Photovoice Groups on Child and Youth Mental Health: Lessons Learned under the Global Pandemic

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On behalf of the Children and Youth Mental Health (CYMH) Project Team

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Presentation Objectives

1. To examine the strengths and limitations on the use of the Photovoice Group to address child and youth mental health issues under the COVID-19 pandemic context

2. To identify challenges and benefits of conducting a community-university partnership research project in a pandemic context

3. To examine promising practices for child and youth mental health services

Presentation Overview

1. Project Background
2. Objectives of the Photovoice Group
3. Methodology: Participatory Action Research and Photovoice
4. Photovoice Group Design
5. Participants
6. Findings
   a. Feedback from participants and parents
   b. Value of using Photovoice group for youth engagement
   c. Lessons learned from online versus in-person delivery
   d. Recruitment strategies for young people group
7. Discussion and Recommendations
8. Selected References
9. Acknowledgements

Project Background

❖The Photovoice Group Project is part of a three-year community-based children and youth mental health (CYMH) project to engage youth, ages 12 – 17, parents, and community partners in the development of user focused initiatives for the promotion and early intervention of mental health in Canada and China.

❖Three cities were selected in Alberta, Canada.

- Namely, Calgary, Lethbridge and County, and Grande Prairie and County

❖In this presentation, we are presenting the findings and experiences of the six Photovoice Groups completed in Canada between July 2021 and August 2022.
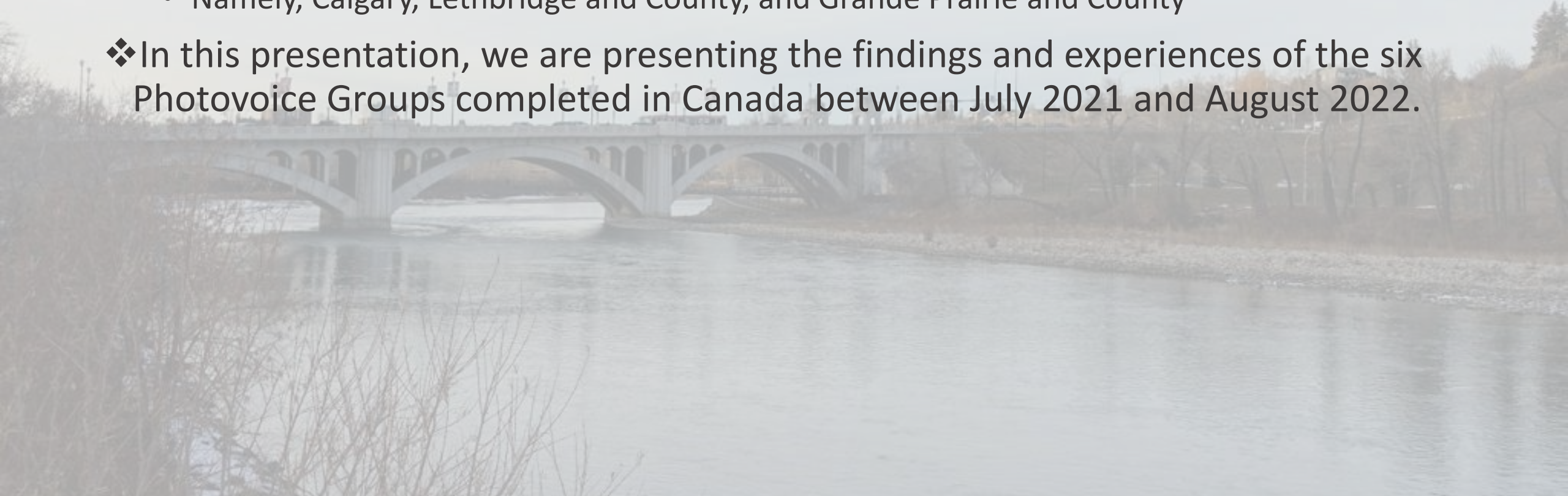
Methodology

- Based upon the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach (Oosterbroek et al., 2021; Shneider, 2012)
- Photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1994; Wang 1999) was used as a tool to engage young persons

Photovoice Group Design

- Seven sessions
- Met weekly for 1.5 hours
- Two facilitators in each group
- Session contents include:

1) Introduction and expectations
2) Introduction to Photovoice and Photography skills
3) Understanding on mental health and wellbeing
4) Challenges on mental health and wellbeing
5) Protective factors for mental health and wellbeing
6) Strategies for healthy development of mental wellbeing
7) Sharing of Photovoice stories

Participants

- Six groups: two intercity online and four face-to-face in three different cities of Calgary, Lethbridge, and County of Grande Prairie, Alberta

- Four groups ages 12 to 14; and two groups ages 15 to 17 (Total n = 44)

- Female (65%), male (25%), and non-binary (10%)

- White/Caucasian (53%), East/South Asians (33%); whereas, others (14%)

- Calgary (48%), Grande Prairie and County (33%); whereas Lethbridge and County (19%)

Main Findings

1. Invaluable feedback by participants and parents
2. Value of using Photovoice group for youth engagement
3. Lessons learned from online versus in-person delivery
4. Recruitment challenges for young people group

Finding 1:
Invaluable feedback by participants and parents

Theme 1.1: Increased mental health knowledge

Theme 1.2: Appreciated the inclusive/engaging environment

Theme 1.3: Enjoyed the sharing/discussion

Theme 1.1: Increased Mental Health Knowledge

Photo by Nadya, Participant 2022

- "I **learned how to manage** my mental health and seek help when I need to." (Participant 27)

- "I've learned about more possibilities for improvement regarding **community resources for mental health**." (Participant 25)

- "To **talk about mental health when I am struggling**" (Participant 4)

- "Ability **to reach out** and talk about mental health" (Parent 4)

Theme 1.1: Increased Mental Health Knowledge

Photo by Gibbs, Participant 2022

- "I **learned how to manage** my mental health and seek help when I need to." (Participant 27)

- "I've learned about more possibilities for improvement regarding **community resources for mental health**." (Participant 25)

- "To **talk about mental health when I am struggling**" (Participant 4)

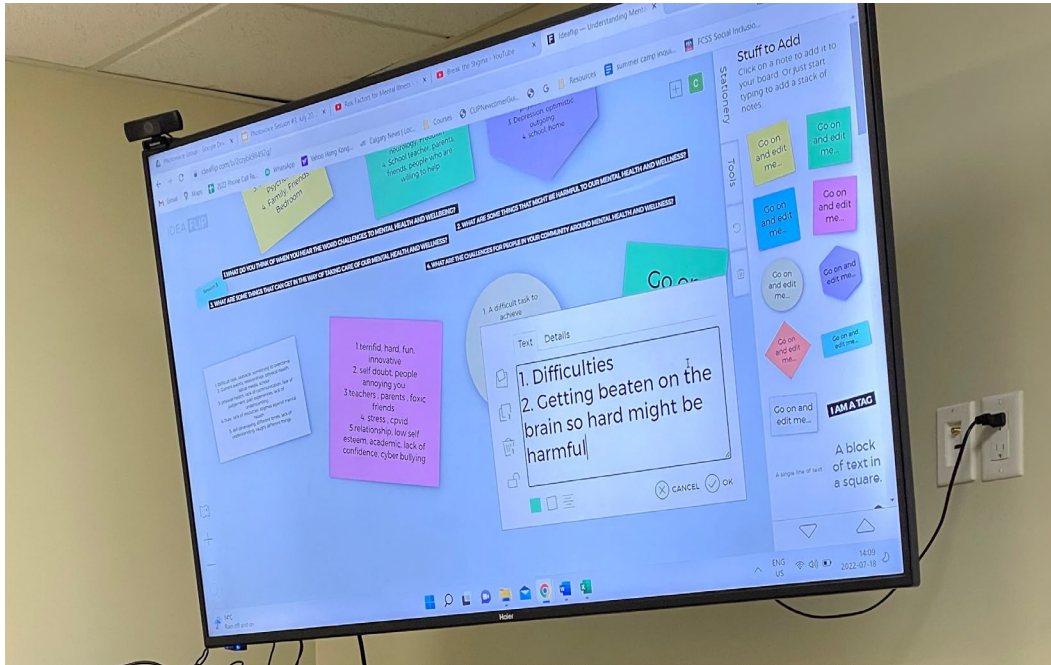- "Ability **to reach out** and talk about mental health" (Parent 4)

Theme 1.2: Appreciated the Inclusive/Engaging Environment

- "The coordinator will make sure that **all of us are included** in the discussion." (Participant 26)

- "I feel like **everyone was welcomed** fairly and **people were comfortable to talk about their problems**." (Participant 31)

- "Everybody was so **respectful** when I shared my opinion on something." (Participant 3)

Theme 1.3: Enjoyed the Sharing/Discussion

One of the Group Sharing 2022

- "The **sharing time**. Because we can get a better understanding and know other people experiences." (Participant 14)
- "I really enjoyed seeing the **different perspectives** from different members of the group." (Participant 28)
- "Being able to talk with other kids and **express their opinions**" (Parent 11)

Finding 2: Value of Photovoice Group

- Theme 2.1: Invaluable empowerment
- Theme 2.2: Broadened perspectives on mental health and wellness

Theme 2.1: Invaluable Empowerment

- "Being able to talk to adults, for them to have a better understanding of youth mental health" (Participant 22)

- "Being able to talk with other kids and express their opinions" (Parent 11)

- "(Became) more confident" (Parent 9)

- "Being able to talk openly about mental health." (Parent 4)

Theme 2.2: Broadened perspectives on mental health and wellness

- "I really enjoyed seeing the **different perspectives** from the different members of the group. There are so many different ways to interpret and respond to the photo prompts, and learning about everyone's answers to those questions really helped **open my way of thinking** (about mental health)." (Participant 28)

- "Participants of East Asian background frequently referenced their roles at home and at school as means of measuring their mental health...We help each one to express his, her (or their) unique story, and **find common themes** that would **bridge experiences and build connection** and understanding within the group." (Facilitator 8)

Finding 3: Lessons learned from online versus in-person delivery

Theme 3.1: Main challenge in building rapport online
Theme 3.2: Recruitment challenges under the COVID-19 pandemic
Theme 3.3: Attendance and Retention Issues
Theme 3.4: Benefits of online group
Theme 3.5: Useful skills for successful groups

Theme 3.1: Main challenge in building rapport online

"Group engagement and rapport was more difficult to build online and that participants had some difficulty managing technological aspects such as uploading photos." (Facilitator 2)

"Understanding how best to share information, create engaging activities over zoom has been a bit challenging, but I think we're figuring it out." (Facilitator 3)

Theme 3.2: Recruitment Challenges

- Offered 12 times/groups, but only six groups completed
  - Online fatigue is an issue
- Number of participants in three out of six groups were small (n = 5-6)
- Only two out the six groups were completed with older youth ages 15 to 17

Photo by Milly, Participant, 2022

Theme 3.3:
Attendance and Retention Issues

- "Maybe a reminder day before meeting. Having a busy schedule I felt like I was forgetting to remind my kids and they missed a class because of that.   Or maybe we should just work on setting reminders" (Parent 11)

- "Hard to commit to in the summer" (Parent 4)

- "A youth decided to discontinue on the group (after 2 sessions) because she got a part-time job." (Facilitator 1)

Theme 3.4: Benefits of online group

- "I like being able to meet with other people (from different cities) around my age to talk about mental health." (Participant 3)

- "In my opinion, the (online) group has provided me with an invaluable opportunity to meet others and learn more. My knowledgebase has grown and I enjoy utilizing the "safe space." (Participant 5)

Things turn better from time to time

Photo by Charlie, Participant 2022

Theme 3.5: Useful skills for successful groups

- Due to the uncertainty and constant changes of social distancing restrictions during the pandemic, *"adaptability and flexibility"* are the two key words shared the most by almost all of our co-facilitators

Finding 4: Recruitment Strategies for Young People Group

➤ Importance of strong community-partners and local connections

➤ Adapting recruitment strategies to overcome constant changes of the pandemic restrictions

➤ Use proper communication channels

➤ Use youth-friendly language, inclusive images on recruitment materials (posters, social media, etc.)

➤ Offer comparable honorarium

Discussion

Were we able achieve what the Photovoice Groups were designed for?

➢ Yes, increase understanding and knowledge on mental health and wellness

➢ Yes, broadened their ways of coping or behaving for healthy development of mental wellness

➢ Yes, developed friendship and strong sense of self by being heard and respected

➢ Yes, provided evidence-informed insight for the use of Photovoice Group to address child and youth mental health and wellness

Recommendations

➢ Face-to-face groups are more welcoming and beneficial for relationship building; however, online groups break isolation and provide accessibility during social distancing restriction

➢ In session activities (including community walk) to work on their photo story more viable than homework assignment as youth already have enough pressure from school work

➢ More discussion time or interactive activities are most appreciated

➢ End session could invite parents/guardians to come sharing the photo stories together

Community walk in one of the groups, 2022

Future Research

➢ Limitations: With reference to the demographics of the participants, they were not representing the demographic make-up of the three selected cities. More efforts should be made to recruit move diverse groups

Questions for the Audience to Direct Future Research:

• Should we offer an honorarium to the participants of the Photovoice Group? What is the rationale behind offering it or not offering compensation? What constraints might service agencies have in offering honoraria to the people they serve?

• Is face-to-face delivery the only option for enhancing social connectedness or are there novel ways we could use online delivery to increase accessibility and provide quality social support?

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Acknowledgements

Thank You!

This picture was taken in a cold winter day in the County of Grande Prairie, Alberta, 2019

For any other question, please email Dr. Dora Tam, Project Lead, at dtam@ucalgary.ca