Mental Health First Aid for the Health Educator

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Background & Introduction : Mental health disorders (MHDs) are the leading cause of disability in North America. MHDs are associated with higher rates of depression, anxiety, psychosis, substance abuse, eating disorders, and suicide.

MHDs should be responded to and prioritized similar to physical health emergencies, but often are not. Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is the initial help given to someone developing a mental health problem/crisis before appropriate help can be obtained.MHFA is a 12-hour course developed to improve the mental health literacy of the Australian public. This program moved to the U.S. in 2008 Purpose: Due to rising MHDs among school-aged populations, the purpose of this study was to investigate literature supporting MHFA as a positive intervention.

Methods: Using Academic Search Premiere and LexisNexis Academic, a search was conducted using the terms MHFA, mental health literacy, mental health, mental health statistics, and school-aged mental health.

Results: Search returned 1, 717,344 articles; 1,716,241 were discarded, leaving 1,103 articles to be analyzed.

Discussions and Conclusion: MHFA has been successful in many countries. Educating school employees, community members, and families on the correct steps to take in addressing mental health concerns alleviates additional complications resulting from an untreated mental illness. MHFA reduces stigma and lessens communication barriers between those with a mental illness and those who are mentally stable. As a result of a communities improved mental health literacy, education and communication skills, care facilities will be made more accessible to those in need.