

Who Drops Out of School? Clinical Correlates of Educational Barriers Among PSE Students with PTSD

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¹Rutgers University; ²CUNY; Funded by NIDILRR #90IFRE0038; ISTSS 39th Conference, November 1-4, 2023, Los Angeles, CA

Introduction

- It is well-documented that students who have been exposed to trauma experience an increase in academic, social, and emotional problems, including increased likelihood of dropout and lower grade-point average (GPA) (Mutavi et al., 2017; Kataoka et al., 2012; Delaney-Black et al., 2002).
- Trauma, and its resultant disorder, Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), have been indicated as a predictor of poor outcomes for college students (Windle et al., 2018). Smyth et al. (2008) and Read et al. (2012) found that between 6-17% of post-secondary students met criteria for current PTSD. Rates of PTSD have been found to be higher among samples of students who are military veterans (Rudd et al., 2011). Given the documented impacts of trauma on post-secondary students, providing services that address trauma may be a powerful strategy to improve long-term outcomes (Dudley et al., 2014; Killackey et al., 2017; Waynor et al., 2018). Services focused on assistance with the completion of formative educational tasks may help reduce disability (Dudley et al., 2014; Marino & Dixon, 2014; Ellison et al., 2018).
- This study examined the impact of PTSD symptoms on PSE education and their service implications. We hypothesized that PSE students with positive PTSD screens would report worse executive functioning, more educational barriers, and service barriers.

Method

PSE students (N=584; 33% males, 55% females, 6% other; 56% white vs 44% non-white; 72% undergraduate vs. 20% graduate/med/law students; 34% were first generation students) who reported at least one traumatic event completed online surveys through RedCAP including:

demographic surveys;

- Adverse Childhood Experiences Questionnaire (ACEs; Felitti et al., 1998)
- Traumatic Life Events Questionnaire (TLEQ; Kubany et al., 2000)
- PTSD symptom checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5; Weathers et al., 2013) with PCL-5>=33 indicating positive PTSD
- Educational Barriers Survey (Mullen et al., 2014)
- Other questions on service access and needs.

Regression was utilized to determine the impact of ACEs and trauma exposure, PTSD symptoms, on the total number of premature dropouts during PSE for trauma-exposed PSE students.

Results

- 69% of this trauma-exposed PSE student sample had PCL-5>=33, indicating a positive PTSD screen. PSE students with PTSD scored higher for educational barriers such as difficulty with submission of assignments, taking exams, meeting course deadlines, and class presentations.
- The two groups did not differ in taking notes, organizing course materials, speaking with professors, writing papers, participating in class discussions, completing group projects.
- PSE students with PTSD scored worse on executive functioning, reported less accessibility to mental health services & ODS services compared to those without.
- In the regression analysis, both ACEs and trauma exposure predicted a number of dropouts among trauma-exposed students, but not PTSD symptoms, controlling for gender, minority status, and educational barriers.

Discussion

- Findings are consistent with research suggest that PTSD in post-secondary students contributes to poorer academic performance, such as lower GPA and increased likelihood of dropping out of college (Bryan et al., 2014; Boyraz et al., 2016).
- Findings suggested that PSE students with positive PTSD
- Face challenges in many different areas from academic, financial to social.
- Helpful services would involve mental health support, academic accommodation, financial aid, and university policies for safety and inclusiveness.
- Findings call for increased access to accommodations and mental health supports for students experiencing PTSD in post-secondary education.

PTSD Screen

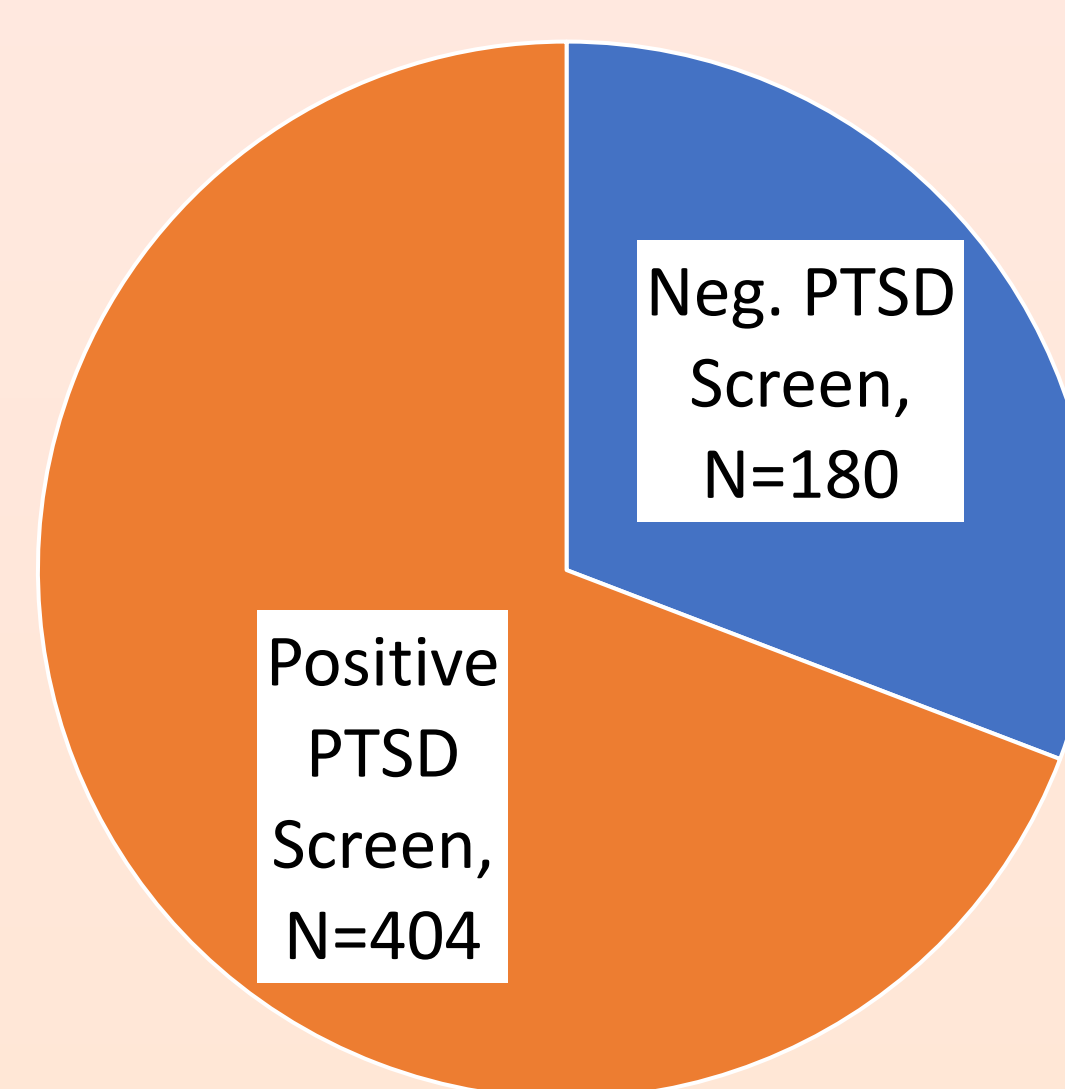


Fig 1. Demographic (n=584 trauma exposed students)

Executive Functioning

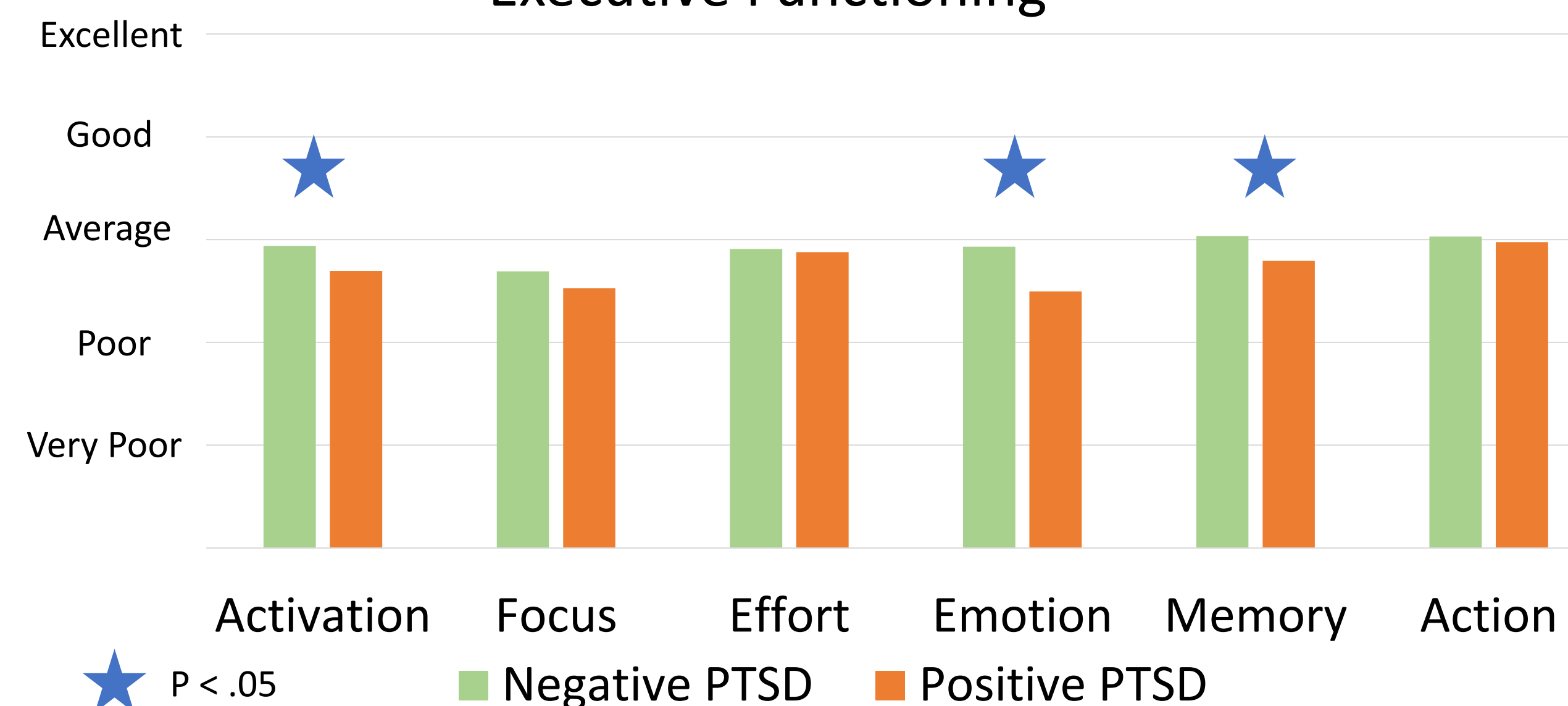


Fig 2. T-test on Executive Functioning for Students w/ and w/o Positive PTSD Screens

Ability to Perform Academic Tasks

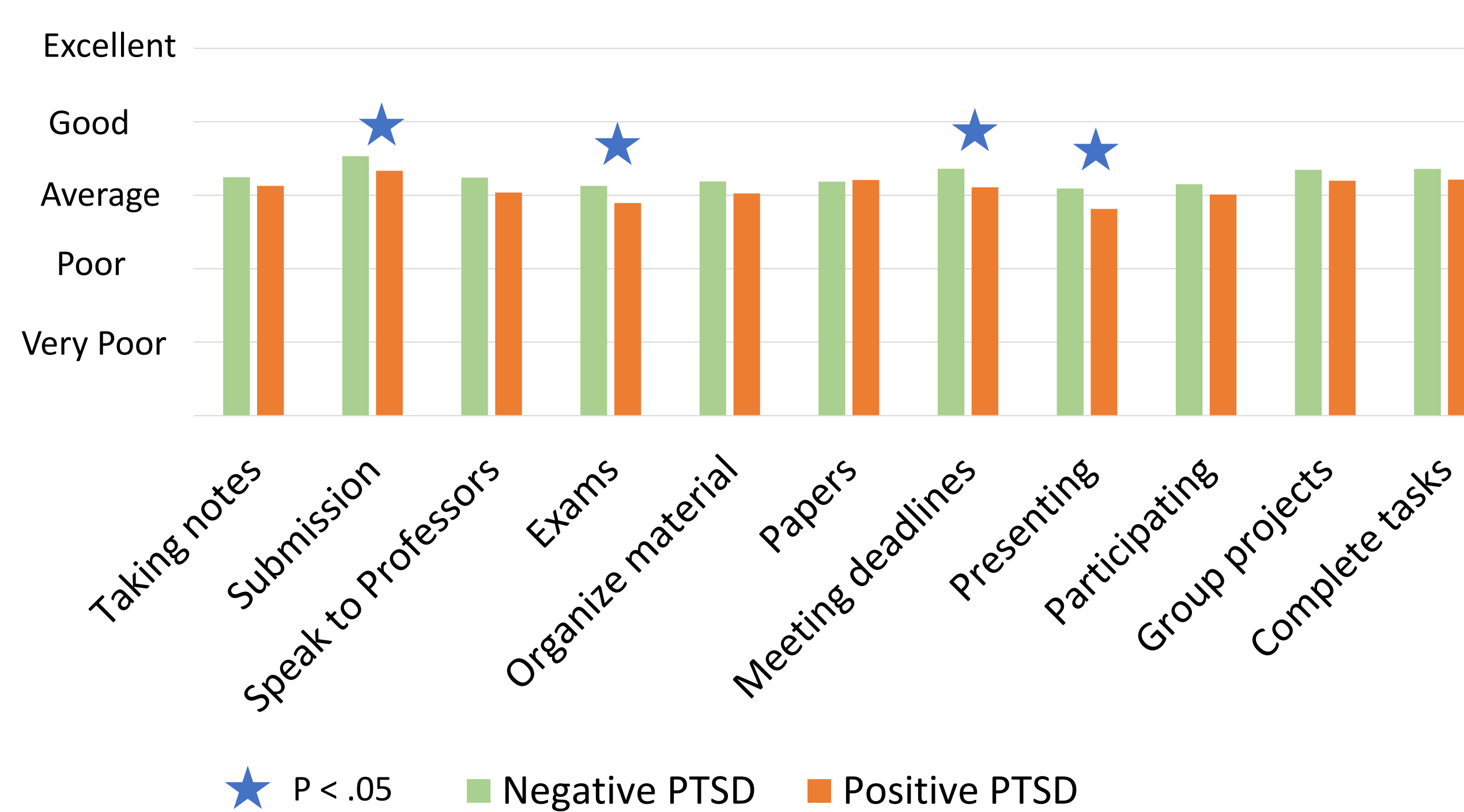


Fig 3. T-test on Educational Barriers for Students with and w/o Positive PTSD Screens

Access to Mental Health Services / Support

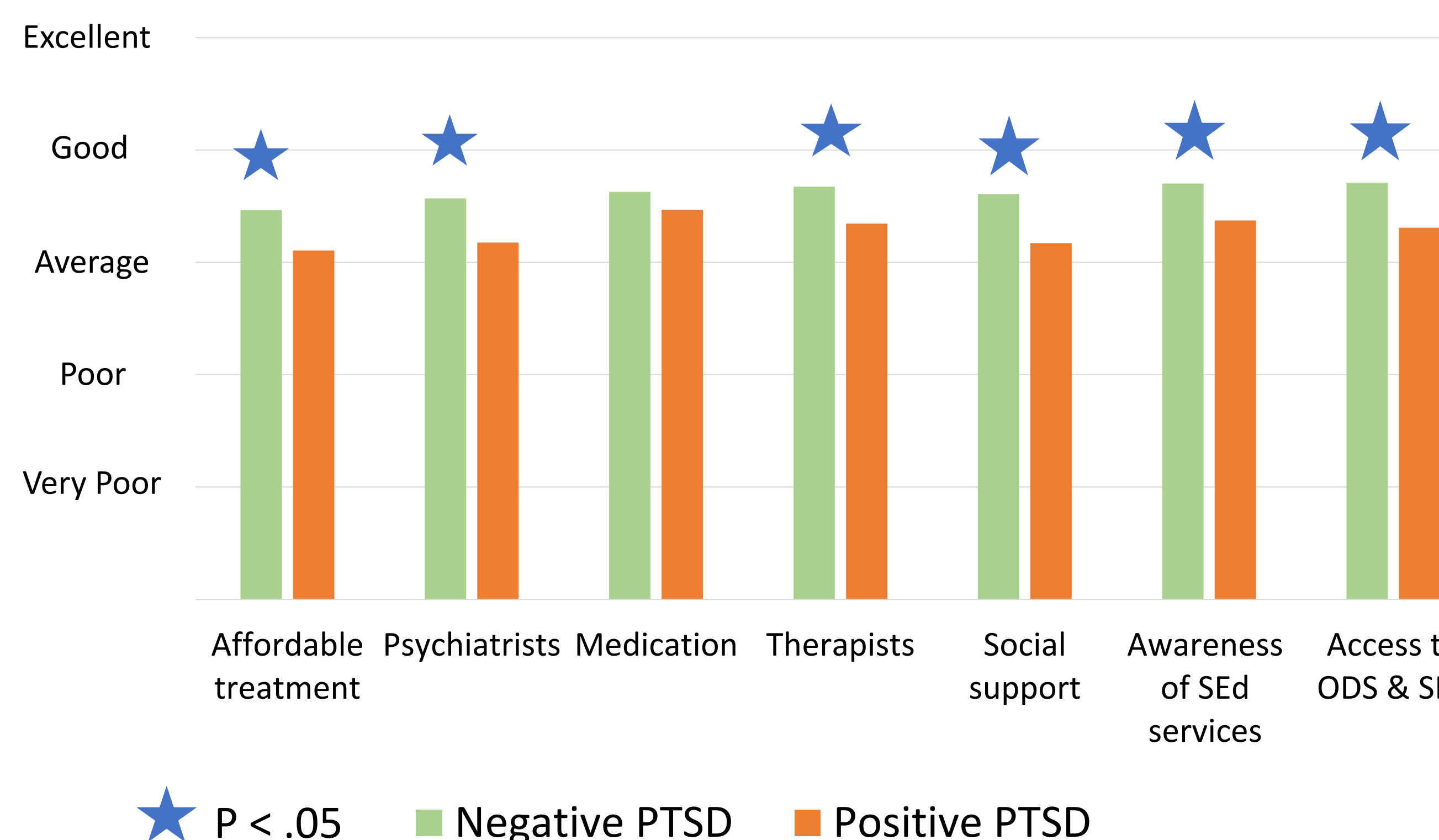


Fig 4. T-test on Service Barriers for Students with and w/o Positive PTSD Screens

of Dropouts (Leave of Absence, LOA) due to Mental Health

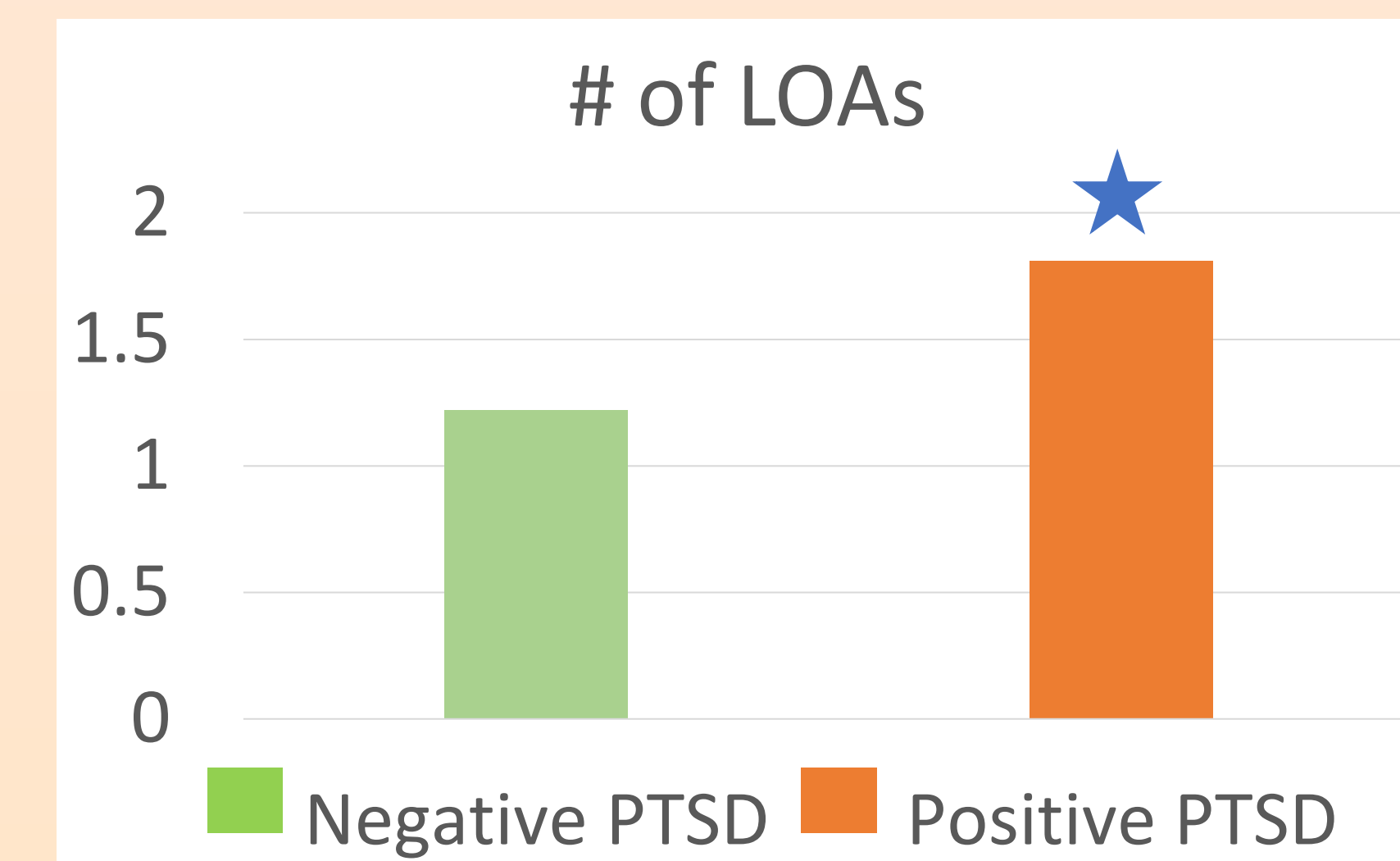
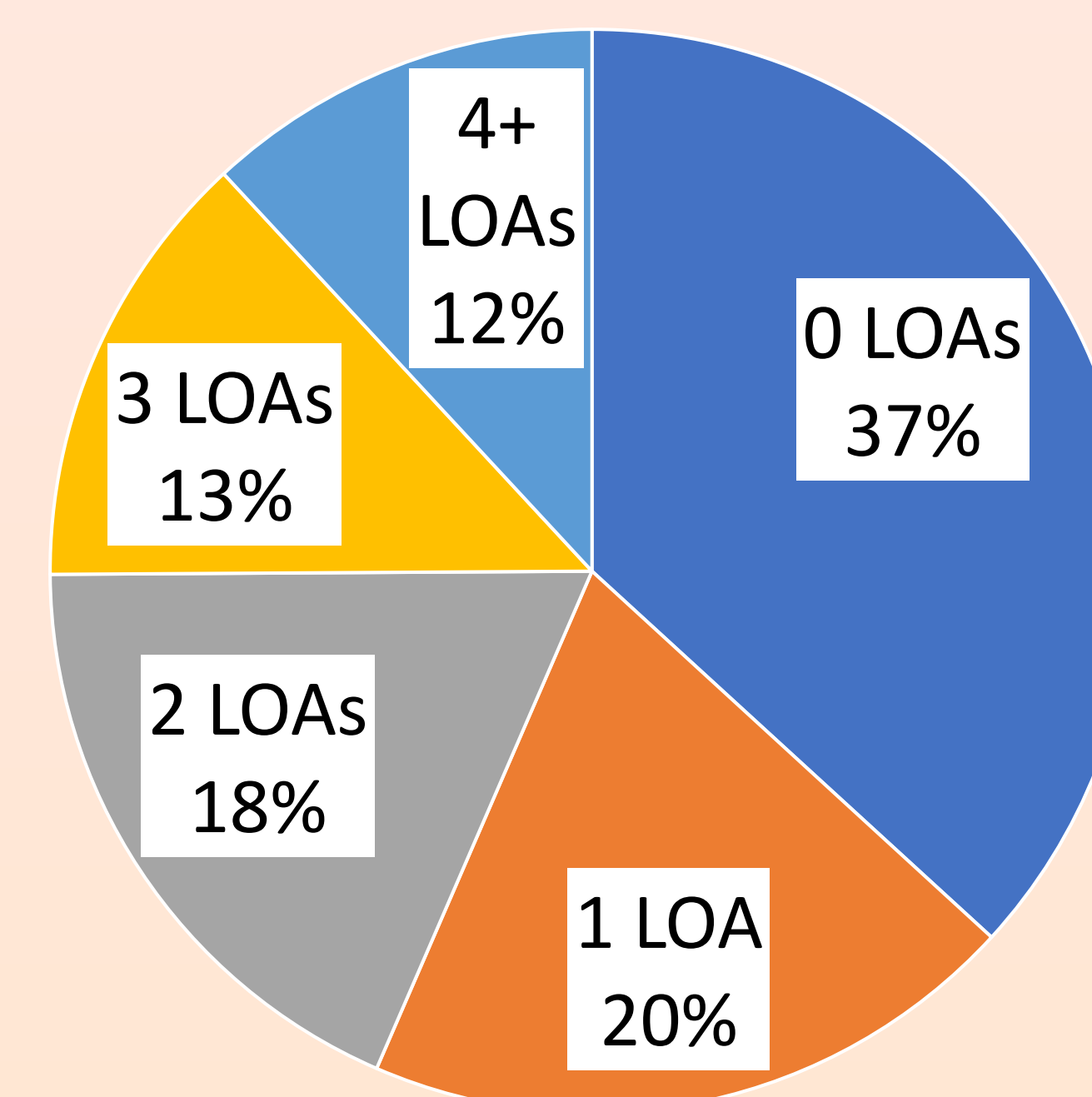
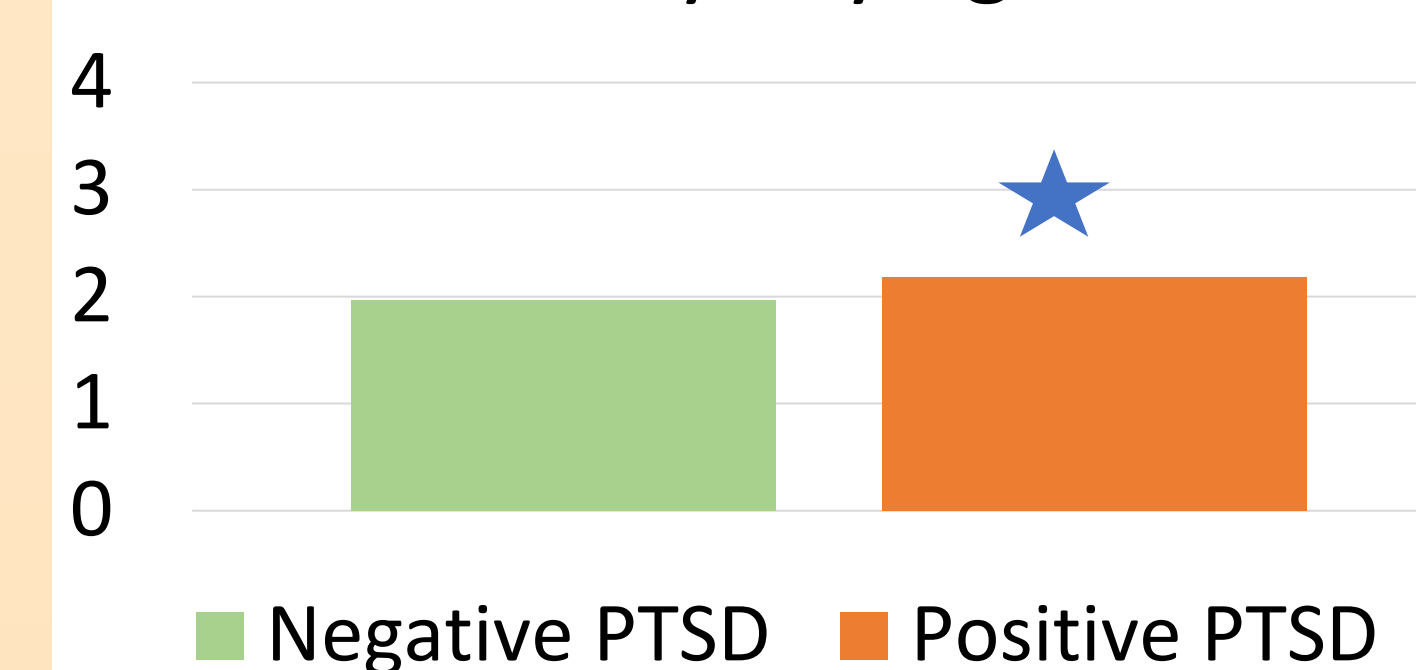


Fig 5. T-test on # of LOAs for Students w/ and w/o Positive PTSD Screens

Difficulty Paying Bills



Confidence w/ Edu. Plan

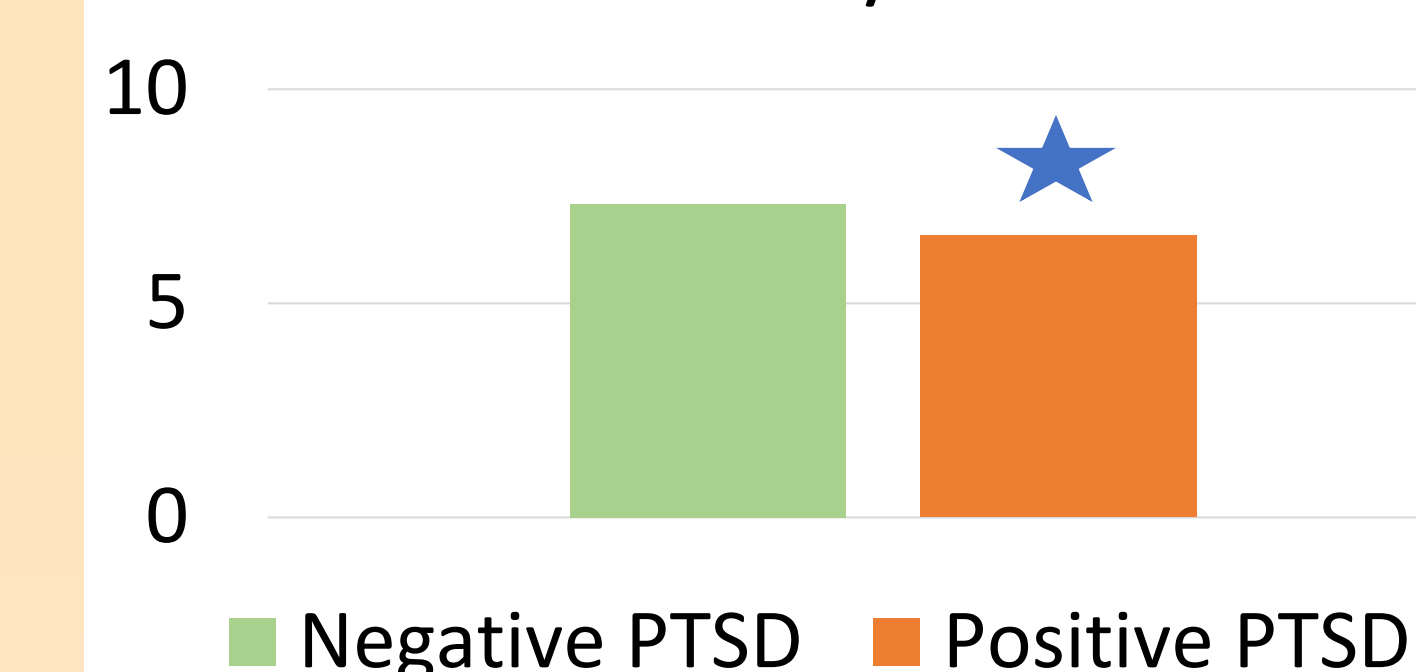


Fig 6. T-test for Difficulty Paying Bills and Confidence w/ Edu. Plan

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