Evaluating Knowledge and Use of Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Skills After Attending MHFA Training

Cheryl Schlamb, DNP, CRNP
Department of Nursing, West Chester University of PA, Exton, PA, USA

Purpose:

The purpose of this project is to evaluate participant knowledge and use of Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) before and after attending Mental Health First Aid training. Mental Health First Aide training is offered to the students, faculty, staff and coaches at West Chester University of Pennsylvania at no cost. 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 design is a pre/post-test design. After participants register electronically for the Mental Health First Aid course, they will be emailed an invitation to participate in a research project which will consist of a pre-survey and post-surveys at 3 months post MHFA course.

Objective:

1. To evaluate the effectiveness and use 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:

Improved post-test scores following Mental Health First Aid training course. Students, faculty and staff correctly answer scenario questions post MHFA training. Initial test scores average 76% and increase to a 90%-100% post MHFA training. Qualitative results indicated that students, faculty and staff are more prepared to handle for a mental health issue or crisis. Respondents provided examples of when MHFA principles were used.
Conclusion:

Mental Health First Aid training is a useful training tool for college campuses. By providing mental health first aid to the college population, we increased awareness of mental disorders, educated the college population, which included faculty, staff and students, on how to help those with mental illness and reduce to stigma of mental illness.

Title:
Evaluating Knowledge and Use of Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Skills After Attending MHFA Training

Keywords:
college, crisis and mental health

References:


**Abstract Summary:**
College students are at higher risk for mental illness/suicide. Suicide is the second leading cause of death in ages 10-24. Mental Health First Aid provides the participant with the tools to assess an individual for risk of suicide or harm, listen, give reassurance/information, encourage professional help, self-help and other supports.

**Content Outline:**
**Title:** Evaluating Knowledge and 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) discuss 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, Morrioss 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 Mental Health First Aid Training for the college campus community. Most of the research has been done in Australia and Europe. The investigators plan to evaluate the effectiveness of Mental Health First Aid training on a university campus and disseminate this 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 Mental Health First Aid.

The purpose of this research was to evaluate participant knowledge and use of Mental Health First Aid before and after attending Mental Health First Aid training. Mental Health First Aide training is offered to the students, faculty, staff and coaches at a university at no cost. College students are at a 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 was based on evidence and expert consensus. By providing mental health first aid to the college population, we increased awareness of mental disorders, educate the college population on how to help those with mental illness and reduce to stigma of mental illness.

Knowledge pre and post Mental Health First Aid training resulted in improved test scores based on mental health scenarios. Qualitative responses from participants (post-training) included the use of Mental Health First Aid concepts to assist someone with an emerging mental health problem or in crisis. The Mental Health First Aid training has been a positive outcome on our college campus which has raised the level of mental health awareness. Our university is actively seeking grant funds to continue Mental Health First Aid training on campus.

First Primary Presenting Author

Primary Presenting Author
Cheryl Schlamb, DNP, CRNP
West Chester University of PA
Department of Nursing
Associate Professor, Certified Registered Nurse Practitioner and Mental Health First Aid trainer
Exton PA
USA

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.