

at-risk for College Students

Gatekeeper Training Simulation

Results from a National Study at 35 Leading Universities & Colleges in the U.S.

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BACKGROUND

Over 1,350 college students commit suicide each year and according to the American College Health Association almost 6% of students say they have seriously considered suicide during the past year. Gatekeeper training has been established internationally as a critical component of comprehensive suicide prevention strategy. The Suicide Prevention Resource Center defines a “gatekeeper” as “any individual trained to identify persons at risk of suicide and refer them to treatment or supporting services as appropriate.” Engaging the school community in identifying students at risk for psychological distress and referring them to their counseling centers is a crucial task considering that 80% of students who commit suicide are never seen by a counselor.

Between September and December 2010, Kognito conducted an empirical study among 944 students at 35 universities and colleges to assess the efficacy of its online gatekeeper training simulation entitled “At-Risk for University Students”. This report summarizes the results of the study.

“I loved that I could actually interact with the student that needed help. Holding on my own conversation makes me more confident to talk to other students if needed. Plus this is a fun program.”

–Student



WHAT IS AT-RISK?

At-Risk for University Students is a 30-minute online, interactive gatekeeper training simulation designed to prepare university and college students to identify, approach, and refer fellow students exhibiting signs of psychological distress including depression, anxiety, and thoughts of suicide. Unlike any other gatekeeper training program, *At-Risk* engages learners in simulated conversations with student avatars that are fully animated and emotionally responsive.

Through these conversations, educators practice and learn to use open-ended questions, reflective listening and other motivational interviewing techniques to effectively broach the topic of psychological distress with an at-risk student, motivate the student to seek help, and avoid common pitfalls such as attempting to diagnose the problem or giving unwarranted advice. By providing learners with hands-on practice, *At-Risk* increases their confidence and ability to handle similar challenging situations in real life. More information about this course and a demo can be viewed at www.kognito.com/atrisk.

At-Risk for University Students is part of a suite of gatekeeper training simulations developed by Kognito and tailored to the needs of specific groups of learners, including university faculty, college students, families of returning veterans, health providers, and emergency department personnel.

SAMHSA SPRC/AFSP BEST PRACTICES REGISTRY

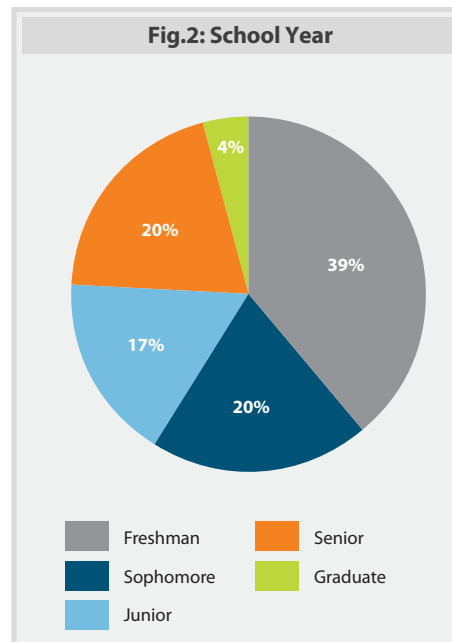
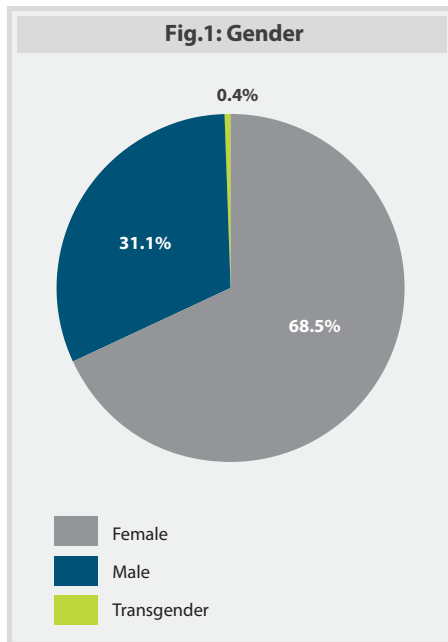
At-Risk for University Students is listed in the Best Practices Registry for suicide prevention programs administered by the Suicide Prevention Resource Center/American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. *At-Risk* is the first and only simulation-based training program to be included in this prestigious national registry.

ABOUT KOGNITO

Kognito Interactive is an award-winning developer of online role-playing simulations where users build interpersonal skills and learn to effectively manage challenging conversations in the areas of health and behavioral health. Simulations are built using Kognito's proprietary Human Interaction Simulation Platform™ which is based on research in social cognition, neuroscience, and motivational interviewing. The platform enables Kognito to author and deliver virtual practice environments where learners must achieve specific objectives by engaging in simulated conversations with emotionally responsive avatars that possess their own personality and memory. By practicing speaking with realistic avatars, learners can become more confident, motivated, and capable to manage similar conversations in real-life.

STUDY PARTICIPANTS

The study included 944 college students at 35 institutions (5 community colleges, 7 colleges, and 23 universities). Four hundred and three (43%) subjects were assigned to the experimental group and 541 (57%) were assigned to the control group. Sixty-eight percent of participants were women, 31% were men, and one was transgender (.4%). (Fig. 1) The average age of participants was 21.3 and 38% of participants were freshman (Fig. 2). Subjects' gender, age and status as students were similar between the experimental and control groups.



METHOD

Participants in both groups were provided with an online questionnaire that captured responses utilizing a four-point likert scale. The experimental group completed the *At-Risk* training and then responded to the questionnaire while the control group only completed the questionnaire. Subjects who reported previous experience with gatekeeper training or identified themselves as RAs were eliminated from both samples to avoid data skewing.

“As a freshman, I was required to take an alcohol education course online and I think that this course should have been mandatory as well. It helps to reduce the stigma associated with counseling and mental health.” – Student



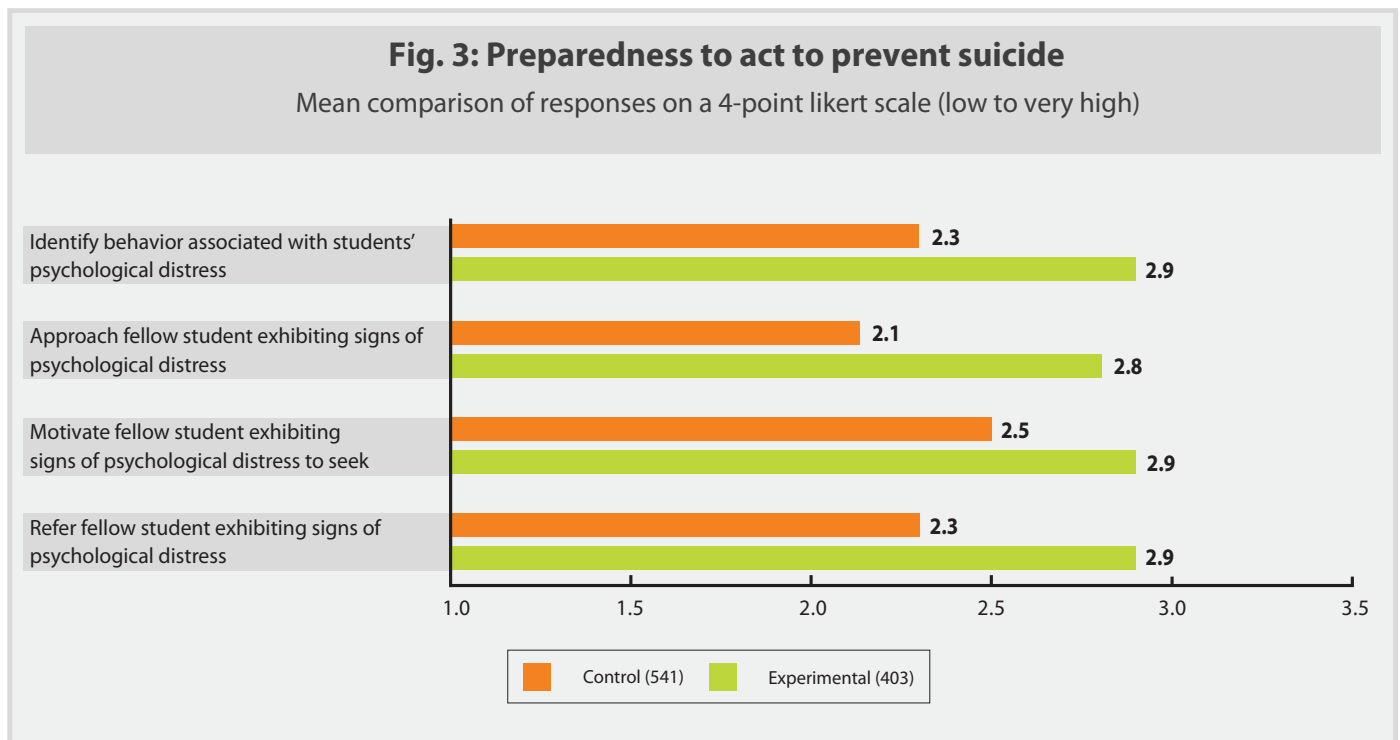
RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Study results were analyzed using independent sample t-tests. Participants' responses in the experimental and control groups were compared on all dependent variables. Results were consistent and **statistically significant at 0.01 level** across demographic characteristics which suggest that the *At-Risk for University Students* program is effective for students regardless of age, gender, and school year as students.

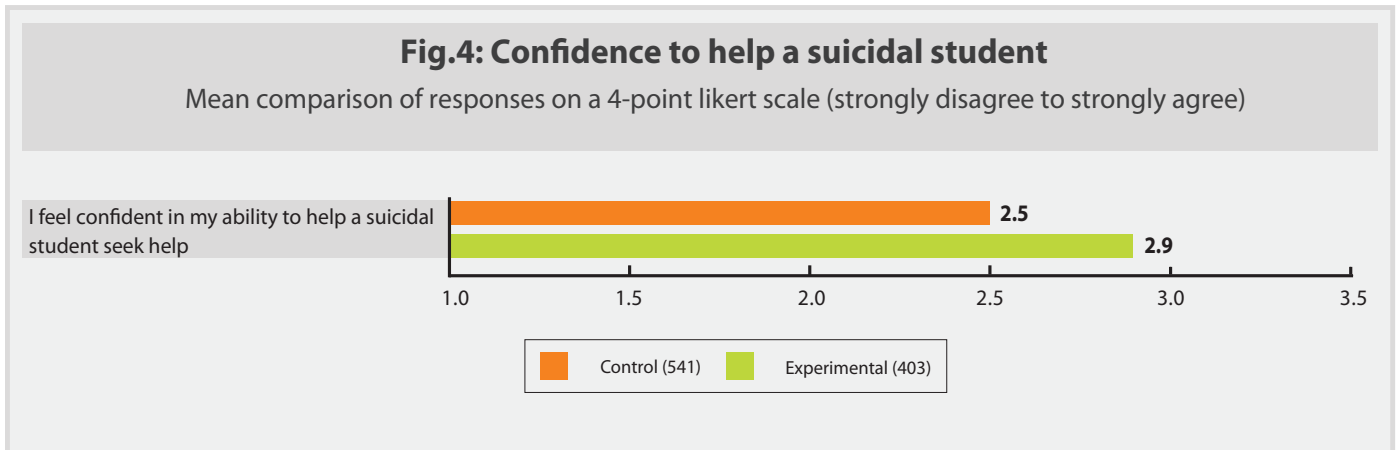
1. SKILLS AND BEHAVIORAL INTENTION

The study found that participants in the experimental group rated **significantly higher** their preparedness to (Fig. 3):

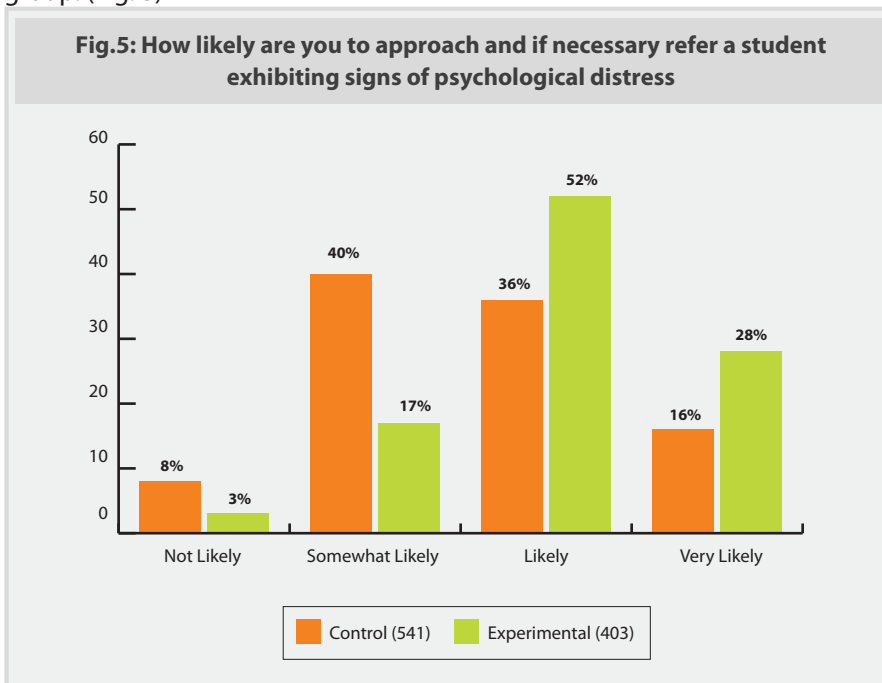
1. Identify behaviors associated with fellow students' psychological distress
2. Approach fellow students exhibiting signs of psychological distress
3. Motivate fellow students exhibiting signs of psychological distress to seek help
4. Refer fellow students exhibiting signs of psychological distress



Participants in the experimental group also reported **significantly higher** levels of confidence in their ability to help a suicidal student seek help. (Fig. 4)



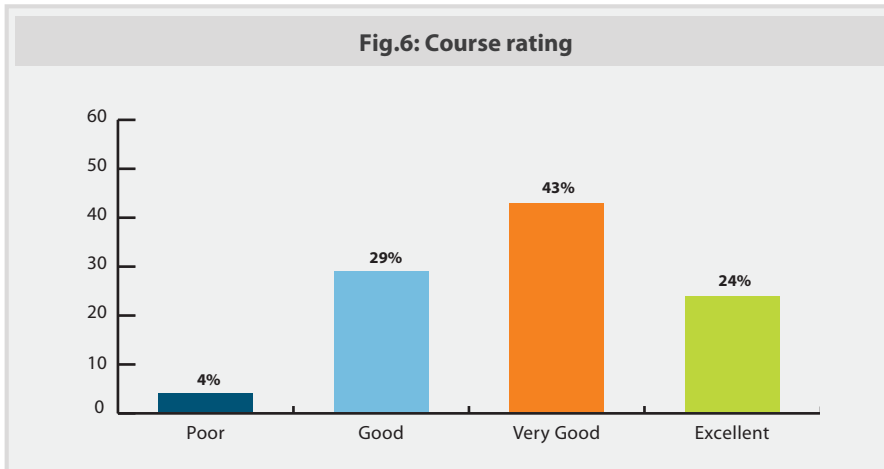
The study also found that students in the experimental group rated **significantly higher** the likelihood that they would approach and, if necessary, refer a student exhibiting signs of psychological distress. In fact, over 80% of students who received the training indicated they were likely or very likely to approach such an at-risk student, compared to 52% in the control group. (Fig. 5)



80% of students who received the training indicated they were likely or very likely to approach and refer an at-risk student.

2. LEARNING EXPERIENCE

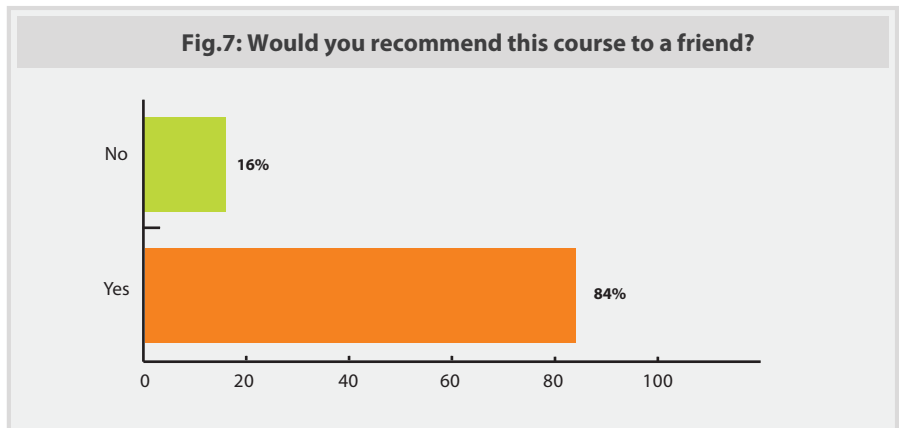
The experimental group was asked to provide input and assessment about the learning experience. Sixty seven percent of participants rated the course as “Very Good” or “Excellent”, twenty-nine percent rated it as “Good”, and four percent as “poor”. (Fig. 6)



96% rated the course as Very Good, Excellent, or Good.

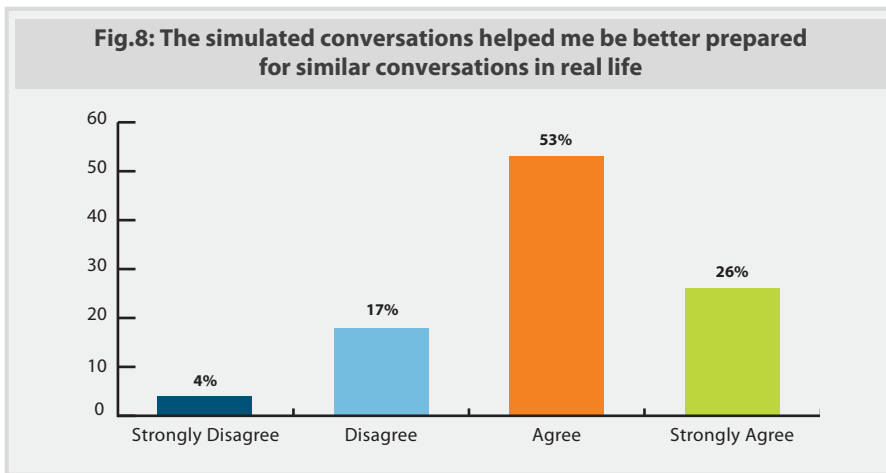
84% said they would recommend the training to their peers.

Eighty-four percent of those who completed the training said they would recommend the course to their peers. (Fig. 7)



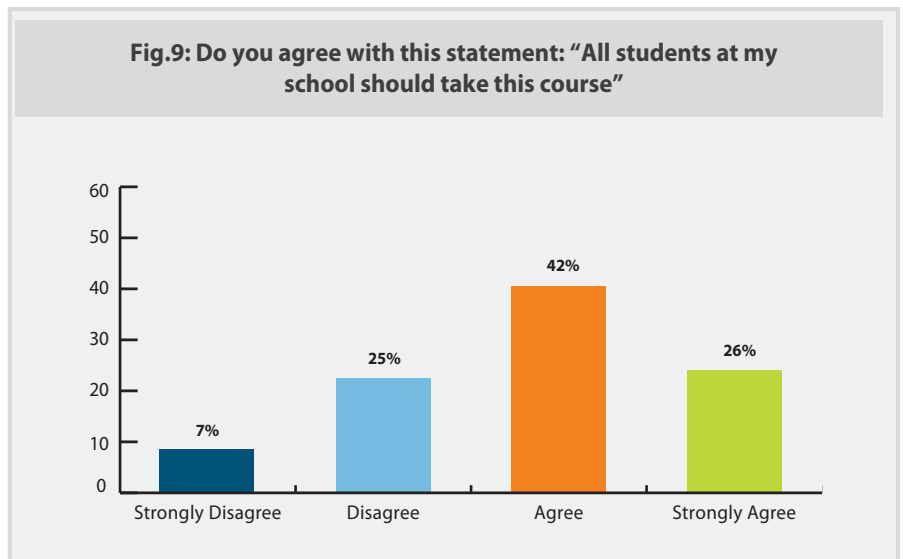
In addition, 79% of participants reported that engaging in simulated conversations with a student avatar exhibiting signs of depression, substance and alcohol abuse, and suicidal ideation was helpful in preparing them for similar conversations in real life. (Fig. 8)

79% of participants reported that engaging in a simulated conversation with an at-risk student was helpful in preparing them for similar conversations in real life.



68% of students agree that all students in their school should take the At-Risk training course.

Finally, 68% of students who completed the training “agree” or “strongly agree” that all students in their school should take the At-Risk course. (Fig. 9)



5. COMMENTS FROM THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP

Students who completed the training appreciated its interactivity, convenience and self-directed nature, advice and coaching, and the realism of characters and conversations, as demonstrated through responses to an open-ended question on the questionnaire for the experimental group about what they liked best about the training. A sampling of their responses is represented below:

“I liked how the course was interactive and didn’t just “talk” at the viewer. It wasn’t boring and kept me interested while teaching me a lot as well.”

“I loved that I could actually interact with the student that needed help. Holding my own conversation makes me more confident to talk to other students if needed. Plus this is a fun program.”

“The avatars had real issues I’ve witnessed personally at different points in my life. It’s refreshing to see the accuracy with which these issues were depicted.”

“I liked the simulated conversations. They appeared real and one could truly relate to each of the characters.”

“It felt more like a game than a task to complete, which made it more enjoyable to learn about how to recognize when I should be concerned for my friends and how to deal with them and encourage them to seek help.”

“As a freshman, I was required to take an alcohol education course online and I think that this course should have been mandatory as well. It helps to reduce the stigma associated with counseling and mental health.”

“I really enjoyed this and will show this to my friends so they can be more aware.”

Images from Training Simulation

In *At-Risk*, students engage in virtual conversations with a student avatar to practice using open-ended questions, reflective listening and other motivational interviewing techniques.



CONCLUSION

The results of the study strongly suggest that:

1. *At-Risk* significantly increases students' ability to identify, approach, and refer fellow students exhibiting signs of psychological distress including depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation
2. Students who complete *At-Risk* are more confident in their ability to help a suicidal student and are significantly more likely to intervene when faced with such a student
3. *At-Risk* is effective regardless of the age, gender, or school year of the student
4. *At-Risk* is a highly engaging learning experience (based on course rating and the percentage of students who would recommend it to their peers)
5. *At-Risk* provides a realistic environment for practice interacting with at-risk students

This study is the first phase of a comprehensive assessment being conducted by Kognito about the *At-Risk* series of gatekeeper training simulations. Future phases will include a comparison of *At-Risk* to other gatekeeper training programs, a longitudinal component to analyze changes in participants' behavior as gatekeepers over time, and an examination of responses to a situational judgment task to measure skill acquisition.

For more information please contact us at 212-675-9234 or info@kognito.com