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PROGRAM EDUCATION DESIGN

Designing a Five-Course Peer-Education Program, Body-Spirit-Soul (Nutrition and Faith) for Trauma Populations: A Proposed Framework

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ABSTRACT

Background: This paper explores the development of a body-spirit-soul educational course designed for vulnerable populations facing trauma or extremely stressful negative life events. Such experiences often manifest in this population as nutritional deficiencies, poor mental health, and a disrupted spiritual connection leading to challenging lifestyles. This article outlines the rationale behind the course design.

Methods: A five-course self-directed peer-education program was designed, incorporating nutrition, mental health, and faith-based practices. Feedback was gathered from 84 live speaking engagements focused on motivational topics, followed by a needs assessment to identify gaps in current support systems for vulnerable populations.

Findings: Findings indicated that a lack of understanding basic lifestyle recovery elements, such as understanding levels of change, mapping of personal historical timelines, knowledge of nutrition and malnutrition induced cerebral-neurological dysfunction, utilization of effective body-spirit-soul health practices, and setting clear lifestyle goals (i.e. leadership, success, and personal growth), hinders recovery. The proposed program is designed to bridge these gaps, offering accessible, peer-driven education to empower individuals and promote recovery. A new integrative model, Nutri-Theology, was coined to propose an intervention that combines principles of nutrition and faith-based practices. A success formula was structured to guide participants in applying the knowledge gained from the courses into actionable and sustainable lifestyle changes. Self-directed courses are strongly recommended.

Conclusion: The proposed five-course peer-education program presents a valuable opportunity to support individuals facing life challenges by integrating nutrition, mental health, and faith-based practices, with further research needed to evaluate its effectiveness and refine its application across diverse populations and settings.

Introduction

In the United States, extremely stressful negative life events, such as trauma, exhibit a high prevalence for nutritional conditions as a result of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).[1,2] National data estimates that approximately 8% of the population is affected by PTSD, while 37-100% of trauma cases have trauma-related eating disorders.[3] In diverse business settings that serve vulnerable populations with PTSD, such as veterans, at-risk youth, or individuals experiencing housing crises, addiction, incarceration, or significant financial hardships, there is a growing recognition of the need for self-directed educational courses led by successful and experienced peer instructors.[4–7] These courses should highlight practical methods peers have used to overcome substantial life challenges, offering relatable and actionable insights. While psychological therapies play a vital role in lifestyle recovery, many facilities serving these populations lack standardized peer-educational frameworks.[4] Self-directed programs from peers who have accomplished success can bridge this gap by providing participants with a sense of connection and hope, showing them that success is achievable through the example of someone who shares their lived experience.[5] Without peers as educational speakers or as creators of educational structured programs that demonstrate pathways to overcome adversity, facilities the risk of missing critical opportunities to achieve desired outcomes.

Objective and Hypothesis

The aim was to develop a five-course program that integrates nutritional, mental health, and faith-based strategies, guided by peer experiences, to empower vulnerable populations in overcoming significant life barriers and achieving sustainable success.

It was hypothesised that providing a peer-developed course that integrates nutritional, mental health, and faith-based strategies, based on personal success experiences, will enhance the ability of vulnerable populations to overcome barriers preventing them from

leading successful lives.

Strategy

Between March and September of 2022, the author conducted 84 live speaking engagements focused on motivational and faith-based topics. These sessions primarily centered on sharing peer experiences, biblical principles, and motivational techniques aimed at helping other peers overcome barriers associated with challenging lifestyles. Discussions frequently incorporated body-spirit-soul techniques such as nutrition, prayer, storytelling, discerning truth from deception, and other self-directed educational activities (i.e. icebreakers, skill building opportunities, goal setting, self-care, etc..) as holistic strategies for personal growth and recovery. Feedback from attendees indicated a significant demand for a structured program derived from these engagements. In response, a preliminary needs assessment was conducted to identify gaps in available resources. Findings revealed a notable lack of research dedicated to integrated approaches that combine nutrition, mental health, and faith-based practices, particularly for individuals experiencing psychological trauma. To further contextualize these findings, a course outline was developed to act as a starting point for existing evidence and future theoretical frameworks supporting such integrated interventions.

Summary Report

Based on feedback gathered from 84 speaking engagements, it was found that lack of understanding basic lifestyle recovery elements appears to be foundational for individuals experiencing significant life challenges.

Basic Lifestyle Recovery Elements

1. Understanding levels of change
2. Activity mapping of personal historical timelines
3. Knowledge of nutrition and malnutrition induced cerebral-neurological dysfunction
4. Utilization of effective body-spirit-soul practices
5. Setting clear lifestyle goals (i.e. leadership, success, and personal growth)

Five-Course Peer-Education

The five-course peer-educational outline proposed includes:

Foundations of Change

Course 1: Foundations of Change

The first course, Foundations of Change, covers the transtheoretical model of change and self-determination theory. These principles provide people who face significant life challenges with the ability to know and understand their readiness level and if they are truly self-determined to make change they need for success. This foundational self-directed course will aim to introduce participants to the principles of behavior change as it pertains to their life, personalizing it without the need for practitioner involvement using non-pathological avenues.

Three Pillars of Lifestyle Recovery

Course 2: Timeline Development

This course encourages participants to explore their personal history and develop an understanding of how past experiences, including trauma, have shaped their present health and lifestyles. Examining historical events helps uncover patterns, self-identify triggers, and break negative cycles, while sharing narratives. Recognizing these aspects can lead to significant life transitions. Participants create a timeline that reflects their nutritional choices, health decisions, and significant life events, fostering self-awareness and agency.

Course 3: Nutrition and Brain Health

The human body needs to detoxify from both life as well as food and beverage constituents. Continuous exposure to stress involves their redirection of nutrients to meet the increased demand of a heightened cerebral metabolism. Focusing on diet in connection to enhancing cognitive functioning can educate a participant on how important nutrition impacts brain health. This course teaches an advanced level of education to help individuals have a sense of self-mastery in their lives.

Course 4: Nutri-Theology

Nutri-Theology is the combination of body-spirit-soul practices, the nutritional, mental, and spiritual health dimensions that make up the whole of a human being. It covers biblical concepts of nutrition, fasting, and outdoor activity for the physical aspect. Whereas psychology would use psychological approaches, Nutri-Theology uses biblical approaches for the mental rejuvenation aspect. These encompass eleven biblical recommendations to include: being controlled, fearless, guarded, lawful, one with the spirit, renewed, righteous, sober, sound in decisions, spiritual in regard, stress-free. For the spiritual aspect, individuals follow nine biblical principles to include: practicing forgiveness, gentleness, gratitude, love, meditation, prayer, self-sacrifice, stewardship, and trust. This course aims to integrate nutrition with faith-based practices, providing a holistic approach to healing. Faith-based healing is imperative to maintaining goals

and objectives proactively. By aligning nutrition with spiritual principles, it acknowledges the importance of addressing not only physical needs but also emotional and spiritual well-being.

The Success Formula

Course 5: Personalized Action Plan

This final course integrates learning from previous modules and encourages participants to create a personalized action plan for health and healing. As part of this process the individual reflects on their chances of success, thereby making them more aware of their circumstances. By presenting statistics relevant to their current situation, vulnerable populations are guided to reflect on the importance of making informed choices for better outcomes. This process multiplied by the in-depth education they receive from understanding their history builds a stronger foundation. Utilizing the peer educational content while managing time, dividing time to adapt, yet focus on persistence, helps participants recognize the potential for change. Including the biblical principles of Nutri-Theology can drive change.

Discussion

Peer education is imperative for addressing nutrition,[5,6] general life skills,[5–7] spiritualism,[6,7] and the importance of mental health.[5–7] While these approaches benefit all individuals, they may carry added significance for those with PTSD, who are at higher risk for eating and nutritional disorders.[1–3] Individuals with trauma experience setbacks that normal populations that normal populations may not encounter.[1–3] The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) emphasizes the importance of integrating peer education, peer support, and holistic methods as part of their approach to lifestyle recovery[5,7] helping to influence individuals with mental health issues to recover more successfully.[5] Specific methods endorsed by SAMHSA are spiritual, physical, emotional, and environmental wellness strategies listed in their The Eight Dimensions of Wellness.[5] Also, focusing on 'purpose' and 'health' is a major focal point of their Four Major Dimensions of Recovery.[5,7]

Peer educators ought to be well-trained, not only in peer recovery,[5] but in counseling and other professions such as nutrition.[6] Peers who have achieved lifestyle recovery, are the ideal model to be involved in creating educational materials[4,5] while the focus is to create course content that pertains to holistic domains. SAMHSA's Working Definition of Recovery is "A process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential."[5,7] Hence, developing an educational course should be aimed at self-directed learning. Peers who have navigated their own recovery, are well-equipped to emphasize the importance of goal setting, leadership skill building, and personal growth that serves as a foundation for developing key skills for successful lifestyle recovery.[3,5] Furthermore, SAMHSA recommends developing educational materials specific to supporting effective coping strategies[5] many which are and can be holistic in nature.

Challenges and Ethical Considerations

Testing the feasibility of a self-directed online five-course peer-education program involves addressing several challenges and ethical considerations. Key challenges include ensuring accessibility for diverse populations, addressing varied learning paces, and maintaining engagement without in-person support. Ethical concerns include safeguarding privacy and ensuring content is culturally appropriate and trauma-informed. Feasibility can be tested through pilot programs with diverse participants, collecting feedback on usability, content relevance, and overall satisfaction. Monitoring participant progress and evaluating learning outcomes will also be crucial for assessing the program's effectiveness in meeting its goals.

Conclusion

The proposed five-course peer-education program offers a unique and necessary intervention for individuals facing significant life challenges. By integrating nutrition, mental health, and faith-based practices, it aims to empower participants through relatable, recovery-oriented teachings. With the support of well-trained peers who have experienced recovery, this program could provide a practical and accessible model that encourages personal growth, leadership, and goal setting. Future research should focus on evaluating the effectiveness of this model in diverse populations, assessing long-term outcomes, and exploring ways to refine the curriculum for broader applications in various settings.

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