

Problem: Peoria, IL. has two zip codes with exceptionally high poverty and high crime rates. Sophia's Kitchen is a Catholic Diocese of Peoria supported soup kitchen with 150+ volunteers and 3 paid staff who serve from 300-750 lunches per day. Volunteers and professionals alike serving in the community were in need of education and support to enable them to work more comfortably with persons with mental illness.

Purpose of research project: To explore the impact of the intervention "Communities of Compassion" (three educational workshops about mental health and the faith community's response) on the perceptions and comfort level of working with persons with mental health problems among participants (*volunteers of Sophia's Kitchen and persons who assist at the four parishes of the Heart of Peoria Catholic Community*) and attendees of the workshops.

Design: Three workshops with content to include four primary mental health diagnosis and key treatment modalities: Anxiety, Depression, Bipolar Disease and Schizophrenia
Synthesis of curriculum from:

- Communities of Compassion
- Pathways to Promise
- National Alliance for Mental Health
- Mental Health Ministries
- Panel of community agency representatives to discuss resources

Process of Proposal Submission for Institutional Review Board and Funding

Collaboration of disciplines and agencies

- Affiliated medical center research committee including College of Nursing
- Local University Institutional Review Board Representatives
- Mental health experts
- Research librarians
- Statistician
- Grant writer to apply for Diocesan grant funding for program
- Grant coordinator for approvals and financing : Fulton Sheen Endowment Fund

Population Served: participants (volunteers of Sophia's Kitchen and persons who assist at the four parishes of the Heart of Peoria Catholic Community) and attendees of the workshops.

Research Method Non-Experimental Mixed Method Research Design

Data collected prior to first educational session and after the third and last educational session

Qualitative: Descriptive Qualitative Study with Semi-structured interviews of participants in a focus group from Leader's Guide of "Let's Talk" . Focus group consisted of 4 volunteers from Sophia's Kitchen prior to and following the intervention.

Quantitative: Perceived Stigma as measured by Attribution Questionnaire (AQ 27) and Error Choice Test (Knowledge Test of Mental Illness) (ECT)

Conclusions

- None of the effects observed were significant at 95% confidence level
- Results suggest the educational seminar had some effect at reducing AQ27 and ECT scores.
- A larger sample size would likely make this effect significant or if more participants were matched from pre to post.
- The church can be a vital resource in reducing the stigma associated with mental illness and become a source of encouragement and inclusion.
- Resources are limited; collaboration essential to develop programs
- Local and national resources are available
- Research essential for contribution of faith communities on health