Adapting the Focus of School-Based Suicide Prevention to Meet Scientific and Community Needs

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Overview

Invited in 2003 by Cobb County School District to evaluate gatekeeper training—State funding to SPAN-Georgia

3 Phases:
- (1) Adult gatekeeper-training (QPR).

In response to benefits and limitations:
- (2) Youth ‘Opinion Leaders’ trained and mentored to conduct peer messaging (Sources of Strength)
- (3) State GLS grant combines gatekeeper training and peer leader training
Support

R34MH071189-01 (Wyman, Brown) NIMH
RCT of Gatekeeper Training for Suicide Prevention

SM57405-01 (Wyman, Brown) SAMHSA
Evaluating Success of a Gatekeeper Program in Linking Suicidal Students to Treatment

Supplement to SM57405-01 (Wyman, Brown) SAMHSA
Enhancing Youth and Community Engagement in Suicide Prevention

P20MH071897-01 (Caine) NIMH
Developing Center On Public Health and Population Interventions For The Prevention Of Suicide

R01-MH40859 (Brown) NIMH NIDA CDC
Methodology for Mental Health/Substance Abuse Prevention & Early Intervention

SPAN-GA Developmental Support from the State of Georgia
Cobb County School District, Georgia
School-Based Randomized Trial-Adult training

Cobb County (Ga) School District 110,000 students

Decision to train all staff in QPR
School-level Random Assignment – immediate training or wait-list for later training
System-wide crisis protocol and rapid mental health evaluations – safe to test gatekeeper training

NIMH funding in 2004

32 Schools (out of 35 total) 48,000 students
  12 High Schools
  20 Middle Schools
QPR Gatekeeper training for staff - 76% trained
Refresher training for 60%; counselor training
Surveillance-Referral Model
Gatekeeper Training

- Adult Gatekeeper
- Gatekeeper Training
- Question
- Willing to Allow Help
- Suicidal Warning Sign
- Suicidal Youth
QPR Training Impact on Staff

Positive training effects after 1 year on:

- Knowledge of Suicide Warning Signs
- Efficacy to intervene with suicidal students
- Perceived access to services (know services and can access to help students)
- All medium – large effects of training

Small effect on Asking Students About Suicide –

QPR training did not increase this key intended outcome overall

Only increase for small group of staff already asking students about suicide – mostly counselors and health professionals

‘Suicide Queries’ increased only for staff already communicating about suicide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did Not Previously Ask Students about Suicide</th>
<th>Previously Asked Students about Suicide</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>86%</td>
<td>14%</td>
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- Did Not Previously Ask Students about Suicide: 86%
- Previously Asked Students about Suicide: 14%

Note: The graph shows the percentage of staff who were trained and those who were not trained in suicide prevention.
2,000 students surveyed in same 32 schools: *Suicidal students less willing to seek help from adults*

“If overwhelmed by life ... “

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ with --&gt;</th>
<th>Would talk to adult or counselor</th>
<th>Believe counselor could help</th>
<th>Friends want me to talk to adult</th>
<th>Family want me to talk to adult</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suicide attempt n=150</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None N=1,909</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>53%</td>
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(1) Implications of findings for Adult Training Approach

- Adult training alone unlikely to significantly increase detection and response to many suicidal youth
- Youth at highest risk least likely to seek help from adults
- Developmental shift - older adolescents seeking help from peers

What alternative approaches needed to ‘reach’ disconnected youth at elevated risk?
Elements to Prevent Teen Suicide in Schools?

- Reduce obstacles to teen help-seeking and communication with adults
- Promote positive norms for coping with distress
- Reduce normative acceptance of suicide
- *Harness influence of peers to influence norms of their friends*
Sources of Strength

- National search to identify a promising peer leader intervention - Developer – Mark LoMurray, North Dakota

- 40% reduction in North Dakota youth suicide from 1990 – 2000 (5,000 trained)

- 3 Phases: engage community, train adults, train Peer Leaders
  - Increase teen help seeking norms/behaviors; awareness of trusted adults nominated by networks
  - Positive coping norms through peer messaging
  - Connect distressed, isolated youth with competent adults
Sources of Strength

- Access to Mental Health
- Family Support
- Access to Medical
- Positive Friends
- Spirituality
- Caring Adults
- Generosity/Leadership
- Positive Activities
Training Peer Leaders

- Select a group of diverse teen Peer Leaders (PL) and adult advisors for training
  - Interactive training
- With adult mentoring teens follow with five action steps
  - **STEP 1:** PL name and contact their trusted adults
  - **STEP 2:** PL contact 5-10 friends, which will name their trusted adults
  - **STEP 3:** Peer-to-peer classroom messages
  - **STEP 4:** PL Resilience Coping Messages
  - **STEP 5:** PL honoring, messaging to adults
As part of Action Step 2 all students at Perry HS, NY are naming their Trusted Adults and forming a growing circle of trust
Sources of Strength in 6 High Schools (Cobb County, GA) after staff training in QPR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Intervention (n=3)</th>
<th>Control (n=3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Size (M)</td>
<td>2,296</td>
<td>2,020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Peer Leaders (PL)</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL/Total Students (M)</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Positive Intervention Impact on Peer Leaders after 4 months

- *Increased Youth-Adult Connectedness*
  - Help-seeking acceptance
  - Communication with adults

- *More Adaptive Suicide Norms*
  - Reject ‘codes of silence’ to keep peers’ suicidality secret
  - Expectation that adults in school help suicidal peers

- *More referrals of suicidal peers to adults for help*
Help-Seeking Norms of Peer Leaders increased by training (p<.05)
Referred a Suicidal Peer to Adults: increase by training ($p<.05$)

**Control Schools**

**Sources of Strength Schools**
Summary and future directions

1. Peer Leader training (Sources-Strength) increased student-adult communication following staff gatekeeper training
2. Building on 2 phases, Georgia applied successfully for GLSMA grant – combining staff training and peer leader training
3. Research ongoing to determine longer-term impact of peer leader training on student norms and suicidal behavior in New York, North Dakota and other states