California State University, Monterey Bay

Digital Commons @ CSUMB

Capstone Projects and Master's Theses

12-2023

Youth Mental Health Awareness

Juana Tomas

Youth Mental Health Awareness

Juana Tomas

SUHSD Wellness Center, Isell Chavarin

Collaborative Health & Human Services

Department of Health Human Services and Public Policy

California State University Monterey Bay

November 19th, 2023

Author Note

Juana Tomas, Department of Health Human Services and Public Policy, California State University Monterey Bay. This research was supported by Salinas Union High School District Wellness Center. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Juana Tomas, California State University Monterey Bay, 100 Campus Center, Seaside, CA, 93955. Contact: jtomassilva@csumb.edu.

Abstract

In 2019, the Salinas Union High School District began to provide services for high school students through Wellness Centers. The centers are intended to act as mental, social-emotional and medical health resources. (Cuevas, 2019). Many students have untreated mental health challenges that can significantly interfere with a student's well-being and ability to learn, grow and develop. The Wellness Center supports students with their social, emotional, and behavioral challenges. They help students with their overall well-being. The capstone project is a presentation awareness video that will recognize the importance of mental health, provide essential coping skills that students can use, and highlight how the professionals at the Wellness Center can support students. After watching the presentation, a post survey was completed by thirty-eight students and met the expected outcome. To keep on bringing awareness the next steps the agency can take is to continue bringing awareness by using social media to promote services.

keywords: *mental health, social-emotional, wellness, high school students, intervention*

Agency & Communities Served

The agency's mission states, "The Nest is dedicated to supporting students' social, emotional, behavioral, and academic development by meeting youth where they are. Through the use of individualized support and by bringing together educators, families, and the local community, we strive to empower students to enhance their overall wellbeing and personal achievement". (The Nest/Wellness Center/Welcome, 2022). The agency's vision also states, "Promote equality and inclusivity for students of all cultural, racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds; sexual orientations; gender identities; and those with special needs". (The Nest/Wellness Center/Welcome, 2022). The main purpose of the agency is to support all students with their social, emotional, and behavior challenges.

The Wellness Center or The Nest provides a range of services for high school students in grades 9-12. According to Everett Alvarez High School data there are about 2,664 students enrolled in this High school. About 74% students come from a low socioeconomic background. (SARC, School Accountability Report. 2019-2020). The EAHS Wellness center offers programs and services like Joven Nobles, Student Study Team, Grief Group, Harmony at Home, and Girasol. These support groups and programs aim to address common issues for high school students related to academics, family problems, peer/relationships, gang affiliation and other barriers to seeking mental health services. Other Services that the Wellness provides include 1 on 1 counseling / therapy with the school Social Worker, Intervention Specialist, Drug Resource Counselor, Restorative Justice or the Marriage and Family Therapist.

Problem Statement

A micro-level problem is that there are too many high school students who suffer from untreated mental health and social-emotional challenges in Monterey County. In California, 1 in 6 U.S youth aged 6-17 experience mental health disorder each year. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness about 396,000 Californians aged 12-17 have suffered from a mental health disorder, which is depression. (NAIM, 2020). This micro level problem contributes to many negative consequences that can lead into more serious problems. "Mental health conditions that are left unaddressed can lead to life-threatening symptoms and poor quality of life". (Turnbridge, 2021). Untreated mental health conditions can result in unnecessary substance abuse, homelessness, suicide, and poor quality of life. A few barriers to services and professional support include stigma, lack of awareness, and poverty.

Due to lack of awareness mental health issues are neglected and never really treated. There is low awareness among people about mental health problems. That is the reason people perceive it and cure it as they like. There are a lot of misconceptions regarding mental health. If someone is showing disruptive behavior, people often act judgemental towards the person that is showing behaviors, for example if someone is having mood swings or acting socially withdrawn people easily call them rude or just don't understand what that person is going through. According to a survey, "39% said they would view someone differently if they knew that person had a mental health disorder". (APA, 2019).

Contributing Factors

Contributing factors that can lead to untreated mental health challenges in students is lack of awareness of resources available for them in their community or professional support. It makes it difficult to seek help when one does not know any information about professional support or places. "While most Americans do try to seek out treatment, there also is a large portion of the population who have wanted to but did not seek treatment for themselves or loved ones (29%) in part due to not knowing where to go if they needed this service". (National Council for Mental Wellbeing, 2023). It is important to know that the earlier someone is diagnosed and begins treatment, the more likely it is that they'll be able to manage their condition and improve their mental health. According to the American Occupational Therapy Association, "early detection and rapid intervention may reduce the impact of mental illness and may even delay or prevent transition to SMI".(The American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 2018). But this makes it a barrier to seeking help when a lot of times people are not aware or well informed of what resources are available for them.

Second barrier can be stigma and stereotypes relating to seeking help and talking to someone. Stigma can lead to discrimination and students feel embarrassed or ashamed of receiving support services. Facing discrimination in cultural, social, and professional circles creates a huge barrier to seeking treatment. People may fear that family and friends will avoid them or treat them differently or that disclosing a mental health condition will lead to adverse treatment and perceptions at school. "A 2010 study of stigma among teens taking psychiatric medication found that many of the participants are afraid of being bullied by their peers in school. Consequently, 90% of them displayed at least one of the three measured stigma themes: secrecy, shame, and limiting social interaction". (Meridian Psychiatric Partners, 2023).

Another contributing factor is that poverty can play a big role in the decision not to seek help or treatment. A lot of times students socioeconomic status makes it difficult to find the right resources and support outside of school. There was an analysis of data from the Millennium Cohort Study in 2012, they found that children in the lowest income quintile to be 4.5 times more likely to experience severe mental health problems than those in the highest. (Mental Health Foundation, 2023). Families living in poverty face a range of barriers that reduce their ability to access mental health services, maintain compliance with treatment, and achieve favorable treatment outcomes. This can lead to not having medical insurance or if they do a lot of times mental health clinics often have long wait times for appointments and require multiple intake visits before treatment is rendered. The effects of these barriers make it worse and more stressful to deal with that can prevent families from prioritizing mental health needs.

Consequences

Untreated mental health or social-emotional challenges can disrupt teens functioning at school. When a student is suffering from mental health it is harder for them to be able to concentrate in their classes. This can lead to school failure, lower grade point averages, or unhealthy coping behaviors. "Mental health problems can affect a student's energy level, concentration, dependability, mental ability, and optimism, hindering performance" (Consequences of Student Mental Health Issues, 2020). Untreated anxiety, depression, and other conditions, can interfere with a student's ability to attend and succeed in school. This can lead to either dropping out of school or not graduating. "One study found that five percent of students do not finish their education due to psychiatric disorders and estimated that 4.29 million people

would have graduated from college had they not been experiencing such disorders". (Suicide Prevention Resource Center, 2020).

Another consequence for untreated mental health disorders is suicide. It can lead to students harming themselves because they can not take the pain. "Most suicides are related to psychiatric disease, with depression, substance use disorders and psychosis being the most relevant risk factors. However, anxiety, personality, eating, and trauma-related disorders, as well as organic mental disorders, also contribute". (PMC, 2018). Suicides among young people continue to be a serious problem. According to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, suicide is the second leading cause of death for children, adolescents, and young adults age 15-24year olds. The majority of children and adolescents who attempt suicide have a significant mental health disorder, the most common is depression. (AACAP, 2021). Among teenagers, suicide attempts may be associated with feelings of stress, self-doubt, pressure to succeed, disappointment, and loss. Sadly, for some teens, suicide may appear to be a solution to their problems.

Another consequence that untreated mental health or social-emotional challenges can disrupt teens is homelessness which can lead to more disruptive behaviors such as substance abuse. People with mental illness are at greater risk of experiencing homelessness. "In 2020, about 25 percent of all homeless adults in Los Angeles County had severe mental illnesses such as a psychotic disorder and schizophrenia and 27 percent had a long-term substance use disorder". (Streeter, 2022). It can be difficult for someone who is suffering from mental health to keep a job. People with mental illness may feel like they are not good enough or that they are not

doing their job well enough. This can lead to a lot of anxiety and stress, which can make it difficult to focus on work.

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
Lack of awareness of resources available in the community	There are too many high school students who suffer from untreated mental health and social emotional challenges in Monterey County.	Difficulty concentrating at school, bad grades, dropping out/not graduating.
Stigma/ stereotypes in the community around seeking mental health services.		Suicide or physical harm
Poverty		Homelessness, Drug abuse.

Project Description

Working Title: Youth Mental Health Awareness

Project Description

The capstone project consists of spreading the word and educating students the importance of understanding how serious mental health is. The project includes the intern talking

to students about what common mental health problems youths have. In the presentation it also includes some coping skills and school resources that are there for students so they can use them. It is important for students to understand that the Wellness center is a big supportive resource and for students to know how professionals including interns can support students. As a project, the intern is responsible for developing more research on social emotion topics and creating them as a powerpoint to show students during their homeroom or health classes.

Project Justification

A lot of time students are not well informed about how serious mental health is. A lot of times they are also not well informed about where they can seek professional support. This capstone project will be focusing on bringing awareness to students. It is very important that students are aware of what mental health is and what resources and professional support are there for them. This presentation will recognize the importance of mental health. The project will help address the issue that students are not well informed about the different human service professionals that are available to support students and the challenges they are facing.

This capstone project would also not only bring awareness to students but to teachers. I think it is important that teachers are aware and well educated about mental health issues. Teachers can also play a big role in students' success. Therefore, they should know what to do when a student is feeling some type of way that is causing them to not focus in class. Many students are vulnerable to mental health issues and it is important to have social emotional services that teach students and teachers healthy coping skills so they can be successful in and out of the classroom.

Benefits

The benefits of the capstone project will make a positive impact for the Wellness Center and the constituent groups involved. I believe students who watch the presentation will pay more attention to their social emotions and see mental health as an important topic that will encourage them to seek help. Teachers will be more aware and know what to do when a student is suffering from mental health. Not only will teachers and students be aware they can also refer to someone who might be going through a mental health issue. It can be a friend, a classmate, a family member, a loved one, etc. Another benefit that will result from the project is that bringing awareness can help students' understand that they are not alone and that many support systems are available to help them.

Implementation Process

The first process consisted of researching the most common mental health in students. In the beginning of the presentation the mental health disorder was defined. There were some videos that were included in the slides for students to watch with audio and to make it interesting. In the video presentation common signs and symptoms were included. There was more research on what coping skills students can do when they are facing a social emotion. The staff from EAHS Wellness Center were included so that students could meet and understand their roles. Lastly, the presentation ended with a quick video exercise for students to try while watching the presentation. In order for this capstone project to be successful, the implementation process was for the intern to develop the presentation and go over it with a mentor before

presenting it with students and teachers. With the help of the mentor, good feedback and ideas were implemented in order to proceed with the presentation. Once the presentation was good to go, it was emailed to the mentor for any final touches. It was the interns responsibility to collaborate with teachers to play the video presentation during their classes. There was a post survey that was provided after the presentation. To deliver the survey a QR code was provided as well as a hard copy paper. Lastly, the intern followed up with teachers to get feedback and collect any paper surveys.

Assessment Plan & Expected Outcomes

The goal of this capstone project was to have a positive outcome. Through the presentations, students learned what coping strategies they can use for social emotional support. The expected outcome we wanted to meet was for students to know what to do and get encouraged to seek professional support. More specifically, students gained insight about the professionals who work at the Wellness Center and what services are available related to mental health/ social emotional. The expectation of these presentations was to increase students' knowledge about mental health stigma and normalize the idea that many students at Everett Alvarez seek services. To measure the outcome, two health classes supported the intern by providing extra credit for students that participated in the survey.

Expected outcome was for approximately 60 students to watch the presentation and about 25 students to participate in completing the survey. The survey was a quick 2 minute survey that will show if the presentation and coping skills provided were helpful. The main expected outcome for this capstone project was to communicate to students about the Wellness Center. It

was important for students to be well informed that the Wellness Center is a free school resource that supports students' well-being. It was important to communicate information to students about the importance of mental health and social emotions. We were hoping to have more students at the Wellness Center after the presentation.

Project Results

The capstone project was a success. After collaborating with the health teachers, the video presentation was successfully delivered. Afterward, a post survey was given to evaluate the project's impact and effectiveness. Based on the results, Thirty eight responses have been collected and evaluated. The data showed that 71% of respondents are facing a mental health challenge. About 92%, agreed that the presentation was helpful and about 68% said that they would consider using coping skills that were provided in the presentation. Lastly, 22 out of 38 students responded that they would most likely use the Wellness Center as a school resource. This capstone project met the expected outcomes of increasing awareness. Overall, the data that was collected from the survey showed a positive outcome and concluded that the capstone project provided information about the importance of mental health as well as encouraging students to use the Wellness Center as a school resource if needed.

Conclusion & Recommendations

A healthy mental state is essential for high school students to thrive in school and in their daily lives. I believe that youth can be vulnerable to the detrimental effects of poor mental health as it can affect their social relationships at school, their identities, their academic progress and

future opportunities. Therefore, it is important for students to understand the value of mental health and have access to supportive resources. For Example, the Wellness Center is a school resource where students can seek for services at no cost. With my capstone project, my goal was to raise awareness and provide information explaining the significance of maintaining a healthy mental state and using the Wellness Center as a school resource. With the results I got based on the survey, I feel empowered to know that students will think about using the Wellness Center as a school resource. A big takeaway is that my capstone project has made me realize the importance of mental health. Overall, I have had a great experience at my agency and learned so many skills. I definitely want to pursue a job where I can continue to advocate for youths with mental health.

I believe the recommendation for the Wellness Center is to continue doing outreach for all students and make an effort to be creative with how information is communicated to students. While I provided information with a video presentation, I now believe it would have been more effective to use social media as a tool to share information. I recognize the role social media plays in students' lives and I believe it would have captured more attention bringing awareness.

References

Aacap. (n.d.). *Suicide in children and teens*.

https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Teen-Suicide-010.aspx

About Mental Illness - NAMI California. (2021, July 26). NAMI California.

https://namica.org/what-is-mental-illness/#:~:text=California%20Mental%20Health%20Statistics,-1%20in%2020&text=In%20California%2C%201%2C243%2C000%20adults%20have,have%20a%20serious%20mental%20illness.

Californian, E. C. S. (2019, August 23). Focusing on student wellness: Salinas middle, high

schools to get health service centers. *The Californian*.

https://www.thecalifornian.com/story/news/education/2019/08/22/salinas-schools-get-student-wellness-health-services-centers/2075750001/

Casali, M. (2022, December 13). *A guide to Untreated and Undiagnosed Mental Illness |*

Turnbridge. Turnbridge.

https://www.turnbridge.com/news-events/latest-articles/untreated-undiagnosed-mental-illness/

Consequences of Student Mental Health Issues – Suicide Prevention Resource Center. (n.d.).

https://sprc.org/settings/colleges-and-universities/consequences-of-student-mental-health-issues/#:~:text=One%20study%20found%20that%20five,not%20been%20experiencing%20such%20disorders

Homelessness in California: causes and policy considerations. (n.d.). Stanford Institute for

Economic Policy Research (SIEPR).

https://siepr.stanford.edu/publications/policy-brief/homelessness-california-causes-and-policy-considerations

Make the greatest impact with Bonterra. (n.d.). Bonterra.

https://www.socialsolutions.com/blog/barriers-to-mental-healthcare-access/%20https://thrivewor

National Council for Mental Wellbeing. (2022, November 17). *Study reveals lack of access as root cause for mental health crisis in America - National Council for Mental Wellbeing*. https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/news/lack-of-access-root-cause-mental-health-crisis-in-america/#:~:text=Lack%20of%20Awareness%3A%20While%20most,if%20they%20needed%20this%20service.

Read, H., Roush, S., & Downing, D. (2018). Early Intervention in Mental Health for Adolescents and Young Adults: A Systematic review. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, *72*(5), 7205190040p1-7205190040p8. https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2018.033118

School Data / SARC ~ School Accountability Report. (n.d.). https://www.salinasuhsd.org/domain/236

THE NEST. (n.d.). THE NEST. https://eahsnest.weebly.com/

Wellness center / welcome. (n.d.). https://www.salinasuhsd.org/domain/244

Appendix A

Project Implementation Plan

Task	Timeline	Parties Involved	Materials/ Services Needed	Deliverables
Research and start working on the presentation	September 12, 2023	Intern, Mentor	Laptop, Google Slides, Powerpoint	NA
Develop the 1st presentation Topic: Anxiety	September 26, 2023	Intern, Mentor	Laptop, Google Slides, Powerpoint	NA
Discussion with mentor for any feedback or ideas	October 3, 2023	Intern, Mentor	Powerpoint, Google Slides	NA
Final recorder video presentation	October 10, 2023	Intern, Mentor, Senior Admin	Powerpoint, Google Slides, Computer	Link for the presentation to be provided for homeroom teachers
Work on survey questions	October 17,2023	Intern	Google Forms	Surveys
Collaborating with two teachers to present the video presentation during health or homeroom class.	October 17, 2023	Intern, Mentor, Teachers,	Phone call/Email or go talk to them in person,	NA
Presentation being presented in homeroom/health classes	October 26, 2023	Intern, Mentor, Teachers, Students	Class space, Powerpoint, Google Slides	Link for presentation.
Providing a post survey after presentations	October 26, 2023	Intern, Teachers, Students	Printed surveys, pencils, QR codes	Surveys
Follow up with	October	Intern,	Email	NA

teachers with overall results	27,2023	Teachers		

These are the results of the post survey that was given after the presentation.

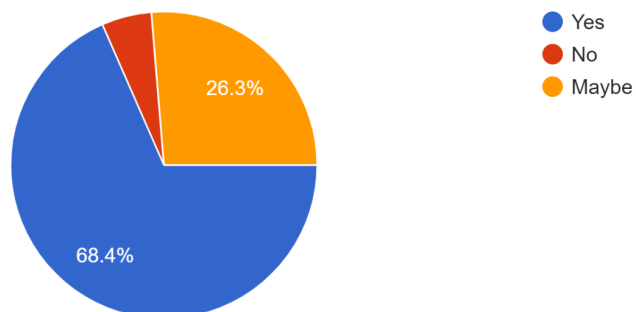Please choose any mental health you might be facing
38 responses

- ● Anxiety
- ● Stress
- ● Depresion
- ● Eating Disorder

71.1% 10.5% 18.4%
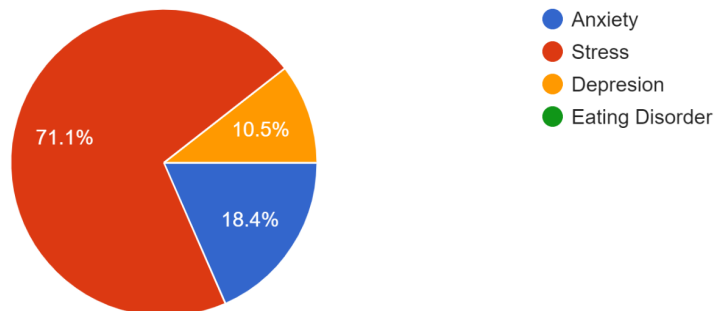
Was this presentation helpful?
38 responses

- ● Yes
- ● No

92.1% 7.9%
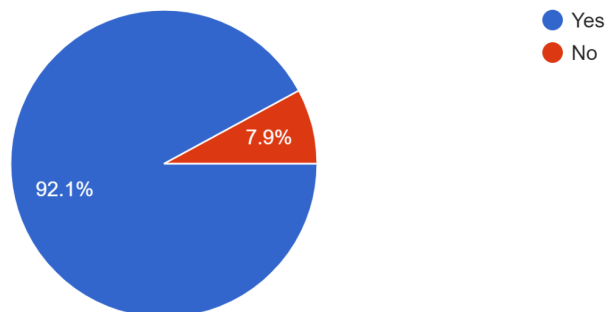
After watching the presentation would you use the coping skills that were presented?

38 responses

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

26.3%

68.4%

These are some of the slides of my presentation.

What is anxiety?

A mental health disorder characterized by feelings of worry, anxiety, or fear that are strong enough to interfere with one's daily activities.
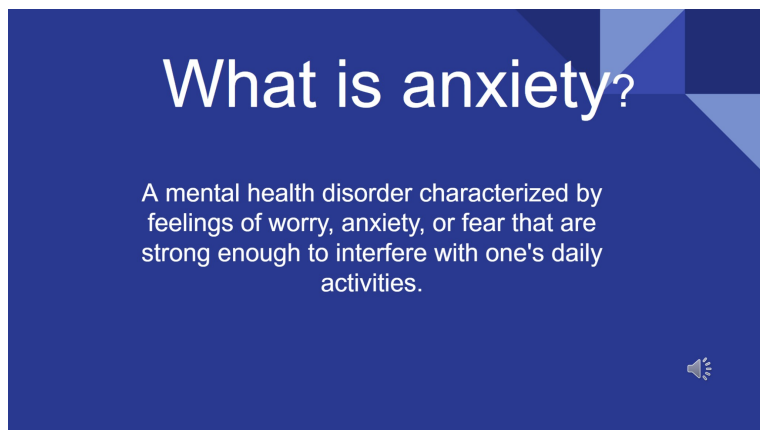
Essential Skills to Cope with Anxiety

➔ Breathing exercises
➔ Meditation
➔ Journaling
➔ Exercising
➔ Reframing Thoughts

COPING SKILLS