

Youth Mental Health: Voices from the Community

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Focus of this Presentation

- We share the findings from three community forums hosted in Calgary, Grande Prairie, and Lethbridge, Alberta in 2023. Objective of these forum was to engage youth, parents/guardians of youth, community partners, and individuals interested in youth mental health to share their thoughts for promotion and early intervention on youth mental wellness.

Background

- Despite the large number of young persons who are struggling with mental health issues, treatment programs are not always accessible, relevant, or effective (Malla et al., 2018; Ruff & Harrison, 2020).
- These forums were part of a 3-year community-based participatory action research project on children and youth mental health that was aimed to develop service user-focused initiatives for the promotion of mental wellbeing among children and youth aged 12-17 in Canada and China.

Theoretical framework

We embraced a Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology, which is considered suitable for engaging young people, given its action-oriented nature and emphasis on active involvement of participants in addressing pertinent issues for change, whether at the individual or community level (Bozlak & Kelley, 2015; Oosterbroek et al., 2021).

Research Questions/Methodology

- There were three research questions for the forums including:
 - What prevalent mental health issues need to be addressed?
 - How can services be improved to address those issues?
 - What priorities need addressing in local communities?
- World Café method (Fouché & Light, 2010) was used to facilitate discussions at the forums, which lasted approximately 2.5 hours each.

Findings



A total of 134 participants: 37 youth; 10 young adults; 21 parents/guardians; 54 professionals/community members; and 12 government officials.

Main themes from the findings:

1. High expectations/stress experienced by youth;

"I feel like school can add a lot of stress to people. The pressure to do well in school but also the pressure to do extracurricular activities" -YYC03

2. Impact of technology on mental wellbeing and social connection;

"I would say some negatives would be sleep deprivation, then also like lack of appropriate social skills, impulse control, dysregulation, unsafe internet behaviours, and chat rooms" -YYC02

3. Budget constraints for programs;

"Actually, to add to that, I wonder if there could be a way to make counselling more accessible for youth as well. Like without the expense required for it. Maybe free counselling for young people under 24, you know, something so that they can access that easily without necessarily having to fill out a whole bunch of forms" -Leth03

4. Roles of community and school;

"There needs to be more outreach from the schools and the community organizations, I think there needs to be a better relationship there between the two." -PG03

5. Accessing supports/programs/safe spaces;

"My daughter sees a psychologist outside of school because she is at the bottom of the list at school and doesn't have access to any supports there." – PG02

"They should give more support to people who aren't in CFS (Children and Family Services)" – PG04

6. Comprehensive/inclusive youth mental health plan.

"That's a good point because you can have someone speak on your behalf but it's a lot more powerful coming from the person themselves and they feel more motivated to want to do it if they get first-hand to share their experience." -Leth02

Discussions and Implications

Findings from the Forums support the need for:

1. Development of initiatives for equity-deserving groups.
2. Addressing barriers for prevention and intervention.
3. Enhancing collaboration between schools and community organizations.
4. Managing the impact of technology on mental wellbeing.



Learn more of the CYMH Community Forum

