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Simran Sandhu
California State University, Monterey Bay

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Addressing Mental Health Issues Through a Screening Tool

Simran Sandhu

Rancho San Juan High School Mentor: Maria GarciaLara

Collaborative Health & Human Services

Department of Health Human Services and Public Policy

California State University Monterey Bay

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Author Note

Simran Sandhu, Department of Health Human Services and Public Policy, California State University Monterey Bay. This research was supported by AGENCY. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to **Simran Sandhu**, California State University Monterey Bay, 100 Campus Center, Seaside, CA, 93955. Contact: ssandhu@csumb.edu.

Abstract

This capstone project was implemented at Rancho San Juan High School which is located on the far north side of Salinas, CA. RSJHS is a newly constructed public high school. The capstone project's goal was to assist RSJHS Wellness Center by determining what services are needed by removing obstacles to accessing services. Intervention services can benefit students greatly. Services focus on mental, emotional, and socioeconomic needs. The project was specifically focused on creating a screening tool for the intervention specialist. A standard screening tool form was developed. The form is a well-organized easy to understand form that contains some personal questions that can be answered with a few words. The goal of this project was to determine what needs to be addressed for each student. The assessment results suggest the tool was a big asset for the intervention specialists and helps understand the needs of the students.

Keywords: *Wellness center, mental health services, screening tool, intervention services*

Agency & Communities Served

Located on the north side of Salinas, CA., Rancho San Juan High School is a newly constructed public high school. It took over twenty years to plan, and in 2019 the school was officially open (Linville, 2019). Rancho San Juan High School is classified as an independent system of local government by the National League of Cities (2021). It qualifies as a separate government because it provides public schools with sufficient administration and fiscal autonomy (National League of Cities, 2021). Rancho San Juan High School's mission is to establish a thriving learning community that values compassion, courage, and perseverance (Rancho San Juan High School, 2021). Through the agency, students and teachers are encouraged to explore different learning approaches instead of focusing just on the process. As well as being sensitive to the different backgrounds and support systems of each student.

There are a variety of programs available for students, including sports, AVID, Advanced Placement courses, Associated Student Body classes, band, and choir. In particular, I intern at the Wellness Center. Programs are offered on Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 of the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support model. The Tier 2 level offers minimal socioemotional interventions and academic support for kids. The Tier 3 level entails more in-depth counseling for individual problems or items that call for more extensive solutions. These initiatives, which are more or less tailored, assist each student's unique needs, whether they be academic or socioeconomic.

Problem Model Background and Literature Review

Problem Statement

All around the country and the world, the coronavirus has a negative impact on young children's lives. According to a poll performed by the mental health NGO Active Minds, "80% of students have suffered some negative effects on their mental health due to the epidemic and 20% claim their mental health has severely worsened" (Gaffney, 2020). This resulted from the stay-at-home order's enforced separation of the kids from their peers. Students are not only dealing with the impacts of the stay-at-home order, but they are also under a lot of stress and anxiety about going back to school. The Rancho San Juan campus has seen the majority of the complaints about the difficulties. Due to a lack of organization within the school, the intervention specialist at RSJHS also had to prepare her own paperwork for students who were sent to her. This can lead to a defect in the services she offers the kids. The lack of resources and correct forms for staff can highlight the school's capacity to offer adequate services to its students. It was also mentioned that the district as a whole lacks an intake process for students. The lack of linear intake procedures, according to the intervention specialist, would necessitate another intake if a student transferred to another school within the district. The fact that students must repeat or relive the trauma they have previously shared with intervention specialists is a problem.

Contributing Factors

Readjusting from COVID-19

The growth of a child is of utmost importance to anyone who has the chance to instruct them. Many people, particularly growing children, have experienced difficulties with the development of their mental health as a result of COVID-19. Some of them were forced to spend

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a significant amount of their stay-at-home orders alone since they were unable to attend school owing to a lack of resources and outreach opportunities. With regard to children's development in terms of their emotional, physiological, and physical well-being, the goal of this senior capstone is to raise awareness of the effects COVID-19 has had. Promoting early mental health awareness involves assisting parents in understanding how their children are feeling as well as enabling the young person to comprehend their own feelings. "To boost public health efforts among those who are more vulnerable, the possible differences in mental health resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic should be investigated" (Gazmarmarian, 2021). It has been discovered that young children are particularly sensitive during certain developmental stages. Due to the pandemic, many things have been and still need to be reorganized in order to provide aid for individuals who are struggling as a result of the situation. Despite the fact that many resources have been developed and placed online, the availability of support has greatly grown.

Socioeconomic Factors

Children's attitudes toward school and academic performance have suffered as a result of the socioeconomic difficulties they experience. According to research, academic skill development is slower for kids from low socioeconomic status families and communities than it is for kids from higher socioeconomic status groups (Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, & Maczuga, 2009). Over 70% of the students at Racho San Juan have been classified as having socioeconomic difficulties. Students urgently need to address these disadvantages. Early exposure to toxic stress has long-term effects on learning, behavior, and health (Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health et al., 2012). Students must respond to their concerns if they want to avoid long-term consequences to their life. The RSJHS is dedicated to giving children the counseling and assistance they require in order to excel in school and in their

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future aspirations. However, there is a roadblock in the way of offering students excellent service. According to studies, under-resourced school systems are frequently found in areas with poor socioeconomic status, which has a detrimental impact on kids' academic development and results (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008). There are remarkably few staff members working at RSJHS's Tier 2–3 PBIS. A smaller staffing level necessitates a larger caseload, and research has shown that larger caseloads can put a staff member under a lot of stress (Camus, 2020).

Stigma About Mental Health

Due to the stigma that can be attached to mental health therapy, some people who are interested in it may be hesitant to start treatment. Stereotypes, prejudice, and discriminatory views maintained by the general public are known as stigma. The criticism can add unneeded guilt, worry, or desertion to an already extremely trying moment in a person's life, which they may not want to experience. This demonstrates that the public has a more negative perception of seeing a therapist than a doctor. Because they don't want to be judged, people may overlook warning signs and put off getting treatment. Although views are changing in today's culture to lessen stigma, there is still obviously a gap between ideas and deeds.

Consequences

Unemployment & Limited Job Opportunities

In the end, graduating high school seniors have a larger likelihood of becoming unemployed if the issues of post-graduation readiness and mental health are not addressed. The unemployment rate for people with only a high school diploma is 9%, according to Torpey (2021). Future career prospects may suffer if newly graduated kids don't find work after finishing high school. Lack of post-graduation preparedness regarding mental health has a significant

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impact on prospects for career growth, wage rate, and career achievability. In addition, Gabe et al. (2019) reported that only five percent of low-wage workers were able to transfer to "higher-quality occupations," as most people in low-wage jobs either stay in their positions or migrate to other low-paying positions with little to no opportunity for advancement.

Mental Health Worsens

Negative effects are frequently experienced by teenagers with untreated mental conditions. The detrimental effects reduce a person's capacity to contribute to society. Therefore, mental illnesses such as serious depression that are left untreated result in an absence, misbehavior, drug misuse, and suicide. When certain illnesses are not addressed, it can have negative consequences on adolescents and lead to the illness getting worse. Tardiness is one effect of untreated mental illness in adolescents. Truancy was defined by the National Center for School Engagement (2009) as any unexcused absence from school. Most school-age children with untreated mental problems risk falling behind, becoming uninformed of available therapies, being lonely, and turning to absenteeism (Pescosolido, 2008).

Substance Abuse

In California, 15% of adults require substance misuse treatment, compared to 22% in Salinas County (Elevate, 2019). According to the research, inhabitants of Salinas County are more likely than residents of other counties in the state to become dependent on drugs. Drug use to treat symptoms is more likely in those who have mental illness and poor coping mechanisms. Cocaine, Xanax, and oxycodone are the most commonly used narcotics in Salinas County (Elevate, 2019). These medications can have detrimental interactions when used simultaneously since some can stimulate the neurological system while others depress it (also known as speedballs). Speedball users are more likely to overdose than those who take just one substance

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(Mixing Drugs, n.d.). 50–71% of teenagers have some form of mental illness (Winstanley et. al., 2012). Greater effects from substance addiction can occur for those who have mental illnesses than for the general population. Numerous case studies demonstrate that alcohol and other substances can aggravate their symptoms, create social dysfunction (family, financial, and housing issues), and make it more difficult to stop using them (Drake and Brunette, 1998).

Capstone Project Proposal and Justification

The objective of this project is to develop a screening tool for the intervention specialist and a new protocol for present and future intervention specialists, taking into account the elements that the intervention specialist has indicated. The project will involve developing a standardized form that will be used by students and administered by the intervention specialist, teachers, and school counselors. To make sure the appropriate questions are posed and answered efficiently, a significant amount of study on forms will be necessary. The intervention specialist and I may need to work together as well because the form had to be advantageous if it was going to be used long-term. The form will include data that the intervention specialist will find relevant when they meet with the student for the first time. The form includes sections about the student's primary concern or problem, the duration of the problem, their feelings, and background information on the student. After the compilation of the form, the intervention specialist can look into any prior counseling received for the student, any physical conditions or medications the student may be prescribed in relation to the issue, a grade check, the student's academic performance, and if the student has received any prior academic interventions.

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
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Readjusting after Covid-19	Students suffer mental health issues throughout their academic career	Unemployment
Socioeconomic factors		Mental health issues worsen
Stigma about mental health in Hispanic households		Substance abuse

Project Description and Implementation Process

For this project to be executed at the school, a significant amount of study must be conducted. It will be difficult and complex. The intervention specialist and the district's coordinator for positive and behavioral interventions and supports both had to approve the form before it could be utilized. The screening tool's first steps are research and preparation; research will be done. Study on different techniques of intake, different questions that would be answered during intake for student counseling, and research on how an intake should be arranged. It took around three months to compile all the information and proof required for the first draft. After the first form is finished, the intervention specialist and I will discuss working together. Feedback will be submitted here so that changes can be made to the form to improve its appearance and make it more useful for the services offered.

Second, the intervention specialist, health educators, and teachers will incorporate the new screening tool. With newly referred pupils, the tool would be utilized about four times. The intervention specialist will suggest one final adjustment to the form after those four rounds.

Lately, the screening tool is still being utilized and final adjustments are now being made to it. Before the effectiveness of the form is evaluated, it will likely be used eight more times.

Assessment Plan & Expected Outcomes

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The capstone project will begin with talking to the intervention specialist to get an understanding of how many students will be likely to use the screening tool. After talking to the health educators the screening tool will be implemented during the health classes. Doing so can insure that all students in every grade level have access to the tool. The screening tool will be available as a printout that can be completed in class or taken home and brought back to the health teachers. The teachers will also be able to hand out the tool to students they think need help. In addition, the teacher will remind students that this form will not be shared with anyone besides their counselor or the intervention specialist. After looking at attendance approximately if there are 25 students in the class it is likely that at least ten percent of them will complete the form. The percentage will only increase depending on attendance and an increase of students in class.

Implementation Process

To implement the screening tool a lot of research has to be done to get a better understanding of what resources are available. Attending the PBIS monthly meetings can help to connect with other intervention specialists in the Salinas School District. In addition, connecting with the intervention specialist and the social workers at RSJHS will benefit the creating process. Having multiple drafts will also be implemented to make sure the questions are helpful in the intake process.

Project Results

Unfortunately, having to be remote this year and working virtually it was hard to get feedback from students. The feedback from health educators and my mentor about the screening tool. This form was necessary to create because it would be a great tool for students that are struggling with obstacles like mental health. After my first round of the draft, I was advised to

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change certain wording so it was easier to understand for all grade levels. In addition, The recommendation was to look into trigger words that can offend or bother students that are dealing with issues. The second draft of the screening tool was sent and implemented at a charter school where a family member works. She was able to use the tool three times throughout the school year.

The first result of the tool showed that student A was dealing with communicating with their parents and showed signs of mental health-related problems. The teacher examined the form and recommend student A talk to her counselor. Because this school does not have a wellness center the counselor play an important role in students' lives with emotional and academic needs.

The second result was the student's B low progress in class was a result of not being able to go to sleep on time and not eating breakfast. Even though the results sound simple we had to look into the situation and determine why these things were happening. Student B had to take care of her younger siblings because both parents work full-time and they can not afford a babysitter. This led to student B having to stay up late to finish their homework. Because they were able to use the screening tool they placed the student and the siblings into a free after-school program.

The last result for student C did not show any signs of mental health problems or any socioeconomic factors. But the student was able to express how they did not have any friends at this school and wanted someone to talk to. The form does not have to be used for mental health-related problems but it can also be implemented if a staff member sees a child struggling with communication or any other issues.

Conclusion & Recommendations

This capstone project was helpful in realizing what different kinds of support services students need during their academic careers. The form was helpful to understand how different socioeconomic factors play a huge role in children's lives. Different factors can lead students to deal with mental health problems that they do not know how to get help for. During my internship, a lot of parents also had a stigma about mental health and a lot of them did not believe it exists. This is a hard stigma to deal with because these beliefs come from many generations in the past and it is almost impossible to get rid of.

The recommendations I think that could make this capstone project better would be having access to previous tools that were created. Because RSJHS did not have any forms prior to them creating what they needed it was hard to get an understanding of what questions to use. I was able to connect with other schools that already have a screening tool in place and they were able to guide me to the right resources that are available. In addition, if you can have your internship in person it will be helpful to connect with students and ask them questions about what type of needs they think their friends can benefit from.

Overall, creating this capstone project was very beneficial in understanding CHS needs and how schools can address so many different types of needs. The wellness center at RSJHS is helping so many students every day and most likely could not get this type of help from outside resources. Because the wellness center is on campus the students could drop off anytime. It is so helpful for students to feel like they have a community at their school and they have someone to talk to.

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Appendix A

Project Implementation Plan

Task	Timeline	Parties Involved	Materials/ Services Needed	Completed Product
Conduct a planning meeting regarding the capstone idea	Aug 29, 2022	Mentor	Google meet link setup, Task list, & intern meeting agenda	Meeting minutes & final capstone idea
Research intake form questions	September 5th-September 30th	Mentor, health educators & Salinas unified school district	Laptop, google meet link, & phone call	Research questions
Meet w/ the PBIS coordinator	October 4th, 2022	PBIS Supervisor & mentor	Google meet link, Laptop, questions, & google doc	n/a
Create the 1st draft of the intake form	October 11th, 2022	Supervisor & mentor	Laptop	1st draft
Meet with the health educators at RSJHS	October 18th, 2022	Mentor & health educators	Google meet link & google doc	n/a
Propose the intake form to the intervention specialist in the school district	October 25th, 2022	Mentor, intervention specialist, & PBIS coordinator	Google meet link, powerpoint, & intake form	1st draft of intake form
Create the 2nd draft	November 1st, 2022	Mentor	Google meet link, google doc, & excel	2nd draft
Have 8 students try the intake form	November 7th-November 11th	mentor & PBIS coordinator	Google meet link, paper intake form,	Intake form

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			&pencils	
Final meeting with the PBIS coordinator	November 15th, 2022	Mentor & PBIS coordinator	Google meet link	n/a
Create the final intake form	November 22nd, 2022	Mentor	Google meet link, google doc, & excel doc	Final intake form

Rancho San Juan Screening Tool

Student Name: (First & Last): _____ Preferred Name: _____ Student ID # _____ Grade Level: _____
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1. How are you feeling today? Circle one image.



Very Sad



Somewhat Sad



Neutral



Somewhat Happy



Very Happy

2. Do you usually have breakfast? YES _____ NO _____ SOMETIMES _____
3. Did you usually go to sleep late? YES _____ NO _____

If yes, what is causing you to go to sleep late and how can you change that?

4. What emotion are you feeling the most today? (Examples: Excited, Happy, Loved, Safe, Hopeful, Angry, Lonely, Sad, Worried, or Frustrated?)

Go into detail about what you are feeling,

5. What was the **best** part of the past week for you?

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_____.

6. What was the **hardest** part of the past week for you?

_____.

7. During the past week, how often did you feel Excited, Happy, Loved, Safe, Hopeful, Angry, Lonely, Sad, Worried, or Frustrated?

_____.

8. Do you have a support person in your life that you can talk to about anything & everything? (example: parents, grandparents, friends, teachers, adults, siblings. It is okay if your answer is no.

_____.

9. Would you like to talk privately with an adult from school about how you're feeling or something on your mind?

_____.