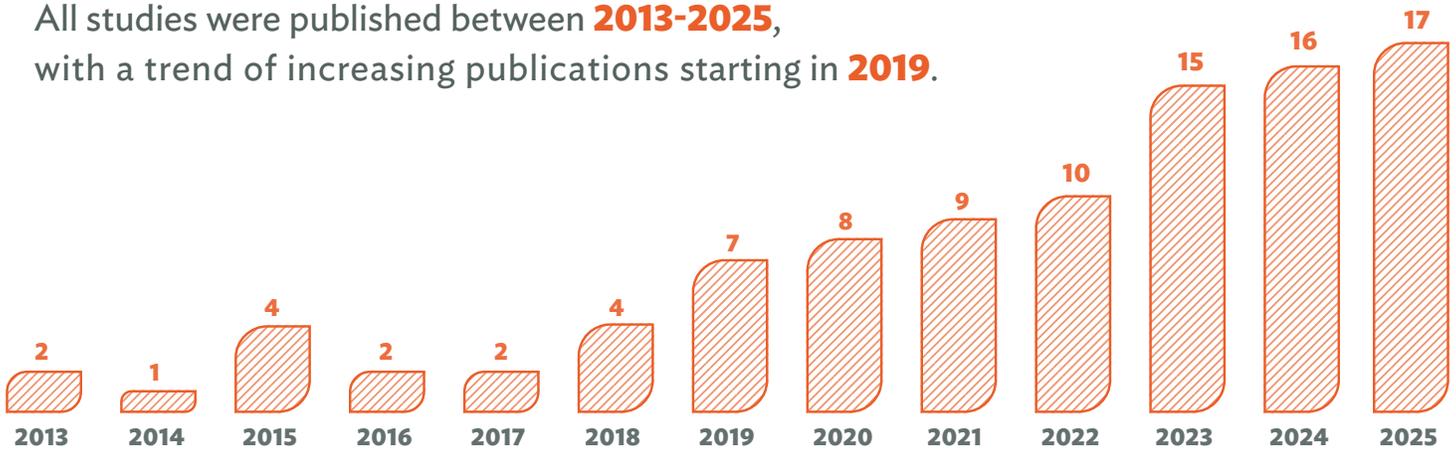
**Scoping reviews** systematically map published literature on a topic by identifying key concepts, theories, and sources of evidence, often to determine gaps in the literature.

**Systematic reviews** collect and summarize all available published evidence on a specific research topic.



**Meta-analyses** use statistics to summarize all available published evidence on a specific research topic.

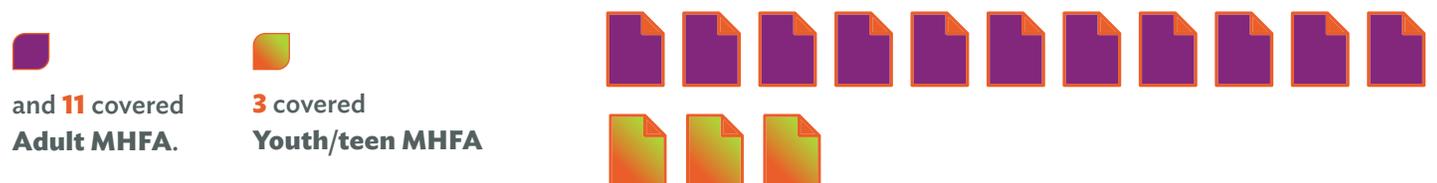
All studies were published between **2013-2025**, with a trend of increasing publications starting in **2019**.



### Of the **82** evaluation studies:



### Of the **15** reviews or meta-analyses:



**NOTE:** There are additional miscellaneous publications, including **18 master's theses** and **doctoral dissertations**, **6 descriptions** of multilevel interventions which included **MHFA**, and **2 presentations** not included in the overall count above.



# Findings from Adult MHFA Studies in the United States

Adult MHFA studies focused on a variety of populations including:



## Adults living in urban and rural areas

(Banh et al., 2019; Bhakta et al., 2024; EL-Amin et al., 2018; Laurene et al., 2023; Ploper et al., 2015; Talbot et al., 2017; Troxel et al., 2022; Wong et al., 2023)



## MHFA Instructors

(Crisanti et al., 2015; Lucksted et al., 2015; Mendenhall & Jackson, 2013)



## Students and higher education staff

(Anderson et al., 2023a, 2023b; Dulellari et al., 2022; Frick et al., 2021; Lipson, 2014; McCormack et al., 2018; McKeirnan et al., 2023, 2025, 2025; Moxley & Garrison, 2025; Ostrowski et al., 2023; Song et al., 2022; Vickery et al., 2023)



## Medical professionals

(Baker et al., 2019; Frick et al., 2021; McCormack et al., 2018; McKeirnan et al., 2023, 2025; Witry et al., 2020; Witry et al., 2020; Yoo et al., 2023)



## Military communities

(Mohatt et al., 2017)



## Faith communities and leaders

(Costello et al., 2021; Jordan et al., 2025; Malone et al., 2024)



## Athletics professionals

(Anderson et al., 2023a, 2023b)



## Justice professionals

(Arazan & Weich, 2023; Flumo et al., 2024; Soderstrom et al., 2024; Valera et al., 2024)

## Adult MHFA studies tracked a variety of measures, including:

- Mental health knowledge/literacy
- Confidence
- Self-efficacy
- Attitudes toward mental illness
- Stigma and empathy
- Course satisfaction
- Recognition of mental health issues
- Use of MHFA behaviors
- Seeking out mental health treatment
- Training engagement
- Identification of assistance behaviors treatment/support resources



# Major findings for Adult MHFA

## FINDING:

**Increased mental health literacy, including:** (Anderson et al., 2023a, 2023b; Arazan & Weich, 2023; Banh et al., 2019; Bhakta et al., 2024; Costello et al., 2021; Dulellari et al., 2022; EL-Amin et al., 2018; Iwinski et al., 2024; Lipson, 2014; Lucksted et al., 2015; McKeirnan et al., 2025; Mendenhall et al., 2013; Mohatt et al., 2017; Moxley & Garrison, 2025; Ostrowski et al., 2023; Ploper et al., 2015; Talbot et al., 2017; Vang-Kue et al., 2024; Vickery et al., 2023; Yoo et al., 2023)

- Knowledge of signs, symptoms and risk factors of mental health and substance use challenges.
- Ability to identify appropriate types of professionals and self-help resources for individuals with a mental health or substance use challenge.



## FINDING:

**Increased confidence/self-efficacy and likelihood to help an individual in distress.**

(Anderson et al., 2023a, 2023b; Banh et al., 2019; Bhakta et al., 2024; Dulellari et al., 2022; EL-Amin et al., 2018; Forbes et al., 2022; Frick et al., 2021; Lipson, 2014; Lucksted et al., 2015; McKeirnan et al., 2023; Mohatt et al., 2017; Moxley & Garrison, 2025; Ostrowski et al., 2023; Ploper et al., 2015; Troxel et al., 2022; Valera et al., 2024; Vang-Kue et al., 2024; Witry et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2023; Yoo et al., 2023)

## FINDING:

**Reduced stigma and increased empathy toward individuals with mental health challenges.**

(Arazan & Weich, 2023; Costello et al., 2021; Frick et al., 2021; Lucksted et al., 2015; McCormack et al., 2018; McKeirnan et al., 2023; Talbot et al., 2017; Troxel et al., 2022; Vang-Kue et al., 2024; Vickery et al., 2023; Wong et al., 2023)



## FINDING:

**Use of MHFA skills after training.**

(Laurene et al., 2023; Robertson et al., 2021; Song et al., 2022; Witry et al., 2020; Witry et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2023; Yoo et al., 2023)

## FINDING:

**Increased likelihood to seek therapy or mental health care for themselves.**

(Lipson, 2014)



## FINDING:

**Correct application of MHFA skills during a simulation.**

(Nguyen et al., 2022)



# Findings from Youth MHFA Studies in the United States

Youth MHFA studies focused on a variety of populations including:



## Social services employees

(Aakre et al., 2016; Childs et al., 2020; Elligson et al., 2021; Haggerty et al., 2019; Yoo et al., 2023)



## Parents

(Havewala et al., 2022; Marsico et al., 2022)



## School personnel

(Chehaib et al., 2023; Elligson et al., 2021; Geierstanger et al., 2024; Gryglewicz et al., 2018; Haggerty et al., 2019; Noltemeyer et al., 2020; Savoia et al., 2025; Wachutka et al., 2025)



## Juvenile justice employees

(Anderson et al., 2020; Childs et al., 2020; Elligson et al., 2021; Gryglewicz et al., 2025; Noltemeyer et al., 2020; Soderstrom et al., 2024)



## Mental health professionals

(Haggerty et al., 2019; Noltemeyer et al., 2020)



## Youth workers

(Iaccopucci et al., 2024)

Youth MHFA studies tracked a variety of measures, including:

- Mental health literacy
- Confidence
- Self-efficacy
- Attitudes
- Stigma
- Awareness of treatment resources
- Program satisfaction
- Behavioral intentions
- Recognition of cues to perform MHFA
- Performance of MHFA actions



# Major findings for Youth MHFA



## FINDING:

**Increased mental health literacy, including:** (Banh et al., 2019; Childs et al., 2020; Elligson et al., 2021; Gryglewicz et al., 2018; Haggerty et al., 2019; Havewala et al., 2022; Iwinski et al., 2024; Marsico et al., 2022; Noltemeyer et al., 2020; Rose et al., 2019; Savoia et al., 2025; Yoo et al., 2023)

- Knowledge of signs, symptoms and risk factors of mental health and substance use challenges
- Ability to identify appropriate types of professionals and self-help resources for youth with a mental health or substance use challenge.

## FINDING:

**Increased confidence/self-efficacy and likelihood to help a young person in distress.**

(Aakre et al., 2016; Banh et al., 2019; Childs et al., 2020; Elligson et al., 2021; Gryglewicz et al., 2018; Haggerty et al., 2019; Havewala et al., 2022; Marsico et al., 2022; Noltemeyer et al., 2020; Rose et al., 2019; Savoia et al., 2025)



## FINDING:

**Reduced stigma and increased empathy/acceptance toward youth with mental health challenges.**

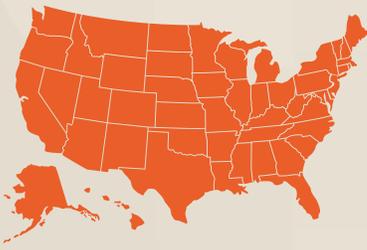
(Elligson et al., 2021; Gryglewicz et al., 2018; Havewala et al., 2022; Marsico et al., 2022; Noltemeyer et al., 2020)

## FINDING:

**Use of MHFA skills after training.**

(Anderson et al., 2020; Laurene et al., 2023; Noltemeyer et al., 2020)





# Findings from **teen MHFA** Studies in the United States

Starting in Fall of 2018, the National Council for Mental Wellbeing engaged a group of researchers at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health to conduct a series of research trials. These studies aimed to culturally adapt the Australian version of tMHFA to the United States, and to evaluate the impact of tMHFA in schools across the U.S.

Rosenbaum and colleagues brought together multiple stakeholders such as teens across the US, experts in mental health, MHFA National Trainers and Youth MHFA Instructors to culturally adapt the Australian version of tMHFA to the United States (Rosenbaum et al., 2023). Recommendations regarding course topics, safety protocols, implementation guidance, and format were taken to create the US tMHFA program.

A 2023 study examined the effectiveness of the tMHFA program in schools across the country (Wilcox et al., 2023). Similar to findings in studies by Laura Hart and colleagues in Australia (Hart et al., 2018, 2022), the effectiveness trial found that after taking tMHFA, students experienced:

 **FINDING:**

**Improvements in endorsing helpful intentions to help a peer.**



 **FINDING:**

**Increases in the number of adults rated as helpful.**

 **FINDING:**

**Reduction in unhelpful or harmful intentions toward a peer.**



 **FINDING:**

**Decrease in stigmatizing beliefs.**



 **FINDING:**

**Improved confidence in helping peers across a range of mental health concerns.**

 **FINDING:**

**Moderate changes to perceptions of adults as helpful.**

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