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Abstract

Exploring the Perceptions and Adaptability of Behavioral Intervention Teams During COVID-19: A Qualitative Interview Study

by

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When first established, Behavioral Intervention Teams' primary purpose was to reduce and prevent campus violence. More recently, these Teams' focus expanded beyond mitigating on-campus violence to a more general concern with student mental health and well-being (Randazzo & Plummer, 2009; Sokolow et al., 2014, Sokolow & Lewis, 2009, Van Brunt, 2016). BITs are present at nearly all higher education institutions, and studies show that they are a key component for preventing and responding to campus violence (Van Brunt, 2016). Although research has been conducted on the development of campus Behavioral Intervention Teams, there is little qualitative research examining BITs members' perspectives about how they carried out and understood their work (e.g., DeLaTorre, 2011; Gamm, Mardis & Sullivan, 2011; Golston, 2015; Graney, 2011; and VanBrunt, Sokolow, Lewis & Schuster, 2012). However, since these Teams perform an essential role at most institutions, it is important for higher education scholars and practitioners to understand the inner workings of these Teams.

The purpose of this qualitative interview study is to explore the work of a Behavioral Intervention Team at one university from members' descriptions of the Team's purpose, the targets of their efforts, and overall expectations for continued support for the safety of students, faculty, and staff as they carried out their work during the COVID-19 global pandemic, transitioned to remote work and learning and as they continued to carry out their work with this global emergency. Using semi-structured interviews, ten Behavioral Intervention Team members were asked to articulate and reflect on their experiences on the BIT and describe their work during the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Findings revealed that this Team was adaptable and continued to be a resource for the campus community in mitigating violence, even while operating in a virtual setting. Findings also showed that this Team's inner workings were predicated on fluid roles within the Team composition, strengthening collaboration. The results of this study suggest that these Teams are an increasingly integral part of the campus response to student mental health concerns and dynamic and unpredictable events which span beyond immediate threats to campus safety.

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