IMPROVING ACCESSIBILITY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOL

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

Yunha Bae

Los Angeles, CA, USA

Improving Accessibility and Effectiveness of School Mental Health Resources

"Most people with horrible insomnia usually kill themselves before it kills them. Why wait miserably to die when you can stop it?" This question was posed by Dean, a sixteen-year-old who has fatal familial insomnia (FFI), a genetic degenerative brain disorder. Of the four stages of FFI, Dean is in early stage 3 and was told it could progress to stage 4 within seven years. Dean's desire to commit suicide is constantly increasing due to depression from his fatal illness and losing his brother. He harms himself daily and says he wants to end his life but refuses any professional help; even the school counselors and peer mediation group's approach did not seem to be effective with him (personal communication, February 19, 2022).

Many teenagers like Dean struggle with depression. In 2017, about 13 percent (1 out of 8) of adolescents reported experiencing at least one major depressive episode (Visions Teen, 2022). Many students struggle with depression, yet only a few know how to deal with it healthily. Depression could lead some to make harmful and tragic decisions. To prevent these occurrences,

schools need to intervene with students suffering from depression. Schools can make mental health resources more accessible and effective for students, provide better funding for more online mental health resources, educate to reduce the stigmas surrounding mental health issues and create effective alcohol/substance use prevention programs.

Funding Health Resources

Increasing funding for more accessible and practical mental health resources at schools is crucial. Many schools have become aware of the prevalence of mental health issues among students and have attempted to offer solutions, such as peer mediation, which involves trained students mediating conflicts between peers. While peer mediation is typically used to resolve conflicts, it can also help address mental health issues through education. The sessions can allow students to discuss personal issues with another individual to obtain advice or guidance in resolving their dilemmas. However, not all schools can offer such programs and mental health programs like this are often inaccessible and ineffective. To address this issue, schools should prioritize the provision of trained counselors who can support troubled students with substance abuse awareness programs, suicide prevention presentations, therapy sessions, and other school events aimed at helping students take a break from stressful work.

Increasing school employment in student support staff can help alleviate student mental health issues. Hiring academic counselors can cost about $74,725 annually, substance abuse counselors about $53,133 annually (Indeed, 2023), and a high school suicide awareness program, costs about $500 per school, depending on the number and size of the schools (PSPA, 2017). It is a valid argument to prioritize improving the education system. However, the urgent need for mental health programs cannot be ignored. By allocating more funds towards mental health programs, "[t]here could be at least 60 million fewer cases of anxiety, depression, and epilepsy

between now and 2030 if we increase spending on mental health to recommended levels"
(London, 2020). As much as academic success is essential, it is equally important to prioritize
students' mental health and well-being. By investing in mental health programs, schools can
provide resources that benefit students in all areas of their lives, leading to better outcomes and a
more positive learning environment.

<div align="center">**Accessibility to Mental Health Resources**</div>

Once funding is covered, schools should make mental health resources more accessible by
expanding their mental health programs with online resources. One way is through a system similar to
telehealth. *Telehealth*, also known as telemedicine, delivers health care, health education, and health
information services through technologies. Telehealth technologies include live video conferencing,
mobile health apps, "store and forward" electronic transmission, and remote patient monitoring (Catalyst,
2018). While telehealth is commonly used for long-distance clinical healthcare, schools can adopt it to
facilitate online one-on-one conferences and awareness-raising sessions and introduce available resources.
Another effective method of enhancing mental health resources is implementing online mental health
screening tools. These tools help students identify potential mental health issues and determine if they
need to seek professional help (American Mental Wellness Association, 2022). Through online mental
health screening tools, students can quickly identify their mental health issues and gain easy access to
targeted resources tailored to their individual needs. By expanding online programs, school mental health
professionals can communicate, monitor, and follow up with their students more efficiently while offering
students the flexibility to reach out for help when needed.

In addition to expanded online programs, schools should provide more stigma-reducing
education. Many schools educate their students on the stigmas surrounding depression and
mental health. However, their efforts to reduce stigmas are often ineffective as they rely on
simply informing students about them rather than implementing specific strategies to address
them. As a result, students are still reluctant to seek help for their mental health issues due to fear

of negative judgment and being perceived as weak. Solid and effective anti-stigma education needs to be promoted as "fostering more positive attitudes and beliefs surrounding mental health topics lessens the emotional burden of shame and stigma" (Behavioral Health News, 2022). For example, promoting positive examples of successful people, such as celebrities and athletes, who have overcome mental illness is one way to reduce the stigmas effectively. It is also essential to give hope to students suffering from mental illnesses and encourage them to seek help.

Alongside providing mental health services, schools should prioritize promoting effective alcohol and substance abuse prevention programs. Stress, depression, and feelings of isolation are common triggers that lead students, exceptionally high schoolers, to develop addictions to drugs and alcohol. A 2016 study of 10,000 adolescents revealed that two-thirds of those who developed substance use disorders had experienced at least one mental health disorder (Child Mind Institute, 2022). It is not uncommon for teenagers to resort to alcohol or drugs as a coping mechanism when experiencing negative emotions, which can be exceptionally perilous due to their developing brains being more susceptible to substance abuse (Child Mind Institute, 2022).

Many schools react to increased substance abuse by banning substance use and locking bathrooms or isolated spaces on campuses. However, these methods could be more efficient. Not only are they inefficient for the targeted students, but the misguided effort also inconveniences other students. School authorities should recognize that students are struggling with it instead of trying to hide the fact. Schools should instead adopt a compassionate and proactive approach emphasizing understanding and rehabilitation for students with substance abuse issues. Schools can then promote substance use prevention by organizing drug and alcohol presentations to raise awareness, hiring a drug counselor, or hosting substance prevention activities like sober parties. Such initiatives provide healthy alternatives for students to socialize without feeling compelled

to use drugs or alcohol. Many students find it challenging to quit their addiction as they feel it is impossible to have fun without substance use. By hosting sober parties, students can enjoy socializing without the pressure to consume drugs or alcohol (Prime, 2023). With understanding and encouraging solutions, students will feel supported and optimistic about overcoming their addiction, leading to more effective and lasting results.

Suicide Prevention Education

Some parents might worry and argue against increasing suicide prevention programs at schools because they think this will plant the idea of suicide in their children. However, it is important to recognize that children will inevitably be exposed to suicide-related issues in one form or another. Through suicide prevention education, "[students are] given the resources to address their suicidal feelings or those of a friend. As such, proper education could dramatically decrease suicidal thoughts and attempts amongst teenagers" (Johnson, 2016). This shows that by providing suicide prevention education, students can learn how to handle these sensitive topics in healthy and constructive ways. Suicide prevention education equips students with knowledge about the symptoms, causes, and stigmas associated with suicide and where to seek support (Prime, 2023). While some may argue that introducing such topics at a young age may be detrimental, it is crucial to understand that many young students are already experiencing depression. Thus, it is critical to provide professional and appropriate education at a young age to prevent negative influences in the future.

<div align="center">

Conclusion

</div>

The number of teenagers experiencing depression is increasing. Many students, like Dean, struggle with depression and need support, but the available resources for them are limited. Even with mental health support programs, many students are not quite reached due to a lack of money

and options in the school mental health support system. Schools should acknowledge the shortcomings of their peer mediation program and prioritize mental health education and assistance as much as academic education is prioritized. To accomplish this, schools should increase funding for mental health programs, expand online resources, provide better mental health education, and offer focused substance abuse resources. By providing more mental health support and education within schools, students will be better equipped to manage their mental health concerns positively. Anyone can work towards making school mental health resources more effective and accessible for all students.

References

2017 National Survey of Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) releases. SAMHSA.gov. (n.d.).

Retrieved April 23, 2023, from https://www.samhsa.gov/data/release/2017-national-

survey-drug-use-and-health-nsduh-releases

5 barriers to mental health treatment and access to care. Social Solutions. (n.d.). Retrieved April

23, 2023, from

https://www.socialsolutions.com/blog/barriers-to-mental-healthcare-access/

American Psychological Association. (n.d.). *Student Mental Health is in crisis. campuses are*

rethinking their approach. Monitor on Psychology. Retrieved April 23, 2023, from

https://www.apa.org/monitor/2022/10/mental-health-campus-care

Bae, Y., & Prime, N. (2023, April 11). Mental Health Support for Substance Use at South

Pasadena High School. personal.

Challenges and opportunities to meet the mental health needs of ... - focus. (n.d.). Retrieved

April 24, 2023, from https://focus.psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.focus.20190028

Contributor, G. (n.d.). Association of American Educators. Retrieved May 7, 2023, from

https://www.aaeteachers.org/index.php/blog/1633-the-benefits-of-teaching-suicide-preventi

on-in-schools

Coombs, N. C., Meriwether, W. E., Caringi, J., & Newcomer, S. R. (2021, June 15). *Barriers to*

healthcare access among U.S. adults with mental health challenges: A population-based

study. SSM - population health. Retrieved April 23, 2023, from

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8214217/

Davo Productions, http://www.davoproductions.com. (n.d.). *Screening tools*. The American

Mental Wellness Association " Screening Tools. Retrieved April 28, 2023, from

https://www.americanmentalwellness.org/intervention/screening-tools/#:~:text=Screening

%20tools%20are%20online%20and,be%20taken%20as%20medical%20advice.

Gillette, H. (2022, May 16). *Why are teens depressed? 6 reasons*. Psych Central. Retrieved April

23, 2023, from

https://psychcentral.com/depression/why-are-so-many-teens-depressed#reasons-teens-fee

l-depressed

Jin, Y., An, J., Zheng, P., & Sun, T. (n.d.). *Mass quarantine and mental health during*

COVID-19: A meta-analysis. Journal of affective disorders. Retrieved April 23, 2023,

from https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34706447/

Job search | indeed. (n.d.). Retrieved May 8, 2023, from https://www.indeed.com/

Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research. (2022, August 12). *Teen depression*.

Mayo Clinic. Retrieved April 23, 2023, from

https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/teen-depression/symptoms-causes/syc-2

0350985

Mental health disorders and teen substance use. Child Mind Institute. (2022, July 28). Retrieved

April 23, 2023, from

https://childmind.org/article/mental-health-disorders-and-substance-use/

Minot, D. (2022, July 14). *Mental health in schools: Moving stigma out in the open*. Behavioral

Health News. Retrieved April 23, 2023, from

https://behavioralhealthnews.org/mental-health-in-schools-moving-stigma-out-in-the-ope

n/

Newsroom. UCI. (n.d.). Retrieved April 23, 2023, from

https://merage.uci.edu/news/2022/07/Best-Practices-to-Improve-Mental-Health-Access-O

utcomes.html

School Mental Health. The 2021-22 Budget: School Mental Health. (2021, February 12).

Retrieved April 23, 2023, from https://lao.ca.gov/Publications/Report/4368

Suicide in children & teens. Suicide and Teens | Boston Children's Hospital. (n.d.). Retrieved

April 23, 2023, from https://www.childrenshospital.org/conditions/suicide-and-teens

Suicide Prevention Training for Teachers and School Staff: Sorted by Cost. (n.d.). Retrieved May

7, 2023, from

https://www.preventsuicidepa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Copy-of-Suicide-Preventio

n-Trainings-for-Teachers-School-Staff-By-Cost.pdf

Visions. (2022, February 25). *How many teens have depression?* Visions Treatment Centers.

Retrieved April 23, 2023, from https://visionsteen.com/how-many-teens-have-depression/

Vital Statistics Rapid Release - CDC. (n.d.). Retrieved April 24, 2023, from

https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/vsrr/vsrr024.pdf

WebMD. (n.d.). *Teen depression: Causes, symptoms, heredity, and treatments*. WebMD.

    Retrieved April 23, 2023, from

    https://www.webmd.com/depression/guide/teen-depression

What age can depression start: Can you be too young? GeneSight. (2021, July 7). Retrieved

    April 23, 2023, from

    https://genesight.com/blog/patient/what-age-can-depression-start-can-you-be-too-young/

What is telehealth? | catalyst carryover - The New England Journal of ... (n.d.). Retrieved May

    8, 2023, from https://catalyst.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/CAT.18.0268

Why investment in mental health is needed now more than ever. World Economic Forum. (n.d.).

    Retrieved May 7, 2023, from

    https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/10/good-mental-health-is-the-foundation-of-happy-

    healthy-and-productive-lives/#:~:text=One%20thing%20is%20for%20sure,200%2C000%2

    0deaths%20could%20be%20avoided.

World Health Organization. (n.d.). *World Suicide Prevention Day 2022*. World Health

    Organization. Retrieved April 23, 2023, from

    https://www.who.int/campaigns/world-suicide-prevention-day/2022