



## Research in Brief: Effectiveness of suicide prevention programs in schools

Suicide is internationally ranked as one of the leading causes of death among youth aged 15-19. Suicide and attempted suicide rates have increased substantially in the last 15 years.

While some countries attempt to prevent suicide by reducing youth access to lethal means, the most common suicide prevention method in the United States is school-based curricula: suicide prevention programs are integrated into a classroom curriculum.

Generally, school-based suicide prevention curricula incorporate instructional videos, presentations, and transparencies 3-5 days per week. Common goals of such curricula are:

- Raising awareness
- Recognizing signs and symptoms in both oneself and others
- Providing students with school and community resources

### Are school-based suicide prevention programs effective?

A recent systematic review sought to determine the effectiveness of school-based suicide prevention curricula. The review examined efficacy and limitations of middle and high school suicide prevention programs.

Students' knowledge, attitudes, and help-seeking behaviour significantly improved with the use of suicide prevention curricula. Two of the eight studies that were examined reported a decrease in suicide ideation. None of the studies directly investigated suicide rates.



### *Why does this matter?*

- ⇒ Suicide is ranked as one of the leading causes of death among youth
- ⇒ A common suicide prevention method is school-based curricula
- ⇒ School-based suicide prevention programs are an effective way to increase students' knowledge, attitudes, and help-seeking behaviour
- ⇒ Although suicide rates or suicide attempts are a better indication of program effectiveness, they are difficult to report in school environments
- ⇒ Researchers emphasize the need for future studies to report suicide rates or suicide attempts



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# Effectiveness of suicide prevention programs in schools

## What is a Systematic Review?

The purpose of a systematic review is to sum up the best available research on a specific question. This is done by bringing together the results of several studies. Studies included in a review are screened for quality, so that the findings of a large number of studies can be combined.

## What did they do?

The researchers found their studies using Ovid MEDLINE(R), Ovid Healthstar, CINAHL, PsycINFO, all EBM reviews—Cochrane DSR, ACP Journal Club, DARE, CCTR, CMR, HTA, and NHSEED, and the ISI Web of Science.

The following criteria was used to qualify a study for this review:

- Middle to High school-based suicide prevention curriculum for males and females aged 13-19 years
- Studies with follow-up examinations
- Randomized controlled studies
- Interrupted time series analysis with a concurrent comparison group

A total of 6 programs examined in 8 studies fit the criteria for this review. The researchers assessed all 8 studies to determine the efficacy of school-based suicide prevention curricula. The 6 programs included:

- Video discussion lessons
- Three-phase intervention
- Participatory classes
- Curriculum vignette program
- The SOS Suicide Prevention Program
- The SEHS Suicide Prevention Program

## What did they learn?

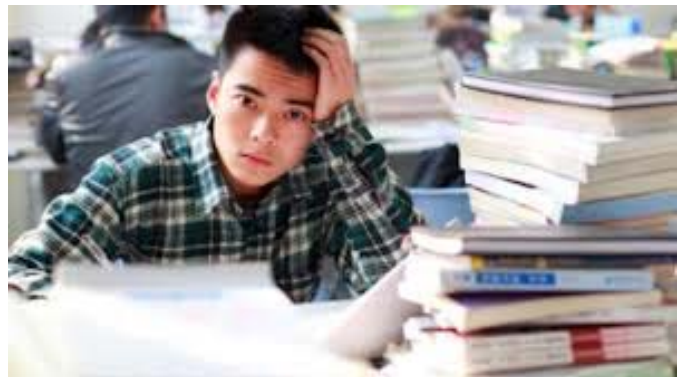
A common misconception deterring schools from using suicide prevention programs is the fear that the program will normalize suicide. The researchers did not find any evidence indicating the use of suicide prevention programs is associated with increased suicide ideation or feelings of hopelessness.

Overall, the only improvements noted were students' knowledge, attitudes, and help-seeking behaviour. Although these measures do not directly measure program efficacy, they are the closest available indication of usefulness.

A direct measure of effectiveness would be to measure rates of suicide or attempted suicide before and after the administration of a program. Reporting suicide rates however, is not feasible in a school environment.

Since an increase in knowledge, attitudes, and help-seeking behaviour may not be directly related to lowering suicide/attempted suicide rates, the researchers highlight a need for future research to report suicide rates, attempted suicide, or suicide ideation as a measure of efficacy.

Additionally, the researchers emphasize the need for longitudinal studies to confirm that benefits of suicide intervention programs continue even after the program is completed.



*This brief summary was prepared from:*

Katz, C., Bolton, S., Katz, L. Y., Isaak, C., Tilston-Jones, T., Sareen, J., Swampy Cree Suicide Prevention Team. (2013). A Systematic Review of School-based Suicide Prevention Programs. *Depression and Anxiety*, 30(10), 1030-1045. doi: 10.1002/da.22114

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