



Title **Efficacy of Suicide Prevention Programs for Children and Youth**

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Aim

To assess and update the published evidence on the efficacy/effectiveness of suicide prevention programs for children and youth, and analyze the elements related to the different suicide prevention programs.

The intent was to provide guidance for decision-makers with program planning and implementation strategies, to inform program evaluations, and to direct future research.

Conclusions and results

Ten primary studies and two systematic reviews were identified that evaluated school-based suicide prevention programs. Most of the studies focused on the general student population, while a few studies initially categorized students as 'at-risk' or 'in need' before the intervention. Six out of 10 studies were rated as 'moderate' to 'strong' in relation to their methodological quality. Two out of these six studies using similar approaches for risk stratification and delivering intervention programs with similar objectives, showed consistent and encouraging evidence on the program effects such as decrease in depression, hopelessness, stress, anxiety, and anger. The findings from other studies were inconsistent. All of the primary studies published since 1991, except for one, either failed to evaluate the program for harmful effects or showed that no harmful effects were found. The potential for harmful effects indicated in this one study were not verified in a followup study.

This assessment revealed that the findings from published research are inconsistent. There is insufficient evidence to either support, or not to support, curriculum-based suicide prevention programs in schools.

Recommendations

There is a good opportunity for the Alberta Mental Health Board to sponsor and design a good quality Canadian study. As this review highlights, research on effectiveness of suicide prevention strategies is complex because of the multidimensional nature of children and adolescents. There are various school-based programs currently being offered throughout Alberta. As a first step, it is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of these programs and then proceed with research to address the questions of highest priority.

Methods

A systematic review of the literature published from 1991 and onwards and a critical appraisal of primary quantitative studies was conducted.

The following databases were searched: PubMed, EMBASE, HealthSTAR, CINAHL, PsycINFO, ERIC database, Sociological Abstracts, EBM Reviews – Best Evidence, Web of Science, Cochrane Library.

Ten methodological or field experts externally reviewed this report.