Co-creating science communication and research with young people about their mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Introduction

An opportunity for citizen science to improve young people's mental health

- Young people's mental health was challenged during COVID-19
- Young people are rarely involved as active co-producers of knowledge about and research into solutions to their challenges
- Through citizen science and co-creation with young people about their mental health and coping strategies, we gave them a voice

Aims

- To gain a better understanding of young people's mental health issues during COVID-19 lockdowns
- Based on this knowledge, to co-create coping strategies and related communication materials with and for young people

Results

Value creation for participants

Participants reported that their engagement provided them with the opportunity for:

- **Self-reflection:** to reflect on their own lives during the lockdowns and how they could make changes in their lives to support better well-being.
- **Social reflection:** to share their experiences and be inspired by their peers.
- **Recognition and contribution:** to be heard and contribute with a unique perspective by, for, and on youth.
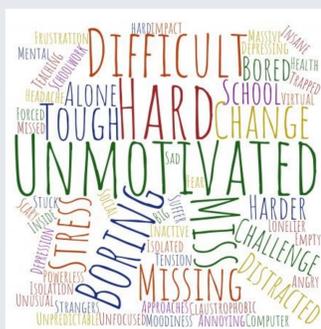
Output for the research project

Activities resulted in output for the research project:

- **5 themes describing the changes** young people experienced during the pandemic: social contact, online education, structure in everyday life, mental health, leisure & hobbies.
- **Co-creation of coping strategies** for young people to deal with the changes
- **Input for communication products:** animation video, leaflet to stimulate conversations at schools and blogpost about coping strategies.

Challenges

Challenges for researchers facilitating participation and co-creation were identified: **time-consuming** activities, developing **strategy and methods for engagement**, **co-creation in a hurry** during lock-downs, and ensuring **diversity** of participants.

Who & How

Participants

As part of the project "Giving young people a voice", we involved 150 young people aged 16-20 in 3 workshops in Denmark during the COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020-2021. Participants were current or former students from The Academy for Talented Youth (ATY), an extra-curricular activity for high school students.

Mixed methods were used for documentation, incl. written reflections (n=150), questionnaire (n=45), interviews (n=12), Miro-board and observation notes.

| Written reflections Webinar Spring 2020 n=150 | Analysis ATY Summer Camp Summer 2020 n=79 | Co-creation workshop Winter 2021 n=70 | Analysis Spring 2021 |

Co-researcher collaboration with young people

To enhance the project and communication, we engaged in a close collaboration with 5 young ATY non-scientists (age 18-20) as co-researchers in planning and execution of a co-creation workshop, data collection, analysis, and dissemination.

"Someone from the outside can easily see our troubles and can be like this: 'Here is the solution for that'...

...but you are more able to take it into account when it is other young people who have it like this, and we know the problems better, so we know what it is about."

Workshop participant

Outcomes

Leaflets

co-creation workshop

video production

illustrations

Board Game

video – mental health advice

Summer camp

illustrations

Conclusion

Value creation as well as challenges

Engagement and co-creation activities with young people resulted in **value creation** for the young participants and the research project.

We also experienced **challenges** that need to be considered in future projects, incl. evaluating long-term effects and value creation, managing time-consuming activities, and how to ensure more diversity among participants.

Recommendations

- Create a **setting for social conversations** between young people
- **Use conversation starters** like games or other media to initiate discussion
- Use **young people as facilitators** to support a safe and equal dialogue
- **Plan co-creation activities** to contribute to research and deliver concrete outputs
- **Ensure diversity** among the participants
- Create **visual, short, and funny** communication
- **Listen and learn**
- **Prepare to spend extra time**

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