

19-24 Year Olds Not in School:

A Health Communication Dilemma

Michigan's campaign objectives

- Reduce stigma related to seeking assistance for mental disorders associated with suicide
- Increase awareness that help and effective treatments are available (response efficacy)
- Increase the self-efficacy of others to help individuals at risk for suicide

Focus populations

- Youths aged 19-24 years not enrolled in higher education
- Their friends and loved ones

Why this population?

- Half of the state's 18-24 year olds have spent no time in college.
- Four out of ten 25-34 year olds have not attended any college.
- Nearly 30% of 9th graders do not graduate high school.
- 2% of Michiganians ages 18-24 lack a 9th grade education.

Why this population?

- A time of major life transition
 - One in seven with an annual income of less than \$50,000 is in debt hardship.
 - One in four has no health care coverage.
 - 28% do not have a personal health care provider.
 - 4% say their physical health was poor on at least 15 of the prior 30 days, but 13% report that their mental health status was not good on at least 15 days.

Why this population?

- Age cohort most likely to engage in heavy drinking
 - 30% engage in binge drinking
 - Among 18-20 year olds, who cannot drink legally in Michigan, 25% report engaging in binge drinking and 5% in heavy drinking

It's a precarious situation

- Documented lack of access to healthcare
- Strong likelihood of increasing use of alcohol and other substances
- Extreme financial strain
- Not “reachable” through a defined system (e.g., college or university)

What we know

- They do not believe friends will look down on individuals seeking or involved in treatment.
- They do not necessarily believe that professional treatment is the answer.
- There is a strong belief among religious young adults that suicide is a sin.
- Both males and females can and do talk about anything within their close peer group.
- They would want their friends to talk to them if they were thinking about suicide.

What we know

- They may not know exactly how to respond if a friend should talk about suicide.
- Main media contacts?
 - movies (action, chick flicks)
 - specific music radio stations
 - specific newspaper sections
 - help wanted
 - car ads
 - sports

What we know

- A brief survey of persons close to 19–24 year olds found:
 - belief that suicide was preventable and treatment for mental illness was important
 - mixed responses about how to help a suicidal young person
 - general lack of awareness about treatment and the disease process

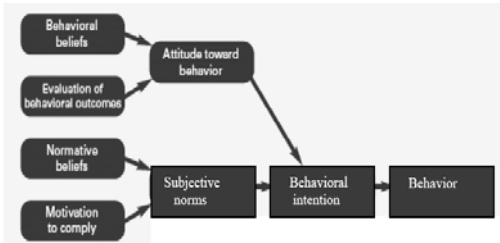
Initial campaign thoughts

- Intended campaign reach
 - 200,000 19-24 year olds not in higher education settings
 - an equal number of persons who have close relationships with individuals in this group
- Suggested campaign mediums
 - print
 - audio

Campaign development plan

- Formative research
 - Focus groups
 - characteristics of messages that would have the most impact on awareness, self-efficacy, and stigma
 - most effective and efficient means of delivering those messages
- Materials development
 - Theory of reasoned action (TRA)
 - Social marketing

Theory of reasoned action



The mission of the message

- put a “face” on the issue
- be culturally appropriate
- establish importance/relevance of the issue
- be memorable
- tie to target audience values, beliefs, and interests
- motivate members of the focus audiences to think, feel, and/or act

Campaign development plan

- Pilot testing: focus groups
 - 19-24 year olds
 - persons close to 19-24 year olds
 - key professionals
- Circulate materials to
 - the Michigan Suicide Prevention Coalition (MiSPC)
 - SPRC technical advisor
 - MDCH Injury & Violence Prevention staff
- MDCH IVPS staff give final approval

Dissemination

- Provide package of sample materials and recommendations for dissemination
 - Michigan’s Community Collaboratives
 - MiSPC
- Make materials available through MDCH Health Promotions Clearinghouse
- Pursue exposure in both broadcast and print news media

Evaluation

- Process-oriented evaluation
 - use focus group transcripts to evaluate message construction strategies and pilot material
 - estimate coverage, or depth, of campaign by tracking dissemination of materials by Community Collaboratives, newspapers, other publications, broadcast time, and MiSPC
 - track number of requests for material through Clearinghouse
 - survey Community Collaborative and MiSPC members who are using the materials to gather feedback

Some outstanding questions

- What mediums are best considering budget constraints and audiences?
- How valuable is pursuing ‘free’ media exposure through distribution of public relations documents (press releases, pitch letters, fact sheets, media kits, etc.)?
- Exactly what types of data will be available for evaluation purposes?
- Are focus groups the best way to initiate development of and to pretest materials?
