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Mental Health in Cesar Chavez Elementary School

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Abstract

Cesar Chavez Elementary School is part of the Greenfield Union School District in Greenfield, California. The counseling department serves students from T-K through 6th grade. Mental health has had a huge impact on students at Cesar Chavez Elementary School. The project consists of a four-week counseling session with a group of 4th-grade students that are considered high-risk according to the CoVitality Survey they take. This process will have lessons that will help them improve on an area of concern with mental health. It is expected that for the next CoVitality Survey, the students are not at high risk. The outcome of the project was that three of the five students were not at high risk for the second survey. The school system should keep using the CoVitality Survey to know who are the students that need more support so that it can be provided to them.

Keywords: Mental Health, Elementary Students, CoVitality Survey

Agency & Communities Served

Cesar Chavez Elementary School is in Greenfield Union School District in Greenfield, California. Greenfield is a city in Monterey County. This city is an agricultural city. There are about 91.9% of the people in Greenfield, CA is Hispanic (Greenfield, CA). Poverty rates for people under the age of 18 increased from 14.4 percent in 2019 to 16.1 percent in 2020 (US Census Bureau, 2022). The counseling serves students from 4 to 12, meaning from pre-k to 6th grade. There are a total of 633 students in the school as of September 7, 2022 (Cesar Chavez Elementary School). Cesar Chavez works with mostly low-income families. Although their focus is on the students, the school also works with the parents in getting them resources that they are able to use.

Their mission is to "promote all students with high levels of academic and personal achievement through a collaborative system of support, guided by passionate, dedicated staff in a safe, nurturing, and culturally responsive environment that fully prepares students for future college and career success" (*HOME*, n.d.). The counseling department mostly focuses on helping the students with any problems that they may have at the social, behavioral, and educational levels. Most of the community at Cesar Chavez Elementary School is Hispanic or Latino.

Problem Model Background and Literature Review

Problem Statement

Mental health or illness is something that can not always be seen in a person, unlike any physical injuries. Mental health has been an increasing topic in recent years. Mental health does not have to be something major to be serious, it can be something as small as feeling sad or it can be feeling anxious. Overall, 1 in 6 students had enough symptoms and impairment to meet the

criteria for one or more childhood mental disorders (CDC). As students go into elementary schools, they may need more help than other of their peers and there is nothing wrong with that. In 2020, there were 126 hospitalizations due to mental health issues in children 5 to 14 years of age in Monterey County and San Benito County (KidsData). Mental health has not always been taken seriously and can be devastating to a whole family if not treated or diagnosed on time, it can lead to a death of a family member. The death of a family member has a huge impact on the whole family and sometimes it can lead to the family falling apart due to the pain of losing a child and even parents blaming each other.

Mental health is very important, and everyone should get help as soon as possible and not wait. From March to October 2020, mental health-related ER visits increased 24% for children ages 5 to 11 and 31% for those ages 12 to 17 compared with 2019 emergency department visits, according to CDC data (Ortega, 2022). Even as a grown up it is hard to deal with mental illness, now for a child it might be harder for them to deal with a mental illness. For children it might be hard to accept that they need more help than their parents realize. There are certain things that can affect a child more than an adult, like Covid-19 which has been affecting every person.

Contributing Factors

Although Covid-19 started two years ago, there was a change seen in the students when they got back to in-person classes. "A review by Fong and Iarocci published in November 2020 combined past pandemic research with newly available COVID-19 findings and concluded that pandemic-related social isolation and quarantining is resulting in significant anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and fears in children and adolescents" (Meade, 2021). The fact that the children were not able to go out was real because restaurants, parks, and malls were closed. The only time that they could go out was to the grocery store and not always due to the

parents who fear their children getting sick. The children knowing that they or their parents could get sick and die due to Covid-19 was a traumatic experience for them. Problems such as worsening school performance, increased agitation, aggression, and regression may arise or become more pronounced (Marques de Miranda et al., 2020). This would be just from the students having to stay home. Sometimes their home might not even be the safest place to spend all day. All of this will lead students to act out during their classes since they might be used to being only at home.

There could be a lot of reasons why children can be affected by a mental health illness. Coming to a new country not knowing what to expect can be traumatic, especially for children. Undocumented people who come to this country illegally must go through immense trauma, not to mention little children who must go through that experience and sometimes even for days. As of 2014, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security estimated that there were roughly 12.1 million undocumented immigrants living in the U.S, mainly in California, Texas, Florida, New York, New Jersey, and Illinois (Chang, 2019). There are a lot of people who come into this country looking for better opportunities and are not only from Mexico, but there are also people who come from other countries. It does not matter from what country they come from they all go through a trauma which they do not get help for. Presently, undocumented immigrants who migrate as children number 2.1 million, just under, 19 percent of the overall undocumented population. For instance, mental health difficulties may be more prevalent when immigration takes place during specific periods of the life cycle (Rousseau & Frounfelker, 2018). The older the children are the more trauma there can be which can lead to mental illnesses. Small children can learn to adapt, but the older the child is the harder time they might have adapting, especially since they do not know the language and they are surrounded by new and unknown people.

In the Hispanic community, there is a huge stigma surrounding the topic of mental health. Mental health in a Hispanic home as in some other countries too is a taboo subject and for most, it does not exist. Mental illness has been a growing issue, especially for children and their parents. Stigma is a term originating from the ancient Greeks, denoting a visible mark placed or branded on members of tainted groups such as traitors or slaves (Hinshaw, 2005). The word stigma has always been seen as something bad and evil. Especially when it is combined with mental health. These words in some cultures are not even talked about and can go as far as calling a person crazy that has a mental illness. Currently, the term has more of a psychological meaning, signaling an invisible, internal mark of shame to a person. Although treatment is most common among adolescents with severe psychiatric problems fewer than half of adolescents with a disorder receive treatment (Villatoro et al., 2018). This can have huge consequences on not only adolescents but to those children that are younger and might not be able to overcome a mental illness without help. This again goes to stigma being surrounding mental health and not realizing that people need help and that there is nothing wrong with that.

Consequences

Covid-19 has a vast impact on every person no matter whether you get this disease or not. Compared with those who did not feel close to persons at school, students who felt close to persons at school had a lower prevalence of poor mental health during the pandemic (28.4% versus 45.2%) and the past 30 days (23.5% versus 37.8%), of persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness (35.4% versus 52.9%), of having seriously considered attempting suicide (14.0% versus 25.6%), and of having attempted suicide (5.8% versus 11.9%) (Jones et al., 2022). This comes to show how much their social life is affected and not only their social life but their home life too. If they are feeling sad and want to connect to people but are unable to interact with other

people. When they do interact with it is based on a computer, where the students are not always required to show their faces on camera. Their home life is affected too because if they feel sad and hopeless, they might not want to even talk to their family. Covid-19 affected the students by not letting them make proper connections with the other students and even teachers since they were home most of the day. For the days that they did have class it was through a screen where it would prevent them from making real connections. In some cases, related research has relied on state summative assessments, with results indicating larger declines in math than reading between spring 2019 and 2021 (Kuhfeld et al., 2022). Not only is the mental health of the student declining and getting worse, but their schoolwork is also declining. The students also have more trouble understanding the material. When students are learning through a computer, they are not always paying attention if they have all these electronics that distract them.

There are consequences to leaving your home country and arriving at a new country is a transition and that transition can come with traumatic experiences. This group is at increased risk for poor physical and psychological health given the lack of economic opportunities and societal resources, poor health care access, and stigma (Chang, 2019). Not only can there be mental health illness, but someone can also suffer from other physical problems. Which all can lead to mental health problems if someone does not receive help in time. Recent research has emphasized the need to develop models of mental health that incorporates both exposures to traumatic events prior to, during and after the migration experience as well as secondary stressors that are experienced in countries of resettlement (Rousseau & Frounfelker, 2018). There are a lot of problems that a person crossing illegally can come by. There are horrible situations that someone can come by. It can be seeing someone die or being left by the person that is supposed to help you cross. There are people who get raped or attacked and there are people who

experience the other person going through that and can not do anything to help and both those things can lead to traumatic experiences which have to be treated as soon as possible, yet they might not have monetary resources or know where to get help.

Stigma on mental health can have a huge impact not only on the life of the child in need of help but to the family too. Left untreated, poor mental health can negatively impact adult outcomes, including unemployment, low income, and limited social mobility (Villatoro et al., 2018). When it comes to mental health it does not matter whether you are young or old, the consequences lead to the same path. As a young child with mental health that can be left untreated it can lead to that child getting in trouble as they grow up. As they are growing, they can start to take drugs or even start to drink which leads to more mental health problems and to other problems. It can lead to not being able to keep a stable job and if they do not have employment, they are not able to have a home or even to get help with their mental illness. One in ten children and adolescents suffer with mental health difficulties at any given time, yet less than one third seek treatment (Kaushik et al., 2016). Children not getting enough help can lead to bigger problems; it is not necessarily only for them but for the people surrounding them. “Untreated mental illness predisposes to longstanding individual difficulties and presents a great public health burden” (Kaushik et al., 2016). Not only can the children with mental illnesses get worse as they are growing up, but they can become harmful to others. They can cause injuries not only to themselves, but to family members and even to people around them.

Capstone Project Proposal and Justification

The primary purpose of this project was to help the students in 4th, 5th, and 6th grade at Cesar Chavez Elementary School. The agency was helping the students to have a better understanding of what mental health is. To know that there are ways that they can be helped. The

students took a survey during school which will tell us who is at high, medium, and low in risk with certain emotions. For example, the survey will tell who needed help with gratitude, optimism, zest, and persistence. Once the results are complete, it will tell who is at high risk. Some of the questions that the survey may ask can be “Do you feel excited about coming to school?” or “Do you think that you can trust teachers at school?” The project met the best standards because not only did the students learn about mental health, but they also got to meet other students that had gone through something similar. The students also got to interact with students that they might have seen around school but never talked to and got to become friends with them.

The project addressed all three contributing factors, which were Covid-19, undocumented immigrants, and stigma against mental health. Covid-19 has had an immense ramification to everyone, but those who are more vulnerable than others. Some children who got Covid-19 might not have understood the seriousness of this disease. They might not understand why they needed to stay home and not be able to go outside. Not only was Covid-19 a substantial reason for why this project was formed. There are other causes that contribute to mental illnesses. This project was done thinking on those other reasons for example undocumented immigrants crossing to a new country and the stigma that there is against mental health. Undocumented people who cross over can have a huge amount of trauma that can lead to mental illnesses when left untreated. Mental health is an enormous topic that has been becoming more popular but for some cultures it is seen as something bad to talk about or even get help, which only increases mental illnesses. It provided a little help for those that were in need that might not have had enough resources to pay for some help.

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
Covid-19	Too many young students are struggling with mental health issues.	Students are not making connections.
Undocumented immigrants		Grades decline.
Stigma against mental health		Can start to take drugs and alcohol.

Project Description and Implementation Process

The project's focus was to help students in the 4th, 5th, and 6th grades with mental health. In this case, the focus of the group was 4th graders. The students took a survey during school which told who is at high, medium, and low risk with certain areas for concern. For example, the survey may tell who needs help with gratitude, optimism, zest, and persistence, which was determined by the response the students gave to the questions. Once the results were complete, it told which student was at high risk. There was a group of students formed that were high-risk. The group met once a week for four weeks. In the four weeks that the students met, there was a lesson that had to do with one of the areas they needed help. The meetings took 20 to 30 minutes on Wednesdays. The area of concern that the students were working on was optimism. When the group first met, they were explained that whatever they talked about was going to stay between the group. During the meeting one of the first lessons, they learned about what the word optimism meant. The next lessons were on how to incorporate optimism in their lives. The

students learned what it is, how to use optimism during their daily life, and lastly, they learned how to keep using optimism in their daily life after the group sessions are done.

Project Results

The survey asked different types of questions in different areas in the student's life. All the students who took the survey would be selected into three areas. The students will be sorted out into low risk, mid risk, and high risk. It was expected that by the time the students took the next CoVitality survey the students would not be in the high-risk section and at least be in the middle or even at a lower risk. The method that was used to gather the success of this project was the second CoVitality Survey that the students took again a few months later. During the second CoVitality survey they were asked the same questions.

In the second survey, it can be seen whether the students did improve or stayed the same. Out of the five students that were in the group counseling session only a few were able to improve. For the next survey, only two of the students stayed at high risk, but the area of concern switched. This means that the group counseling sessions did work since they did improve a little in the area of concern that the student needed help with. As for the other three students they did improve, not only did they improve on the area of concern they were able to be removed from the high-risk area to a lower-risk section.

Conclusion & Recommendations

In the end, all three of the contributing factors, Covid-19, undocumented immigrants, and stigma against mental health do have consequences on mental health, especially for those who are still children. Some students struggle with mental health daily without all these factors. These factors only make it harder for those students to get help and be able to improve. For Covid-19, schools were closed for a whole year and students were not able to get out and communicate

with other students or people, which affected them and their schoolwork. Undocumented families have more trouble getting resources if their children were not doing good with their mental health. As for the stigma on mental health, it prevents not only children from maybe getting the right help and then getting worse, which affects their social and school life.

The school had some great teachers and staff members. All of them including the principal, vice principal, and counselor always treated the students with respect. There are some recommendations that might be good for the agency to try and start the group sessions earlier to have enough time with the students. Another thing that might help with the group sessions is for the counselor to have more help in the school since there is one counselor for the whole school, which some days is not enough for so many students.

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Appendix A


Project Implementation Plan

Task	Timeline	Parties Involved	Materials/ Services Needed	Completed Product
Make and print permission slips	January, 2022	Mentor	Counseling office, laptop, and printer	Completed and printed Permission slips
Sort permission slips for those who do not have permission	January, 2022	Mentor and students	Counseling office and computer	N/A
Give Survey out	February 2022	Mentor, students, and teacher	Classroom and computer	Completed Survey
Sorting out groups	End of February 2022	Mentor	Computer and counseling office	Got 2 or 3 groups
Permission slips	End of February, 2022	Mentor	Computer and counseling office	Students had permission slips for group sessions
Work on material for Week 1	March 2022	Mentor	Counseling office and computer	Finished material for the first meeting
Implement capstone project Working on optimism	March 2022	Mentor and students	Counseling office	N/A

Work on week 2 material	March 2022	Mentor	Counselor office and computer	Ready material for week 2
Week 2: Reminder on optimism and optimism cont.	March 2022	Mentor and students	Paper	N/A
Work on week 3 material	March 2022	Mentor	Counselor office and computer	Ready material for week 3
Week 3 Optimism and how to work on it	March 2022	Mentor and students	Paper	N/A
Work on week 4 material	March 2022	Mentor	Counselor office and computer	Ready material for week 4
Week 4 Optimism last lesson	March 2022	Mentor and Students	Paper	N/A
Permission Slip for CoVitality survey	August 2022	Mentor	Computer and paper	Students had permission slips
Retake CoVitality Survey	August, 2022	Mentor and Students	Computer	Completed results

Appendix B

Example of CoVitality Results



INDIVIDUAL STUDENT PROFILE REPORT

STUDENT ID

STUDENT NAME

CONTACT ID

GRADE: **4th**

GENDER: **Male**

SCHOOL: **Cesar Chavez Elementary**

DATE: **03/02/22**

RESPONSES: **Valid**

WHAT WAS USED?

STRENGTHS PROFILE

CoVitality-P domain Results

This student's CoVitality-Primary *strengths profile* is shown in the chart below. Information about the CoVitality-P domains is provided to explore recommended areas for targeted intervention and support to build upon the student's personal assets.

Strengths	Areas to Enhance	Areas for Growth
	Persistence	Zest Gratitude Optimism

CoVitality-P

CoVitality Primary (CoVitality-P) is a social emotional health survey used to screen for complete mental health to help increase positive developmental outcomes and robust psychological wellbeing.

CoVitality-P Domains

Persistence	Working diligently to accomplish one's goals, including maintaining interest in the face of adversity and failure.
Gratitude	Sensing thankfulness that arises in response to one's benefitting from some kind of transactional means.
Zest	Experiencing one's life in the present moment as exciting and energizing.
Optimism	Expecting the occurrence of good events and beneficial outcomes in one's future.