Integrating a Suicide Prevention Program into a School Mental Health System: A Case Example from a Rural School District

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Background

- Suicide is the 4\textsuperscript{th} leading cause of death in 10- to 14-year-olds and the 3\textsuperscript{rd} leading cause of death in 15- to 24- year olds (CDC, 2011)

- 15.8\% of high school students have contemplated suicide (Eaton et al., 2012)

- Prevention and early intervention strategies are critical for suicide prevention

(Schmidt, Iachini, George, Koller, & Weist, 2014)
Suicide prevention programs can be integrated into existing school mental health (SMH) systems (Bridge, Goldstein, & Brent, 2006)

Unfortunately, there is little guidance on how schools might integrate suicide prevention efforts into their existing SMH systems

(Schmidt et al., 2014)
Case Study

• Rural Maryland school district comprised of nine schools
  – Included 5,949 students in grades 6-12

• Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention Program (YRSPP)
  – Primary strategies: education and screening
  – Two trainings: “Ask 4 Help! Suicide Prevention for Youth” and “Be a Link! Suicide Prevention Gatekeeper Training”

(Schmidt et al., 2014)
Method

- Ask 4 Help trainings offered between February and May each academic year 2007-2012

- Students completed a knowledge survey about suicide and help-seeking behaviors before and after the training
  - Positive responses to the suicidal ideation question included as part of the survey resulted in individual meetings with a mental health staff member

(Schmidt et al., 2014)
Results

- 11% of participants reported having thoughts of hurting themselves
- Most prevalent reasons for suicidal thoughts: family problems, feeling bullied, or grief or loss
- Positive changes in knowledge scores after receiving the YRSPP program

(Schmidt et al., 2014)
Implications for Practice

• School social workers should address nonacademic barriers to learning that affect overall mental health

• Consider incorporating youth suicide prevention strategies into existing school mental health programs

• YRSPP is a promising program that is feasible to integrate into existing SMH programming

(Schmidt et al., 2014)
References


Prepared by H Goldstein (2014)