Social Marketing Campaign for the National Eating Disorder Awareness Week among Utah State University Students

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Introduction

As one of the Healthy Campus 2020 initiatives, college campuses nationwide are encouraged to focus on reducing the proportion of students who report experiencing an eating disorder/problem within the last 12 months from 5.3% to 4.4% (American College Health Association [ACHA], 2015). In a survey of 636 Utah State University (USU) students, 0.6% of respondents reported an eating disorder/problem having a negative impact on their academic performance (ACHA, 2015). Although this data may sound reassuring, recent studies conducted by USU faculty members reported some concerns about body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviors among USU students. Therefore, a needs assessment project was conducted by promoting awareness and knowledge of eating disorders and collecting data with an eating disorder screening test among USU students during the National Eating Disorder Awareness (NEDA) week which was February 22-26th, 2016. The purpose of the research was to increase awareness and access to resources throughout USU’s campus.

Method

Participants
• Current USU students

Procedure
1. Created a social marketing campaign.
2. Advertised the campaign across USU campus:
   • Put physical flyers located in the Fieldhouse, HPER building, and TSC and virtual displays in the ARC.
   • Announced the campaign in Health Education and Promotion classes and the University Ambassador meeting.
   • Posted on the USU Campus Recreation Facebook page, the USU Activities page, the USU activity calendar online, and on various USU Canvas pages.
3. Implemented the social marketing campaign on Students Promoting Eating Disorder Awareness and Knowledge (SPEAK) USU Facebook page by posting diverse media pieces daily to reach all gender, race/ethnicity, and cultural divides.

Topics covered:
• Access to eating disorder screenings
• Media and body image
• Positive self talk
• Healthy exercising
• Resources for help

Pre-survey results: The need for National Eating Disorder Awareness on Utah State University’s campus was first assessed by a pre-survey that was posted on the SPEAK USU Facebook page. The questions on this pre-survey asked the participants about the USU Health and Wellness center, eating disorder screenings, and resources for helping a loved one with eating disorders. The link was posted to the SPEAK USU Facebook Page on Sunday February 21st. Of the 30 responses, the results are found in the following charts.

Social Marketing Campaign Results:
• The top day for posts, reach, and views was Monday February 22.
• The first introductory post had the farthest reach with 367 views.
• The target population was compiled of 80% women with 27% of those women between the ages of 18-24. 22% of these women are located in Logan, UT. The below chart breaks down the reach of the campaign by location, language, age, and gender.

Post-survey results: The link to the survey was posted to the SPEAK USU Facebook Page on Friday February 27th. Only 7 responses were collected and the results are in the following charts.

Results

USU Health and Wellness eating disorder screening results:
• Online version of eating disorder screening created and given to the health and wellness center for future use.

During NEDA week, the Qualtrics survey was posted on the SPEAK USU Facebook page and 28 responses were collected which exceeded the objective of having 20 responses. 26 of the 28 respondents were USU Juniors or Seniors and only 5 of the respondents were male. The results reported:
1. The question that respondents reported they practiced most often was that they compared themselves to other people.
2. The two questions that were reported as things that respondents never do were; eat large amounts of food and then make myself vomit and use laxatives to control my weight.

Evaluation of campaign through an online survey at the beginning and end of the week.

Conclusion

It was concluded that this social marketing campaign was successful due to:
• Achievement of all goals and objectives
• Increased awareness throughout USU students of issues and resources

Limitations included:
• Some of the respondents were health education and promotion students that were encouraged in class to participate.
• This group of students could have started with more of a base knowledge of the issues surrounding eating disorders and resources for help.

Recommendations for future implementation of social marketing campaigns on USU’s campus:
• Social media platforms that reach a more diverse audience be used to disseminate information
• Social marketing be used more often to distribute health information throughout campus and raise awareness

The external validity of this social marketing campaign was not evaluated, but it is believed that due to the success of this campaign, similar social marketing campaigns on USU’s campus or other college campuses would also prove successful when implemented in the same way.

Supervised by Maya Miyairi, USU Professor. Collaboration with USU Health and Wellness center for materials. References available upon request.