

Training of Educators and Trainers on the Mental Health & High School Curriculum Guide at Strait Regional School Board

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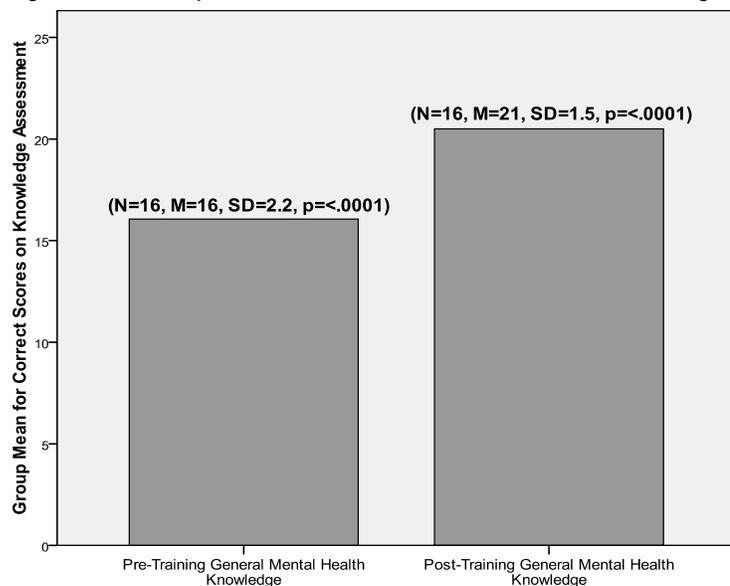
Background

The *Mental Health & High School Curriculum Guide* (Mental Health Curriculum Guide) was developed by Dr. Stan Kutcher, Sun Life Chair in Adolescent Mental Health in collaboration with the Canadian Mental Health Association. Designed to be usually embedded in grade nine or ten curriculum, its objective is to enhance mental health literacy among students and teachers. To support the Mental Health Curriculum Guide (designed to be implemented in a modular manner), a one day training session (the Guide Training Program) developed by Dr. Kutcher and Ms. Yifeng Wei of the Sun Life Financial Chair Team is offered to educators who will implement the Mental Health Curriculum Guide within their classrooms. The training addresses: the concepts of mental health; the mental disorders that typically onset in adolescence; stigma and where to seek help for mental health problems/disorders. The training also reviews the six modules of the Mental Health Curriculum Guide, external educational resources and teaching strategies pertaining to school-based mental health. The objective of the training is to improve educators' knowledge of the Mental Health Curriculum Guide and its contents, enhance positive attitudes towards mental illness, and enhance positive attitudes towards mental illness and those who are living with mental disorders. An additional six hour trainers workshop is conducted to prepare allied professionals (usually health and human services providers, such as; guidance counselors; nurses; psychologists; mental health care professionals) who have taken the initial Mental Health Curriculum Guide training program to become trainers for the program. This report presents the outcome of the first day of the of Mental Health Curriculum Guide training delivered to educators and allied professionals from the Strait Regional School Board (SRSB), Province of Nova Scotia in September 2012. The allied professionals who took the Guide Trainers Program will work as trainers to deliver the Guide Training Program to Grade 9 Healthy Living teachers at the school board in the upcoming 12 months.

Participants

In preparation for implementing the Mental Health Curriculum Guide within classes in the SRSB, training-the-trainer sessions were provided to educators and allied professionals within the school and community. Specifically, a one day session was provided to 16 educators and a one-and-a-half-day training session was provided to 11 allied professionals from the SRSB on September 11 and 12, 2012. The sessions were conducted by Dr. Stan Kutcher and Ms. Yifeng Wei of the Sun Life

Figure 1: Mean Group Scores for Educators General Mental Health Knowledge

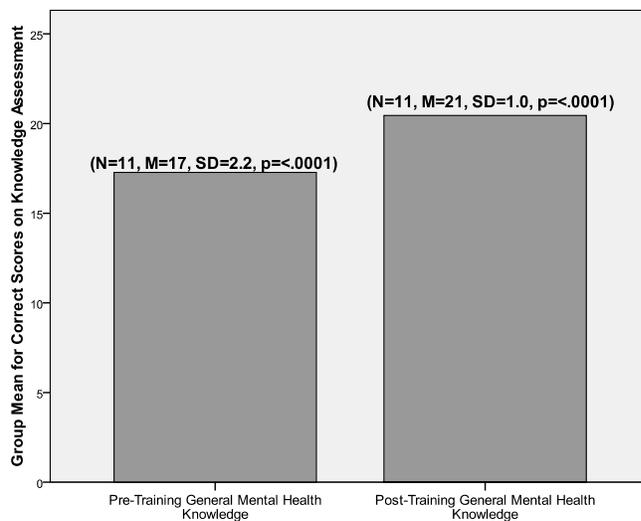


Financial Chair in Adolescent Mental Health Team, of the IWK Health Centre and Dalhousie University and involved 27 participants (3 male; 23 female; 1 who did not identify). The first day of the training (taken by both groups) focused on the basic concepts of mental health and mental disorders, a thorough review of the six modules of the Mental Health Curriculum Guide, and discussions of teaching strategies. The second half day was for trainers only and was designed to re-present and discuss key materials provided from the first day, and establish capacity to support classroom teachers in the delivery of the Mental Health Curriculum Guide. The educators mostly taught Grade 9 Healthy Living, as well as junior high school classes such as Science, Math, Resource, Social Science, French and English.

Outcomes

Participants in the Mental Health Curriculum Guide training day one completed anonymous knowledge assessment surveys before and after the training in order to help

Figure 2: Mean Group Scores for Allied Professionals General Mental Health Knowledge

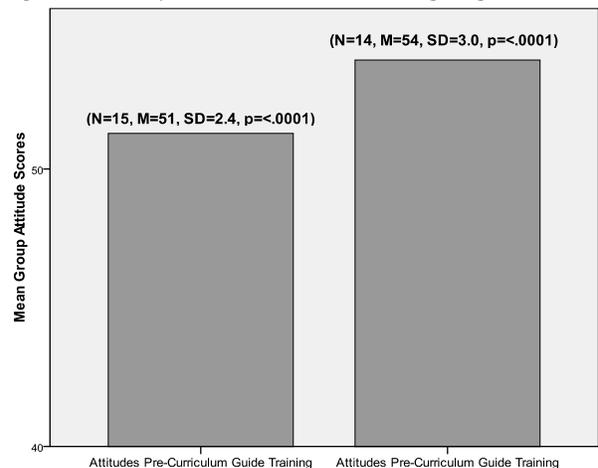


determine the effectiveness of the training. Surveys included 30 knowledge questions, 22 pertaining to general mental health literacy and 8 related specifically to the Curriculum. These questions were framed as “True”, “False”, and “Do Not Know” options. Participants were instructed to use this “Do Not Know” option rather than guessing. The survey also included eight questions examining attitudes related to mental illness. These questions were measured with a 7 point Likert Scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. A total positive attitude score out of 56 was calculated. To assure anonymity participants were asked not to provide

any identifying information. In order to link participants’ responses between the pre-training and post-training surveys, anonymous linking questions were asked, such as their month of birth, mother’s first name, and postal code. Participants also completed an additional satisfaction questionnaire allowing them to provide qualitative feedback regarding their satisfaction with the training.

Outcomes of the knowledge assessment survey reveal that prior to the training, as a group the educators correctly answered an average of 16 of 22 (73%) of general mental health questions correctly, which improved to 21 of 22 (93%) following participation in the training program, which is a statistically significant change $t(15) = 8.5$, $p < .0001$ (see Figure 1). As a group, the allied health providers answered an average of 17 of 22 (79%) of the general mental health

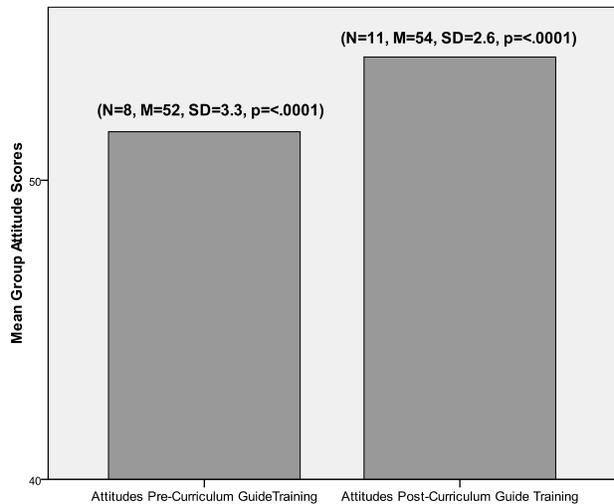
Figure 3: Mean Group Scores for Educators' Attitudes Regarding Mental Illness



questions correctly, which improved to 21 of 22 (93%) following the participation in the training program, which is a statistically significant change $t(10) = 7.5, p < .0001$ (see Figure 2).

Educators' attitudes towards mental illness were found to be positive at baseline. From a possible positive score of 56, educator scores ranged from 48 to 56 with an average group score of 51 (Standard Deviation [SD] = 2.4) prior to training. Following training, educators' attitudes ranged from 48 to 56 with an average group score of 54 (SD = 3.0). This change represented a statistically significant improvement in attitudes, $t(13) = 3.2, p < .0001$ (see Figure 3). Allied health providers' attitudes towards mental illness were also found to be positive at baseline. From a possible score of 56, allied health providers' scores ranged from 47 to 56 with an average group score of 52 (Standard Deviation [SD] = 3.3) prior to training. Following training their attitudes ranged from 48 to 56 with an average group score of 54 (SD = 2.6). This change represented a statistically significant improvement in attitudes, $t(7) = 1.6, p < .0001$ (see Figure 4).

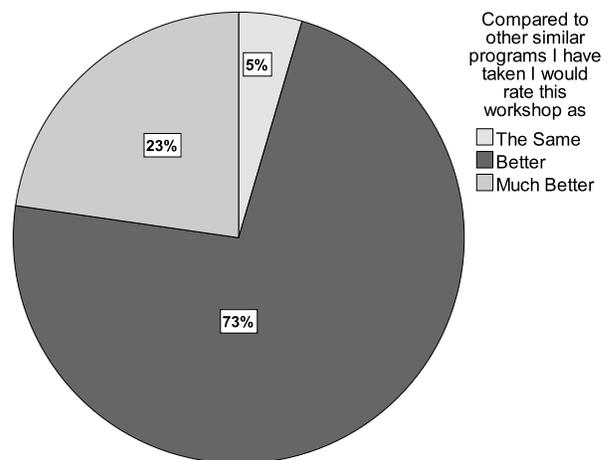
Figure 4: Mean Group Scores for Allied Professionals' Attitudes Regarding Mental Illness



from 48 to 56 with an average group score of 54 (SD = 2.6). This change represented a statistically significant improvement in attitudes, $t(7) = 1.6, p < .0001$ (see Figure 4).

Training participants also provided feedback regarding their satisfaction with the training. Using a six-point scale (i.e., 0 = poor; 5 = Excellent), participants responded to several questions and were invited to provide comments and suggestions. When asked "Overall, I found the workshop useful and informative" participants' average score was 4.83. In response to the question "Overall I found the speaker(s) to be of high quality" as a group participants' average score was 4.83. In response to the question "Overall I learned information and concepts that will be helpful to me in my work" as a group participants' average score was 4.92. When asked "would you recommend this workshop to my colleagues" as a group participants average score was 4.92. When asked to provide an overall rating for the workshop as a group participants' average score was 4.88 out of 5. Finally, participants were asked to rate this workshop compared to other similar workshops they have taken. The options given were "Much Worse", "Worse", "The Same", "Better" and "Much Better." As a group, the participants rated the workshop as "The Same" (5%), "Better" (73%) and "Much Better" (23%) (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Participants Rating of the Curriculum Training Compared to Other Similar Programs



Most participants considered the training session as “excellent”, “very interesting” and as providing “very pertinent information”. The participants enjoyed the speakers and thought the information learned was relevant to their work. Some of the highlights of their feedback include the following:

Very interesting! Lots of great information.

Great questions to challenge my thinking and attitudes so I can pass on to my students. So much knowledge! Thank you.

Great day! Lots to take back to the classroom.

I love Dr. Kutcher’s ability to describe and explain mental processes in an easy, accessible manner.

Thank you for a curriculum that includes mental health! This guide and in-service is a great resource.

Discussion and conclusions

Evaluation of the teacher training on the Mental Health & High School Curriculum Guide at the Strait Regional School Board (SRSB), demonstrates that such training is helpful to significantly improve educators’ and allied health providers’ knowledge regarding the Mental Health Curriculum Guide and its contents, significantly increase knowledge regarding mental health and mental illness, and significantly enhance positive attitudes towards mental illness. This helps to set a strong foundation for SRSB to embed mental health literacy into the grade nine curriculum through the application of the Mental Health Curriculum Guide and additionally provides a cadre of trained trainers who can meet ongoing SRSB training needs and support teachers in the classroom as the curriculum is applied.

Next step/Action plan

All teachers at SRSB will implement the Mental Health Curriculum Guide in the Healthy Living classroom once they receive the training from the trainers. To facilitate the implementation of the Mental Health Curriculum Guide, SRSB decided to continue their collaboration with the Chair team to prepare school support staff with the “Go-to” Educator Training Program so that they are able to provide appropriate help when students seek help for their mental health problems, and further link students with health providers if needed. The “Go-to” Educator Training will be conducted through the School Plus project supported by the Nova Scotia Department of Education Student Services Division, the Sun Life Financial Chair in Adolescent Mental Health and the Nova Scotia Teachers Credit Union.