BRAINSNAP:
Understanding mental distress and help seeking in young people from a migrant background in Australia through photo-interviewing

AIMS
1. Learn how young migrants describe and experience mental distress.
2. Learn how young migrants manage mental distress.
3. Identify any gaps in, and access barriers to, mental health services for young migrants.
4. Evaluate the use of photo-interviewing as a research method in transcultural mental health.

CONTEXT
Young people in Australia generally do not utilise mental health services despite having high rates of self-reported mental disorders (Aust Bureau Stats 2007). Those from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background may be even less likely to seek help for mental distress (Rickford 2014, Stolk 2008).

Individual migration experiences and cultural understandings of distress can behave as barriers to seeking assistance from mental health services (Kleinman 1978). Research into how this population group experiences, understands, and manages mental distress has been limited.

The use of an inductive qualitative research method can provide CALD young people with opportunities to explore and express personal lived experiences of mental distress. Incorporating a visual process into this method can potentially encourage participant engagement and the expression of in-depth life narratives from their own perspectives (Harper 2002, Silvast 2008).

METHOD
- Young people born in a non-English speaking country between 18-25 years of age
- Living (or will live) in Victoria, Australia for at least 12 months
- Self-identify as having experienced mental distress: “persistent worry, unhappiness, frustration, stress, or mental illness”

RECRUITMENT STRATEGY
- Tertiary education institution notices and flyers
- Networking with migrant community and youth health organizations
- Project website (www.brainsnap.org) and social media (Facebook)
- $100 gift voucher

PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENT
Individual face-to-face interviews; self-directed photography task.
1. First interview (30-60 minutes): Semi-structured qualitative. Demographic information; migration history; cultural background; describe any personal experiences related to mental distress and/or illness.
2. Participants create photographs representing what it was/is like to experience mental distress and well-being, and the things that were associated with distress and well-being. Privacy and safety guidelines on photography provided. Any form of still camera permitted.
3. Second interview (60-120 minutes): Conduct 4+ weeks after the first interview. Select up to 20 photographs for printing and sorting. Discuss the meaning of the images, and the reasons for creating them. Participants direct the interview.

ANALYSIS
Qualitative thematic and narrative analysis of the interview transcripts.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS
21 young people have participated in this project to date since March 2015 (5 in pilot study, 16 in main study; 1 lost to follow up).

Data analysis is currently in progress, and scheduled to be completed by the end of 2016.

EMERGING THEMES
- Peer support and self-help are common first-line strategies for managing mental distress. Establishing and maintaining peer networks were a commonly expressed priority.
- Formal mental health services were not considered primary sources of support. Contact with services generally not maintained, if established.
- Young migrants interested in connecting socially with Australian-born peers. Many find this difficult. Barriers encountered with language and cultural practices.
- Family plays a complex role: reinforcing cultural norms, financial support, distance.
- Food, environment, and entertainment media play significant roles in individual and social well-being.

PHOTO-INTERVIEWING
- Method provided participants with control over the form and content of their mental health narratives.
- Doing photography encouraged participant observation and reflection of their own lived experiences.
- Participants more likely to engage in the research if photography already part of their daily routines (e.g. social media use).
- Less interviewer prompting required to elicit participant narratives during the photo-interviews.

REFERENCES

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