Designing for resilience with unaccompanied migrant youth
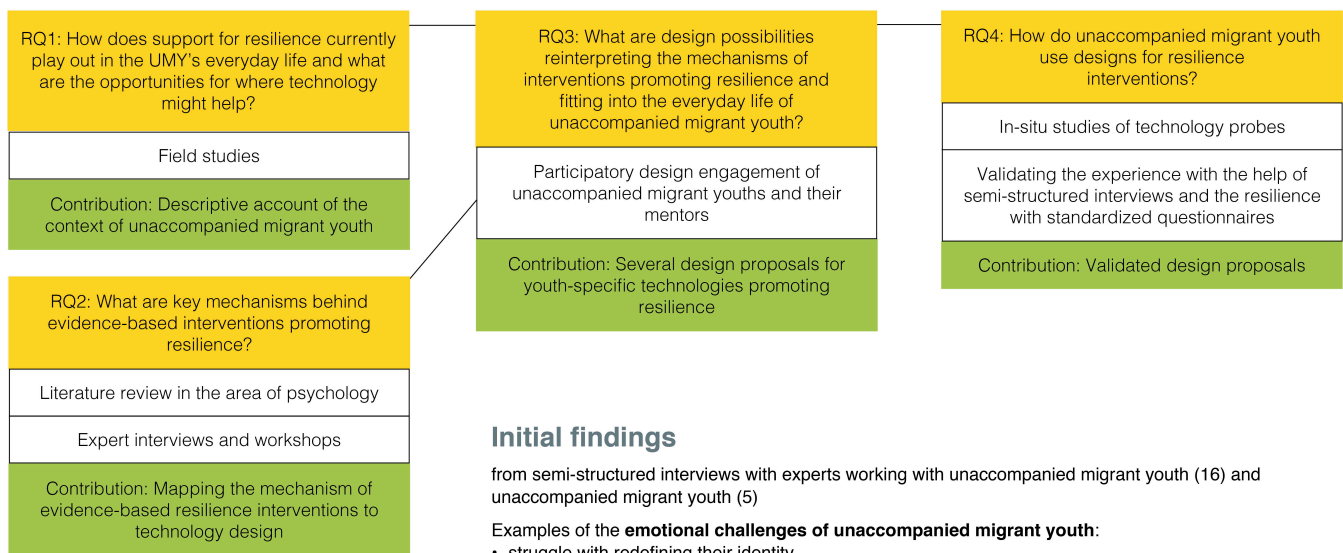
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Overview of the research project

This project aims to explore the design space of youth-specific technologies promoting resilience. Building and enhancing the life skill of being resilient would have a high potential impact on the future of unaccompanied migrant youth. However, language barriers, time, lack of resources and their image of mental health support hinder unaccompanied migrant youth from enhancing their resilience. To start addressing these issues, we are investigating how technologies can be used to deliver (and, if needed, re-interpret) existing evidence-based interventions promoting resilience.

- 3-year long **PhD project**
- Collaboration with psychologists and psychiatrists from the Medical University of Vienna and Anna Freud Centre in London
- Main research methodology: Research through design[12]
- Main research area: Computing in Mental Health[4], Positive Computing[3] and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) technology[10]
- Main contribution: **A design framework and design implications for youth-specific technologies promoting resilience**

RQ1: How does support for resilience currently play out in the UMY's everyday life and what are the opportunities for where technology might help?

Field studies

Contribution: Descriptive account of the context of unaccompanied migrant youth

RQ2: What are key mechanisms behind evidence-based interventions promoting resilience?

Literature review in the area of psychology

Expert interviews and workshops

Contribution: Mapping the mechanism of evidence-based resilience interventions to technology design

RQ3: What are design possibilities reinterpreting the mechanisms of interventions promoting resilience and fitting into the everyday life of unaccompanied migrant youth?

Participatory design engagement of unaccompanied migrant youths and their mentors

Contribution: Several design proposals for youth-specific technologies promoting resilience

RQ4: How do unaccompanied migrant youth use designs for resilience interventions?

In-situ studies of technology probes

Validating the experience with the help of semi-structured interviews and the resilience with standardized questionnaires

Contribution: Validated design proposals

Background

Resilience contributes to the **success in school and in life**[11] and can **prevent** at-risk youth from **becoming socially excluded**[1].

This research project focuses on resilience as **internal factors** such as appropriate coping strategies, optimism, problem solving, and self-regulation which protect individuals against adverse situations[13].

These internal factors **can be learned** to a certain degree[9] and be promoted through preventative interventions[8].

Initial findings

from semi-structured interviews with experts working with unaccompanied migrant youth (16) and unaccompanied migrant youth (5)

Examples of the **emotional challenges of unaccompanied migrant youth**:
- struggle with redefining their identity
- need to fulfil the expectations of the social contacts and family from their ancient as well as new home country
- struggle with building up new relationships to peers and adult care givers
- want to be autonomous but are dependent on support
- need to deal with uncertainty, high pressure, frustration and loneliness

The youth ...
- try to find their own coping strategies to deal with negative emotions, however, these only help to some extend or the youth struggle with applying them in the long term.
- have a **negative image of therapy**.
- struggle with **language barriers**.
- lack **time** to attend therapeutic help such as art therapy.
- do not understand that improving mental wellbeing takes time.
- are **at the risk** of falling out of the care system.

Technology ...
such as social media and computer games plays an **important part in their everyday life**. However, technology is **rarely used in the social work**.

Initial design proposals

A technological application promoting wellbeing should ...
- **non-language based**: in contrast to current applications which tend to be language-based and talk-based[5][7].
- **integrated in the everyday life activities**: in contrast to most of the current digital technologies which are developed for the school-setting or designed in a way that the users have to carry out certain tasks such as writing a mood diary[2][7].
- **designed for specifically youth context**: support adolescents to build character strength with activities they enjoy, as adolescents might be less open to interventions improving their character strengths[6].

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