

# Engaging Young People as Co-researchers in Mental Health Research during the COVID-19 Crisis: *Ethical and Practical Reflections*



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## Introduction

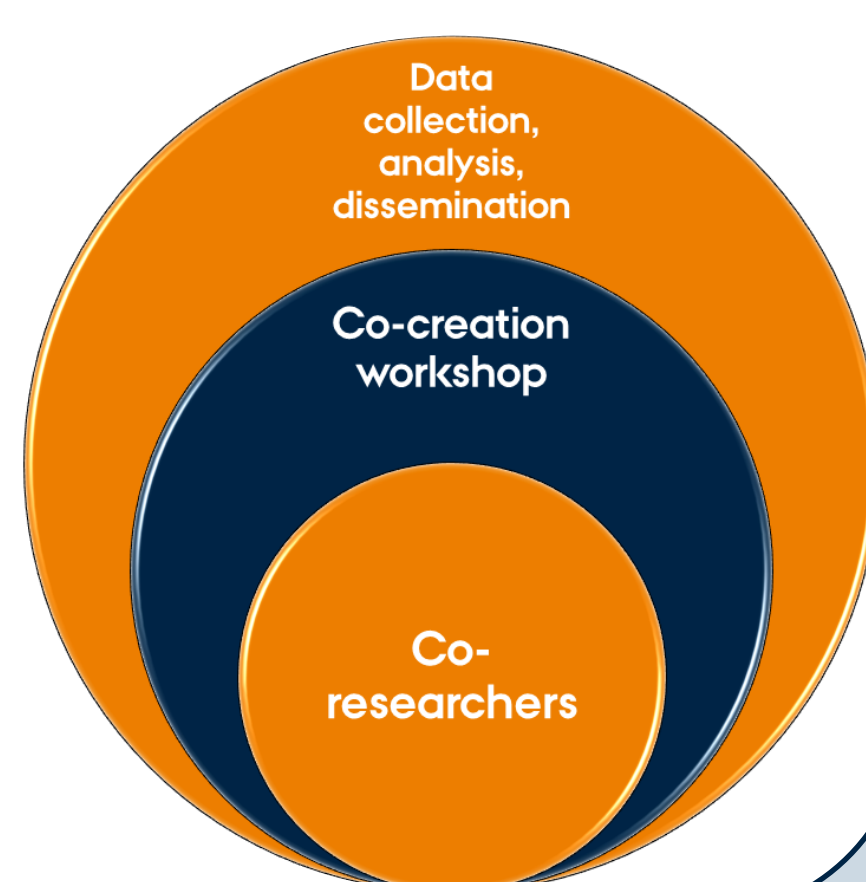
- ◆ Young people's mental health was challenged during COVID-19
- ◆ Co-creation with young people about their mental health and coping strategies
- ◆ Co-researcher collaboration with young people would have benefits for all involved

## Aim

- ◆ Explore the benefits and challenges of a co-researcher collaboration for both the young individuals and the research project
- ◆ Gain a better understanding of young people's mental health and co-create coping strategies and communication materials

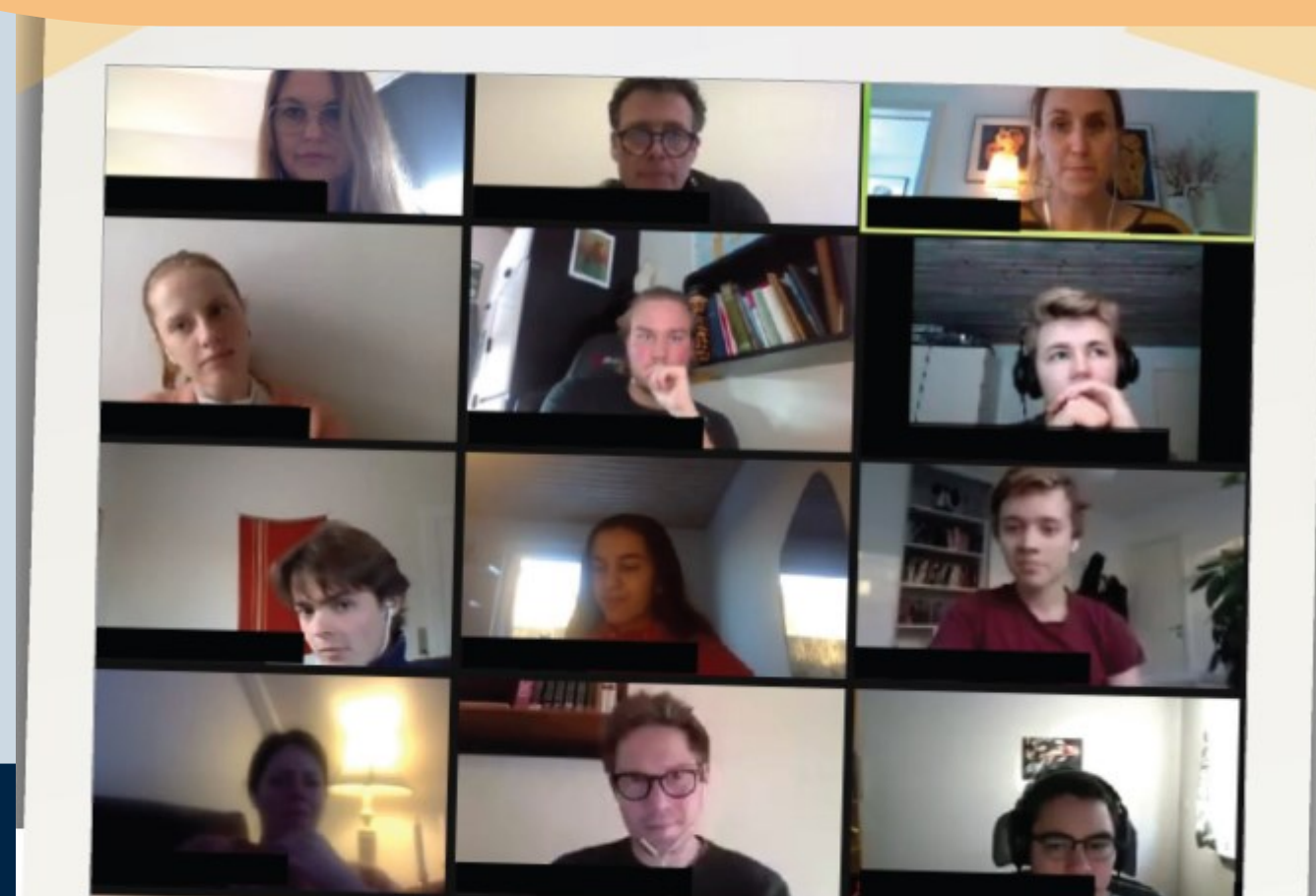
## Methods

- ◆ **Participants:** 5 young non-scientist co-researchers recruited from the Academy for Talented Youth, Denmark, an extra-curricular high school activity (age 18-20)
- ◆ **Involvement:** The young co-researchers participated in the planning and execution of a co-creation workshop about young people's lives and challenges during COVID-19, incl. facilitation, data collection & analysis, dissemination, and publication
- ◆ **Evaluation:** Qualitative interviews with co-researchers, joint evaluation workshop, and researcher survey



*"One of the informants is my really good friend. We have seen each other a lot these past six months, and this collaboration has been a topic of conversation every single time. We have really been able to sit and talk about it for hours because we are so excited about it.*

*And people who don't know me or her at all or anything about the project have been coming over and started to share feelings and experiences related to covid. All of a sudden people were actually telling really crazy stuff. It has just been a whole new way of getting to know people."*



Co-researcher

## Conclusion

### Value creation as well as challenges

- ◆ In our study we found that the co-researcher collaboration provided value creation for the research project as well as for the co-researchers
- ◆ However, we also learned that it poses several challenges to be considered and, if possible, mitigated in future co-researcher projects
- ◆ Some aspects should also be further utilized, for example the young co-researchers' unique skills and relationships with their peers

## Results - Benefits

### For the young co-researchers:

- ◆ Input for reflections about their own life and mental health
- ◆ New skills and an insight into research processes
- ◆ Network and community with other young people and researchers
- ◆ Spin-off: establishment of association "Being Young", incl. collaboration on mental health game for young people

### For researchers:

- ◆ Input for research about young people's challenges and coping strategies during COVID-19 lockdowns
- ◆ Communication with young people enhanced by co-researcher facilitation:
  - Facilitated equal and safe dialogue with young participants
  - Interviews more at eye level with interviewees
- ◆ Co-creation of data collection, analysis, interpretation & dissemination of results
- ◆ Communication products & a spin-off collaboration about card game



## Results - Challenges

### Observed by young co-researchers:

- ◆ Need for a more systematic plan for meetings, activities and deadlines
- ◆ More communication with researchers: better overview, follow-ups and ongoing feedback
- ◆ More involvement of the co-researchers and focus on their unique contribution

### Observed by researchers:

- ◆ Time-consuming: Involving young co-researchers is a time-consuming venture - strategy, planning, meetings, skill building and feedback
- ◆ Insecurity about what could be expected from the co-researchers (time/support/deadlines)

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## Recommendations For co-researcher collaborations

- ◆ Matching of expectations at the beginning
- ◆ Skill-building - on both sides
- ◆ Focus on communication: Regular meeting schedule, use of communication tools, regular feedback
- ◆ Regular formative evaluation during the project is important
- ◆ The social dimension: Remember to have fun!