It Begins with Wellness: Preparing Public Health Students for the Workforce

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Background

Students in the university setting face multiple stressors as they navigate social connections, financial independence, academic pursuits and family responsibilities. As the public health workforce is experiencing increased rates of mental health issues and burnout, there is a need to educate the student pipeline on preventative measures to ensure their wellness.

Purpose and Objectives

The goal of the study is to explore how graduate students in public health are utilizing wellness practices in their lives. It will inform the development of an expanded curriculum, which will address secondary traumatic stress and burnout in the public health workforce.

Methodology

In this study, (N=100) students over the age of 18 in public health undergraduate and graduate courses at a Hispanic-serving institution participated in a 7-week intervention called Rising Above. The program aims to help students explore tools for implementing mindful self-care and other wellness practices in their personal and professional lives. The study focuses on the analysis of three open-ended questions from the final session of the program. Participants were asked to reflect on the challenges they overcame, identify wellness resources from the program they plan to use moving forward, and highlight wellness areas they plan to prioritize. Qualitative data from the responses were analyzed by three researchers, using the Sort and Sift, Think and Shift technique. Reviewers individually identified meaningful quotes and proposed diagrams with themes and categories, then met as a group to discuss and finalize their analysis.

Expected Results

The analysis of student reflections will give insight into their experiences of resilience, as well as their intentions to practice wellness. Ultimately, this will inform the development of future curricula to help students develop tools that will help them thrive in the workforce.