Body Mapping:

Piloting an Approach to Explore the Experiences of Young People in Drug and Alcohol Residential Treatment

S.Macken[1], S.Nathan[2], A.Gibson[3], M.Jersky[4] & K.Boydell[5]

[1] Medicine, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia; [2] School of Public Health and Community Medicine, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia; [3]School of Health, Victoria, University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand; [4]Sydney Children's Hospital Network, Sydney, Australia, [5]Black Dog Institute, Sydney, Australia.

Contact details : s.macken@student.unsw.edu.au

Introduction

Commonly employed research approaches do not always provide an in-depth understanding of young people's perspectives and experiences. Arts-based approaches offer an alternate, innovative method. This pilot study examines the utility of body mapping, an arts-based method, as a way to improve understandings of the lives and experiences of adolescents who are admitted to a drug and alcohol residential treatment program.

Body Mapping

Body mapping is an innovative visual method which involves the creation of life-sized artworks of the human body to illustrate an individual's perspective of their body, identity, and lived experiences (Dew et al., 2018). Body mapping is a promising qualitative research method which can be used to supplement interviews and provide therapeutic benefit by encouraging self-reflection and a means to visually represent thoughts, feelings and lived experiences which are otherwise difficult to articulate (Brett-Maclean, 2009; Dew et al, 2018).

Examples of participant's body maps

Design & Aims

This pilot study forms part of a larger study with the Ted Noffs Foundation. Two body mapping workshops were held in August 2018 at a residential treatment facility in Australia. The workshops focused on using body mapping techniques to explore the young people's strengths and support networks. By doing so, the project aimed to:

Explore the utility and value of body mapping as a research tool in a residential AOD treatment program for adolescents.

Develop an improved understanding of clients' perspectives of their lives, their identity and experiences.

Results

The data revealed that body mapping engaged the participants, reduced verbal barriers and facilitated dialogue on their sources of strength and support. Four recurrent themes were identified:

- **Engaging through art**
- **Promoting a sense of achievement**
- **Revealing their strengths**
- **Removing the mask that hides their emotions**

Methodology

Two workshops were held at an adolescent residential treatment facility in Australia. They were facilitated by a team of researchers, including an artist and focused on using body mapping techniques to explore the young people's personal strengths and support networks.

Five male residents and three females participated. Semi-structured follow-up interviews with participants were conducted and triangulated with other data sources, including observational notes and staff interviews, to examine the utility and effectiveness of body mapping as a research tool.

Discussions & Conclusions

Visual methods, such as body mapping, hold promise for optimising research with younger participants as they are an engaging and less confrontational form of data collection compared with interviews alone. In particular, body mapping is a useful tool to prompt discussion on topics which participants find hard to verbalise face-to-face.

Utilising more arts-based activities in research with young people undergoing treatment can provide rich data about their experiences and help pinpoint areas to improve treatment engagement, retention and after-care support.

References

- BRETT-MACLEAN, P. 2009. Body mapping: Embodying the self living with HIV/AIDS. *Canadian Medical Association Journal,* 180**,** 740-741.
- DEW, A., SMITH, L., COLLINGS, S. & SAVAGE, I. 2018. Complexity Embodied: Using Body Mapping to Understand Complex Support Needs. Qualitative Social Research