

Campus Suicide Prevention as a Moral Imperative in Pandemic Times

Hoyt and colleagues (2020) illustrate troubling trends concerning college student mental distress in the time of the pandemic. They concluded that persistent mental distress will be the “new norm” for college students in pandemic times, and vulnerable student groups will disproportionately endure this “new norm.” While these findings are troubling, we agree with both points.

We further surmise that this “new norm” raises the stakes for campuses to respond with campus-wide suicide prevention strategic plans as a moral imperative during these difficult times. Suicide prevention is often the sole responsibility of campus counseling centers, who are commonly overburdened under normal circumstances, not to mention the challenges posed by the pandemic. The Jed Foundation (2016), espoused guidance in their seminal work, *A Guide to Campus Mental Health Action Planning*. We argue that a campus strategic plan should make use of this instrumental resource as a starting point.

A comprehensive suicide prevention program should achieve several broad goals: (1) reduction of risk factors such as those identified by Hoyt and colleagues, (2) enhancement of protective factors for students, and (3) early detection and utilization of existing mental health resources. Examples of comprehensive programs that can inform campus strategic planning exist in the literature (e.g., Cramer et al., in press), but would need to be tailored to the unique needs of the campus and challenges posed by the pandemic. We believe that campus suicide prevention planning needs to extend beyond counseling center staff and the study body to include administration, faculty, on-campus and off-campus health and psychological services; law enforcement; multicultural, religious, and other joint-interest unions or organizations; and

student affairs entities such as housing or residence life. Such campus-wide involvement is consistent with a public health approach needed to respond to student wellness in a high time of need.

References

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