



# Visual HeARTS: Connecting Young Adults with Cancer through

## Online Photovoice Group Work

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### Introduction

- In 2019 approximately **80,000 young adults** (YAs), aged 20-39 received a cancer diagnosis<sup>1</sup>
- Cancer remains a **leading cause of death among YAs**<sup>1</sup>.
- Developmental disruptions place YAs at risk for **social isolation, depression, anxiety, and hopelessness**<sup>2,3</sup>
- **COVID-related isolation** created additional threats to YAs' social and emotional well-being due to their compromised immune systems<sup>4</sup>

### Objectives

The study included the following aims:

- To investigate the **feasibility** of integrating photovoice methods into a **Zoom-based** online group intervention
- To explore the **acceptability** of the photographs of meaning theoretical framework within a group of YA cancer survivors.

### Methods

#### Research Study Design:

- This photovoice intervention was an **8-week closed** group
- Incorporated **narrative therapy**<sup>5</sup> and **meaning-centered psychotherapy**<sup>6</sup>

#### Components of Research Intervention:

- Research/Informed Consent
- Psychometric surveys assessed: **anxiety, depression, sense of meaning/purpose**
- Orientation to group and virtual **Zoom** platform
- Group Intervention: 8 (90-minute) weekly group sessions
- Exit interviews
- Photo exhibit of participants' photos and captions

#### Inclusion criteria:

- On cancer treatment or within one year of completing treatment
- Between the ages of 18-39
- Access to device (computer, tablet, phone) & internet service
- Must attend all 8 groups
- Must submit at least 1 photo & photo caption for each session

#### Data Collection:

- Psychometric surveys (pre and post 8 week-intervention)
- Photographs
- Photograph captions
- Themes from group members' discussions
- Exit interviews

### Methods: Group Intervention

Each photovoice session focused on a meaning-centered topic which informed the YAs photographs and narrative captions. Through the use of group members' **photographs** and **photo captions** gathered from their group exit interviews, the meaning-making journeys of young adult participants, and how they maneuvered living with advanced cancer during a pandemic, was explored.

#### Typical structure of each meeting included:

- Check-in
- Individual sharing of photos
- Identification of themes and open dialogue
- Check-in about awareness project
- Brief overview about the following week's theme
- Closure activity

#### Examples of session themes:

- Living with Cancer
- What Matters Most
- Coping with Bad Days
- My Story of Uncertainty and Hope



Group members have granted permission to use their images in this presentation.

### Results

#### Feasibility Study Sample: (n=3)

- **Age:** range= 33-35
- **Gender:** Female (n=3)
- **Race/ethnicity:** Caucasian/non-Hispanic (n=3)
- **Cancer Diagnosis:** breast (n=2) & gynecological (n=1)
- **Cancer Stages:** I-IV
- **Treatment Status:** 1 year post treatment (n=2); ongoing treatment (n=1)
- **Participants' Location:** Midwest U.S. (n=3)

#### Emotional and Existential Survey Findings:

- Despite the small sample size, findings demonstrated trends toward improved anxiety, depression, and sense of meaning/purpose
- Scores **approached significance (p=.057)** for **improved sense of direction in life, finding value in life, and sense of fulfillment.**

#### Findings Relating to Acceptability and Feasibility:

- Due to participant preference, the responsibility of uploading images to the Zoom platform shifted from participants to facilitator to alleviate stress and give participants more opportunity to concentrate on their narrative as opposed to the technical aspects of uploading images
- Increase # of photos shared from 1 to 2 to augment participants' ability to portray a more elaborate and representative story of their experience
- Hosting one-on-one Zoom orientations with a research team member increased confidence in the virtual platform and how to choose and provide context to their stories

"[Sharing photos] really showed the reason why I was able to fight through cancer. It was a way to recognize [my] resiliency and stubbornness."

"The experience... was so new and so open, like it just opened so many doors in my mind and just meeting people and saying, 'Wow, there are people like me out there to connect to.' And that was really awesome."

"I really enjoyed seeing things that [other participants] enjoyed or how they look at things or how they've processed and how strong minded, how they found their inspiration. It was all really inspiring."

### Discussion and Conclusions

- Sharing visuals and stories, within a facilitated group, **fosters connections** and provides a **safe environment** to exchange feelings, attitudes, and challenges of living with cancer
- Members articulated that what **brought them joy and meaning** were available to them both before and after cancer
- When words fail, **photos rise to the occasion**
- **Encourages a sense of normalcy and belonging**
- **Promotes storytelling** and reauthoring of narratives
- **Supports ongoing relationships** via social media, share images/captions



### Acknowledgements

- Our first participants for sharing their courage and inspiring the continuing journey of this photovoice group
- IASWG for their support of this research through their SPARC Grant so that we may move this initial feasibility study into a pilot study and the development of an intervention manual
- Cancer Services of Northeast Indiana for their support in recruiting participants

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