



Opening doors to life: A suicidal behavior prevention program involving Gatekeeper teachers

Abrindo puertas para la vida: Programa de prevención de conductas suicidas a través de docentes *Gatekeepers*

Abrindo portas para a vida: Programa de prevenção ao comportamento suicida por meio de professores *Gatekeepers*

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Abstract

Introduction: Suicide is the third cause of death in young people aged between 15 to 19 years. Thus, school environments can promote mental health of adolescents through early identification of risk factors and prevention of suicidal behaviors. One prevention strategy is the training of "gatekeepers". **Objective:** To determine the impact of the "Opening Doors to Life" program on the knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding prevention of suicidal behavior in a set of high school teachers from an educational institution in San Juan de Pasto, Colombia. **Materials and methods:** A pre-experimental study with an intervention group and pre- and post-follow-up measurements. Nine volunteer teachers participated during two training sessions. **Results:** Positive changes regarding knowledge, attitudes, and practices of the participants during pretest and posttest were observed for the majority of evaluated sub-dimensions. However, after three years, the positive measures prevailed only for knowledge about suicidal behavior and attitudes toward prevention. **Conclusion:** The "Opening Doors to Life" program showed effectiveness and relevance. However, maintaining its impact requires follow-up actions and support of trained teachers.

Keywords: Suicide; program; teachers; students; mental health; referral and consultation. (Source: DeCS, Bireme).

Resumen

Introducción: El suicidio es la tercera causa de muerte de jóvenes entre 15 y 19 años. Ante esto, los ambientes escolares pueden favorecer el fomento de la salud mental de los adolescentes, permitir la identificación temprana de factores de riesgo y aportar en la prevención de conductas suicidas. Una de las estrategias de prevención es el entrenamiento de "gatekeepers". **Objetivo:** Determinar el efecto del programa "Abriendo Puertas para la Vida" sobre conocimientos, actitudes y prácticas en prevención de conductas suicidas en un grupo de profesores de secundaria de una institución educativa de San Juan de Pasto, Colombia. **Materiales y métodos:** Estudio preexperimental, con un grupo de intervención y medidas pre y pos-seguimiento. Participaron nueve docentes voluntarios durante dos jornadas de formación. **Resultados:** Se identificaron cambios positivos en conocimientos, actitudes y prácticas de los participantes entre pretest y posttest, en la mayoría de las subdimensiones evaluadas; sin embargo, tres años después, estos cambios se mantuvieron tan solo en conocimientos sobre las conductas suicidas y en actitudes hacia la prevención. **Conclusión:** El programa "Abriendo Puertas para la Vida" evidenció efectividad y pertinencia, sin embargo, el mantenimiento de sus efectos requiere de acciones de seguimiento y acompañamiento a los docentes formados.

Palabras clave: Suicidio; programa; docentes; estudiantes; salud mental; derivación y consulta. (Fuente: DeCS, Bireme).

Resumo

Introdução: O suicídio é a terceira causa de morte de jovens entre 15 e 19 anos. Diante disso, os ambientes escolares podem promover a promoção da saúde mental em adolescentes, permitir a identificação precoce de fatores de risco e contribuir para a prevenção do comportamento suicida. Uma das estratégias de prevenção é a formação de "gatekeepers". **Objetivo:** Determinar o efeito do programa "Abrindo Portas para a Vida" nos conhecimentos, atitudes e práticas na prevenção do comportamento suicida em um grupo de professores do ensino médio de uma instituição educacional em San Juan de Pasto, Colômbia. **Materiais e métodos:** Estudo pré-experimental, com grupo de intervenção e medidas pré e pós-acompanhamento. Nove professores voluntários participaram durante dois dias de treinamento. **Resultados:** Foram identificadas mudanças positivas nos conhecimentos, atitudes e práticas dos participantes entre o pré-teste e o pós-teste, na maioria das subdimensões avaliadas; porém, três anos depois, essas mudanças se mantiveram apenas no conhecimento sobre comportamentos suicidas e atitudes frente à prevenção. **Conclusão:** O programa "Abrindo Portas para a Vida" mostrou efetividade e relevância, porém, a manutenção de seus efeitos requer ações de acompanhamento e apoio a professores capacitados.

Palavras chave: Suicídio; programa; docentes; estudantes; saúde mental; encaminhamento e consulta. (Fonte: DeCS, Bireme).

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Several elements could explain the effects mentioned above. First of all, the components included in the ODL program (information and myths about suicide, crisis situations and how to face them, and channeling routes for risk situations (Table 1) must be taken into account, as they were focused on their possible application in an educational context. It is likely that teachers felt a greater level of self-efficacy and confidence in their knowledge and skills after the participation in this program⁽³¹⁾. Furthermore, it has been shown that gatekeepers training induces a significant increase in knowledge about suicidal behaviors, a reduction in reluctance to intervene, and an increase in perceived self-efficacy for future interventions^(7,31).

Secondly, it is necessary to consider the fact that teachers participated voluntarily in the program. Previous studies on prevention of suicidal behaviors suggest that there is a relationship between the personal involvement of teachers in this type of activities and their willingness to learn, acquire, strengthen their skills, as well as to apply them to prevent suicide in their students^(32,33).

Finally, the characteristics of the provided information is a third aspect to take into account. Indeed, for a process focused on eliciting novel behaviors to have a demonstrable effect, the information provided must be concise, specific, and clear⁽³⁴⁾. Given that the participants of the program were not health experts, the addressed contents, the information given in each thematic core, and the provided instructions were concrete, specific and they described the expected behavior in the proposed hypothetical situations⁽³⁵⁾. Even though these programs are considered low-threshold strategies and carried out with actors from the educational community, all the elements described above are important since the GTP is an efficient and cost-effective option for mobilizing, addressing, and preventing self-harmful behaviors⁽³⁶⁾.

Conclusions

The ODL program focused on teachers led to a significant and positive increment in their knowledge, attitudes, and practices on aspects such as risk factors, prevention factors, and actions to prevent suicidal behaviors. Although there was a favorable change between pretest and post-test measurements in the general components of attitudes and practices, as well as in some subdimensions of knowledge and attitudes, the achieved levels were not maintained until the follow-up assessment period. This observation highlights the need for monitoring and reinforcing actions targeted towards trained gatekeepers.

The design of future multicenter studies is recommended, which could facilitate access to this type of intervention programs. The inclusion of a "waiting list" strategy could expand the number of participants and strengthen the corresponding statistical analysis. Likewise, it is necessary not only to carry out more frequent assessments (3, 6, and 12 months) but also to continue with multimodal

interventions that improve the maintenance of the achieved changes. Finally, a time-stable institutional strategy is key for teachers to continue with prevention processes and feel that they are essential actors for these processes.

The results achieved in this study may not be generalized as the number of participants was limited. Nonetheless, this work offers important information about observations that could be replicated in studies with a larger number of participants. Also, this is a relevant work because the generation and implementation of these types of programs is highly required in educational communities.

Conflicts of interest: None declared by the authors.

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