In the United States, suicide is the second leading cause of death of youth aged 15 to 24 years (CDC, 2013) and almost 16 percent of high school students have seriously considered suicide (Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2013). The National Strategy for Suicide Prevention calls for comprehensive approaches that extend beyond traditional mental health systems to include governments, health care systems and companies, educational institutions, community-based organizations, and individuals and families to increase our understanding of effective suicide prevention efforts (Office of the Surgeon General & National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention, 2012). Simultaneously, others have been calling for increased youth involvement in research, and community and organizational development (Irby, Ferber, & Pittman, 2001; London, Zimmerman, & Erbstein, 2003).

Participatory action research (PAR) engages community members in research on issues that matter to them. PAR builds on the strengths in a community to equitably involve community members in all phases of the research process to design and conduct research that is relevant to the community and helps eliminate health and social disparities (Israel, Eng, Schulz, & Parker, 2013). PAR has been gaining ground in academia, particularly in public health, and is regarded for transforming research findings on complex health and social problems into actionable strategies for social change (Ahmed & Palermo, 2010; Israel et al., 2010; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008; National Institutes of Health [NIH], 2011; Viswanathan et al., 2004).

In 2013, Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center developed a Youth Council for Suicide Prevention (YCSP) to address the prevalence of adolescent and young adult suicide in the Cincinnati region. YCSP is comprised of approximately 25 high school youth who raise community awareness of suicide and conduct their own research projects facilitated by a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) approach. Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR)
YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN YPAR

is a specific type of collaborative research that engages young people in the examination of the world around them. Like other participatory approaches, YPAR is grounded in critical theoretical frameworks that encourage people to analyze their social context in order to identify and challenge social injustices that impede their development (Cammarota & Fine, 2010; Foster-Fishman, Law, Lichty, & Aoun, 2010; Rodríguez & Brown, 2009). YPAR aims to develop more than youth research skills; it is a critical pedagogy for youth so they can take action and, more importantly, believe in their own power to enact change (Cammarota & Fine, 2010).

A long-term YPAR outcome is a change in societal inequalities or health disparities; however, youth development is the driver of this change and serves as an intermediate outcome that builds the foundation for positive community-wide impact that can take much longer to achieve (Berg, Coman, & Schensul, 2009; Suleiman et al., 2006). Youth development as embodied in YPAR contains a number of constructs, including empowerment, self-esteem, self-efficacy, perceived control, and action for social change (Cammarota & Fine, 2010; Cargo, Grams, Ottoson, Ward, & Green, 2003; Ozer & Douglas, 2013). Although youth development is a key goal of YPAR, few studies involving youth as research partners actually measure youth development to explain the full impact of their involvement (Vaughn, Wagner, & Jacquez, 2013; Ozer & Douglas, 2013). As YPAR develops and becomes a more widely used approach to research, it is necessary to understand its full impact on youth development in order to test the critical theoretical underpinnings of the approach. Furthermore, we need to understand the impact on youth development when it is practiced in a variety of contexts (Irby, Ferber, & Pittman, 2001; London, Zimmerman, & Erbstein, 2003).

This study aims to fill a gap in our understanding of YPAR implementation in a community-based research project designed and conducted by YCSP members. The YCSP
project involves qualitative interviews with peers about how the topic of suicide is communicated in different facets of their lives. The purpose of the study being presented is twofold: (1) to use YPAR so that YCSP members obtain real-world experience conducting research that positively impacts youth, and (2) to examine the impact of YPAR on youth development, particularly on self-esteem and empowerment, research self-efficacy, and capacity for action. This study aims to answer two research questions: (1) Does self-esteem, empowerment, and research self-efficacy and capacity for action change over time for youth developing and conducting their own research project? (2) How do youth describe the experience of participating in YPAR and the ability to contribute to suicide prevention?

**Methods**

Mixed methods are being used in this participatory case study design, which is described as a cyclical, iterative processes of inquiry, reflection, and dialogue that merges the roles of co-researchers and study participants so that power over the research and findings is equally shared among the academic and community members (Reilly, 2010). The proposed design will contribute to the literature about youth development in YPAR, as well as provide formative research for the ongoing work of YCSP that extends beyond the life of this single project.

**Method 1:** Pretest-posttest measures to examine change amongst YCSP members participating in the YPAR project. The pretest was conducted at the start of the project (September) and the posttest will be conducted at the end of the project (May) to align with high school academic calendars. Only youth who completed a pretest will be given a posttest so matched pairs can be used in analysis. Existing questionnaires, including those developed for other recent YPAR studies, are being used: (1) *Self-Esteem Questionnaire* (DuBois, Bull, Sherman, & Roberts, 1998; DuBois, Felner, Brand, & Phillips, 1996); (2) *Psychological*
Empowerment Survey (Ozer & Douglas, 2013); and (3) Research and Action Self-Efficacy (Ozer & Schotland, 2011). A demographic questionnaire was also distributed at pretest to collect information such as age, length of YCSP involvement, and previous research experience.

**Method 2:** Group interviews with YCSP members who participated in the YPAR project (up to 20 members). Interviews will be conducted by the graduate student in May-June 2016 after the youth have completed data collection and analysis phases for their own research project. This will maximize the youth project timeline so they may reflect and comment on their experience participating in all phases of a research project. Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

**Results and Discussion**

Results of the pretest-posttest measures and interviews will not be available at the time of this presentation. However, preliminary feedback from youth about their experience with the research project will be shared. The presenter will also discuss the ways in which YPAR has been implemented throughout the 2015-2016 academic year. This includes processes that have been used to: (1) engage YCSP members in critical analysis of suicidality and prevention efforts, (2) promote team building and shared decision-making, and (3) develop youth capacity to design and conduct research.
References


