

Mental Health Podcast Reflection

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According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, one in five adolescents has had a serious mental health disorder at some point in their life. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide is the third leading cause of death in the United States for youth aged 15-24. In order to curb rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide among adolescents, many people are advocating for increased mental health education in schools. In the Health Code podcast, we discussed mental health education methods. In this paper, I will attempt to dig deeper into the necessity of mental health education in order to prove its value.

In the Health Code episode, we discussed the high rates of suicide among adolescents. It is clear that something must be done to prevent suicide rates from rising. Mental illness is prevalent among adolescents, yet according to Wendy Smith, a prominent early interventionist, only a third of students that have mental illnesses are being treated. This is especially disheartening when considering the Treatment of Adolescents with Depression Study (TADS), which found that eighty to ninety percent of people who seek treatment for depression are successfully treated using therapy and/or medication. Knowing the availability and effectiveness of treatment can save lives, so we support education that brings adolescents this knowledge. Because the podcast as a medium does not lend itself well to analysis of statistics or specific studies, this paper attempts to supplement our podcast with more research into the necessity of mental health education in schools.

One study that demonstrates the effectiveness of mental health education was conducted in Japan by researchers funded in part by the Japanese Ministry of Education. In this study, researchers surveyed 118 secondary students before, immediately after, and three months after they were taught in two sessions about mental health literacy (Ojio et al). The students' surveys

are incredibly compelling and speak for the benefits of mental health education. For example, before the program, only 29.8 percent of students surveyed knew that medication improves many mental illnesses (Ojio et al). Immediately after the program, however, 91.5 percent of students knew this was the case (Ojio et al). While the retention of this knowledge decreased by the time three months had passed, the percentage of students who knew this was the case remained at 76.6 percent, which is significantly higher than before the program (Ojio et al). These two fifty minute lessons also made a significant difference in the behavior the students reported they would take. While this does not actually give insight into the true behaviors, this survey still demonstrates that students' attitudes changed. For example, when shown a case of major depression, 87.2 percent of students immediately after the study said they would speak to someone they trusted if they developed those problems, as opposed to only 46.8 percent who reported they would do so before the program (Ojio et al).

Suicide prevention efforts are critical given today's high rates of adolescent suicide. One important way to prevent suicide is to give students the knowledge they need to maintain their mental health and seek out proper resources if they begin developing signs of mental illness. Mental health education in schools may not solve the problem, but it is an effective way of combating it and should definitely be implemented nationwide.

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