



Impact of a Suicide Awareness Program for the General Student Population at UWEC



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❖ Counseling Services

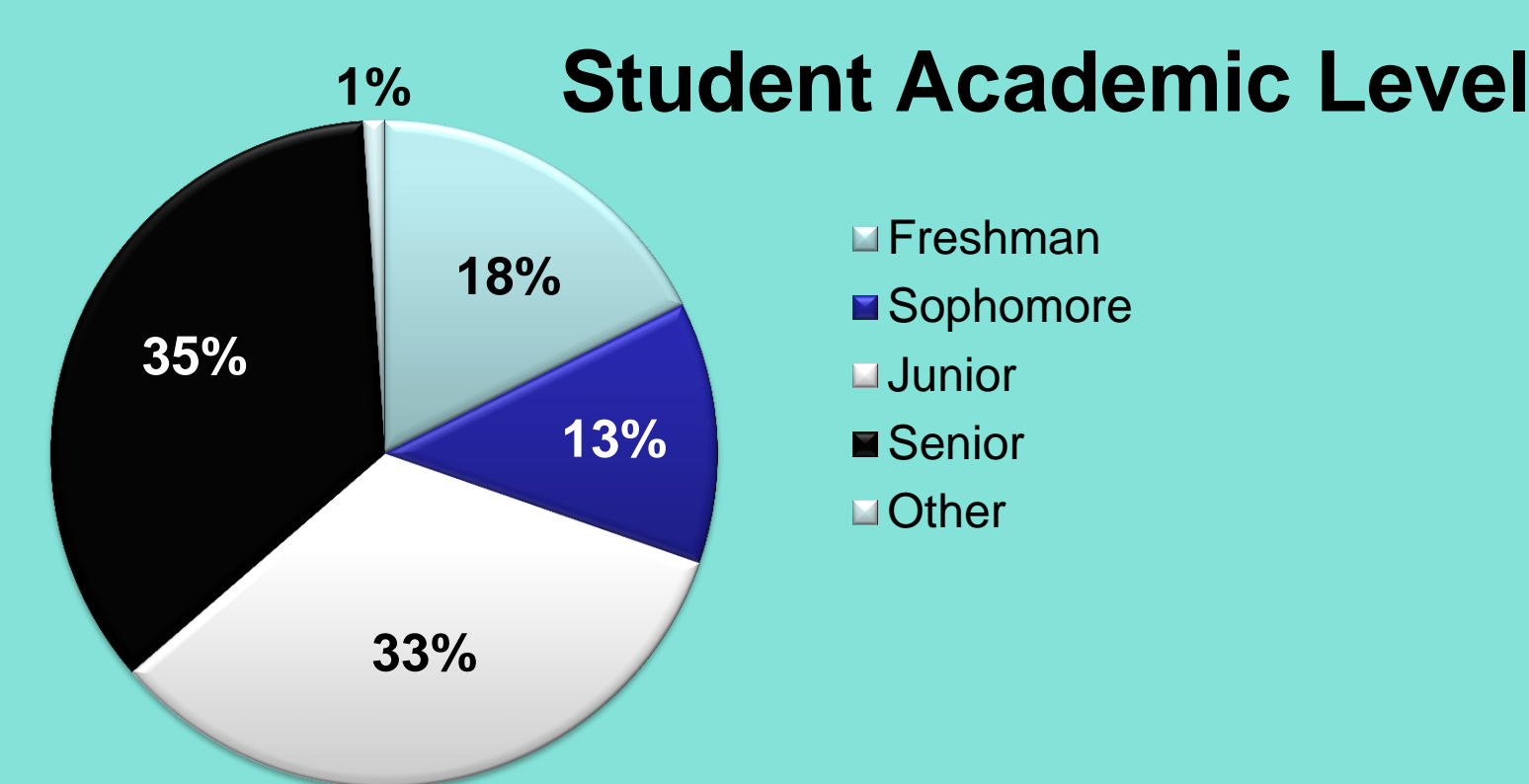
❖ Psychology Department

Purpose of the Study

- ❖ Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for college students, and one in 12 college students report having made a specific suicide plan in the past year (AAS, 2010).
- ❖ High School students who participated in a suicide prevention program showed an increase in knowledge of depression and suicide warning signs as well as increased willingness to seek help (Aseltine & DeMartino, 2004).
- ❖ A follow-up study showed that knowledge of suicide warning signs and more accepting views of help seeking was linked to reduced suicide attempts among program participants (Aseltine, 2007).
- ❖ The University of Wisconsin- Eau Claire was among the many colleges that had no comprehensive programs aimed to prevent or heighten awareness of suicide.
- ❖ The goal was to create, implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of a suicide awareness program.
- ❖ Hypotheses: It was expected that participants would report an increase in knowledge of suicide, an increase in perceived ability to seek help, and a decrease in social stigmas relating to suicide and seeking professional help.

Participants

- ❖ 102 total (72.5% female), Mean age= 20.7
- ❖ 68 from applied health classes, 17 from residence halls and 17 from a volunteer condition for course credit.

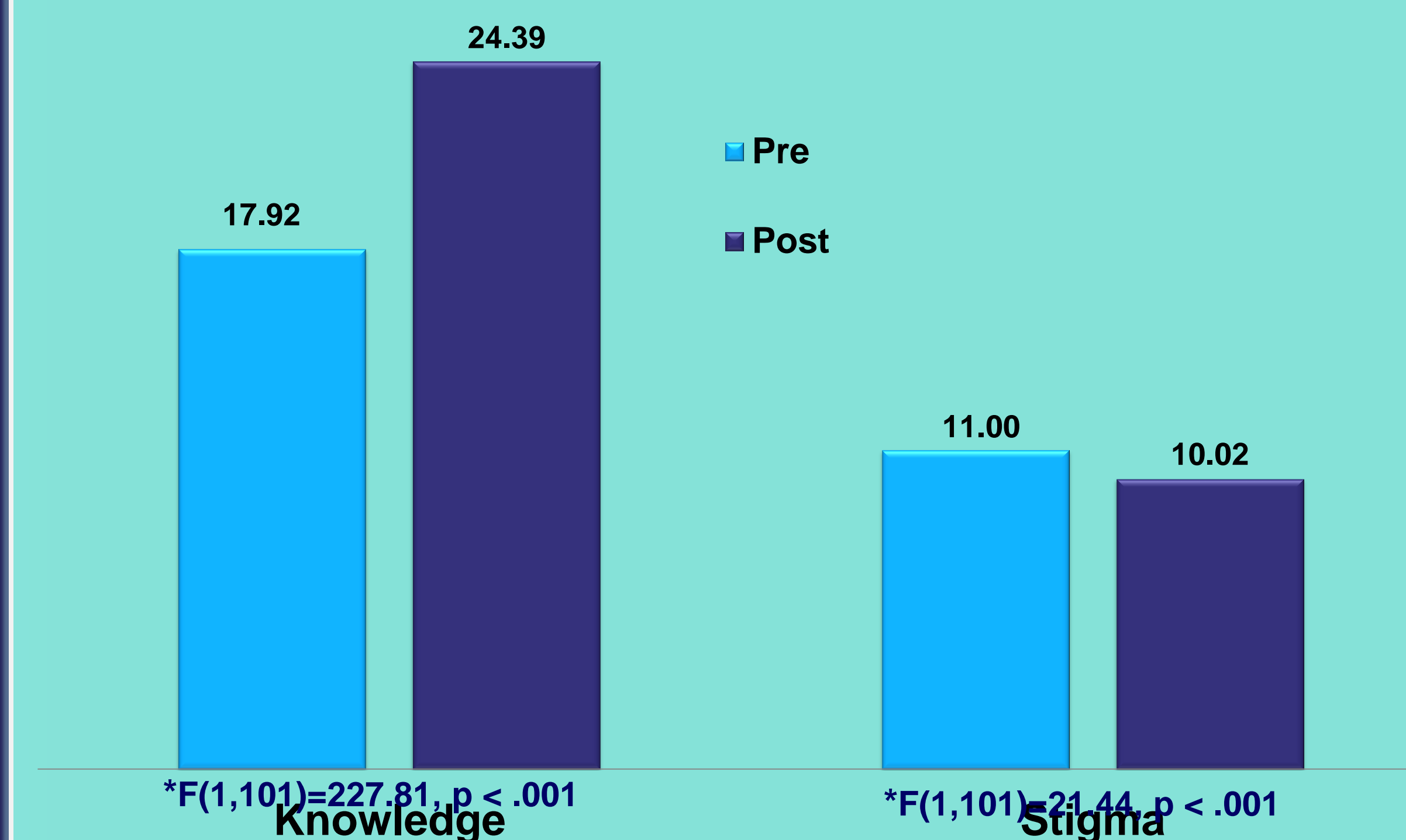


Procedure

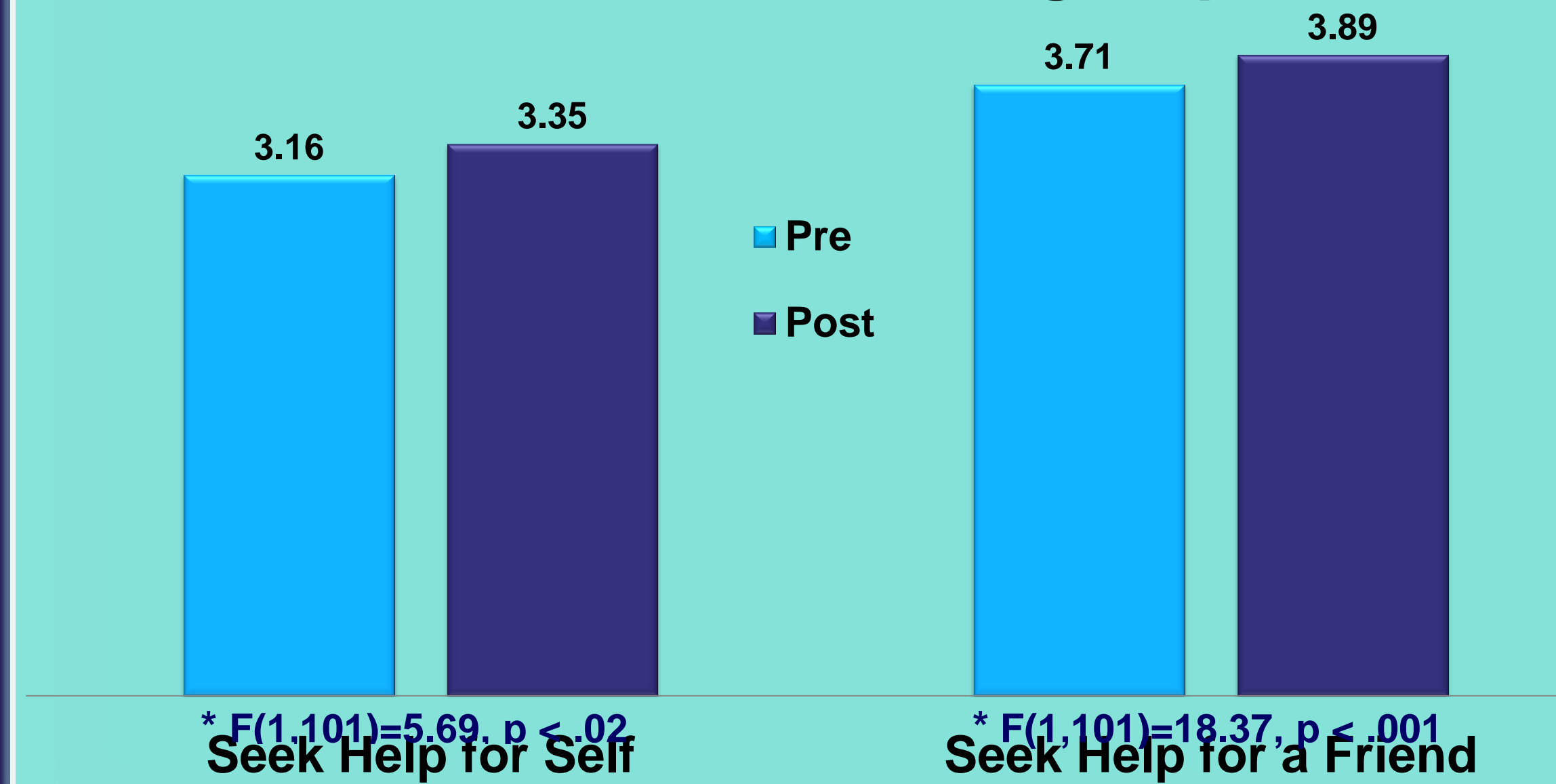
- ❖ Faculty and Hall Directors were sent a flier about the suicide awareness program and appointments were scheduled to offer the program as part of a class or hall programming.
- ❖ Prior to the presentation, participants completed a survey consisting of Likert-scaled items assessing baseline knowledge of suicide, attitudes towards seeking help and stigmas.
- ❖ **The program** (50 minute duration) consisted of:
 - ❖ Two video clips introducing the topic and reality of suicide
 - ❖ Suicide statistics, risk factors, warning signs and myths
 - ❖ Role play facilitation to encourage peer responding
 - ❖ C.A.R.E. bookmarks with local resources for services
- ❖ After the program participants knowledge of suicide, attitudes towards seeking help and stigmas were re-assessed. Qualitative feedback questions were also included.
- ❖ All questionnaires were administered by an independent researcher to reduce demand characteristics.

Results

Mean Knowledge and Stigma



Likelihood of Seeking Help



Most Frequent Qualitative Comments

What was most useful?

42% said: Learning how to identify those with possible suicidal thoughts.

o "Knowing the warning signs and risk factors, because I do notice them in people..."

26% said: Information on referral services and the take home materials.

o "The C.A.R.E. cards... something to quickly reference in case of an emergency..."

24% said: Learning how to respond to someone with suicidal thoughts.

o "... I am actually in this situation now with a friend, it really helps to know what to do now. I knew a few things, but knowing exactly the way to handle it really helps."

o "I have had to talk to people in that situation and I had no idea what to say, now I do."

16% said: Gaining an understanding of the prevalence of suicide.

o "I didn't know that it was such an issue, more people are suffering than I thought."

What could be improved?

17% said: Offer more advanced "convincing" skills.

o "What do you do if someone denies they are depressed or refuses your help?"

15% said: Need more time for presentation and/or role plays.

o "Maybe some more role-plays, more examples help to correlate to everyday life"

12% said: Make role-plays less awkward.

o "It was hard to feel empathy for someone I don't know at all."

o "The presenters should just demonstrate possible scenarios instead of making the audience participate."

9% said: Presenters should share their personal stories.

o "It would help to hear how the presenters dealt with suicide and their personal testimonies."

Discussion

- ❖ The hypotheses were supported, with significant increases of reported knowledge, increased likelihood of seeking help for oneself or a friend, and a decrease in perceived stigmas surrounding suicide and seeking help for suicidal thoughts.
- ❖ The qualitative data reveals the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the program, with many of the comments matching the self-reported data showing significant changes.
- ❖ The most commonly mentioned "useful" portion of the presentation was that it taught participants how to identify someone who may be experiencing suicidal thoughts, and that identifying those in need is the first step in prevention.
- ❖ Many participants acknowledged the benefit of the role plays and understood the importance of practicing the help seeking skills presented in the program, but suggested more time was needed for this part of the program.
- ❖ Overall, it appears the suicide awareness program developed for UWEC was effective but long-term follow up is needed to see if the improvements in knowledge and help-seeking are maintained.

Limitations

- ❖ Questionnaires were self report.
- ❖ Possible ambiguity in some items of the questionnaire.
- ❖ Convenience sample drawn from helping-prone population.
- ❖ Lack of a follow up component assessing retained knowledge.
- ❖ Demand characteristics may exist despite attempt to control.

Implications

- ❖ Due to the great need for suicide prevention programs on college campuses and the preliminary positive outcomes of this program, additional efforts should be placed into improving the current program.
- ❖ Ideally, officials of the college will see the necessity and value of implementing a suicide awareness and prevention program on a wider scale as part of UWEC's commitment to student health and well-being.

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