Through a Child’s Eyes: How Visual Media Can Be Used to Engage Northern Aboriginal Youth in Knowledge Exchange Activities for Community-Driven Health Research

Community-Driven Research

CANHelp (Canadian North Helicobacter pylori) Working Group

- Addresses community concerns about health risks from *H. pylori* infection

- Addresses health authorities’ need for information to improve clinical management of *H. pylori* infection and to inform public health policy related to *H. pylori* infection
Helicobacter pylori

- *H. pylori* infection is often asymptomatic
- It causes inflammation of the stomach lining; when this persists, it can lead to peptic ulcers and, in rare instances, stomach cancer
- Often acquired in childhood, most likely through direct contact with digestive fluids
Fort McPherson, NWT

- Located on the Peel River at 67°N and 134°W, approximately 98 km north of the arctic circle
- Hamlet had a population of 755 people circa 2015
- Most residents are Gwich’in Dene (Athabaskan) First Nations
- A ‘remote’ community accessible most of the year by road or by air
Rationale for Engaging Youth

• Youth are underrepresented as informants in both ethnographic studies and community health research

• Likely due to longstanding misconception that children lack capacity to be engaged as active research participants
Two Approaches for Engaging Youth in Visual Research

• Drawing-Based Logo Design Project
  • Children from Fort McPherson submitted drawings for a logo design contest to visually represent *H. pylori* infection and their community

• Photovoice Project
  • Students in grades 7-12 at Chief Julius School participated in a photovoice project to capture the social impact of *H. pylori* infection in their community
Drawings from Fort McPherson

- Drawing as a medium to engage youth is well established in several applied areas of research.

- Symbols and recurrent themes in the visual content represent the artists’ knowledge, values, and perception of *H. pylori* infection within their community.
Photovoice Images from Fort McPherson

• Photovoice has been widely used across numerous disciplines

• The flexibility inherent to this approach allows the photographer to co-determine the foci of the project with the researcher

• Combination of visual and textual media facilitates knowledge exchange
Analysis of the Visual Materials

• Visual media is an open-ended, relatable approach for engaging youth

• Drawings and photovoice media of youth participants reflect concerns and ideas about *H. pylori* infection similarly expressed by adult community members

• Analysis shows that even young children can make important contributions to community health research
Benefits of Visual Approaches to Research with Youth

• Drawing facilitates the communication of ideas that children may not be capable of or comfortable expressing verbally.

• Drawing facilitates deeper and broader responses as the process helps the artist to process and organize their understanding of the subject matter itself.

• A familiar enjoyable form of expression, visual media breaks down barriers that have tended to limit inclusion of youth to the role of research subject rather than participant or even partner.
Benefits of Visual Approaches to Research with Youth

- 41% of Fort McPherson residents are <25 years old
- Engaging youth in research provides important insights and builds positive relationships for the future
- Educational opportunities build capacity and enhance informed decision making
Images Reach Diverse Audiences

- I have used these drawings and photos as primary data sources for research and knowledge translation

- I have also used both kinds of images for knowledge exchange between various stakeholders

- Knowledge exchange has also been extended to further engage broader audiences
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