



Hoos Connected

Enhancing Social Belonging &
Support Among UVA Students

December 2019

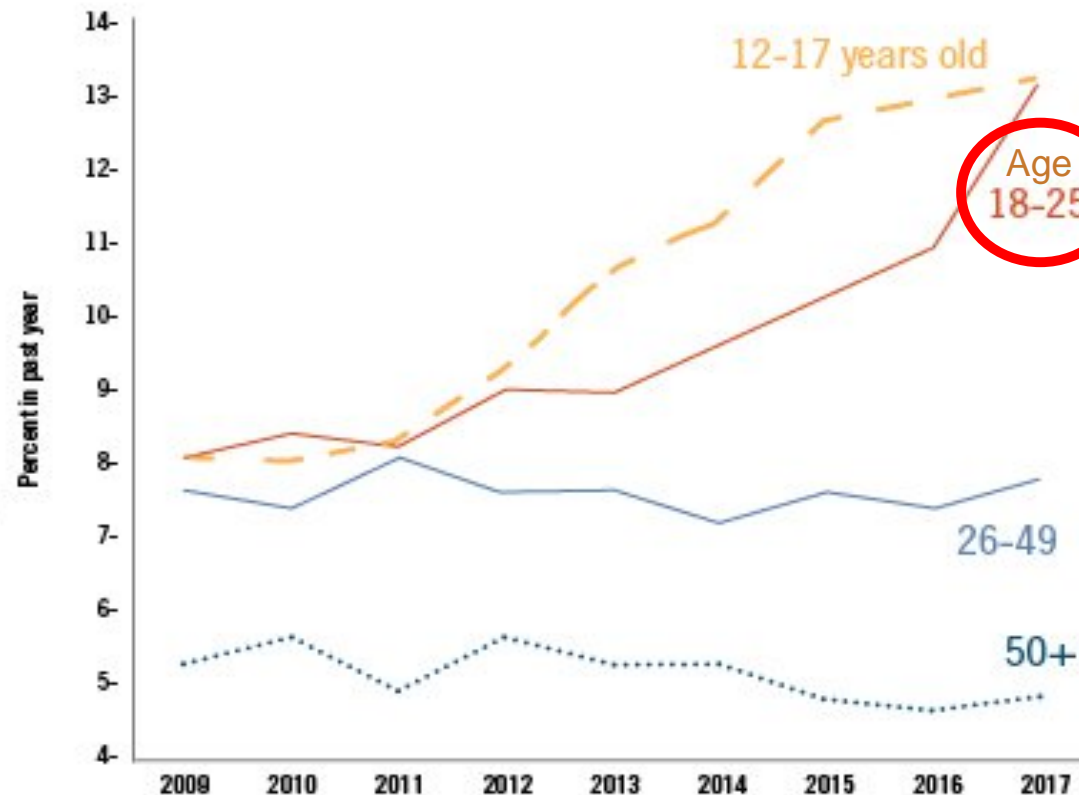
Changing Social Context Over the Past Decade

- Increasing social isolation and loneliness among all adults...
- ...but *especially* among young people:
 - ‘Generation Z’ (ages 18-22) reports the highest levels of loneliness of any cohort in America

Why It Matters – Mental Health

STUDENT DEPRESSION ON THE RISE

An analysis of a federal survey shows increasing rates of teen and young adult respondents reporting a major depressive episode in the last 12 months. Rates have stayed more consistent among older adults.



63% increase in depressive symptoms in past 10 years

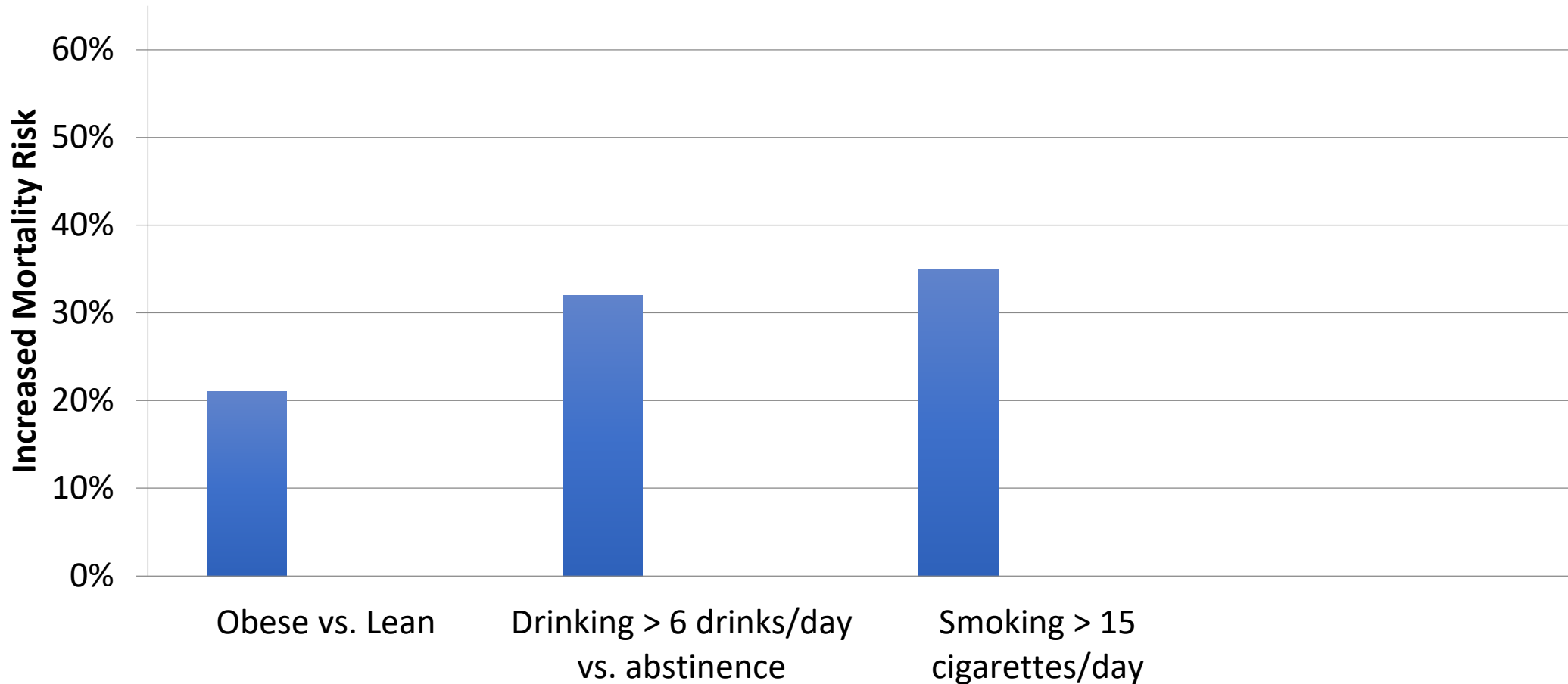
SOURCE: Journal of Abnormal Psychology

EDUCATION WEEK

Why It Matters – Physical Health

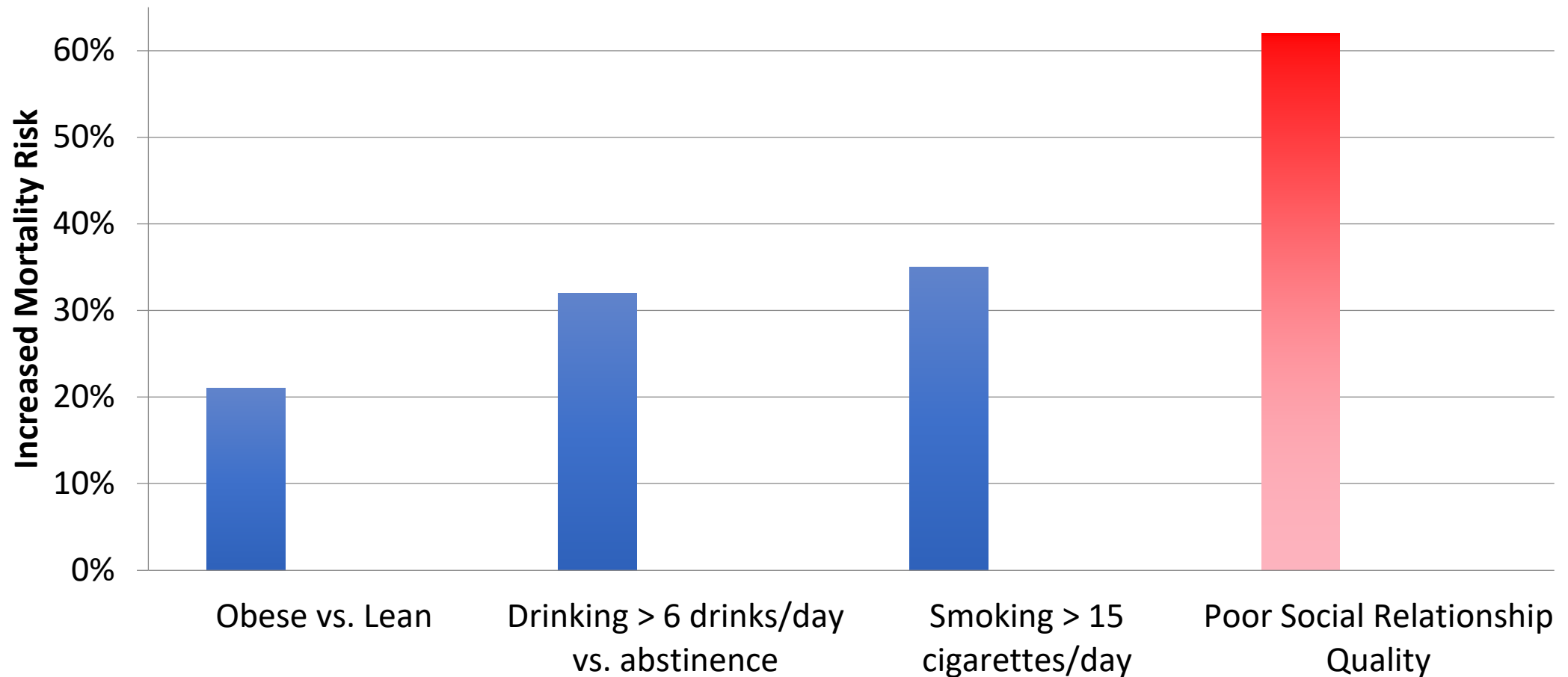
- The *Virginia Adolescence Research Group*
 - 184 Charlottesville middle-school students
 - Multiple data sources: Teens, parents, peers, direct observations, tests
 - Followed for 22 years (so far), with 97% continuing participation
 - Key Findings:
 - Friendship quality predicts *physical* health across more than a decade (age 13 to age 25)
 - Conflict and hostility in relationships predict *blood markers* of processes linked to disease and premature aging

Why It Matters – Staying Alive



(Holt-Lundstad, Smith & Layton, PLOS Medicine, 2010)

Why It Matters – Staying Alive



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We Can Change This

- *Program Development*

- Identifying the conditions that *naturally* lead to strong relationships
- Devising a program to create these conditions
- Initial work with High School Students:
 - Weekly sessions, in small groups, for 12 weeks
 - Goal: Make it safe to open up to give and get support
 - Never forced
 - Recognizing how much is shared beneath the surface

We Can Change This – *Results*

Fully randomized controlled trial in Ferguson, and St. Louis, Missouri

- Primarily students from marginalized groups (racial/ethnic, economic)
- Why a randomized trial matters
- Four months *after* completion of the program participants displayed:
 - Stronger relationships & were viewed as more approachable even by students who were *not* in the program
 - Greater academic engagement
 - Fewer depressive symptoms

(Allen et al., in press, *Development & Psychopathology*)

Bringing this approach to UVA: *Hoos Connected*

- Slight adaptation for college-level students
- Nine weekly sessions for small groups (6 – 12 students)
- Activities + facilitated discussions
- Targeting first-year and transfer students
- Overwhelmingly positive feedback from piloting:
 - Would you recommend this to a friend?
 - 95% of participants say yes
 - (72% extremely likely; 23% somewhat likely)





***Hoos Connected* made me realize that everyone has more in common than we initially assume. It also helped me feel more comfortable around new people and at UVA.**

I felt that I was not alone and that I was not the only one worrying about certain concerns. It was nice to know that other people are going through similar things and that we can all help each other.





The sessions helped me realize my own strengths and weaknesses when building relationships with people. I am cognizant of how my habits and actions contribute to the environment at UVA and how I can improve to make Grounds a more inclusive space.

Hoos Connected: A Strategic Approach to Scaling

- Transition to undergraduate leadership
 - An *affordable* approach to scaling & staffing
 - Training & skill-building for leaders
- A residence-hall approach
- Ongoing Evaluation
 - A continuous improvement model



Long-term Goals

- Deep connection as a signature part of the UVA experience
- A 'glide path' to connection for entering students
- A cadre of skilled upper-level student leaders
- Building a culture of awareness, understanding, and support across diverse groups of students

www.hoosconnecteduva.com