Suicide Awareness and Prevention for College Students: Incorporating Campus-Based and Social Media Interventions for a Multidimensional Approach

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Objectives

- Review risk factors associated with suicide and self-harm behaviors in college students.
- Demonstrate the benefit of multiple approaches to campus-based suicide awareness and prevention efforts
- Identify risks and benefits associated with the use of social media campaigns for suicide awareness and prevention.
- Provide an example of a social media video

Disclosures

- The presenters have no conflicts of interest, commercial support, or off-label use to disclose.

Definitions

- Suicide: death caused by self-directed injurious behavior with an intent to die as a result of the behavior
- Suicide Attempt: non-fatal, self-directed, potentially injurious behavior with an intent to die as a result of the behavior; might not result in injury
- Suicidal Ideation: thinking about, considering, or planning suicide

CDC, 2015a
Statistics

- Not well represented
  - under reported
  - false positives
  - false negatives
- 448 deaths of undetermined intent

(CDC, 2014; Rodel, Kralovec, Yazdi & Fartacek, 2011; Pritchard, & Hansen, 2015; Talliefsen, Hem, & Ekeberg, 2012)

College Students

- Increased risk, even compared to same age peers
- May perceive self as low risk
- Fear stigma of having mental illness or feel ashamed
- Lack social support from friends and family.
- May conceal their suicidal thoughts to preserve autonomy regarding decision
- Concerns of being hospitalized or expelled from their college or university.

(Denmark, Hess, & Becker, 2012)

Background

- Worldwide
  - 800,000 suicide annually
- U.S.
  - 10th leading cause of death overall.
  - 2nd leading cause of death among college-age individuals
  - 5,162 suicide related deaths for individuals age 17-25
    - 12.85 deaths per 100,000

(Bramley, 2014; CDC, 2014)

Recognizing Risk

Warning Signs
- New or changed behaviors
- Increased or new use of drugs and alcohol
- Withdrawing from normal activities
- Isolation
- Giving away belongings
- Changes in mood

Protective Factors
- Family and social support
- Access to mental health services and primary care
- Cultural and religious beliefs
- Lack of lethal means to commit suicide

(American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, 2016; CDC 2015b)
**Risk Factors**
- Drug or alcohol use or history of use
- Previous suicide attempts
- History of family suicide
- History of mental illness
- Impulsive or aggressive tendencies
- Easy access to lethal methods
- Local epidemics of suicide
- Physical illness
- Loss of relationships, work or finances
- Feelings of hopelessness

CDC, 2018b; Niederkrotenthaler, Reidenberg, Till, & Gould, 2014

**Integrating Social Media**
- Social media use is greatest among college aged students
- Increasing help seeking behavior is a potential benefit
- Multi-dimensional campaigns that incorporate media can be effective, though warrant caution to prevent over-normalization of suicidal behavior
- Stakeholders in social media organizations perceive the benefits of using social media outweigh risks if caution is taken
- Media that focuses on positive aspects of overcoming crisis are related to decreased suicide rates, while sensationalism is linked to increases


**Recommendations**
- Early treatment and prevention
- Promote available services
- Multidimensional approaches to suicide prevention have been more successful in reducing suicide rates.
- Ensure faculty training on suicide prevention, available resources and crisis intervention.
- Engaging staff in detecting mental health problems, encouraging help seeking, and providing services are more important than the ratio of mental health professionals to students

Rickwood, Diane, & Wilson, 2007

**Suicide Prevention in College Students Video**

Sample Video
Future Research

- Reducing the risk of “Copy Cat” suicide related to social media strategies
- Understanding when social media strategies are best used to target students at risk
- Identifying best avenues to reach highest risk students
- Establishing guidelines for responsible reporting of suicide in social media


References