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The Big Picture

'The Big Picture: Adapting Photovoice to enhance psychological, social & cultural insights into & prevention & treatment of youth substance use in India' is an **ESRC-funded project led by the University of Leeds**. It is **one of a number of projects** that, like Changing the Story, seek to make a significant impact by addressing global development challenges through arts and humanities research. Here, PhD student **Chloe Brooks** tells us about her work as part of the Big Picture team.

I joined the Big Picture team (most of whom are in the photo below) and started my PhD in October 2018. My PhD project is exploring mental health research-to-policy pathways in Assam. It is part of the Big Picture project, which focuses on understanding the lived experience of Indian young people around risk, recovery and resilience in relation to substance use and mental health. The goal is to increase knowledge, enhance the voice of young people, and to inform practice through impacting policy and promoting public awareness. The latter is where my PhD comes in.



The Big Picture team. From L-R: Professor Anna Madill, Professor Paul Cooke, Louise Walton, Dr Siobhan Hugh-Jones, Dr Rebecca Graber, Chloe Brooks and Dr Raginie Duara (and, not pictured, Dr Tolib Mirzoev).

I am aiming to create an in-depth understanding of the extent to which, and how, evidence informs policy and practice in Assam-level mental health policy-making. This will help to plan the public awareness and policy-directed activities of the wider 'Big Picture' project.

I have always been interested in the narratives of underrepresented groups: what we can learn from listening to them, the value they can have through the creation of more effective policies, and how the process can empower those involved. [Photovoice](#) is a participatory research methodology, where participants use visual means to tell their story. My Master's dissertation, which used a Photovoice element to explore the community perspectives of HIV in rural South Africa, showed me how powerful this method can be.

Getting research into policy and practice is a challenge for all contexts. This is added to when the research involves the voices of young people which can often be considered as less legitimate knowledge. In this Photovoice project, young people will produce posters and make their own films. Images and films can be evocative and powerful. But is this type of data viewed as robust by decision-makers? And what is the best way to communicate research finding to policy makers. In order to answer these questions, I will be conducting in-depth interviews with key mental health stakeholders in Assam, as well as holding stakeholder workshops. Mental health is an issue which affects adolescents in particular given the high prevalence of mental health problems. Therefore, it is particularly important that the voice of young people on this issue is listened to and that they contribute to discussions and decisions at the policy-level.

The global youth climate movement, and the recent global student strikes on the 15th March 2019 organised by the movement Schools 4 Climate Action shows that young people can put issues on the agenda. But the voices of young people are not always heard. It is important to make sure they are listened to, which will ultimately result in more effective policies and better mental health.

I am looking forward to starting my data collection, and visiting Assam for fieldwork, improving my understanding of the context. You can keep in touch with The Big Picture through our Instagram account [@ukprojectresilience](#), twitter [@UKProResilience](#) and website www.projectresilience.co.uk