

Metaphors as an Expression of Wellbeing and Mental Health: Insight from Youth

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Background and Purpose

- As a part of a three-year project focused on community-based mental health for children and youth (CYMH)
- Objectives of the Photovoice project were:
 - to use photo stories to examine socio-ecological protective/supportive; and risk factors that affect youth mental health and wellbeing; and
 - to support youth, develop user-focused initiatives for prevention and intervention.



Research Methodology

- The Participatory Action Approach (PAR) was utilized to collaboratively engage youth in the knowledge generation process (Oosterbroek et al., 2021; Vélez-Grau, 2019).
- Photovoice was used as a PAR tool to take photos and engage in discussions to facilitate change (Wang & Burris, 1994, 1997).



Photo Story Theme Questions

- What does mental health and wellbeing mean to you?
- What are some challenges to mental health and wellbeing?
- What are the strategies for supporting positive mental health and wellbeing?
- What community support that could improve youth mental health and wellbeing?



Participants

- In Alberta, Canada, six photovoice groups ($n=44$) were facilitated during July 2021 and August 2022.
- Each group consisted of 6 to 7 sessions, each lasting 1.5 hours.
- 22 individual and 3 group photo stories were developed

The Children and Youth Mental Health Project Presents

Youth Group: Photo Stories of Mental Wellbeing

We invite youth to share their thoughts on improving children and youth mental wellbeing by creating a story with photos or artwork!
This is a great opportunity to meet new friends and help others!



Ages: 15 - 17 years old

Date: July 4, 2022 – August 15, 2022 (every Monday),
excludes Monday, August 1, 2022 due to statutory holiday

Time: 1:00 pm – 2:30 pm

Location: Diversecities office
1406 Centre Street NE Calgary, Alberta T2E 2R9

Register Today!

CYMH.Coordinator@ucalgary.ca
Louise @ 403-667-1216
(Text or Call)

Each participant will receive a \$150 (i.e., \$25/session) gift card after the completion of 6 sessions.
Need transportation for attending the group? We can help! Let our coordinator know.

SSHRC  CRSH

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Data Analysis

- A three-stage data analysis process (Wang & Burris, 1997) to analyze the data was used:
 - 1. *Selecting*** - choosing photos that look at needs and assets.
 - 2. *Contextualizing*** - determining the significance of images and the underlying meanings therein.
 - 3. *Codifying*** - discerning metaphors that contribute to a deeper understanding of factors influencing youth mental health and wellbeing.





Findings

Four metaphors emerged:

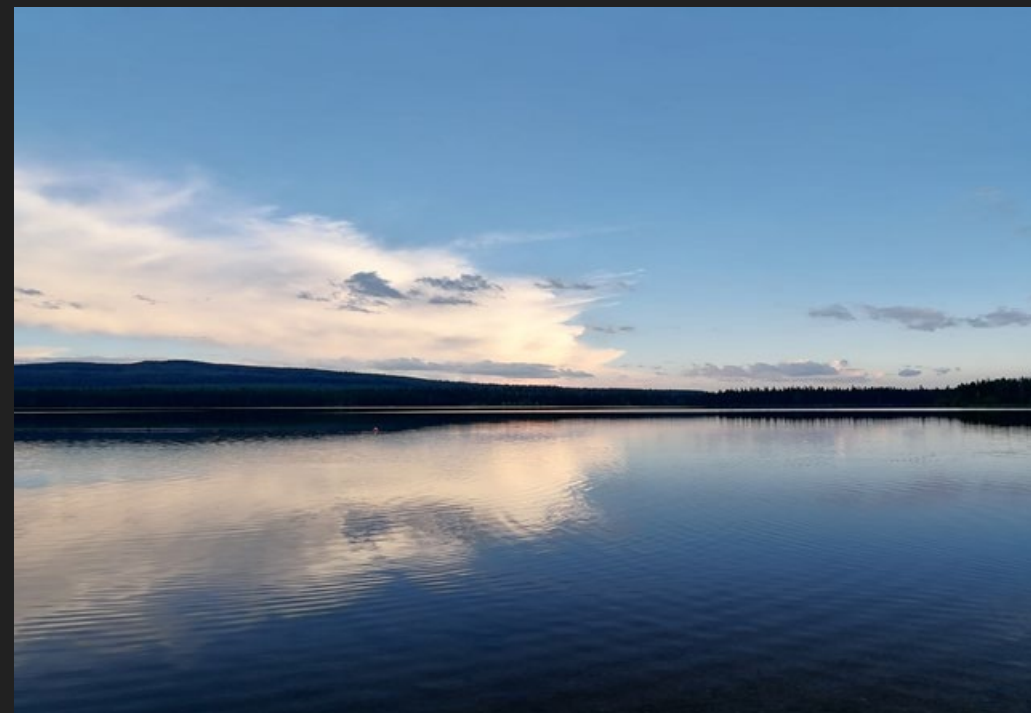
- *Navigating unpredictability and tension;*
- *Impact of external forces;*
- *Fostering growth; and*
- *Unity against adversity.*

Navigating Unpredictability and Tension

(What does mental health and wellbeing mean to you?)



What does mental health & wellness mean to you?



To me, positive and negative mental health & wellness can be a night and day difference.

~Ivan W.

What does mental health & wellness mean to you?

It means like the weather to me.

Sometimes it can be good and sometimes it can be pretty bad too.

It affects my daily life a lot but I cannot control it.

~ C.C.





What does mental health & wellness mean to you?

Mental health has both bad and good side. Just like flowers. They could be in bloom; they could also be wilt.

~Charlie





What does mental health & wellness mean to you

Darkness (mental health problem) will always be a part our lives but it is normal.

~Kristy



Impact of external forces

(What are some challenges to mental health and wellbeing?)





A challenge to my mental health would be my dirtbike being crashed. When something you love is ruined, it can cause a lot of stress and overwhelming feelings that aren't positive towards mental health.



Pixabay (2017)

Widespread changes that affect everyone can have a lasting legacy on one's mental wellbeing if not addressed thoroughly (i.e. economic recession and consequential outcomes).

The vivid imagery around us shapes our worldview, as a result of various characteristics, including color and numbers (i.e. the color red and negative numbers might be associated with unfavorable connotations).

~ R



***"Many things affect whether you
can climb to the top or not"***

What are the challenges to mental health & wellbeing?

People with mental illness may not recover even though they tried. It's because many things could affect the recovery. Ex. when someone has depression, their hormone could affect their brain. Also their personality, their relationship and family and friends.

~ C (#061).

Fostering growth

(What are the strategies for supporting positive mental health and wellbeing?)





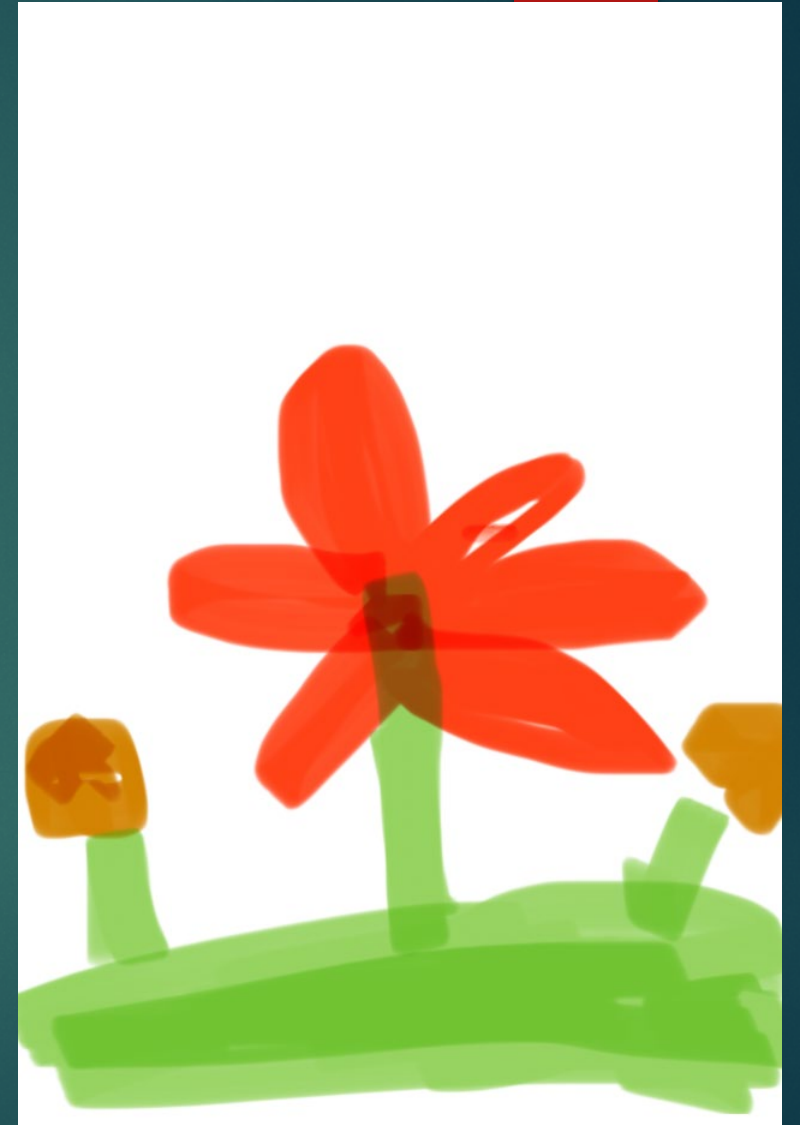
What are the strategies for supporting positive mental health and wellbeing

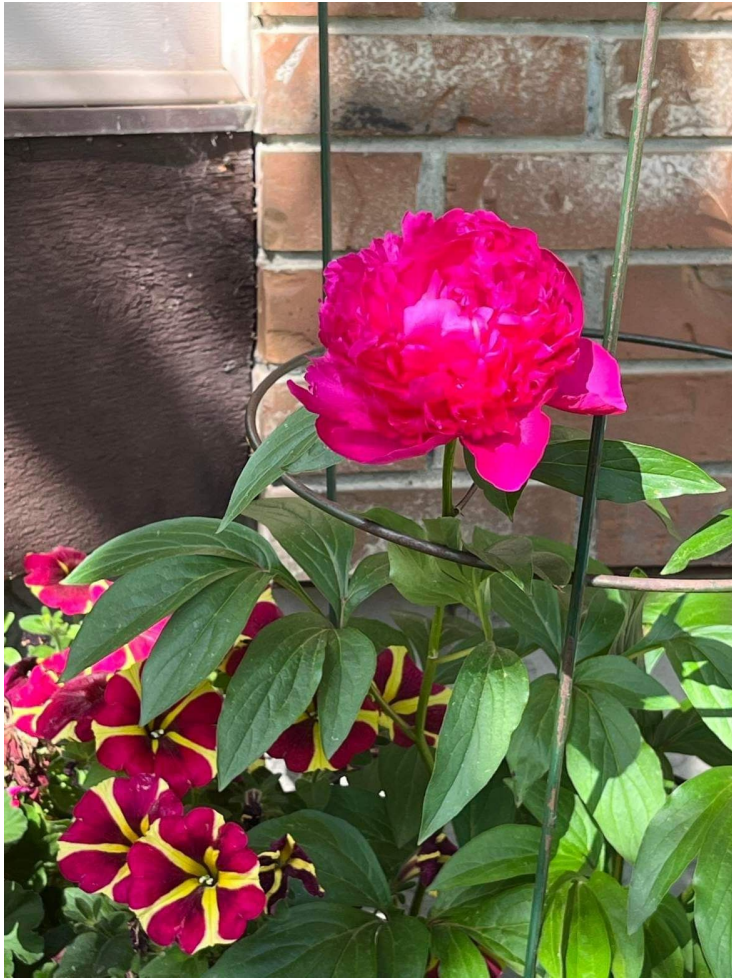
Having a good mindset helps support positive mental health and well being. This wooden bowl is a reference to the greek hellenistic philosopher Diogenes the Cynic. Diogenes is the most well known practitioner of the philosophy known as cynicism. The cynics believed that happiness should be self sufficient and not be dependant on any outside factors. A lot of stress that many people experience today come from societal pressures that tell them what they need to do to be happy.

~E.F.



This big flower in the middle is helping the other flowers to grow and become big flowers. Plants share their nutrients with the other plants around them through the soil. Having support helps us grow. – R.





Flower because if you take care of your mental health then you're going to have a healthy life; but if you don't care about it, you are going to have a bad really suffering life.

~MN

Unity against adversity

(What community support that could improve youth mental health and wellbeing?)





Things turn better from time to time



What would you like to see in your community to support mental health for children and youth?

I hope my community would take a better care of youth's mental health. It would be better if the adult put themselves in the youth's shoes, try to understand the youth, instead of scolding them without giving a youth to explain themselves.

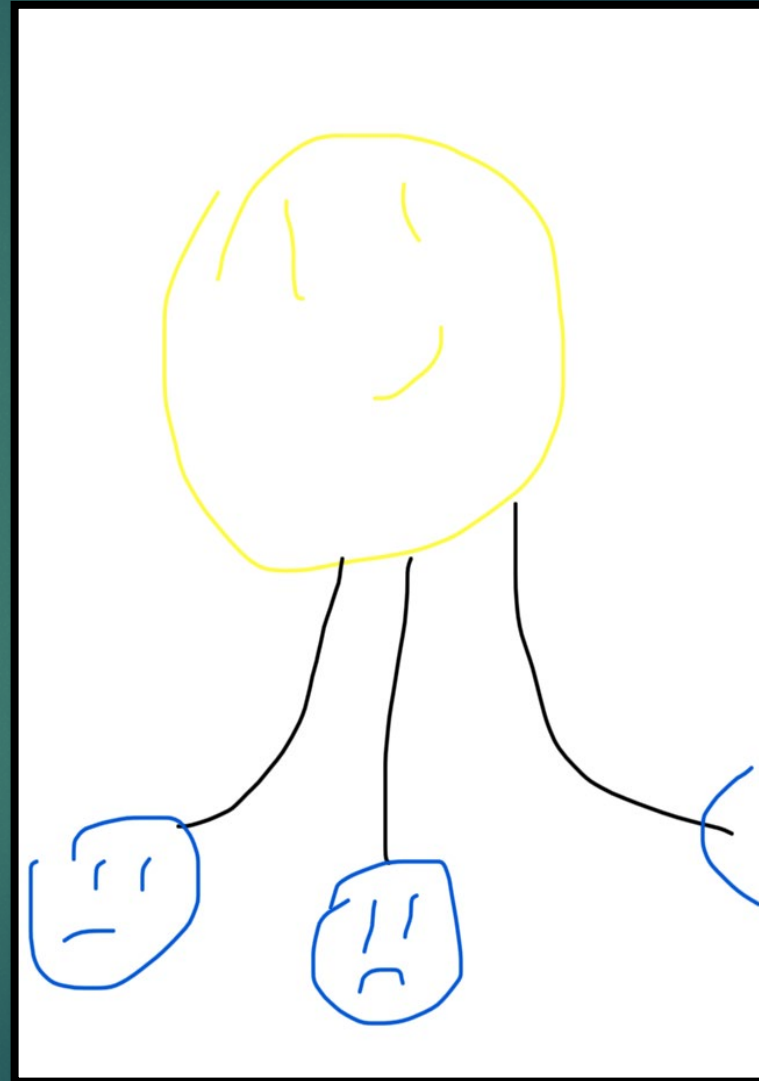
~ C (#061).



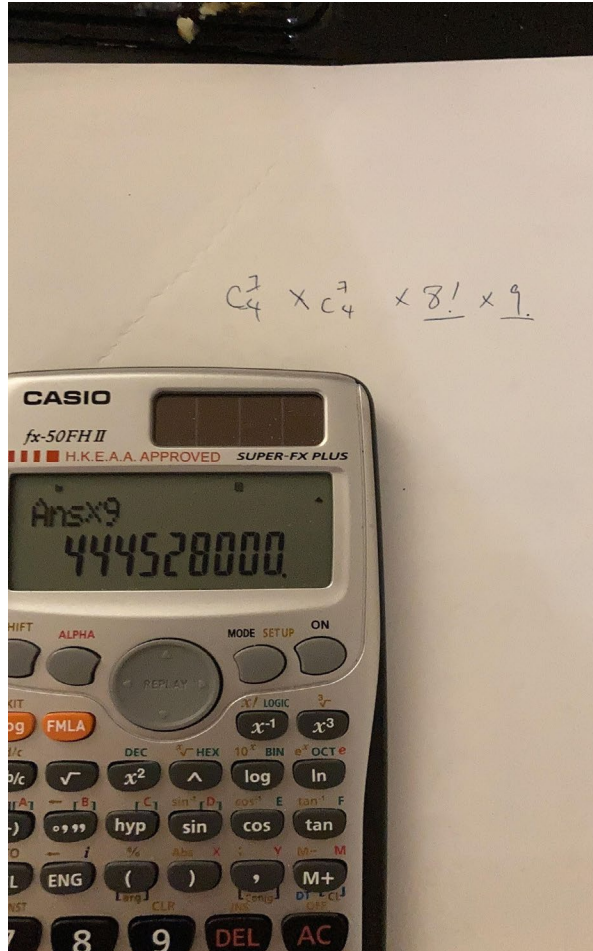
I took a picture of someone pushing a stroller with a baby in it because it is like a community person is coming to help you.

~R.K.

I have a happy balloon lifting up a sad balloon which is like people helping each other during hard times. – R.



What would you like to see in your community to support mental health for children and youth



Help children and youth develop self-esteem, so that they feel good about themselves:

- Show lots of love and acceptance.
- Praise them when they do well. ...
- Ask questions about their activities and interests.

~ C (#067).

Conclusions and Implications

- The findings of this study provide insight on how metaphors are a powerful tool for youth to express complex emotions and experiences associated with mental health and wellbeing.
- ***Practice Implications*** - It is crucial to recognize the importance of **early intervention** (such as support needed to alleviate pressures that youth face), to prioritize mental health support, and building supportive communities that prioritize mental wellness.
- ***Educational Implications*** – It is important for social work educators to be knowledgeable **and sensitive on different ways of expressions/communications**. Reflected from this study, youth from different cultures express their thoughts or challenges in non-directive ways such as using metaphors.

Select References

- Oosterbroek, T., Yonge, O., & Myrick, F. (2021). Participatory action research and photovoice: Applicability, relevance, and process in nursing education research. *Nursing education perspectives*, 42(6), E114-E116.
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- Vélez-Grau, C. (2019). Using Photovoice to examine adolescents' experiences receiving mental health services in the United States. *Health Promotion International*, 34(5). <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/day043>
- Wang, C. & Burris, M.A. (1994) Empowerment through Photovoice: Portraits of Participation. *Health Education Quarterly*, 21(2), 171-186
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Thank You!



Gratitude goes to all
CYMH project assistants,
practicum students, and
community partners.

For more Information:

<https://www.childrenandyouthmentalhealth.com/>

Or, email Dr. Dora Tam at dtam@ucalgary.ca

