

## Helping Others and Mental Health: A Qualitative Study Exploring Perspectives of Youth Engaging in Prosocial Activities

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**Abstract :** Background: Mental health challenges that begin during the youth age period may continue across the entire life course. One way to support youth mental health is to encourage youth engagement in prosocial activities. This study aimed to explore youth's perceptions about helping others and mental well-being, barriers, and enablers for youth to initiate and continue prosocial activities, and strategies for developing the attribute of helping others in youth. Methods: We conducted a qualitative study using semi-structured, virtual interviews with 18 young individuals (aged 16-24 years) living in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Results: Youth perceived helping others as a source of feeling peace and calm, finding meaning in life, experiencing social connection and promoting self-care, and relieving stress. Participants reported opportunities to learn new skills, the role of religion, social connections, previous positive experiences, and role modeling as enablers for their prosocial behaviour. Heavy time commitment, negative behaviour from others, self-doubt, and late exposure to such activities were considered barriers by youth when participating in prosocial activities. Youth also brought forward key recommendations for engaging youth in helping others. Conclusions: The findings of this study support the notion that youth have positive experiences when engaging in helping others and that involving young people in prosocial activities could be used as a protective intervention for promoting youth mental health and overall well-being.

**Keywords :** helping others, prosocial behaviour, youth, mental well-being

**Conference Title :** ICCCPMH 2023 : International Conference on Clinical Child Psychology and Mental Health

**Conference Location :** Vancouver, Canada

**Conference Dates :** May 22-23, 2023