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## **Youth Participatory Action Research in Reference to Mental Health: A Scoping Review Protocol**

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# Youth Participatory Action Research in Reference to Mental Health: A Scoping Review Protocol

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## INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organization, mental health is a “state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community (WHO, 2022). It is estimated that each year, one in five youth will experience a mental health challenge (*About Mental Health*, 2024). According to the American Psychiatric Association, approximately 50% of mental illness begins by the age of 14, and 75% begins by the age of 24 (“Mental Health Conditions,” n.d.). Over 60% of teens in the United States who experience mental health challenges don’t seek help, and suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death for this age group (*Key Substance Use*, 2021). During 2021, 40% of Mississippi’s adolescents reported feeling sad or hopeless, and 26.3 % reported their mental health was most of the time or always not good (*2022 MH-CLD Annual Report*, n.d.; Wilcox et al., 2023).

Mental Health Literacy (MHL) refers to the knowledge, attitudes, and help-seeking skills needed to maintain and foster good mental health (Brown Epstein, 2022). There are five critical components of MHL: 1) understanding how to obtain and maintain good mental health, 2) understanding mental health disorders and their treatment, 3) addressing stigmatized attitudes related to mental disorders, 4) enhancing help-seeking efficacy, and 5) enhancing help-seeking attitudes (Chao et al., 2020). Mental health literacy is at the root of what adolescents need to have the knowledge and skills to promote good mental health and prevent the onset of mental disorders (Nobre et al., 2021). With mental health concerns on the rise across the country it is imperative to improve the knowledge teens have about mental health, decrease the stigma associated with mental health issues, and support help-seeking behaviors to empower teens (Marinucci et al., 2022).

Adolescence is an important time period for enhancing mental health behavior and wellbeing (Seedaket et al., 2020). During this timeframe, youth are malleable and become active in their own developmental process, making it an important time for them to develop beliefs such as their own attitude about mental health (National Academies of Sciences et al., 2019).

Patient-centered research and community-based participatory research (CBPR) have been found to be valuable research methods for engaging members of their particular area to bring forward unrepresented voices (Collins et al., 2018). At the root of all participatory action research is the process by which researchers and participants work together to examine a social

problem and change it for the better (Wadsworth, 1998). Youth-led Participatory Action Research (YPAR) grew from these methodologies and allows youth voices to be heard (Collins et al., 2018). YPAR is an approach that engages young people and researchers as equitable partners in each phase of the research process—empowering youth to drive change in their communities and social systems (Ozer et al., 2022).

YPAR positions youth as experts and primary investigators in the research process and aims to increase the power of youth to improve the conditions in different settings relevant to their lives, such as schools, neighborhoods, or health systems (Ozer et al., 2022). This methodology has been shown to improve and support adolescent self-efficacy and civil engagement, as well as lead to mental health literacy in the community (Anyon et al., 2018). YPAR can be conceptualized with three fundamental principles: inquiry-based, participatory, and transformative. The topics of investigation are based on the youth's lived experiences and concerns that require their participation as collaborators in the design, methodology, and education process (Lindquist-Grantz & Abraczinskas, 2020). YPAR is a methodology that empowers youth to make improvements in their own lives and their community (Anselma et al., 2020). This makes it a great resource for introducing programs and interventions focused on mental health and health literacy. YPAR has been used in a number of different public health-related intervention areas, such as air pollution, gender-based dating violence, bullying, access to healthy foods, and physical activity (Garcia et al., 2014; Ozer & Piatt, 2018). However, little is known about how it has been used in MHL. YPAR could be especially valuable in MHL because it can help identify the gaps in knowledge teens have about MHL. It has the possibility of directing future research and intervention development to address the youth mental health crisis the United States. A scoping review, originally created by Arksey & O-Malley (2005), is a type of evidence synthesis that follows a systematic approach to identify and map the breadth of evidence available on a particular topic. They can clarify key concepts and identify key characteristics or factors related to a concept in the literature (Munn et al., 2022). A preliminary search of MEDLINE, PROSPERO, the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, Campbell Collaboration, and *JBI Evidence Synthesis* was conducted and no current or underway systematic reviews or scoping reviews on the topic were identified.

This scoping review aims to explore and assess the extent of the literature on how Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) has been used to explore mental health literacy in adolescence/teens.

## **Review Question**

This review seeks to see how YPAR has been utilized to explore MHL among adolescents, what outcomes have come from utilizing YPAR in interventions with adolescents and what the current gaps in the literature are regarding the utilization of YPAR to examine MHL with adolescents. A PCC framework (participants/population, construct, context) will be applied to the review (Peters et al., 2015).

## **Keywords**

Youth participatory action research; Participatory action research; Community participatory action research; Mental health literacy; Mental health; Teens; Adolescents; High school students

## **Inclusion Criteria**

### ***Participants***

Studies focused on YPAR related to mental health among adolescents/teens. Studies that focus on any other age group will be excluded.

### ***Concepts***

Studies focused on interventions aimed at exploring mental health and mental health literacy from a YPAR approach will be included. Studies that do not use a participatory action research method will be excluded.

### ***Context***

Studies conducted in any settings, including after-school, community settings, and school-based classrooms, in the United States. Studies outside of the United States will be excluded.

### ***Types of sources***

This scoping review will consider both experimental and quasi-experimental study designs including randomized controlled trials, non-randomized controlled trials, before and after studies and interrupted time-series studies. In addition, analytical observational studies including prospective and retrospective cohort studies, case-control studies and analytical cross-sectional studies will be considered for inclusion. This review will also consider descriptive observational study designs including case series, individual case reports and descriptive cross-sectional studies for inclusion.

## **Methods**

The proposed scoping review will be conducted in accordance with the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) methodology for scoping reviews (Peters et al., 2022). The protocol will be developed in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) and deposited in the University of Mississippi's open-access online repository, eGrove.

## **Search Strategy**

An initial limited search of the Scopus, Pubmed, PsycINFO, and ERIC databases, was undertaken to identify articles on the topic. The text words contained in the titles and abstracts of relevant articles, and the index terms used to describe the articles were used to develop a complete search strategy. The search strategy will include youth participatory action research, participatory action research, community participatory action research, mental health literacy, mental health stigma, mental health education, teens, adolescents, and high school students. The complete search string for each database will be included as an Appendix.

The search strategy, including all identified keywords and index terms, will be adapted for each included database and/or information source. The reference list of all included sources of evidence will be screened for additional studies.

### **Study/Source of Evidence Selection**

Following the search, all identified citations will be imported into the reference management software Zotero and duplicates will be removed. Titles and abstracts will then be screened by two or more independent reviewers for assessment against the inclusion criteria for the review, following a pilot test. The full text of potentially relevant sources will be retrieved. The full text extraction selected citations will be assessed in detail against the inclusion criteria by two or more independent reviewers. Reasons for exclusion of sources of evidence at full text review will be recorded and reported in the scoping review. Any disagreements that arise between the reviewers at each stage of the selection process will be resolved through discussion and reference to the inclusion criteria set in the protocol. The search results and the study inclusion process will be reported in full in the final scoping review.

### **Data Extraction**

Data will be extracted from the sources identified for inclusion in the scoping review by two or more independent reviewers using a data extraction tool developed by the reviewers. A draft extraction checklist tool is included in the Appendix. The draft extraction tool will be utilized and may be modified as necessary during the process of extracting data from each included evidence source and any modifications will be detailed in the scoping review. The data extracted will include the author's name, title, and publication year; study design; YPAR strategy; characteristics of the study population; study location; intervention characteristics and assessments of MHL; and funding source. With the aim of this review to examine the extent of current literature regarding YPAR with MHL in adolescence/teens; specifically, extracted data will include a determination of whether collected data with the population is in alignment with the aim are included in the study. Any disagreements that arise between the reviewers at each stage of the selection process will be resolved through discussion and reference to the inclusion criteria set in the protocol. If necessary, authors of papers will be contacted to request missing or additional data, where required.

The results will be displayed in descriptive tables detailing the variables of interest. Frequency counts and percentages describing the characteristics of the participants; study design; YPAR strategy; characteristics of the study population; study location; intervention characteristics and assessments of MHL will be utilized to map the existing research, summarize what is known, and identify knowledge gaps about YPAR use related to MHL programs. Insights gained through this review will provide guidance for future research efforts in intervention development in MHL programs for teens.

### **Data Analysis and Presentation**

Data will be reviewed for categorization within YPAR strategies and a summary table of literature will be provided in the results. Findings related to each component of the review question will be organized into a table for reporting.

## **Funding**

No external funding will be utilized to conduct this review.

## **Conflict of Interest**

The author declares there are no conflicts of interest.

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