

Therapeutic Implications of Photovoice on Young Adult Cancer Survivors

Proposal for Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program Fall 2015

College of Social Work

Sample

Statement of Research Topic

Cancer is a major health concern of our day and thus is a topic of much research. Numerous studies have investigated the psychosocial impacts of cancer on young adults, however; little research has examined the impact from the cancer patient's own perspective. The proposed project will explore the experiences of young adult cancer survivors using photovoice, a participant driven research approach.

Photovoice is an innovative qualitative research approach to conduct participant driven research through photography and narratives. This approach will allow the participants to document photographic images of their experiences, and identify important aspects of their cancer survivorship. Photography serves as the catalyst to discuss emergent themes and personal experiences. After sharing images captured from the week, participants will identify one theme using group consensus and will then discuss how it relates to their experience. The discussions will be recorded and used for analysis.

The images and narratives documented will be used in photo exhibits, town hall meetings, and publications. This research will be used for future interdisciplinary follow up studies with the Huntsman Cancer Institute and the College of Social Work.

Literature Review

As medical cancer research continues to advance and treatments become more effective, cancer patients have greater odds of survival. However, cancer survivorship comes with significant long-lasting medical and psychosocial effects (Yi & Zebrack, 2010). To help combat negative effects, measures are being taken to improve the lives of cancer patients and cancer survivors. Empowering cancer patients allows them to have more control over their illness, and encourages collaboration between the individual, healthcare staff, and family and friends of the

patient (Jerofke, Weiss, & Yakusheva, 2014). Individuals and communities that feel empowered and are affirmed in their engagement can assess the strengths and needs of the community and act as catalysts for improvement (Wang & Burris, 1997).

Wang and Burris developed photovoice as a research approach to empower groups of people marginalized from society (1997). Photovoice is a qualitative, participatory research method, which explores health concerns of communities and individuals through photographs taken by the participants of their unique experiences (Poudreir & Mac-Lean, 2009). Wang and Burris highlighted their vision for photovoice explaining, “from the people, their visions, and their words, we can begin to assess real local needs, in the hope that the divergent perspectives of health professionals and laypeople will converge to exert a more effective impact on a community’s well-being (Wang & Burris, 1997, p385).” With this method, researchers are able to assess the needs of a community through critical discussions around the images captured and create a dialogue for change (Hergenrather, Rhodes, and Clark, 2006). Often marginalized groups are excluded from important decision-making; their voices go unheard by the people in power. Photovoice aims to empower marginalized groups by giving them a voice through their photography.

Unlike other more restrictive qualitative research methods which rely on questionnaires and interviews, photovoice is more inclusive in its approach. Participants do not need to be literate to be included in the research (Hergenrather, Rhodes, and Clark, 2006). Their stories can be shared through the photos and community dialogue. This increases the opportunities for participation.

Challenging power inequalities is an important aspect of photovoice. Participants are valued as experts on their own situation, and are given a platform to convey important

viewpoints that might otherwise go unheard by people traditionally in control (Poudreir & MacLean, 2009). This approach creates trust between researchers and participants, builds capacity in the community, and gives individuals a sense of ownership (Adams, Burns, Liebzeit, Ryschka, Thorpe, & Brown, 2012).

Plan of Action

- 1. Analyze Data** First I will begin my UROP project in August of 2015 by analyzing the photovoice project on cancer patients and survivors that was completed by Dr. Yi. We will analyze the photographs and the discussion around the photographs to understand how photovoice impacted the cancer community. With the data we will assess the strengths and needs of the cancer community studied, and will write manuscripts from the photovoice project.
- 2. Design an Intervention Photovoice Project** With the data that were analyzed we will design a new photovoice project in September and October.
- 3. IRB Approval** Assist in the process of getting Institutional Review Board approval for this new photovoice project in October and November.
- 4. Implement Project** Once we have received IRB approval I will implement the new photovoice project during the months of January and February.
- 5. Photo Exhibit and Analysis** During March and May a photo exhibit will be held where the photographs taken by the community studied will be displayed to the larger community and discussed. This data will then be analyzed and recorded.

Relationship of Proposed Work to the Expertise of Faculty Member

My faculty advisor will guide me in my research, analyzing the therapeutic impact of a photovoice project with cancer patients and survivors. Dr. _____ has a strong background in social work research, specifically in photovoice. She previously worked on a photovoice project studying families of childhood cancer survivors. Dr. _____ has studied cancer survivorship using several research approaches. As an assistant social work professor at the University of Utah and experienced social worker she has an excellent knowledge base, and has the experience necessary to aid me in improving my research skills. Her expertise will prove critical in assisting and mentoring me on my UROP research project.

Relationship of Proposed Work to Future Goals

I plan to graduate with my Bachelor's Degree in Social Work in the spring of 2016. Ultimately, I hope to work with people in crisis as a clinical therapist. With the UROP position, I will be able to draw from my past research experience working with the Mechanical Engineering Department and a genetics lab at the Huntsman Cancer Institute, combining it with my social work course material to continue to develop my research skills in a social research setting. With mentorship from an experienced social work researcher, I will be able to learn with Dr. _____ and develop critical skills of data analysis, professional research writing, and professionalism.

Completing this research project will give me a great social work research base upon which I can continue to improve. Working on this project will allow me to gain an understanding of how to evaluate a therapy approach to understand the implications, which will be very useful in my career as a therapist. I think evidence based practice is very

important for therapists, and research is essential to develop and refine methods that are used in social work practice. I hope to make social work research part of my career.

Sample

References

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