Supporting Adolescent Mental Health

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of Public Health in Community Health Education

By
Maria Guevara Galicia

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The graduate project of Maria Guevara Galicia is approved:

Dr. Bobbie Emetu

Dr. Suzanne E. Spear

Dr. Mirna Troncoso Sawyer, Chair

California State University, Northridge
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Abstract

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Currently, at least one in two adolescents in the United States report having experienced a mental health disorder at some point in their lives. Mental health disorders can interfere with an adolescent’s development stages and quality of life, which is a public health issue. Adolescents are a vulnerable population, however those exposed to poverty, abuse, or violence have higher odds of experiencing a mental health disorder. Adolescents dealing with mental health problems such as anxiety and depression are at even higher risk for suicide. Suicide is the fourth leading cause of mortality among adolescent and young adults. Neglecting adolescent mental health can lead to worse mental health consequences later in adulthood and lack of adequate prevention, detection, and treatment are contributing factors. Data suggests that lack of utilization to treatment for mental health is prevalent, contributing factors include stigma, cultural beliefs, and knowledge. Stigma associated with mental health treatment has been linked to knowledge gaps which impedes help-seeking behaviors. Having interventions that are qualified to support adolescents are imperative to their health and well-being. Implementing interventions that build community capacity by increasing knowledge, mental health literacy, and encouraging peer-to-peer support can have positive benefits in adolescents. School settings can play an important role in cultivating healthy environments that promote and encourage help-seeking behaviors for better mental health. This paper proposes a self-efficacy school-based educational program that promotes the benefits of help-seeking behaviors by improving mental health knowledge, promoting peer-to-peer support, and building community-based participatory research. Adding these components to the intervention can reinforce help-seeking behaviors and contribute to supporting treatment for adolescents.