

Project SMART: Recruitment and Engagement in Adolescent Mental Health Research

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Introduction

In recent years, adolescent mental health concerns have increased alongside widespread use of social media platforms. National survey data indicate that a substantial proportion of U.S. adolescents use platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat daily, with many reporting being online almost constantly (Faverio & Sidoti, 2024). While social media has become a central part of adolescent communication and social interaction, research findings examining its relationship with mental health outcomes remain inconsistent. Project SMART is an NIH-funded longitudinal mixed-methods study designed to better understand patterns of adolescent social media use and mental health using real-time and ecologically valid data collection methods (National Institutes of Health, 2026).

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of my work on Project SMART was to support participant recruitment and youth interviewing efforts and to examine recruitment effectiveness within a community-based adolescent research study. My objectives were to assist with recruiting youth participants using multiple outreach strategies, conduct youth interviews, and evaluate recruitment-to-interview conversion rates to better understand participant follow-through across recruitment periods.

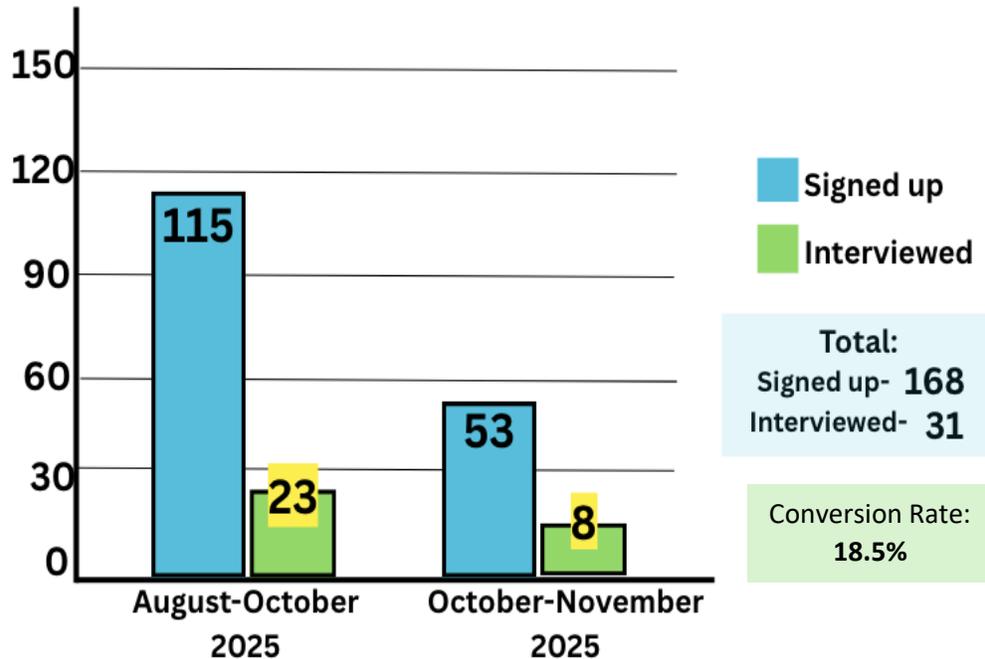
Methods

From Fall 2025 through the present, I worked as a Research Assistant on Project SMART under the direction of Dr. Wang and Louana Paddock. My main responsibilities included recruitment and youth interviewing. Recruitment strategies consisted of distributing flyers, staffing booths at community events, and participating in school-based recruitment efforts in collaboration with local partners. Recruitment tracking data were used to document participant sign-ups and interview completion. Between August and November 2025, a total of 168 adolescents and caregivers signed up to participate in the study, and 31 participants completed a scheduled General Assessment Visit (GAV) and interview. Recruitment-to-interview conversion rates were calculated by dividing the number of completed interviews by the total number of sign-ups.

Results

Across the recruitment period, 31 out of 168 participants who signed up for Project SMART completed a scheduled interview, resulting in a recruitment-to-interview conversion rate of 18.5%. As shown in Figure 1, recruitment volume and interview completion were higher during the August–October 2025 period compared to October–November 2025. Differences between recruitment periods suggest that timing, follow-up availability, and scheduling constraints may influence interview completion rates in community-based adolescent research.

Figure 1. **Participant sign-ups and completed interviews across two recruitment periods for Project SMART (August–October 2025 and October–November 2025).** Bars represent the number of participants who signed up for the study and the number who completed a scheduled GAV and interview. Total signed up and interviewed were calculated into a successful recruitment conversion rate.



Conclusions

Examining recruitment-to-interview conversion rates provided valuable insight into participant engagement within an ongoing adolescent mental health study. This experience highlighted familiar challenges associated with recruiting and retaining youth participants, particularly in studies that require follow-up and scheduled interviews. Through my role on Project SMART, I gained practical experience in recruitment, youth interviewing, and outreach tracking, as well as a real understanding of factors that influence participant follow-through in applied research settings.

References

- Faverio, M., & Sidoti, O. (2024). *Teens, social media and technology 2024: YouTube, TikTok, Instagram and Snapchat remain widely used among U.S. teens*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org>
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