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Evaluating Knowledge, Use, and Skills After Attending Mental Health First Aid Training

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Purpose:

The purpose of this research project is to provide Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training to the students, faculty, staff and coaches at West Chester University of Pennsylvania. College students are at higher risk for mental illness, substance use and suicide. There are campus resources available but how do we reach those who do not seek help for various reasons or do not realize that they need help? Mental Health First Aid was developed in Australia in 2001 and introduced in the United States in 2008. It is based on evidence and expert consensus. By providing mental health first aid to the college population, we increase awareness of mental disorders, educate the college population on how to help those with mental illness and reduce to stigma of mental illness.

Methods:

The project will consist of providing the 8-hour Mental Health First Aid course at no cost to participants (students, faculty and staff) at West Chester University of Pennsylvania for free. Researchers are nursing faculty members, nurses/nurse practitioners and certified MHFA instructors. E-mails and ads in the Campus newspaper will advertise the free 8-hour course. Interested participants will register electronically for the course. After registration, they will be emailed information regarding the course and also an invitation to participate in a research project which will consist of a MHFA pre-survey and post-surveys to assess knowledge, use and MHFA skills. Participants will complete additional surveys at 2 months and 6 months post MHFA course to describe if they have used MHFA training principles.

Objectives:

1. To increase the knowledge of participants on mental illness by providing MHFA training.
2. To prepare participants to assist a person with a mental illness if needed.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of MHFA training using pre and post surveys (knowledge) for tools.

Hypothesis:

Mental Health First Aid training will:

1. Improved knowledge regarding MHFA.
2. Decrease stigma of mental health problems on our campus.
3. Lead to earlier intervention for mental health problems on our college campus.

Research Questions:

Does MHFA training improve the knowledge regarding mental health illnesses, know the appropriate ways to support someone with a mental health issue or who may be in crisis, connect to care someone with a mental health issue, and decrease mental health stigma on our campus?

Results:
1. Mental Health First Aid training sessions are now offered routinely on campus (monthly) and are at capacity (25-30 participants).
2. Preliminary results from this research study are positive that MHFA Knowledge, Use and Skills have improved post MHFA training (ongoing survey data is being collected).
3. MHFA participants revealed that they are more confident in intervening for students/peers with an emerging mental health problem. Study participants stated that they have use MHFA techniques to assist others on campus.
4. A new clinic, specializing in counseling and supportive modalities, has been opened on campus to meet the needs of students with a mental health illness or crisis.
5. The university has adopted "Take a Mental Health Day" and "Check in From the Head Up" to support mental health initiatives on campus.

Conclusion:

Mental Health First Aid training and research has made a positive impact on our campus community to improve the health and well-being of our students. By discussing mental health illness, our goal "to reduce mental health stigma", will be achieved.

Title:
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Keywords:
College, Crisis and Mental Health

References:


**Abstract Summary:**
EBP Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training provides participants with the tools to assess individuals for risk of suicide/harm, listen nonjudgmentally, give reassurance/information, encourage appropriate professional help and other support strategies. The purpose of this research is to evaluate participant knowledge and use of MHFA before/after attending MHFA training.

**Content Outline:**
**Title:** Evaluating Knowledge, Use of Mental Health First Aid Skills After Attending Mental Health First Aid Training

**Keywords:** Mental Health, College, Crisis

**Abstract:**
College students are at higher risk for mental illness and suicide. Suicide is the second leading cause of death in adolescents from ages 10-24 (Heron, 2016). College students have several risk factors of suicide to include age, lack of social support, higher rate of substance abuse and alcohol abuse and lack of resources (National Council for Behavioral Health, 2015). Depressed young adults are more at risk for other comorbid conditions such as substance abuse and suicide compared to older adults (Lamis,
Ballard, May, and Dvorak, 2016; Mason, Zaharakis and Benotsch, 2014). College students at the start of their college educations are in the most vulnerable states and lack the social supports and problem-solving skills which increase their risk for suicide and self-harm (Auerbach et al., 2016; Taliaferro and Muehlenkamp, 2015). In addition, Jennings, et al. (2015) discussed how college students are less likely to seek help for their mental illness and substance abuse due to the stigma of mental illness of substance abuse. Universities and colleges have built programs to help students with mental health disorders but less than 25% of students seek help due to the stigma of mental illness and embarrassment of the disorder (D-Amico, Mechling, Kemppainen, Ahern and Lee, 2016; Egbert, Miraldi, and Murniadi, 2014). Davies, Wardlaw, Morriss and Glazebrook (2016) researched university students and their ability to help each other in regard to mental illness. They discovered that the students do not have the skills to support others with mental illness, assist them in seeking help for their mental illness and assessing them for their risk of suicide or self-harm.

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) provides the participant with the tools to assess an individual for risk of suicide or harm, listen nonjudgmentally, give reassurance and information, encourage appropriate professional help and encourage self-help and other support strategies. Skill training programs like MHFA have been proven to be significantly more effective than other programs on mental health awareness (Conley, Durlak, and Kirsch, 2015; Hadlaczky, Hokby, Mkrtchian, Carli and Wasseman, 2014). A randomized control trial in Sweden noted that subjects had improved knowledge, awareness and confidence in providing help for somebody with a mental illness at six months and two years after MHFA attendance (Svensson and Hansson, 2014). In addition, Australian researchers noted an increase in knowledge and helping behaviors after MHFA attendance (Rossetto, Jorm and Reavley, 2014). In the college population, MHFA not only educates the participant but empowers them to help others and guide them to resources available. An Australian randomized controlled trial of MHFA training for nursing students in a large university identified increased mental health literacy on the college campus and the ability of the nursing students to use these skills in all settings whether they are the college campus or in the work force (Crawford, et al., 2015). Of interest, an experimental study indicated the college students with the weakest mental health first aid skills were male students in in majors that do not include mental illness content (Davies, Wardlaw, Morris and Glazebrook, 2016).

Little research has been done in the United States on the effectiveness of MHFA training for the college campus community. Most of the MHFA research has been done in Australia and Europe. The investigators of this study are evaluating the effectiveness of MHFA training on a university campus and disseminating evidence in order to gain more awareness of mental health issues on college campuses and provide the evidence to support the efficacy of programs like MHFA.

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Author Summary: Drs. Jacquelyn Owens and Cheryl Schlamb are nursing professors at West Chester University of Pennsylvania (WCU) Drs. Owens and Schlamb are conducting research on the Knowledge, Use and Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Skills following MHFA training. Drs. Owens and Schlamb have a
vested interest in Mental Health, Mental Health Services, and the health and well-being of our campus community. Expansion of mental health recognition is critical to decrease mental health stigma.

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