

Pathways to Happy and Healthy Minds Project

Presented by Emily Hess

Sponsored by Professor Elizabeth Bleicher

Background:

Society is being engulfed by a mental illness epidemic, constructed by a culture of expectations to excel. Adolescent depression and anxiety continues to rise at an alarming rate and some studies say one in five teens are suffering from one or both of these chronic illnesses. While we acknowledge the problem, where is our solution? Caused by aspects in our culture, as adolescents are constantly burdened by the overwhelming weight of pressure from teachers or professors, parents, and friends, while also forced to fulfill societal expectations drowns adolescents mental illnesses — anxiety and depression being the most prevalent. Nevertheless, our nation continues the trend of disinvesting in school-based mental health facilitation, which is where adolescents spend most of their developing years; thus, leaving students and teachers in a anxiety and depression epidemic with everlasting consequences.

Methods:

In order to theorize the increasing prevalence of mental illness and the lack of resources, two interviews were conducted with high school teachers from Groton High School in Upstate New York asking similar questions, such as if they knew how to handle students with anxiety and or depression, if their school has mental health programs and education, and their overall opinions regarding the mental health of their students.

Also, a survey that was taken by 38 college freshman from Ithaca College, a small liberal arts school in Upstate New York, asked these students a variety of question regarding the

prevalence of anxiety and depression in their own lives (friend, peer, or themselves), if they knew how to properly and effectively deal with it, and if their school offered free mental health resources.

Results:

The results portrayed an overwhelming adolescent population suffering from anxiety and or depression, while teachers and students are left without the skills, knowledge, and education to help themselves and their peers/students.

Project Introduction:

As mental health affects almost every aspect of daily life, high schools need to change the approach to preventing and treating psychological disorders. Correspondingly, high schools, where people spend the majority of their adolescent years, share a similar aspiration with health services, as they both intend to educate and appropriately socialize the youth. Through collaborative efforts with behavioral and mental health professionals from local organizations, such as a community mental health provider, that partners with a school's staff, students, teachers, and staff will be able to start denying the accepted failure of adolescent mental health. Thus, the Pathways To Happy and Healthy Minds Project will consist of four parts, all which will be sponsored and work directly with local public health services:

1. Awareness and Stigma Campaign
2. A 5-Part Teacher and Youth Educational Program (mandatory classes and workshops)
 1. What anxiety and depression are and how school, home, and cultural aspects are causing the rising epidemic in teens and suicide awareness, with another focus on abandoning stigmas.

2. How to notice signs and symptoms
 3. What to do if you think you, a peer, or student may be struggling with anxiety and or depression.
 4. Self Care — What it is, how it can help, and how to implement it into daily life.
 5. Treatment — The different types of treatment available, how it can help, and where to go to get treatment for you, a friend, or student.
3. Implementing free counseling services in high schools
 4. Free mental health screening in all public high schools

Conclusion:

By promoting efforts of mental health and educating the people who spend the most amount of time with teens about the skills, knowledge, and appropriate attitudes, high schools will be able to foster healthy development and create a safe social and educational environment. Any advancement in improving adolescent public health needs to start at the school level by offering resources and education to ensure our future generations have safe and healthy futures.