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**Enhancing suicide risk assessment through the use of visual
metaphor**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

Master of Health Science

in

Psychology

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New Zealand

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QUOTATION

“Knowledge is a processing of piling up facts, wisdom lies in their
simplification”

Martin H. Fisher

“Tell me and I forget. Show me and I remember. Involve me, and I
understand”

A Chinese Proverb

ABSTRACT

Competent assessment and management of the risk of harm is a core competency that mental health professionals are expected to possess. However, despite this expectation, adequate training programs have been lacking for decades and, even when risk assessment training is provided, it is often reported as being insufficient. The literature indicates that training delivery methods often include passive and didactic methods during supervision or seminar sessions. To help enhance the learning of suicide risk factors, some authors proposed a visual metaphor that visually and metaphorically depicts all suicide risk factors. The main purpose of this study was to examine the efficacy of the proposed visual metaphor.

A pilot RCT was undertaken to test several hypotheses, all of which predicted that the visual metaphor would demonstrate superior effects when compared with the conventional textual teaching methods. A group of 22 psychology students were randomized into either a control group (who learnt suicide risk factors via the conventional textual teaching methods) or a treatment group (that learnt the risk factors using the visual metaphor in addition to the conventional textual teaching methods). Memory recall, knowledge transfer, cognitive load, and satisfaction were all tested at the end of the learning sessions.

Independent samples *t* tests indicated that the visual metaphor was effective in improving memory recall and knowledge transfer and reducing the cognitive load. The differences between the two groups' post-learning scores were significant in each of these outcome measures. The treatment group also expressed higher satisfaction levels in comparison to the control group. Overall the visual metaphor of suicide risk factors was found to be superior to the conventional teaching methods in teaching suicide risk

factors to university psychology students. Limitations, implications of this study and directions for future research are discussed.

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