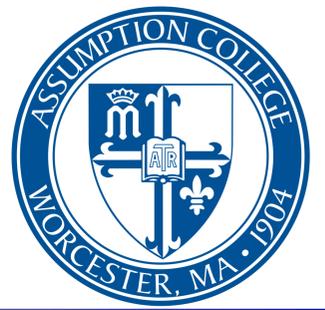




Suicide Prevention in Adolescents: Implementation of a High School-Based Psychoeducation Program



Adam M. Volungis, Ph.D., Brenden Knight, B.A., Mark Joyce, B.A., & Colleen Popores, B.S.

Psychology Department
Assumption College, Worcester, MA

Introduction

- Approximately 20% of high school age students have a mental health disorder (National Institute of Mental Health, 2015). Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth between the ages of 11 and 18 (Centers for Disease Control, 2015).
- Few programs specific to depression and suicide have been empirically validated (Katz et al., 2013; Klimes-Dougan, Klingbeil, & Meller, 2013).
 - The **Signs of Suicide (SOS) Prevention Program** is one of the few youth suicide prevention programs that has shown improvement in students' knowledge and adaptive attitudes about suicide risk and depression, including a reduction in self-reported suicide attempts (Aseltine & DeMartino, 2004; Aseltine et al., 2007; Schilling et al., 2016).

Focus of Study

- The high school guidance department involved in this pilot study wanted to increase awareness and proactively address specific concerns about student mental health.
- As the high school's first formal attempt at implementing a psychoeducation prevention program, they wanted to use an evidence-based program targeting a primary mental health concern – depression and suicide.
- The guidance department and school administration decided that the SOS Prevention Program had strong potential to directly address the symptoms, risk factors, warning signs, and coping strategies connected to suicide and depression.
- One goal** of the initial implementation of psychoeducation based on the SOS Prevention Program was *to increase students' basic knowledge of depression and suicide.*
- Another goal** was *to learn from the implementation process to make necessary adjustments for future mental health psychoeducation programs.*

Contact Information

Email: am.volungis@assumption.edu
Website: www.dradamvolungis.com
LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/adamvolungis

Method

Participants

- 879 high school students in grades 9-12 (13-19 years) from a suburban regional high school in New England
- 53% female; 90% Caucasian

Procedure & Measure

- Psychoeducation was provided through a PowerPoint presentation in each homeroom that was created by the guidance department based on the content of the SOS Program.
 - The specific content areas focused on the myths, risk factors, warning signs, and prevalence of depression and suicide.
- In addition to the PowerPoint, a discussion of coping skills, distribution of depression/suicide related resources for support, and a de-stressing coloring activity rounded out the lesson.
- Prior to the beginning of the lesson, students completed a nine question Likert scale pre-survey.
- After the lesson, students were given a post-survey of the same questions and asked to rate their current level of knowledge.

PRE-SURVEY (BEFORE PRESENTATION) 1

Please fill in the appropriate circle for each question and then write out as many answers as you know in the blank spaces provided

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	
1) I can identify common features of depression	1	○	○	○	○	○
a. _____						
b. _____						
2) I can identify common myths about depression	2	○	○	○	○	○
a. _____						
b. _____						
3) I can identify risk factors for depression	3	○	○	○	○	○
a. _____						
b. _____						
4) I can identify warning signs of depression	4	○	○	○	○	○
a. _____						
b. _____						
5) I can identify common myths about suicide	5	○	○	○	○	○
a. _____						
b. _____						
6) I can identify risk factors for suicide	6	○	○	○	○	○
a. _____						
b. _____						
7) I can identify warning signs of suicide	7	○	○	○	○	○
a. _____						
b. _____						
8) I can identify the differences between self-injury and suicide	8	○	○	○	○	○
a. _____						
b. _____						
9) I can identify positive coping skills for difficult situations	9	○	○	○	○	○
a. _____						
b. _____						
10) I can identify resources for support during difficult situations	10	○	○	○	○	○
a. _____						
b. _____						

Results & Discussion

- Paired samples t-tests showed a significant difference across all nine pre-post survey questions and overall score, $t(816) = -32.843, p = 0.000$.
 - Analyses demonstrated that psychoeducation based on the SOS Prevention Program was effective in enhancing students' knowledge and awareness about depression and suicide.
- Although these results are promising, another goal was to learn from the implementation process to make necessary adjustments for future mental health psychoeducation programs.
 - The high school guidance department in this pilot study plans on providing full advisory lessons for future incoming classes (i.e., 9th grade) and yearly follow-up programs for existing classes (i.e., 10th, 11th, and 12th grade).
- Information gathered from the pre-post survey data and a review of the implementation process resulted in key recommendations to enhance effectiveness for future psychoeducation programs:
 - Standardization in training teachers to educate students, standardization in educating students, matching psychoeducation content with survey content, survey questions wording, survey Likert scale wording and data points, and integrating psychoeducation content into the school's day-to-day routine (i.e., culture and climate).

REMEMBER TO A.C.T.

A - Acknowledge the emotions being experienced and take them seriously
C - Let your friend know that you Care and are concerned about them
T - Tell a trusted adult immediately that your friend is in need of support and help