



Trauma-Informed Care in Court:

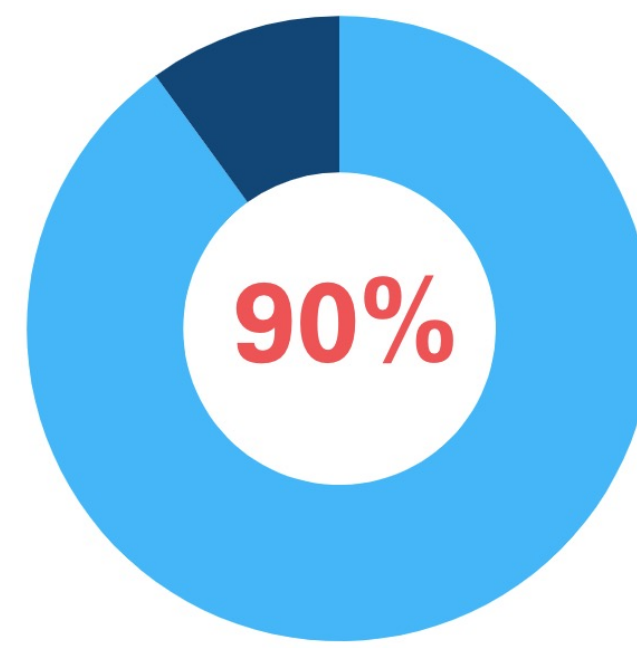
An Exploratory Research Project



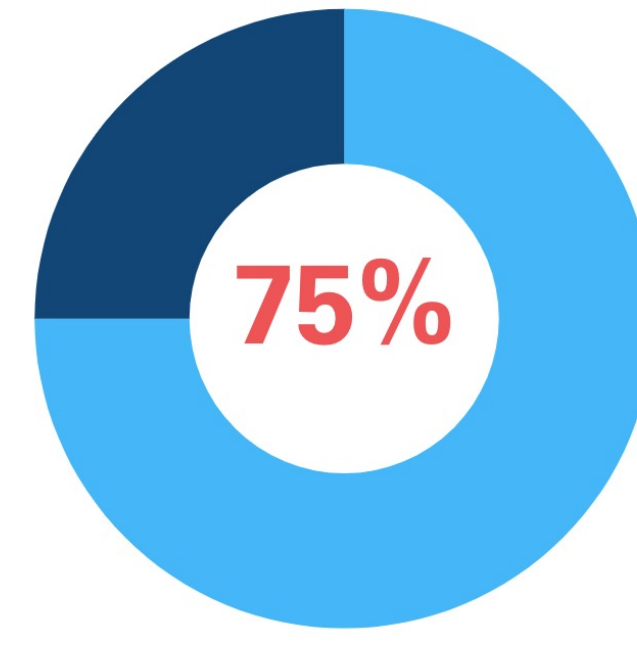
OUR STUDY

Trauma is the lasting emotional response that can result from a distressing event.¹

Up to...



of court-involved youth, and



of court-involved adults

have experienced trauma.²

Trauma-informed care (TIC) in the court context recognizes this reality and elevates **safety and comfort** through environment, policy, and behavior modifications, called trauma-informed practices (TIPs).³



This project is the **first** empirical assessment of trauma-informed care in the North Carolina court system.

WHAT WE LEARNED

- Judicial education programs can begin to shift attitudes, showing **promise for future trauma education efforts**.
- Judges self-report and demonstrate highest engagement with TIPs related to communication, but **less with practices that require broader collaboration and planning**.
- Judges **underutilize TIPs** related to decision-making, interactions with youth and families, and understanding systemic causes of court-involvement.
- Future research and education could **explore why these gaps exist and how to encourage judges** to make far reaching TIC-aligned changes.
- More research is also needed to understand the **impact of trauma-informed practices** on court-involved youth and their families.

We investigated four main questions:

1 How do judges view trauma-informed care?



We surveyed **91** district court judges to better understand their **experiences** and **attitudes** related to TIC. We found:

- Juvenile justice (JJ) judges held **more favorable** attitudes towards TIC compared to non-JJ judges.
- Judges self-reported **higher** levels of engagement with TIPs related to **communication** and less engagement with practices related to policies/procedures and decision-making.

Juvenile justice judges expressed greater...

personal support for TIC

intention to understand underlying causes of behavior

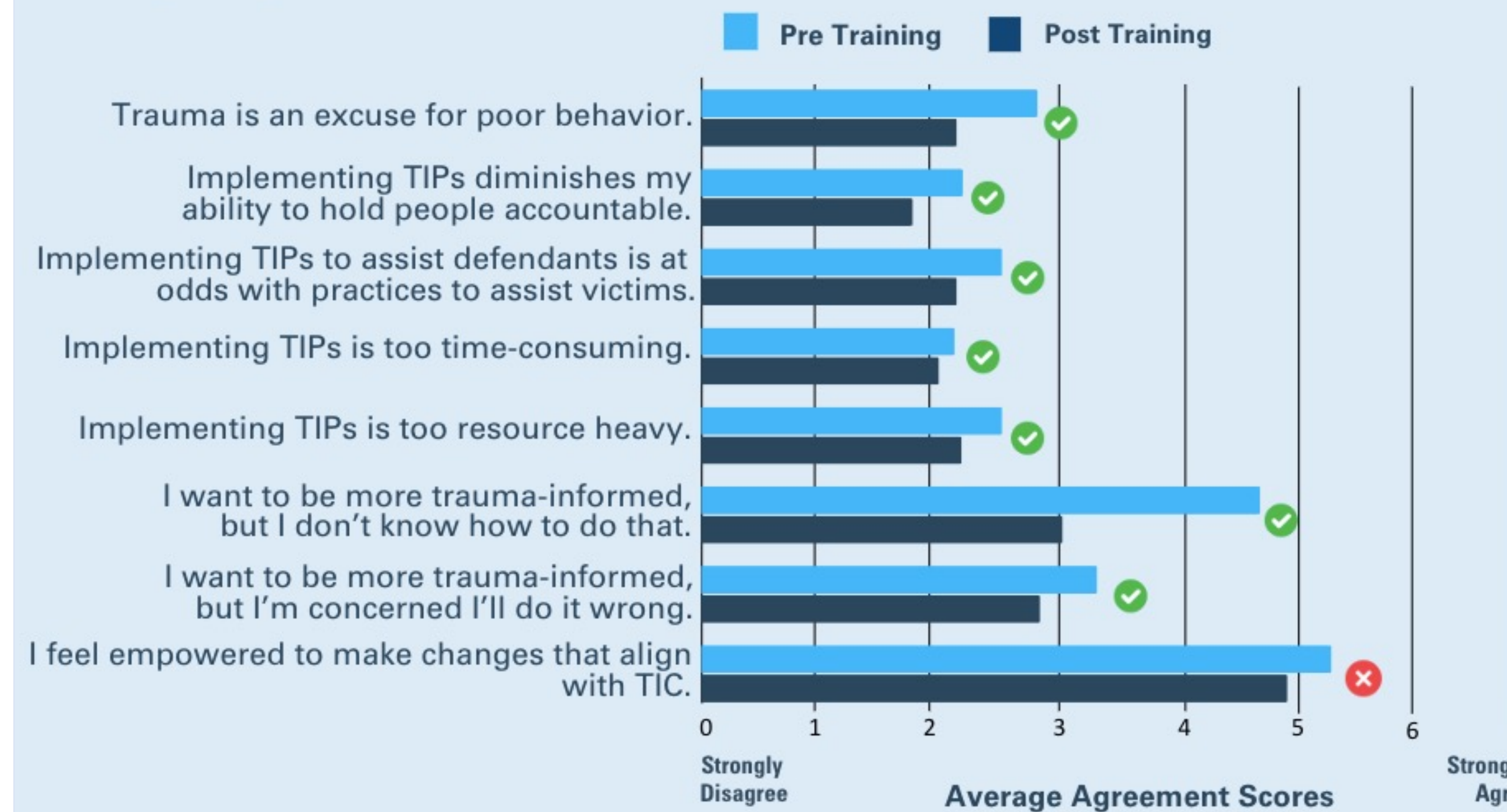
flexibility in response to problem behavior

2 How do judges respond to trauma education?

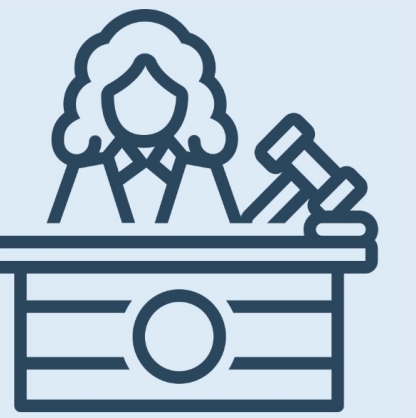


We surveyed 50 new judges before and after a trauma education program. Judges rated all sessions **“very”** or **“extremely”** effective on a 5-point Likert scale. We also assessed judge agreement before and after the session on common barriers to TIC:

Judge Agreement With Common Barriers to TIC Pre- and Post-Training

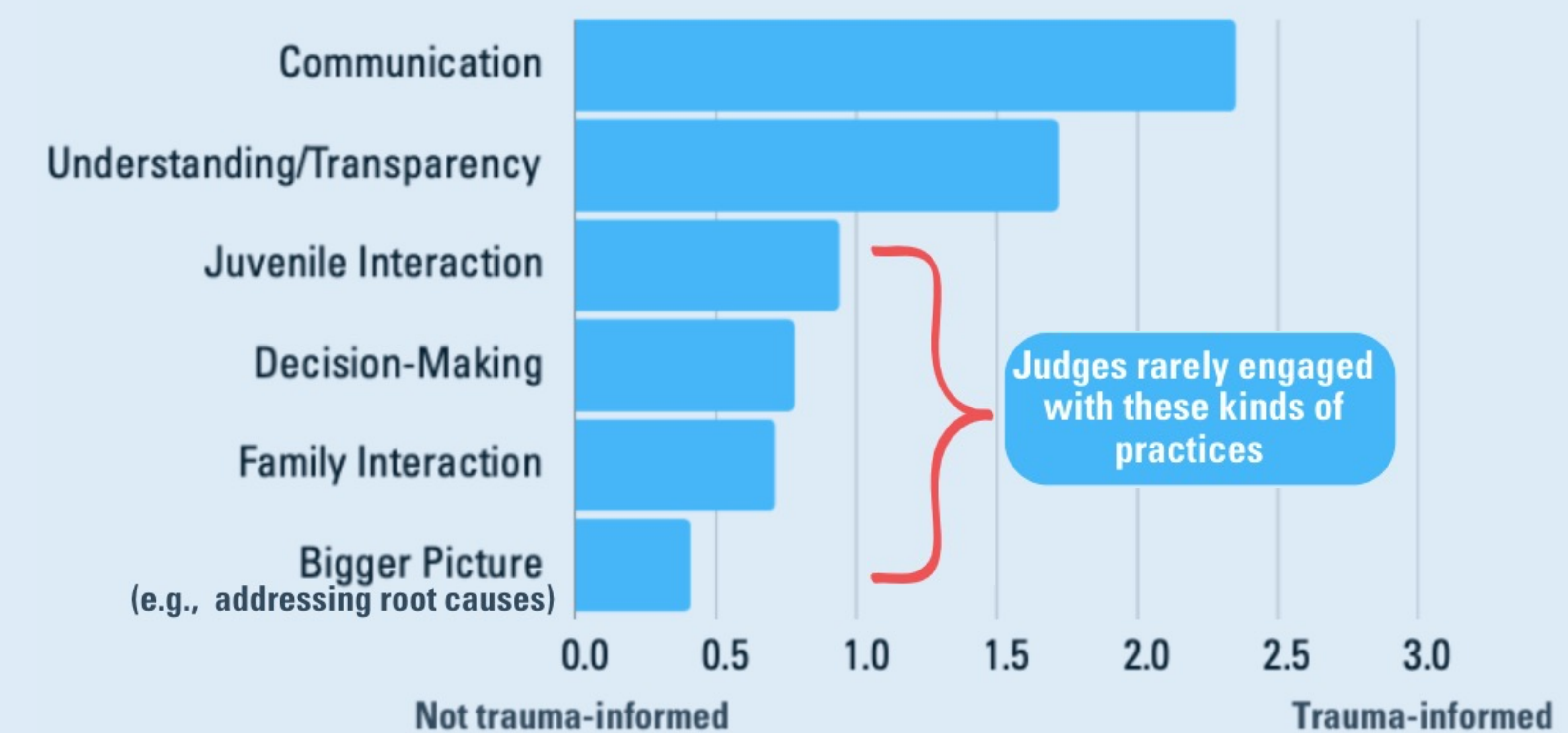


3 How do judges act in juvenile court?



We observed **201** juvenile delinquency court hearings across **16** judges in **seven** counties. We scored judges' engagement with 30 TIPs across six categories:

Judges' Mean Scores For TIP Categories



Judges rarely engaged with these kinds of practices

4 How do youth experience court?



We surveyed **17** youth, **25** juvenile defenders, and **29** juvenile court counselors in North Carolina about youths' court experience.

- Youth reported more than moderate distress during their court experience ($M = 5.80$).
- This was more distress than defenders ($M = 4.78$) and court counselors ($M = 4.93$) perceived the youth to have.

Court counselors and defenders also shared their views on judge behaviors that impact youth:



0-10 Distress Thermometer

Positive Impact
 Show respect
 Practice active listening
 Acknowledge progress
 Encourage accountability
 Seek to understand

Negative Impact
 Exhibit malicious behavior
 Be overly punitive
 Lack of empathy/understanding
 Be too soft