



# The Mental Health of Students of Color and Their Performance in School

Grace Warner-Haakmat, Applied Data Analysis, Wesleyan University

## Introduction

- Brown v. The Board of Education largely set off the movement to provide equal education opportunities for all children, but recently there has been pushback on how Black students' mental health may be negatively affected by being in schools with their white peers, seeing as there's a direct correlation between how Black children are treated and their mental health (Bloom & Western, 2011).
- Additionally, achievement gaps between students of color and white students, although closing more over time, are still relatively large (Guerrero, 2021).
- Students who have adequate support from adults (teachers, school social workers, etc.) are more likely to have improved mental health and experience in school, which in turn improves academic achievement and engagement (Wegmann, 2015).
- Socio-economic status factors account for a majority of the achievement gap between Black and white students (Guerrero, 2021).

## Research Question

- Is a student's level of feeling depressed correlated with their performance in school, and how does race affect this relationship?

## Methods

### Sample

- Respondents (n=20,000) were drawn from The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Wave 1) in 1994, a nationally representative sample of adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18.

### Measures

- Feelings of depression was measured using the answers to the statement "You felt depressed". Possible responses ranged from 0 to 3. This variable, "feeling depressed" was then coded dichotomously in terms of never/rarely/sometimes, or often/most or all of the time. The data was collapsed so that 0-1 signaled not depressed, and 2-3 signaled depressed.
- A participant's race was determined using the answers to the statement "Black or African-American". Those who chose one were considered.
- Academic score was determined by the collapsing of the student's grades in Math, History, English, and Science. If a participant marked a 1 or a 2 (an A or a B) as their grade, they were considered as having a "high academic score". If a participant marked a 3 or a 4 they were considered as having a "low academic score".

## Results

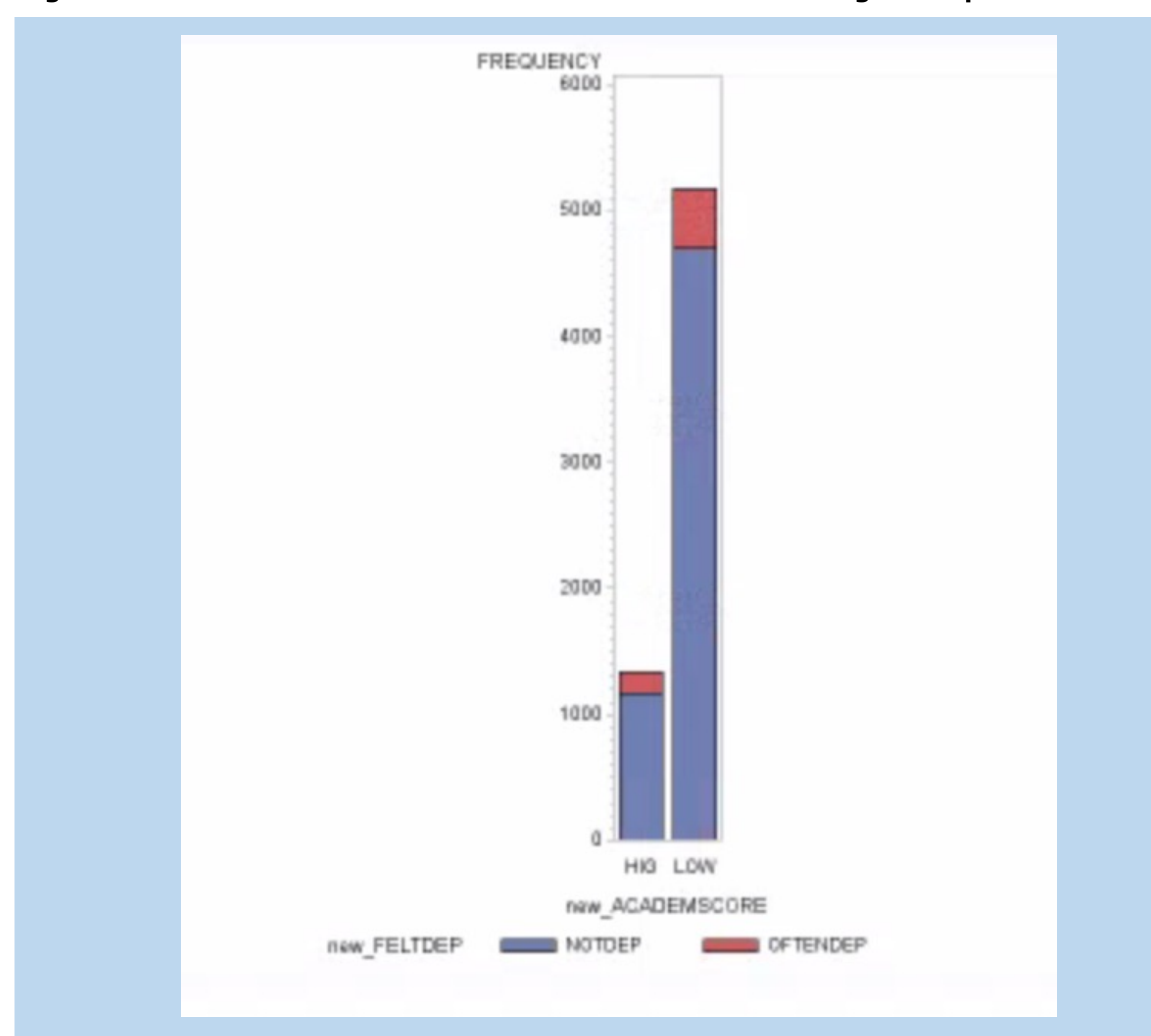
### Univariate

- 24.97% of respondents are Black.
- 9.79% of respondents indicated that they were often depressed.
- 57.92% of respondents have a low academic score, meaning that their average grade was a C or lower.

### Bivariate

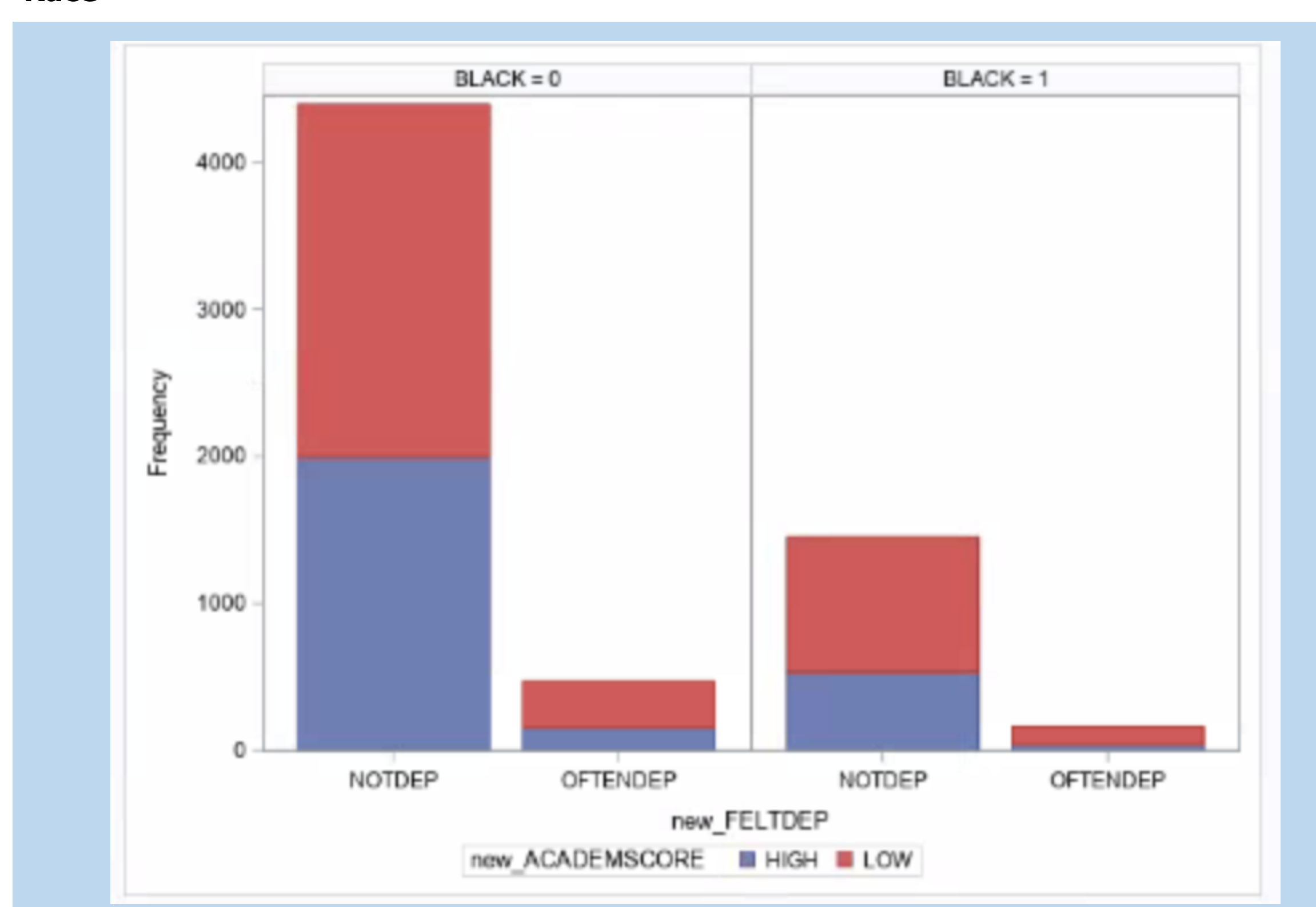
- Chi-Square analysis showed that among 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders, those who often felt depressed were significantly more likely to have lower academic scores (68.76%) than those who never or rarely felt depressed (56.74%),  $\chi^2 = 12.6727$  1 df,  $p = <.0001$ .

Figure 1. The Association between Academic Score and Feelings of Depression



- As shown in figure 1, 31.24% of the often depressed group had high academic scores, meanwhile, 43.26% of students who were not depressed had high academic scores.

Figure 2. The Association between Academic Score and Feelings of Depression by Race



### Multivariate

- Blackness is not a moderator for the association between feelings of depression and academic scores (Figure 2).
- After controlling for race, a student's feelings of depression are significantly associated with their academic scores ( $B=0.1793$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

## Discussion

- Black students are disproportionately receiving lower grades in comparison to their peers, although most students who participated received grade averages of a C or lower.
- Students who had frequent feelings of depression disproportionately received lower grades in comparison with those who rarely or never had feelings of depression.