

SUICIDAL IDEATION AND ASK LISTEN REFER

As Missouri's consortium in promoting healthy behaviors among college students, Partners in Prevention (PIP) is dedicated to creating safe and healthy campus environments, including addressing student self-harm. PIP implements the annual Missouri College Health Behavior Survey (MCHBS), which contains questions regarding mental health and suicidal ideation. Although suicide is an issue on all college campuses, training and prevention programs are largely underrepresented. Ask Listen Refer (ALR), a suicide prevention training created in 2009 for campuses across Missouri, offers information that teaches faculty, staff, and students how to identify risk factors and warning signs of suicide. ALR also guides participants through the process of talking to individuals who are at risk and helping them find resources in their area. **This is the second in a series of briefs on the most critical public health issues in Missouri higher education. We define critical issues as the behaviors on campus which cause threats to the safety of our students on a daily or weekly basis.**

DISCUSSION

During the 20 minute ALR training program, participants learn about signs and symptoms of suicidal behavior, common myths about suicide, how to ask if someone is considering suicide, and how to make trauma-informed resource referrals. Participants are given a pre and post-test to evaluate knowledge, attitude, and willingness to intervene, and they have the opportunity to take 3 follow-up surveys to assess the overall use and effectiveness of the program.

Data from ALR participants suggest that it is a promising practice to teach students, faculty, and staff about how to help a friend or student who may be considering suicide. When comparing student, faculty, and staff pre-test and post-test scores, there is a significant rate of change which suggests that individuals are learning more about suicide prevention while taking the training. Out of a possible 40 points,

both pre-test and post-test scores ranged almost the entire spectrum from 8 to 40 points. Averaged pre-test scores for the last 66 months of 2015 ranged from 27.3 to 30 points, while averaged post-test scores ranged from 34.6 to 36.9 points. Students and staff showed the greatest increases in scores with both groups having a percent increase of 27%.

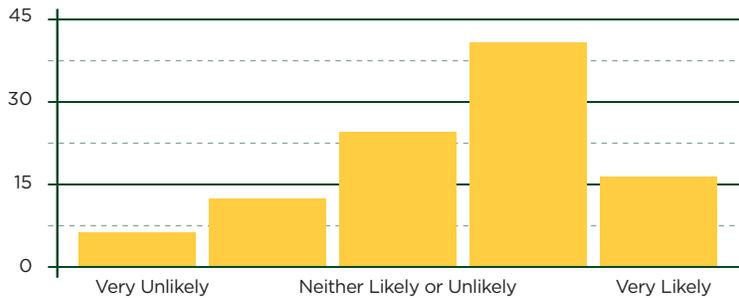
	Pre-test Score	Post-test Score	% Change	N
Student	27.3	34.6	27%	1973
Faculty	28	34	25%	29
Staff	27.3	34.8	27%	261
Other	30	36.9	23%	11

According to the 2015 MCHBS data, 40% of students reported having ever had suicidal thoughts, and 15% of students reported having suicidal thoughts within the last year. Two percent of Missouri college students reported attempting suicide in the last year, but only 32% of students sought assistance for suicidal thoughts or attempts in the past year. While the majority of students (53%) are still not seeking assistance for suicidal thoughts and attempts, MCHBS data suggests an improvement in the last year, as 67% of students did not seek assistance in 2014. Additionally, 31% of students reported being concerned about a friend having suicidal thoughts and 48% of them reported they would be willing



to complete an online suicide prevention training program (ALR). When asked if students were aware of the ALR program, 27% of students answered “yes.” Nineteen percent of students also utilized ALR at least once in the past year, 5% twice and 2% more than twice when concerned about an individual at risk for suicide.

How likely are you to bring up the topic of suicide with someone you think is at risk?



Of the 21 PIP campuses, 20 participate in the ALR program. For the purposes of this brief, 5 schools are considered active participants in the ALR program, meaning that they had at least 200 participants from their campus in 2015. Comparing these active schools to the rest of the PIP campuses reveals no difference in suicidal ideation or attempts; however, these students do show an increased awareness of the programs on their campuses. Students at active ALR schools were slightly more likely to report being concerned about a friend having suicidal thoughts in the past year than students from other schools (33% vs. 30%) and were more likely to report having heard of ALR than students from less active schools (36% vs. 24%). Interestingly, students from active ALR schools did not show much difference in their likelihood of discussing suicide with someone at risk of suicide or referring someone at risk to local resources. Some of these differences could be accounted for by higher

rates of staff and faculty participation on some campuses, meaning that more outreach to students is needed.

How many times have you used ALR in the past year?	Active ALR Schools	Other PIP Schools
At least once	28%	25%
Twice or more	9.4%	5.4%

SUMMARY

According to the National Center for Injury Prevention, suicide is the second leading cause of death for college-aged young adults (ages 15-34). With 15% of Missouri students self-reporting suicidal ideations and 31% of students being concerned about a friend within the last year, suicide prevention is a priority for PIP. Furthermore, over 50% of Missouri students said they would likely bring up the topic of suicide with someone who may be at risk. This willingness means Missouri students are at a great starting point when it comes to addressing mental health and improving their own mental health.

Even though students are more likely to turn to their friends first when seeking help, faculty and staff on Missouri college campuses have unique access to students, and these relationships can be utilized to help address mental health issues. Despite the fact that ALR is designed to reach all of these audiences, not all of those who are in a position to intervene with high-risk or at-risk individuals are taking advantage of this resource. **For more information, please visit the ALR website at www.asklistenrefer.org.**

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