



Spread of a Peer-Led Suicide Prevention Program through School Networks

August 02, 2019

News Type: Weekly Spark, Weekly Spark Research

Degree of exposure to a peer-led suicide prevention program depends on individual student characteristics and closeness to peer leaders.

Sources of Strength is a suicide prevention program in which peer leaders work to strengthen protective factors among students, including healthy bonds with peers and adults in the school community. To improve the Sources of Strength model, researchers sought to understand how the program spread by evaluating how characteristics of students' peer and adult networks influenced exposure to program messaging.

Researchers implemented Sources of Strength in 20 schools with 533 students trained as peer leaders. At the start and end of the school year, 3,730 students completed questionnaires measuring suicidal thoughts and behaviors and social networks. At the end of the school year, students were also asked about exposure to the Sources of Strength program, including a presentation or assembly, posters or videos, direct peer communication, and participation in an activity. The researchers found that exposure was higher for students who had closer peer leaders in their friendship network and students who named more trusted adults. Exposure was lower for males.

These findings show the importance of strategically selecting peer leaders to maximize closeness with students throughout the school, particularly in larger schools, to increase exposure to peer-led programs.

Pickering, T. A., Wyman, P. A., Schmeelk-Cone, K., Hartley, C., Valente, T. W., Pisani, A. R., . . . LoMurray, M. (2018). Diffusion of a peer-led suicide preventive intervention through school-based student peer and adult networks. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 9(598).

Printed on 02/17/2020 from <http://www.sprc.org/news/spread-peer-led-suicide-prevention-program-through-school-networks>

The Suicide Prevention Resource Center at EDC is supported by a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), under Grant No. 5U79SM062297.

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