Understanding the Digital Divide: A qualitative study with Canadian youth to explore their digital mental health service use experiences

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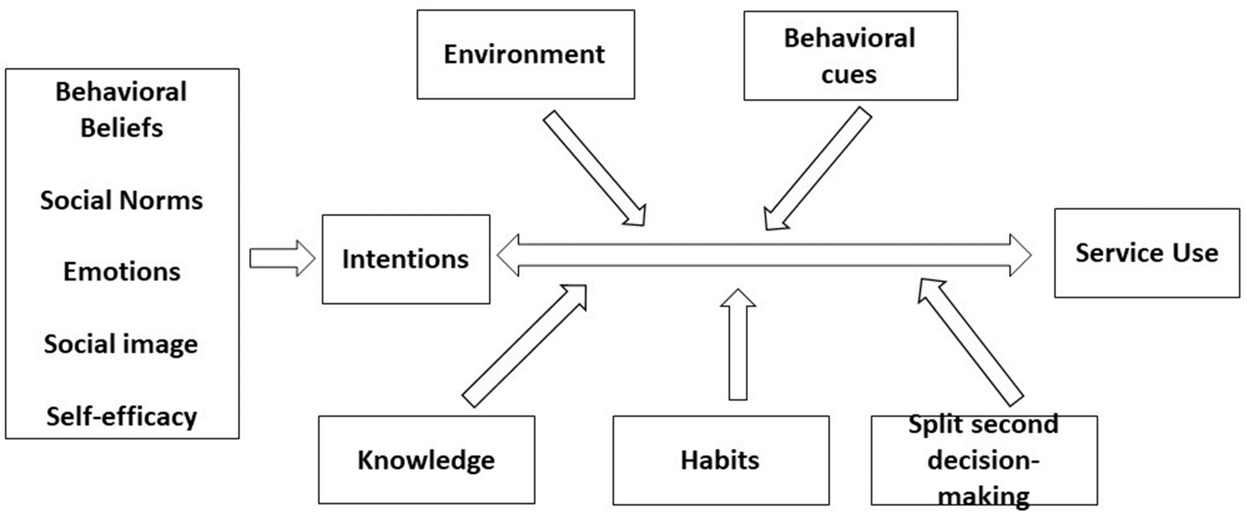
Introduction

- One in four youth in Canada experience a mental health issue each year. Only about 20% access mental health services.
- While nearly all youth use the internet to access health information, a common concern is how to navigate online health information.
- Youth voices are integral to determining what youth want or need from digital mental health resources. However, oftentimes the youth voices are not considered when developing tools/resources nor in the research process
- OBJECTIVE: This qualitative study, co-developed with youth researchers, set out to understand how youth aged 12-24 make decisions about accessing digital mental health technology (DMHT), and how their identities (e.g. gender, ability, race, student status) influences service use.

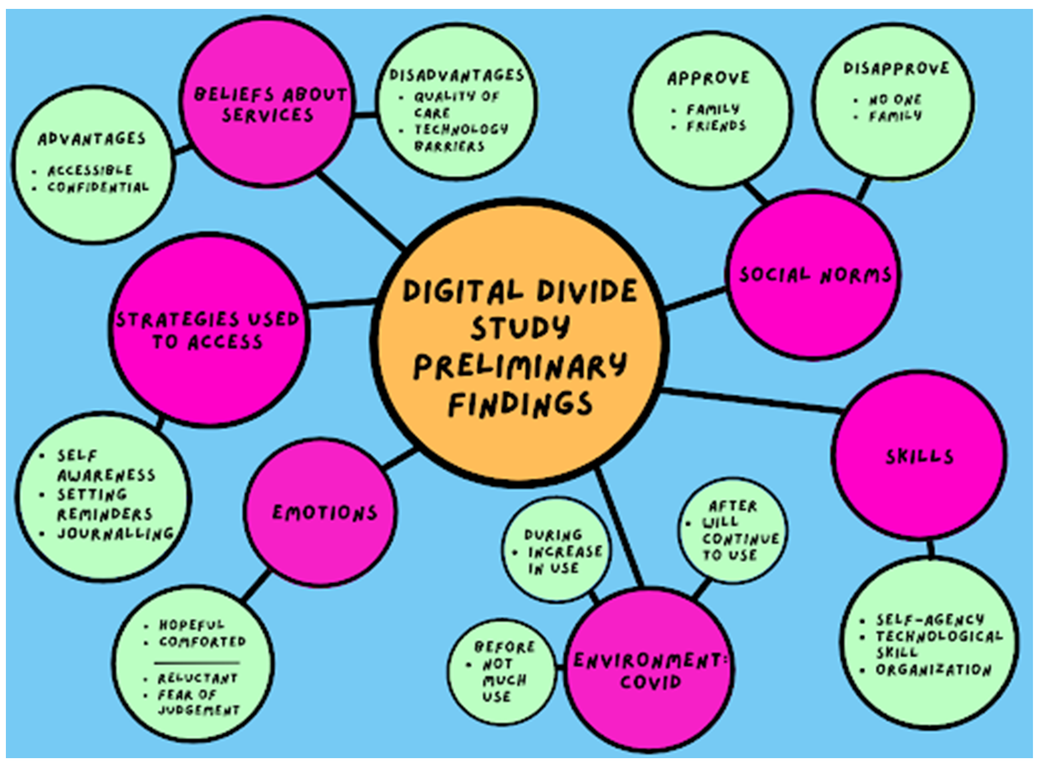
Methods

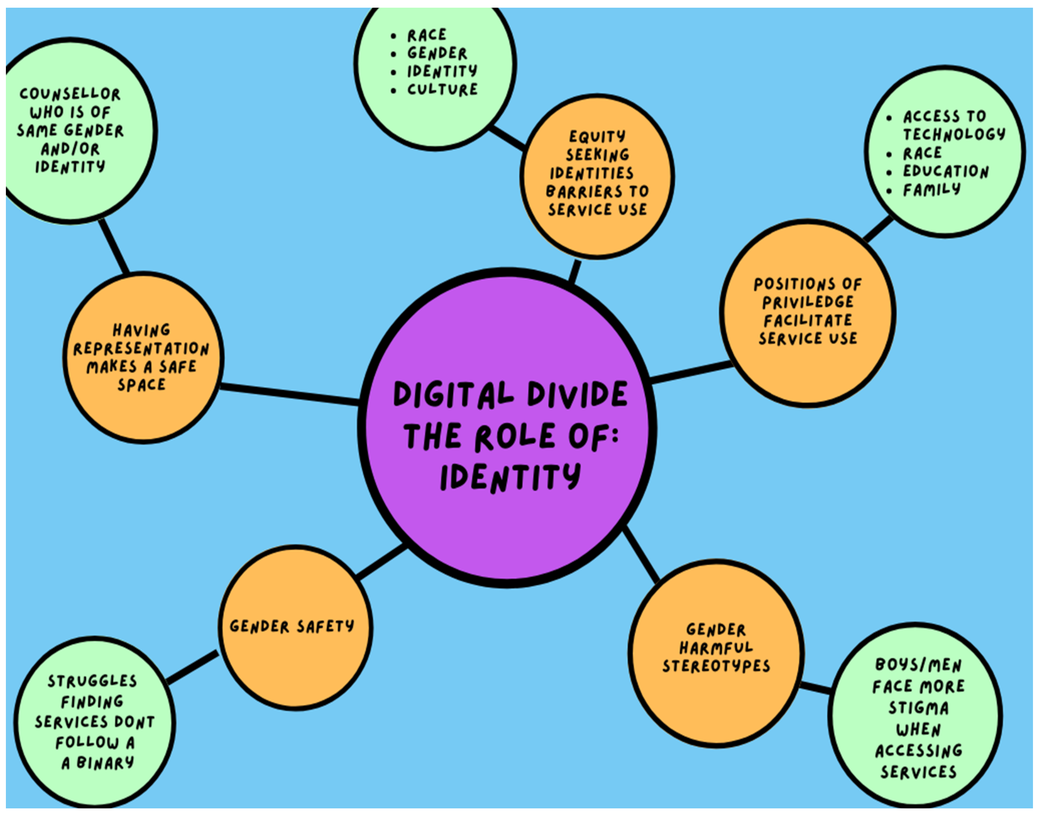
- This study engaged youth research assistants, undergraduate and graduate students in the research process.
- 45 youth aged 12-24 participated in 1-2 hour long virtual qualitative interviews in the Summer and Fall of 2020.
- Interview questions were developed based on the ten constructs from the Unified Theory of Behavior (Jaccard et al., 2002), a decision-making framework.
- Youth were also asked questions related to how their identities (e.g. gender, race, ability, student status), and the pandemic influenced their services use experiences.
- Content analysis was used to come up with the top categories that emerged from each question.

Unified Theory of Behavior



Results





Conclusions

- Future interventions should consider the role of identity when designing DMHT.
- Findings from this study can be applied in the creation and implementation of DMHT tools and resources to help support youth in the decision-making process when considering accessing DMHT.

Citations

(1) Jaccard, J., Dodge, T., & Dittus, P. (2002). Parent-adolescent communication about sex and birth control: A conceptual framework. New directions for child and adolescent development, 2002(97), 9-42.

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