

# Growing up with absence: the lasting impact of parental loss on young adult mental health.

Bergeron-Leclerc<sup>1</sup>, C., Cherblanc<sup>1</sup>, J., Gallais<sup>1</sup>, B., Lane<sup>2</sup>, J., Pouliot<sup>1</sup>, E., Proulx<sup>1</sup>, F.A., & Côté<sup>1</sup>, I.  
<sup>1</sup>Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, <sup>2</sup>Université de Sherbrooke



## 1. BACKGROUND

Transition to adulthood

- Critical developmental period characterized by significant **identity formation**, **emotional adjustment**, and **social role exploration**<sup>[1]</sup>.
- Young people face multiple life changes, such as leaving the family home, pursuing higher education, building romantic relationship (often involving cohabitation) or entering the labor market<sup>[2]</sup>.

Mental health vulnerabilities

- This stage is **associated with heightened vulnerability to mental health challenges**, including anxiety, depression, and psychological distress<sup>[3]</sup>.
- This fragility may be linked to the **cumulative demands of personal, academic, and social transitions**<sup>[1-3]</sup>.

Childhood events

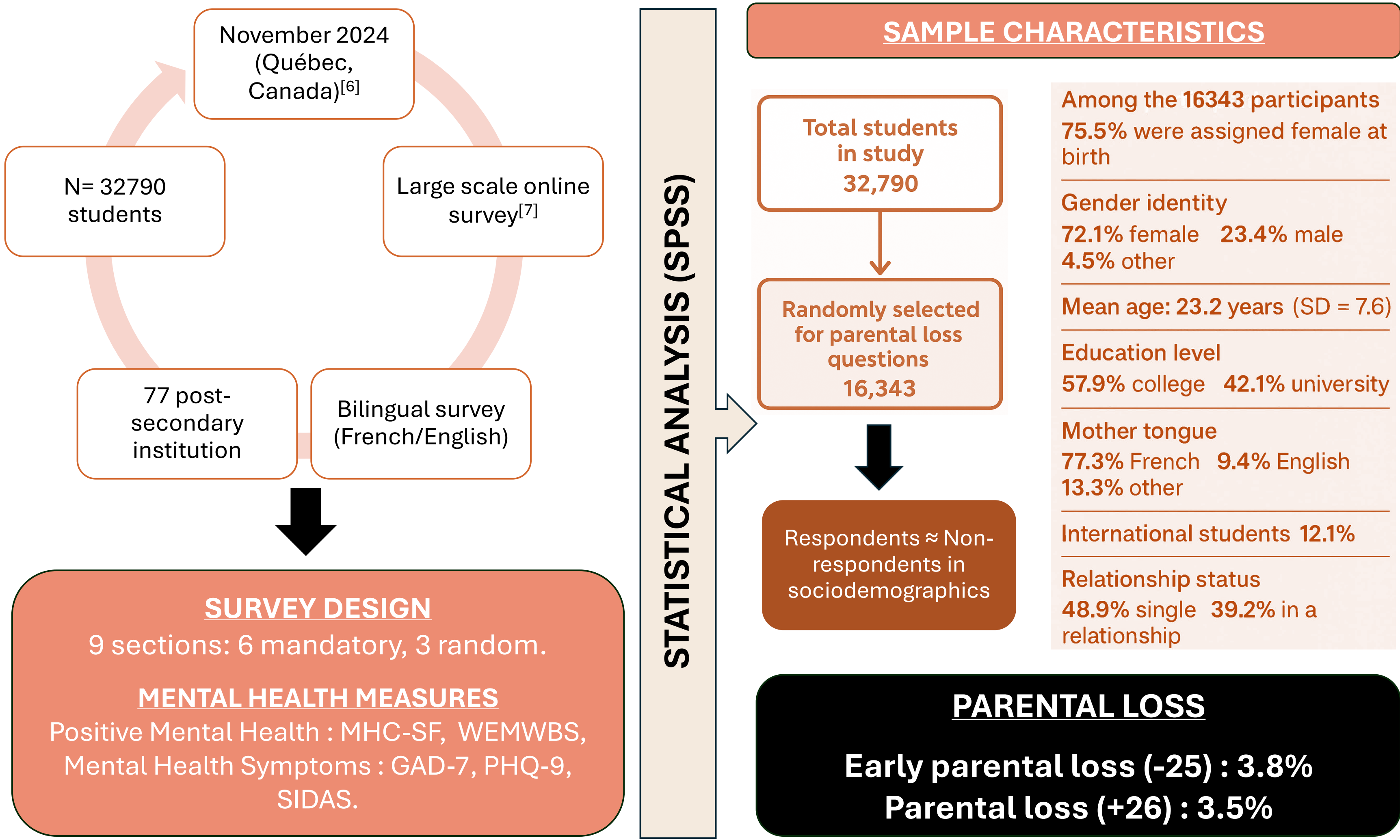
- **Adverse childhood events**—such as maltreatment or household dysfunction—are well-established risk factors for long-term psychological difficulties<sup>[4-5]</sup>.
- **Early parental loss (EPL)** (before 25) is associated with cognitive and academic difficulties, caregiving burdens, and greater social and economic vulnerability<sup>[5]</sup>.

Understanding how **early parental loss** intersect with the **developmental challenges of emerging adulthood** is crucial for identifying at-risk populations and designing effective mental health interventions.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

- 1 Provide an overview of the complete mental health of the students.
- 2 Compare mental health between students with and without early parental loss.
- 3 Explore the impact of early parental loss and other determinants on students' mental health.

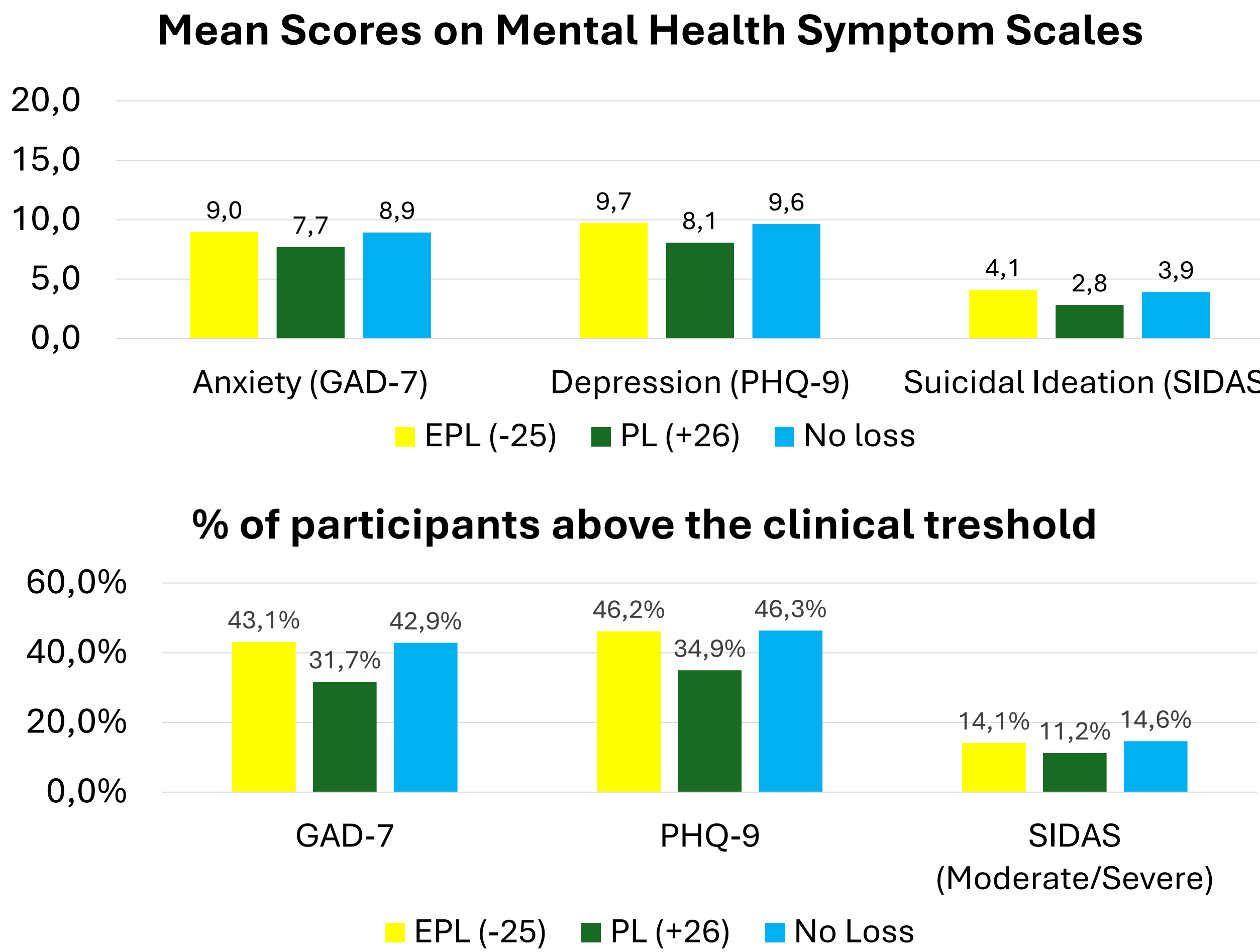
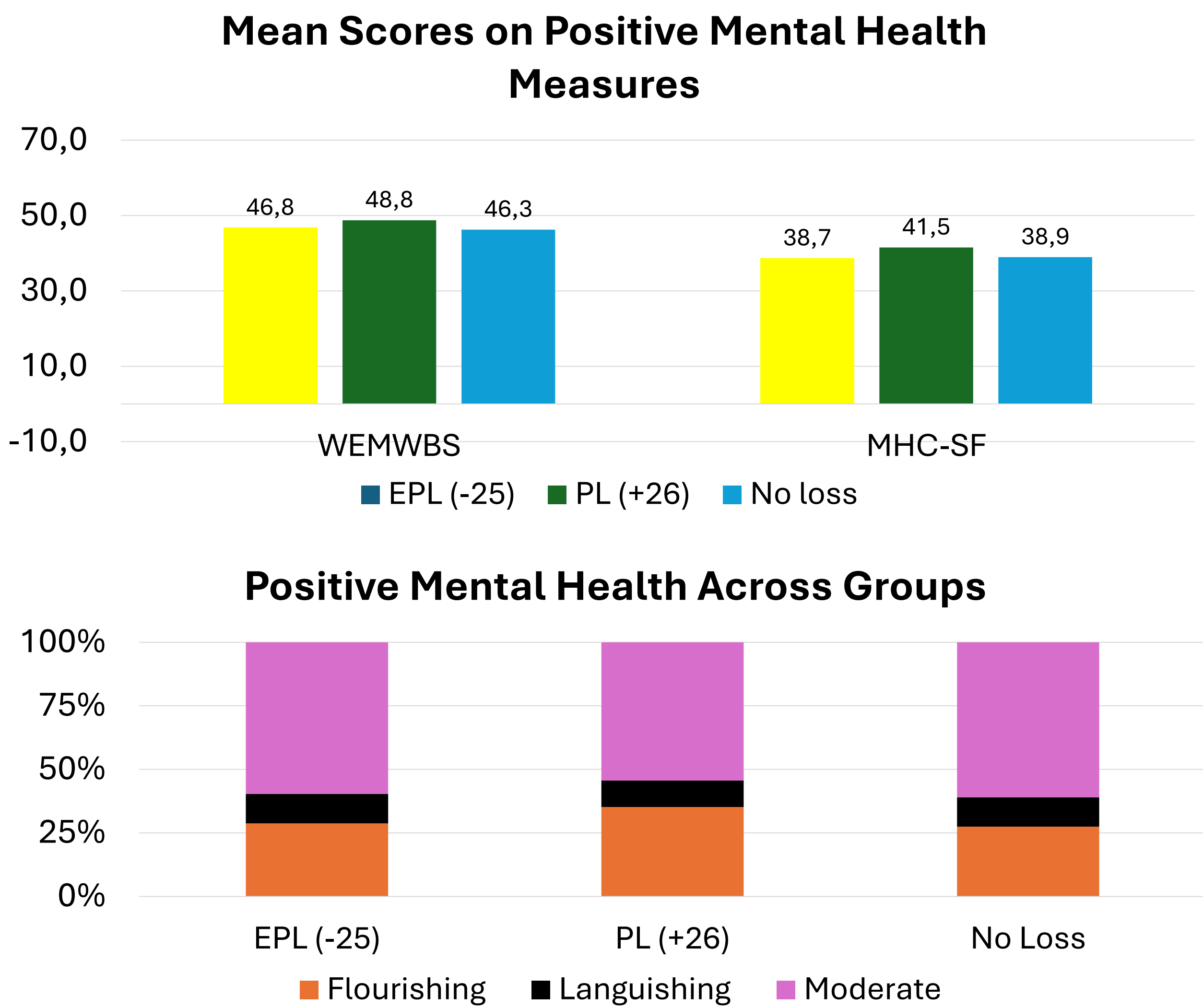
## 3. METHODOLOGY



**REFERENCES:** [1] Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist*, 55(5), 469–480. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.5.469>. [2] Pauzé, R. (2018). État des connaissances concernant la transition à l'âge adulte chez les jeunes vulnérables. Commission spéciale sur les droits de l'enfant. [https://www.csdepi.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/Fichiers\\_clients/Documents\\_depotes\\_a\\_la\\_Commission/P-038\\_Etat\\_Transition\\_Adulte\\_R\\_Pauze.pdf](https://www.csdepi.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/Fichiers_clients/Documents_depotes_a_la_Commission/P-038_Etat_Transition_Adulte_R_Pauze.pdf). [3] Arnett, J. J. et al. (2014). The new life stage of emerging adulthood at ages 18-29 years: implications for mental health. *The lancet. Psychiatry*, 1(7), 569–576. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(14\)00080-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(14)00080-7). [4] Lytje, M. et Dyregrow, A. (2019). The price of loss – a literature review of the psychosocial and health consequences of childhood bereavement. *Bereavement Care*, 38(1), 13–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02682621.2019.15808>. [5] Tennant C. (1988). Parental loss in childhood. Its effect in adult life. *Archives of general psychiatry*, 45(11), 1045–1050. <https://doi.org/10.1001/archpsyc.1988.01800350079012>. [6] OSMEES (2024). Enquête sur la santé mentale étudiante en enseignement supérieur. <https://osmees.ca/enquete-sur-la-sante-mentale-etudiante-en-enseignement-superieur/>. [7] Morin-Martel, F. (2025). Près d'un étudiant du Québec sur deux risque de souffrir d'un épisode dépressif. Le Devoir. <https://www.ledevoir.com/societe/sante/873856/pres-etudiant-du-quebec-sur-deux-risque-de-souffrir-d-un-episode-depressif-quebec>. [8] DRSPM (2014) Outil synthèse : les facteurs d'influence de la santé mentale étudiante, des leviers pour agir! [https://santepubliquemontreal.ca/sites/drsp/files/media/document/DRSP\\_Pub\\_2024\\_OutilSyntheseFacteursInfluenceSMEtudiante.pdf](https://santepubliquemontreal.ca/sites/drsp/files/media/document/DRSP_Pub_2024_OutilSyntheseFacteursInfluenceSMEtudiante.pdf). [9] Flammand, C. (2020). L'orphelinage précoce continue de diminuer au début du XXIe siècle [https://www.ined.fr/fichier/s\\_rubrique/30356/580.population.societes.aout.2020.orphelinage.fr.pdf](https://www.ined.fr/fichier/s_rubrique/30356/580.population.societes.aout.2020.orphelinage.fr.pdf).

## 4. RESULTS

### 1 & 2. MENTAL HEALTH STATES ACROSS GROUPS



### 3. MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES DETERMINANTS

| OUTCOME                 | R <sup>2</sup> | ÂGE | ASSIGNED SEX | SOCIAL SUPPORT | ANNUAL INCOME | PARENTAL LOSS |
|-------------------------|----------------|-----|--------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|
| PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING | 0,34           | ✓   | ✓            | ✓              | ✗             | ✗             |
| POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH  | 0,30           | ✓   | ✓            | ✓              | ✗             | ✗             |
| ANXIETY                 | 0,20           | ✓   | ✓            | ✓              | ✗             | ✗             |
| DEPRESSION              | 0,26           | ✓   | ✓            | ✓              | ✗             | ✗             |
| SUICIDAL IDEATION       | 0,11           | ✓   | ✓            | ✓              | ✗             | ✗             |

## 5. DISCUSSION & FUTURE DIRECTION

- Key findings**
- **Bivariate analyses:** Better mental health outcomes for the PL(+26) group.
  - **Stepwise regression:**
    - Same predictors across all mental health outcomes<sup>[8]</sup>;
    - Parental loss not a significant predictor;
    - Best predictive model: **Psychological wellbeing**.
- Contribution**
- Among the first studies in a Canadian context to examine the prevalence of early parental loss and mental health impacts;
  - Prevalence slightly higher than in the literature<sup>[9]</sup>;
  - Determinants of mental health remain similar.
- Next Steps**
- Explore the life trajectories of orphaned individuals;
  - Identify specific determinants shaping their overall mental health.

**Christiane Bergeron-Leclerc, Ph.D. :** cblecler@uqac.ca