Using Prevention Science to Promote Children’s Mental Health

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ABSTRACT

In a recent issue of The Counseling Psychologist, Hage et al. (2008) encouraged greater involvement of counseling psychologists in prevention-related activities. To support these efforts, the authors described 15 principles of prevention science and provided inspirational guidelines to counseling psychologists. Although the call for counseling psychology participation in prevention activities is not new, the article was unique in connecting counseling psychology to the emerging field of prevention science and in offering suggestions for applying these principles. The present poster is intended to highlight the prevention science principles articulated by Hage et al. (2007) by describing the activities of the Missouri Prevention Center, a program that uses these principles of prevention science within counseling research to enhance children’s mental health.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Research has shown that early and focused prevention efforts can greatly reduce the costs, economic, psychological, and social, borne by children, families, and societies impacted by poor mental health (Weissberg et al., 2003). Despite increasing interest and awareness about prevention science among counseling psychologists (Romano & Hage, 2000; Vasa, 2000), most literature suggests that counseling psychologists are not contributing to prevention-related activities. To support these efforts, the authors described 15 principles of prevention science and provided inspirational guidelines to counseling psychologists. Although the call for counseling psychology participation in prevention activities is not new, the article was unique in connecting counseling psychology to the emerging field of prevention science and in offering suggestions for applying these principles. The present poster is intended to highlight the prevention science principles articulated by Hage et al. (2007) by describing the activities of the Missouri Prevention Center, a program that uses these principles of prevention science within counseling research to enhance children’s mental health.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGISTS

Based on our work at the Missouri Prevention Center and a thorough review of prevention science literature, we propose a number of ways in which counseling psychologists could integrate prevention science into their research, practice, and training:

1. Develop comprehensive, multiethnic interventions for addressing both risk and protective factors through a careful integration of ecological, public health, and social justice frameworks that focus on creating systemic changes in the individual’s physical and social environment (Romano & Hage, 2008) and on ethnically (e.g., Brownmiller, 1979)

2. Undertake early intervention efforts that target children as young as preschoolers and toddlers, thereby preventing the risk factors from crystallizing and becoming resistant to intervention (Coie et al., 1993).

3. Develop and implement more contextualized and culturally appropriate prevention initiatives by capitalizing on counseling psychologists’ core competencies in the areas of multicultural research and practice (Arredondo, 1999; Romano & Hage, 2000).

4. Participate in national and international cross-disciplinary prevention groups such as the Society for Prevention Research. Coie et al. (1993) maintain that prevention research “requires collaborative efforts of interdisciplinary teams to achieve the diversity in expertise and breadth of intellectual focus that is necessary.”

5. Move away from a remotely-focused model of care and adopt a prevention-based agenda (e.g. Hilden & Black, 1999; Schmeling et al., 1997) in counseling psychology research, training, and practice.

6. Develop and touch evidence-based prevention practices as part of the counseling psychology curricula for graduate students and practitioners.

7. Increase involvement and participation in school-based intervention and prevention programming. Romano & Hage (1995) insist that counseling psychologists need to overcome their hesitance to work with schools, parents and administrators, and actively collaborate with these important stakeholders in the community for accomplishing this.

PREVENTION SCIENCE IN ACTION:

Critical Steps in Developing, Implementing, and Sustaining Evidence-Based Prevention Programs

Step 1: Develop Ecological Conceptual Model

Step 2: Test Hypothesized Risk/Protective Factors

Step 3: Manipulate Hypothesized Causes

Step 4: Partner with Communities to Design Culturally and Contextually Relevant Interventions

Step 5: Develop/Implement Sustainable Programming

Our implementation strategies include establishing Family Resource Centers in schools, where training, consultation, and services will be provided in collaboration with the school counselors/psychologists, administrators, teachers, and parent groups. Our goal is to strengthen these already existing structures in the schools so that the counselors take ownership of the program even after MIP has withdrawn its active involvement.