Promoting Mental Health of Middle and High School Students Using Universal and Targeted Strategies

Alyssa Brown, OTS. Moses Ikiugu, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA

UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH DAKOTA
SCHOOL OF HEALTH SCIENCES

BACKGROUND & SIGNIFICANCE

Background
- Half of all mental health disorders have onset during childhood and adolescence (Chan et al., 2017; Imran et al., 2018).
- Schools play a vital role in promoting mental health for students (Imran et al., 2020).
- Supportive classrooms are associated with improved well-being, academic achievement, positive peer relationships, and decreased behavioral problems (Oberle, 2018).
- Other school settings such as the cafeteria, recess playgrounds, and extracurricular activities can significantly contribute to student's mental health (Bazyk et al., 2018).
- Leisure participation can facilitate positive emotions, identify, self-esteem, and connectedness for students (Zhang et al., 2014).

Purpose Statement
The aim of this capstone experience was to develop and administer a theory- and occupation-based program to improve the mental health of students.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The Person-Environment-Occupation (PEO) Model (Law et al., 1996)
Used to guide Program Development and Implementation
- Provided principles for creating a positive environment in both academic and nonacademic settings through education and other programmatic strategies using occupation-based media including activities of daily living, instrumental activities or daily living, social participation, education, leisure, and health management.

The Public Health Approach to Mental Health (Bazyk et al., 2015)
- Provided a framework for understanding mental health problems of students and how to address them.
- This approach consists of three tiers: Tier one – universal services, Tier two – prevention services provided to individuals who are at risk for mental health challenges, and Tier three – intensive and individualized services provided to students diagnosed with a mental illness.
- Informed my choice of universal approach to promote and prevent mental health problems of the students.

The Social-Ecological Model of Occupational Therapy (CDC, 2022)
- Provided strategies for identifying mental health needs and priorities, creating programing to improve communication, positive peer norms, healthy relationships, and address societal beliefs and norms about mental health.

The Model of Human Occupations (MOHO) (Kielhofner, 2008)
- Provided assessments to measure project outcomes related to volition, habituation, performance, and environment components of the student's human system
- Throughout my project I aimed to promote occupational participation in a variety of areas.
- The model also provides strategies to address dysfunction in the components of the human system in order to improve the mental health of students. These strategies were considered during program development.

METHODS & ACTIVITIES

I completed the capstone experience at the Wood River Rural Schools Middle and High School. The Wood River Middle and High School serves students from the surrounding Wood River and Alda, Nebraska communities. The middle school serves 276 students in grades 6-12, which includes 128 middle school students and 148 high school students.

I developed a program to promote awareness of mental health at a school and to provide education, training, and support to school personnel so that they are prepared to address the mental health problems of students. I implemented a cafeteria program that emphasized promotion of a positive environment and a leisure program to encourage participation in leisure activities. I also provided a weekly mental health resource video and handouts to staff to educate them on mental health topics and strategies to promote mental health in the classroom.

Program Development and Implementation
- I created a 7-week cafeteria program to help build the capacity of cafeteria supervisors and middle and high school students to create a positive environment and a 7-week leisure program to educate students about the benefits of participating in leisure activities and promoting participation in these activities.
- I distributed weekly videos and resources on mental health topics to 53 staff members to educate them on mental health of adolescents and mental health promotion strategies.

Pretest and Posttest Survey Questionnaires
- Administered survey questionnaires to measure assess student's perceived mental health, support, and leisure participation and staff confidence, awareness, and perceived student mental health.

Collaboration and Leadership
- Collaborated with site mentors, a clinical mental health counselor and guidance counselor, along with cafeteria supervisors, teachers, and other school personnel.
- Built rapport with school personnel and students, collaborated on program development to meet identified needs, demonstrated mental health promotion strategies through program implementation, and provided weekly mental health resources to staff.
- Site mentors were asked to complete a survey questionnaire to evaluate my professional collaboration and leadership skills.

RESULTS

There was:
- A significant improvement in student's perceived mental health and staff's confidence in addressing mental health.
- No significant change in student perceived mental health, support, and staff perceived student mental health.
- A significant decrease in leisure participation.
- Higher confidence of staff in addressing mental health needs of students.
- Increased staff awareness of mental health promotion strategies and resources.

CONCLUSION

- The shift to occupational therapy prevention and promotion services of mental health through a whole school approach is necessary.
- Through collaboration with school personnel and implementation of theory- and occupation-based programs, there are many ways to promote student mental health.
- More research is needed to confirm program outcomes

REVISIONS TO THEORY

- The chosen organizing and complementary models and frames of references were appropriate for guiding the development and implementation of this capstone project.
- They were fundamental in ensuring I maintained an emphasis on promotion and prevention strategies and used a holistic view in addressing mental health needs of the students.
- Additional theory-based assessments would have supported the reliability and validity of my results.
- I believe the Psycho-Social (PSE) Profile Questionnaire would have been beneficial in the beginning of my program to help identify needs within the school, as well as to measure pretest and posttest improvements of the school environment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

- Occupational therapists can address students' mental health by facilitating occupational participation, and consulting and collaborating with school personnel
- Further research is needed to determine the clinical effectiveness of such programming.

REFERENCES

Bazyk, S., Demirjian, L., Horvath, F., & Doxsey, L. (2018). The Comfortable Cafeteria program for promoting student participation and enjoyment: An outcome study. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 72, 7203205050. https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2018.025379

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2022). *The Social-Ecological Model*. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/about/social-ecologicalmodel.html

Chan, C., Dennis, D., Kim S. J., & Jankowski, J. (2017) An integrative review of school-based mental health interventions for elementary students: Implications for occupational therapy. *Occupational Therapy in Mental Health*, 33(1), 81-101. https://doi.org/10.1080/0164212X.2016.1202804

Imran, N., Rhaman, A., Chaudhry, N., & Asif, A. (2018). World health organization "school mental health manual" -based training for school teachers in Urban Lahore, Pakistan: study protocol for a randomized controlled trial. *Trials*, 19, 1-8. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13063-018-2679-3

Kielhofner, G. (2008). *Model of human occupation: Theory and application* (4th ed.). Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

Law, M., Cooper, B., Strong, S., Steward, D., Rigby, R., & Letts, L. (1996). The person-environment-occupation model: A transactive approach to occupational performance. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 63(1), 9-23. https://doi.org/10.1177/000841749606300103

Oberle, E. (2018). Early adolescents' emotional well-being in the classroom: The role of personal and contextual assets. *Journal of School Health*, 88(2), 101-111.

Zhang, S., Shi, R., Liu, X., & Miao, D. (2014). Passion for a leisure activity, presence of meaning, and search for meaning: The mediating role of emotion. *Social Indicators Research*, 115, 1123-1135. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-013-0260-8