

12-2021

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### Recommended Citation

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Mental Health Awareness Among Watsonville Youth

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March 16, 2021

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### **Abstract**

Watsonville PAL is a non-profit agency that is funded by donations or community sponsors. Watsonville PAL works with the city of Watsonville and the Police department to help youth stay out of trouble. Watsonville PAL offers an amount of programs that as well relies on educational and recreational activities to keep youth busy and focus on school and heading to the right path and most importantly be a positive influence in their community. Watsonville is a community where the highest percentage of population are Latinos, who work all the time to feed their families and try to survive. While this is to support their families, at the same time it affects their children directly. The lack of attention, the lack of resources in the community or the language barrier from parents are affecting the children directly and causing them to develop a mental health problem. This can cause their motivation for school to decrease and they can start taking another route. The community of Watsonville is a community that has a lot of gang affiliation and a lot of drugs that attracts youth. The project allows youth to understand the definition of mental health and how important it is to be healthy to not develop a problem.

*Keywords: Mental health, youth, PAL*

**Agency & Communities Served**

Police Activities League (PAL) of Watsonville is a non-profit organization that is funded by donations/ grants and community sponsors. PAL has two different sites in Watsonville that work directly with the City of Watsonville and the police department to offer to all youth prevention crime opportunities or programs that can help youth better themselves in life and have more focus in school to become someone in life. The communities that are getting served by these programs are youth in elementary and middle school directly. The program also serves all these families that work in agriculture and have no other resources to help their children out. Most of the students from the PAL program are Latinos/Hispanic.

These programs also help youth be a better influence for all the community of Watsonville. PAL offers a variety of programs, with some of the programs that are active in the agency being kickboxing, martial arts, soccer and many team building opportunities. During the summer the students are granted different field trip opportunities where they can learn something new. For example, they have the opportunity to visit Alcatraz and learn about the history of the prison. Another great way to keep them active is taking them on a hike to different areas from the county, where they get to see new surroundings from their community and enjoy the weather of Monterey county as well as Santa Cruz county. The agency's mission statement mentions, "We, as police officers, know that we must do everything we can to get to children before they get involved with drugs or gangs. Please remember that Watsonville PAL is strong because of community support and without the support of concerned residents like you, we cannot reach out to the youth in our community" (2021). Thanks to all the community and the partnerships the

agency had the chance to grow and help all sorts of youth in the community keep themselves safe and busy with productive work.

### **Problem Description**

Mental health issues have become a huge problem in the United States among youth. Most of the youth are experiencing mental health issues without support. Their main support for all these young students need to come from their home, meaning their parents and family. In the article *Journal of Youth Development* they mentioned, “Youth who are racial/ethnic minorities, low-income, homeless, LGBTQ, system-involved, or male are least likely to get care” (Slaton, & Stelk, 2010). All youth that fall into these categories tend not to pay attention to their mental health problems, mostly because their own parents are not paying attention, so they feel like they have no support. Young adults or youth need attention and someone older than them like their parents to be paying attention to what they need or feel, when a children does not receive this or feels that they are not receiving this is because their is a problem that is leading to a bad mental health and that is not being treated correctly the way it's supposed to be. There are many contributing factors that come along with mental health.

### **Contributing Factors**

#### ***Mental health issues are not discussed at home***

In America mental health has become a huge social problem, the issue is that it is targeting youth directly and most children do not know how to overcome that. The reason for this is because mental health is not being prioritized at home. As well as not being treated. In the article *Mental Health Disorders in Adolescents* the author mentions, “Only one third of these youth receive the necessary treatment” (Brookman, 2017). This author states that one third of the

youth are receiving treatment for mental health which states that youth are not being taught about mental health at home. Some might be diagnosed with it or have a mental issue and parents at home have no idea. “At least one in five youth aged 9–17 years currently has a diagnosable mental health disorder that causes some degree of impairment; one in 10 has a disorder that causes significant impairment” (Brookman, 2017). Youth are being diagnosed with a mental issue that might have or might have not been spoken at home by their parents or they simply did not have information or support their kids at home.

### ***Parents are hesitant to have students access outside resources***

A lot of the problems at home are fear of being denied services of any kind. In the book “*Journal of Adolescents Health* the author mentions”, “It was hypothesized that parents' discrimination experiences would adversely affect their adolescent children's mental health via a moderating effect on the target adolescent discrimination-distress link (Park,2018). The discrimination of the parents affect the kids directly because if the parents are not providing what the student needs then the youth is being affected. In America many Hispanics that live undocumented are afraid of being denied access to resources for their children because they are undocumented and believe ICE would send them back to their country.

### ***Bullying and self-esteem issues***

Being bullied at school or by friends can affect students and with time they grow and they start developing low self esteem issues. Cyberbullying has now become the “best” way to bully someone; it has also become a global and cross cultural problem. Students think it is okay to make fun of other students online or post offensive comments/pictures to hurt others. With time this starts creating a mental problem for that student. In the article *Parent–Child Attachment*

*Moderates the Associations Between Cyberbullying Victimization and Adolescents'*

*Health/Mental Health Problems: An Exploration of Cyberbullying Victimization Among Chinese*

*Adolescents* the author mentions, "A national study in the United States revealed that 9.1% of adolescents aged 12 to 18 years old have experienced cyberbullying victimization (Payne & Hutzell, 2017). Which shows that many kids are being affected by bullying which leads to low self esteem most of the time. Cyberbullying tends to lead children or youth to depression which can have serious problems .

## **Consequences**

### ***Depression and Anxiety***

One of the biggest consequences of a mental health issue is depression. Many youth start having a change in their behavior like not eating, fatigue, lack of motivation which are red flags of depression that come from having a mental health disorder. Interim INC. mentions, "People with low self-esteem, who are easily overwhelmed by stress, or who are generally pessimistic appear to be more likely to experience depression" (Interim. Inc, 2019). Youth that are being stressed or overwhelmed because they are being bullied at school or because they do not know how to feel or react to certain situations or feelings they have, experience depression.

### ***Students are not motivated at school (graduation rates)***

Having a mental health issue can lead students to not have any motivation in school or to continue. They start losing interest in school when they feel like they have no support or have depression. Blad talks about a school in LA experiencing the same issue. "Macbury's school enrolls about 175 students ages 16-21 who have struggled in a traditional high school" (Blad, 2019). This research clearly shows that 175 students were struggling in high school due to lack

of motivation, most of these students that were enrolled were having severe mental issues and had depression and anxiety. Virginia, who sponsors the state's legislation mentions that sometimes we insult others that are struggling. Which she is correct we sometimes insult others without knowing what they are going through or what they are feeling when we insult them.

**Substance Abuse**

Although many youth are strong and healthy, many have developed a mental health issue that has increased their behaviors. This leads to depression while others find the easy way out like using any type of substance to forget about any problems they have.. There has been some research by the *Centers of Disease Control and Prevention* and they mentioned, “14% of students reported misusing prescription opioids” (CDC, 2020). Students are finding prescriptions and using them for other things than a health condition and are putting all these youth at risk of an overdose or an increase of a mental health problem. This is the moment where students start failing in school, have an injury or end up in a juvenile hall.

**Problem Model**

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
Mental health issues are not discussed at home	Students are experiencing mental health issues without support	Depression and anxiety
Parents are hesitant to have students access outside resources		Students are not motivated at school (graduation rates)
Bullying and self-esteem issues		Substance abuse



## **Capstone Project Description and Justification**

### **Capstone Project**

Mental health awareness is always a must especially around children. A mental health lesson plan in which the word “mental health” is projected to all the students and they will understand the meaning of speaking what they feel or think. A 1 hour lesson plan will be delivered to the students with two topics. The first topic will be the effects of depression. The second topic would be communicating better with parents. Each topic will have a Who? What? Where? And why? In each lesson plan. During the lesson plan there will be two to three activities that the student will participate in that is related to the topic. At the end of the lesson plan, there will be a “Self-care bucket” with different topics related to Mental Health. Each kid every day will get a paper without knowing the topic and write about what they think it means or if they relate to it, they will be doing this for a week straight. The way that data would be collected to see if the workshop was effective or not is going to be simple. Each student will get a sticky note and be asked to write “Yes” or “No” if they think that the workshop was helpful or if they learn something new. After the presentation there will be a graph to visualize the results of the workshop.

### **Project Purpose**

The purpose of this project is to spread awareness to all the youth in a way that they can understand and take into consideration. For example, this workshop can teach the students how to communicate with their parents or families when they have a problem. Nowadays most youth spend their time on the internet or playing video games that they forgot how to communicate with their parents. Teaching them to communicate can improve their skills with their parents and

even in school or outside home. This helps youth that are going through a mental process better their self-esteem and improve their knowledge of mental health and when is it safe to talk about it before it creates a bigger problem with them.

### **Project Justification**

YMHC Education says “A sharp focus on promoting wellbeing, building resilience and good mental health will improve outcomes for children and young people. We all benefit when we identify ways to support each other” (YMHS Education, Para.3). This shows that by teaching and highly focusing on a mental health topic youth can benefit and learn something new that can help them if they are going through something or are thinking of harming themselves. Not only this but, people that teach this are also benefiting themselves by teaching and seeing positive outcomes. By spreading the awareness of preventing mental health among youth their lives can improve so much more. The reason why a workshop can be the best option for these kids is because their knowledge is not well developed and there are a lot of words they won't be able to understand. With activities being involved in the workshop they are able to interact with other students and be able to understand the meaning of each activity and what is for.

### **Assessment Plan**

Making sure the project is effective for all students seems very difficult because they are young children and it can be hard to know if something helped them or if they learned something new. The plan is at the end of the lesson, pass a sticky note to each student and ask if they learned something new, their answer will be Yes or No and therefore we can see what worked and what did not work.

**Expected Outcomes**

The purpose of the project is to start giving an idea to kids of what mental health is so they can connect what is being presented and their personal experience. The outcome the project wants to do is teach young students how to communicate with their parents at home when they have an issue that can hurt them. The prevention of any substance abuse and gang affiliation is very important for this project to show. The idea is for more than half of the students in the group to mention a “yes” in the activity being successful for them and obtaining the information appropriately to take it home.

**Project Implementation**

The plan of the overview project to implement is through a PowerPoint presentation. One of the first steps before creating a workshop is gathering information and going over it with the mentor of the agency and getting approval. Something very important through the process is getting to know the youth a bit more and interact with them. This gives a better understanding of each student to try to gather ideas and information to see what would get the students attention to cause an impression so they can take in consideration the topic. The most reasonable thing to do is to create a lesson plan. Once all the information is clear there will be a PowerPoint created with the topic meaning, the causes, effects and solutions for the social topic among the community of the agency. Once the slides are ready they will be sent to the mentor for approval or any changes, once approved then there will be dates and times to choose from to present the workshop to the students. All materials would be gathered to present the workshop. Students will receive a sticky note at the end of the workshop and simply say “Yes or No” to gather the results and outcomes of

the workshop. A detailed implementation plan and timeline can be seen in the Scope of Work in Appendix A.

### **Project Results**

The results of the workshop were excellent. Everything came out as planned. The students received a sticky note at the end of the workshop and they were asked, “Did this presentation change your mind about mental health? Did you gain something new?”. There were 28 students in total and 23 students answered “Yes”. The workshop was a success. Something that really was shocking because at the beginning of the presentation most students were confused and wanting to know more about the topic. After the presentation there were ice breakers with questions about the presentation and 8 students responded correctly, which shows that the workshop was very effective to more than half of the group of students. At the end of the workshop, students that responded “No” to the questions were asked the reason why they thought the workshop was not effective for them or if they learned something new. These students that responded no were much younger than they expected so there were many concepts they did not understand. There was an open explanation to them explaining a bit more in depth about what is mental health and all their questions were answered. Next time something that can be done better is adding a bit more visuals and explaining what they mean and the reason for them and how they connect to the topic being presented. Therefore, this can help many students that are younger and are not fully aware of what is being thought. It can help them understand and at least have some type of interest to know more about what is being presented the importance of the topic

### **Conclusion & Recommendations**

In conclusion the results were excellent, it teaches the presenter the importance of the issue wanting to address in the community through the reaction of all the youth from the agency. The process in developing this workshop was intense due to the fact that there was so much information to develop and tie down for the youth to understand but in the end it was all worth it. To help the youth from the community increase the communication with their parents, avoid anything that can affect their mental health the following recommendations are proposed: To address the decrease in developing a mental health problem in youth, the agency should provide more programs or classes for the youths parents to teach them the importance of mental health among youth. As well as teaching them how to know when they are developing a problem and learning how to communicate with them without harming them. Youth should be assigned to a staff at least once a week to talk to them about their week in school and at home to acknowledge how they are feeling or if they have any problem so they can address it and find the solution. This can be helpful to the students in the agency because it is showing them that the agency really cares for them and is trying to do a change for the community.

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**Appendix A**

**Scope of Work**

Activities	Deliverables	Timeline/Deadlines	Supporting Staff
Approval from Mentor of the project		March 2021	Carmen
Look into mental health with teens and youth		April 2021	Yajaira
Speak to the Youth and try to come up with ideas for the activities that will interact with the students		May 2021	Yajaira
Create a lesson plan and review with mentor for approval		June 2021	Yajaira
Create a presentation and put together the activities		August-September 2021	Yajaira
Send presentation to mentor for review		October 1st, 2021	Yajaira
Get approval by the mentor		October 20th, 2021	Yajaira
Present workshop at the youth center		October 28th, 2021	Yajaira, Youth center Staff, Mentor