

Development of an Assessment Tool to Understand Adolescents' Mental Health and the Role of Technology in Response to COVID-19

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INTRODUCTION

Because of preliminary evidence indicating increased risks of adolescents' developing mental health problems due to social isolation caused by COVID-19, the National Mental Health Innovation Center (NMHIC) worked to identify adolescents' methods for coping and maintaining wellbeing through the use of technology. Subject matter experts in the field helped guide the development of our assessment tool for use during adolescent interviews.

METHODS

Study Description

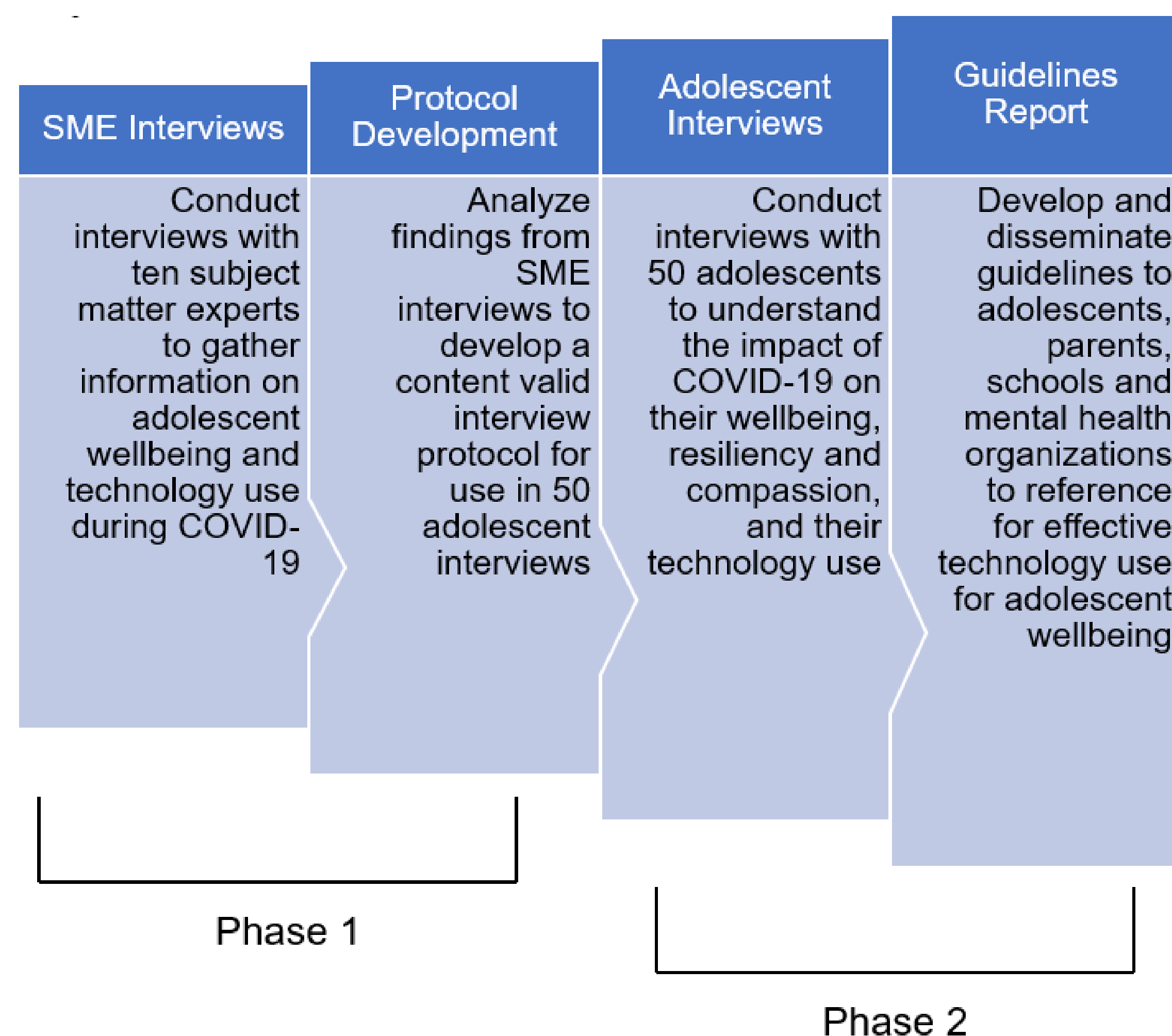
The overall purpose of this project is to develop a high-quality assessment tool to administer during interviews with adolescents to identify technology-based solutions that adolescents can adopt to reduce mental health symptoms and enhance wellbeing.

To fully capture this information, we first conducted semi-structured interviews via Zoom with 10 subject matter experts (SMEs) comprised of child development and mental health experts in order to gain knowledge on the elements of mental health and technology use that are essential for assessing adolescents' wellbeing. The interviews covered topics on mental health and technology with focus on connection, resiliency, and compassion.

Procedures & Analyses

SMEs were recruited from partners within the Tech Innovation Network at the NMHIC and referrals from the Hemera Foundation representing schools, community mental health centers, private practices, and organizations who work with adolescents. NVIVO Qualitative software was utilized to identify overarching themes and the interviews were coded separately by the research team to ensure interrater reliability.

Identified themes from within the data guided the development the assessment tool to interview a diverse range of adolescents that will capture transparent and thorough information about the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has on adolescents, their technology utilization throughout the pandemic, and how technology has impacted their resiliency and wellbeing overall.



SAMPLE OF SME INTERVIEW PROMPTS

1. In what ways have you seen adolescents impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic?

- How has this impacted their mood, relationships, resilience, connection?

2. How have adolescents used the challenges they've experienced during the pandemic to build their resiliency?

3. What role has technology played regarding the impact of the pandemic on adolescents' wellbeing?

RESULTS

IDENTIFIED THEMES FOR PROTOCOL DEVELOPMENT

Results

Seven overarching themes were identified across the ten transcripts. Each theme was categorized based on whether it provided direction regarding the structure and development of the protocol or whether it identified content that was necessary to include in the interview questions. **Protocol Development themes included:** Structure and Approach while **Protocol Content themes included:** Compassion, Resiliency and Coping, Mental Health Challenges, Positive Role of Technology and Negative Role of Technology. Each theme included subthemes which helped provide more robust information core to the larger themes.

SMEs stressed that adolescents still feel the need to support others during the pandemic despite the personal struggles they are facing. One SME noted:

...they recognized the need to support others during this time. They may not be able to articulate how they're feeling or why they're feeling like that, but they can recognize that they need to reach out to their peers and families.

Notable Subthemes

Number indicates the amount of times theme is mentioned across SME Interviews



Overall findings from SME interviews:

- Adolescents feel the need to engage with their peers and community despite the mental health struggles they may be experiencing.
- Adolescents use their tech platforms as a means of staying connected with others in their community and have developed creative ways of staying engaged with others in their peer groups.
- Adolescents are experiencing the pandemic differently based on how they identify with certain groups within their community.
- School served as a positive experience as adolescents were able to attend school virtually, but this led to increased reports of tech fatigue.

CONCLUSIONS

- SME feedback helped determine our approach in interviewing adolescents by including key topics that should be addressed among this population.
- Findings led to the development of a 15-question adolescent interview protocol.
- The protocol is designed to be led by young adults to facilitate interviews with 50 adolescents from diverse backgrounds.
- These findings will guide the development of guidelines to facilitate beneficial technology use among adolescents which will be distributed to families, schools, mental health organizations, and organizations working with adolescents.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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