

# Evaluation of SADAG's Suicide Shouldn't Be A Secret Program using "Speaking Books"

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## BACKGROUND

To this day suicidal behaviour remains a serious public health problem. According to the World Health Organization's (WHO) report on suicide by the year 2000 approximately one million people died from suicide, representing one death every 40 seconds. By 2020 this number is likely to increase to approximately 1.53 million. According to the Initial Burden of Disease Estimates for South Africa (2000), suicide is ranked number ten as a cause of the premature mortality burden for men and ranked number nineteen for women. In South Africa, 9% of all non-natural deaths among young people can be attributed to suicide, with children as young as ten years having taken their own lives. Schools are excellent venues for health education programs as they are recognized to be the most universal setting for delivering services to children and consequently are a major focus of the effort to improve children's mental health services

## SADAG'S "SUICIDE SHOULDN'T BE A SECRET PROGRAM"

SADAG has been presenting workshops for adolescents, in a school setting, called "Suicide Shouldn't Be a Secret", since 1998. This educational workshop promotes the concept that suicide is directly related to mental illness, typically depression and that suicide is not a normal reaction to stress or emotional upset. Youths learn to recognize the signs of suicide and depression in themselves and in others, and they are taught how to seek help. SADAG also distributes literature as well as workshop material to programme participants, however, a major problem has always been the low level of literacy seriously impacting on the effectiveness of any literature distributed to the many thousands in need of health care education. Incwadi Zethemba - Books of Hope, in association with SADAG has created a means to present health care issues, by producing hard backed books featuring a sound track read by well-known local personalities in any language, on relevant topics of health care.

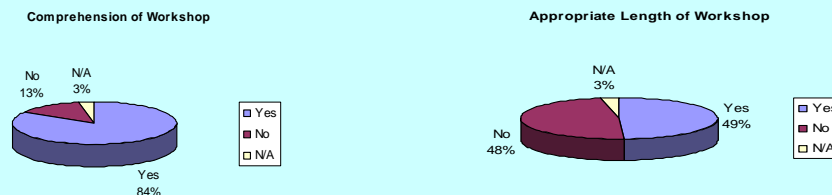
## PROCEDURE

SADAG's "Suicide Shouldn't Be A Secret" Program on depression and suicide was administered to grade seven classes in four schools in the Kimberley area. Eight classes attended the educational workshop and 4 classes will receive the Speaking Book. This is due to the cost of manufacturing the speaking book. The classes that received the latter intervention were chosen randomly. After a brief introduction to the program, and before any teaching on the subject of depression and suicide, the SADAG trainers administered a pre-test to assess baseline knowledge of the topic. An identical post-test survey administered 3 weeks after the intervention to evaluate knowledge retention of the information provided to students. In order to protect anonymity, the students were asked to provide their address in order for us to match pre and post test questionnaire.

## RESULTS

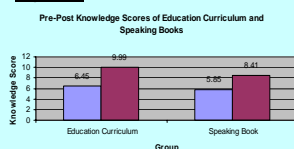
**Educational Workshop:** We were able to match pre and post test scores of 355 students who participated in the Educational Workshop. The study included 40% males and 60% females with ages ranging from 12-17 with the mean age being 13 years old. Overall, 83.7% of the participants reported that the workshop was easy to understand, and 49% reported that the curriculum was long enough. See Figure 1. The adolescents who received the Educational Workshop scored a mean of 6.46+/- 1.94 on the pre-test and a mean of 9.99 +/-1.74 on the post-test, showing a significant 58% improvement between the two tests ( $p < 0.01$ ). These results suggest that SADAG's Educational Workshop has a positive impact on the student's knowledge of suicide and depression. Please see figure 2.

Figure 1



**Talking Book:** We were able to match pre and post test scores of 95 students who received the "Suicide Shouldn't be a Secret" intervention. 82.1% of students reported that they found the book easy to understand. The study included 36.8% males and 63.2% females with ages ranging from 12-18 with the mean age being 13 years old. The adolescents who received the "Suicide Shouldn't be A Secret" Book scored a mean of 5.85+/- 1.69 on the pre-test and a mean of 9.4 +/-2.12 on the post-test, showing a significant 58% improvement between the two tests ( $p < 0.01$ ). A Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was conducted as the data was non parametric. The mean difference of 3.57 resulted in a test statistic based on positive ranks, with a z-score of -7.92. This value is highly significant at  $p < 0.001$ . This statistically significant difference suggests that the "Suicide Shouldn't Be a Secret" Book has a positive impact on the student's knowledge of suicide and depression. Please see figure 2.

Figure 2



## CONCLUSIONS

The results indicated that both the Educational Workshop and the Talking Book are valuable in increasing students knowledge about suicide and depression. Most importantly the Speaking Book having such an impact on the students knowledge has many implications when trying to target extremely rural areas. When finances are limited and literacy poor the Speaking Book provides a inexpensive way to disseminate valuable information at a relatively low cost.