

*"I feel like nature is how I cope with  
stuff"*

Understanding How Connections to  
Nature are Formed and How They  
Shape Experiences of Mental Health  
in Canadian Youth

Madi Peters, Stephanie Wadge, and Safa Khan

Close your eyes...

calming

relieving

coping

relaxing

disconnecting

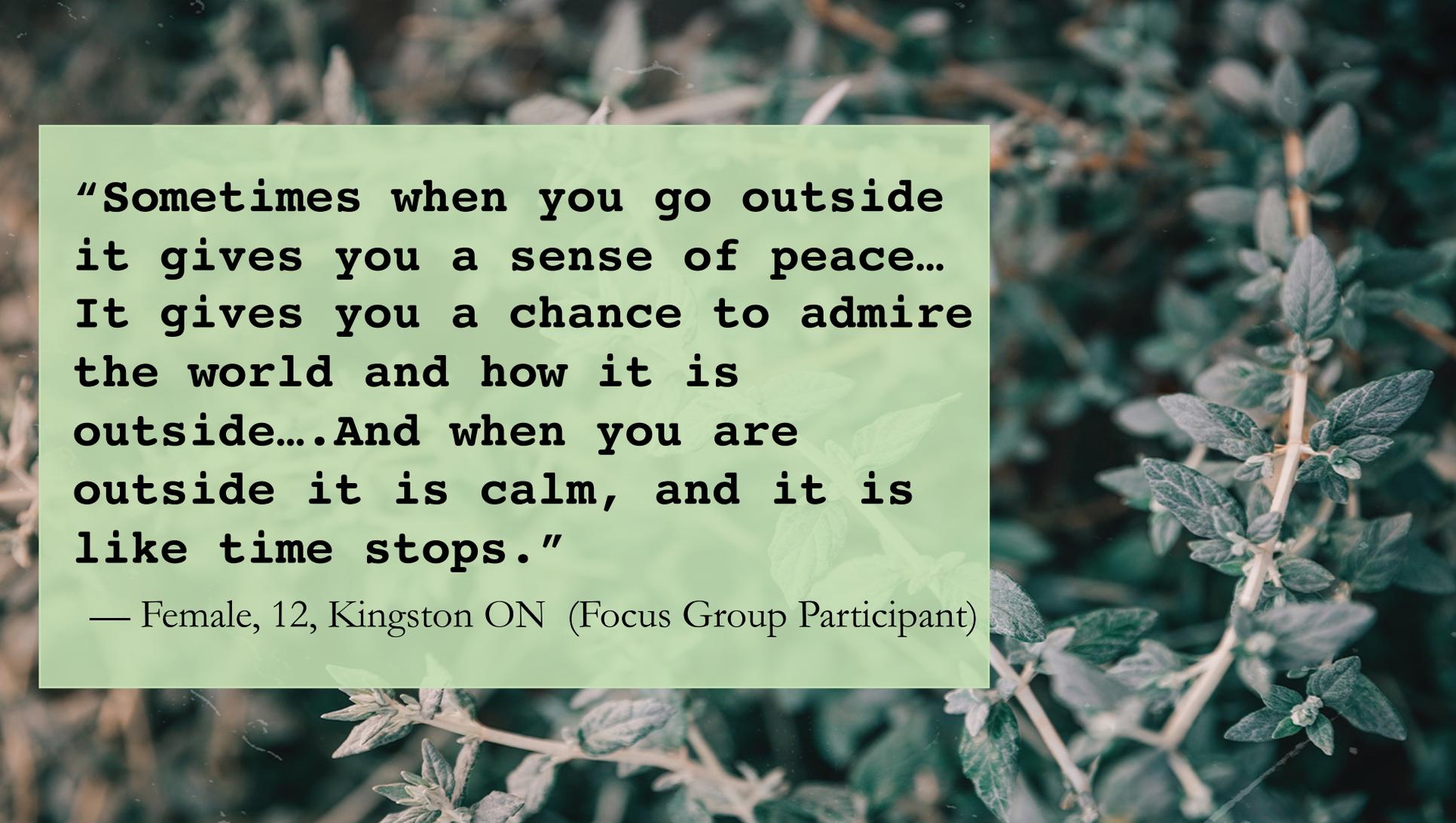
clarity

escape

peaceful

quiet





**"Sometimes when you go outside  
it gives you a sense of peace...  
It gives you a chance to admire  
the world and how it is  
outside...And when you are  
outside it is calm, and it is  
like time stops."**

— Female, 12, Kingston ON (Focus Group Participant)

# ABOUT US

CIHR grant application  
#437289

Spiritual health as a  
protective mental  
health asset in at-risk  
Canadian adolescents: a  
mixed-methods study



Madi Peters



Stephanie Wadge



Safa Khan



Dr. Valerie Michaelson



Dr. Pauli Gardner

# Background

## WHAT'S KNOWN

Overall findings support the contention that nature has a positive influence on adolescent mental health

## FOUNDATIONAL WORK

Richard Louv: *Last Child in the Woods*

The child in nature is an endangered species, and the health of children and the health of the Earth are inseparable."

## GAPS

Lack of representation of Canadian youth populations

Pervious literature focused on extreme encounters with nature

Proximity to nature emphasized over connections

# RESEARCH QUESTION



**How are connections to nature formed  
and how do they shape experiences of  
mental health in Canadian youth?**

# RESEARCH METHODS

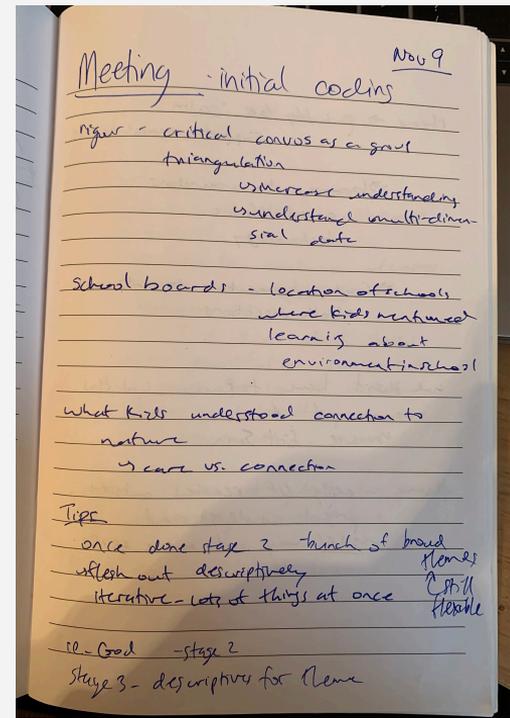


- Qualitative semi-structured interviews and focus groups (n=74) across Canada.
- Youth aged 10-18.



From larger spiritual health data, we only used information that pertained to nature

- Broad thematic exploration
- Descriptive coding
- Interpretive analysis



Field notes

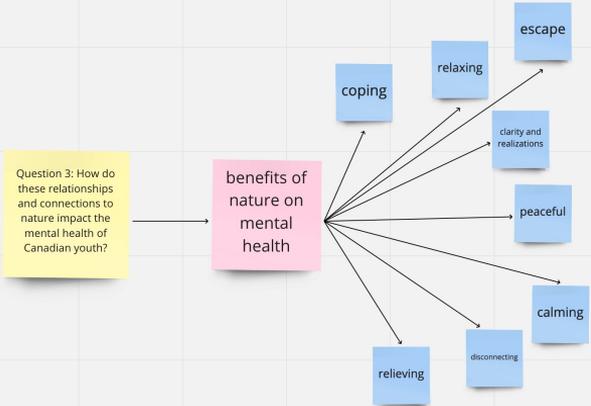
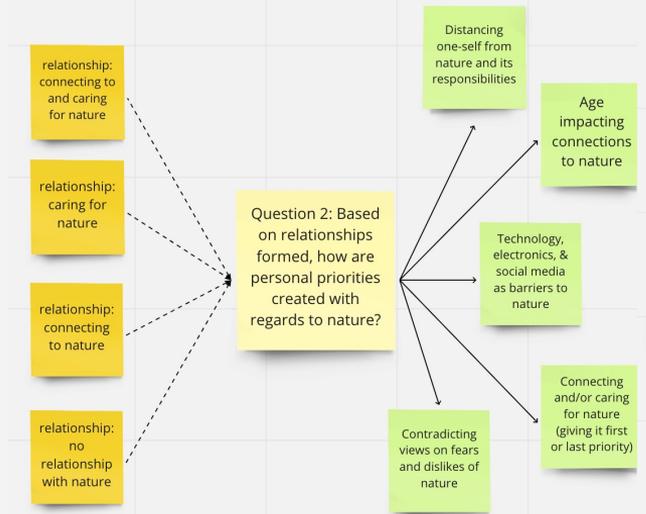
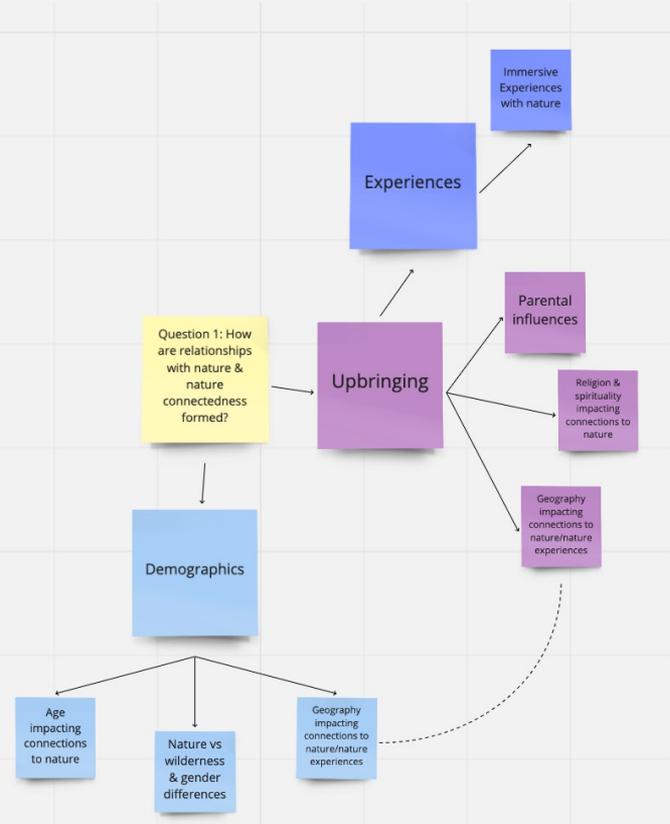
# USING 'MIRO' BOARDS

The image shows a Miro workspace with a grid background. At the top, the Miro logo is on the left, followed by the title 'Themes for Focus Gr...' and icons for favorites and sharing. On the right, there are icons for navigation, a share button, a help icon with a '7' notification, a search icon, and a menu icon. On the left side, a vertical toolbar contains icons for selection, erasing, text, sticky notes, shapes, arrows, lasso, zoom, and a menu. The main workspace contains several mind maps and diagrams:

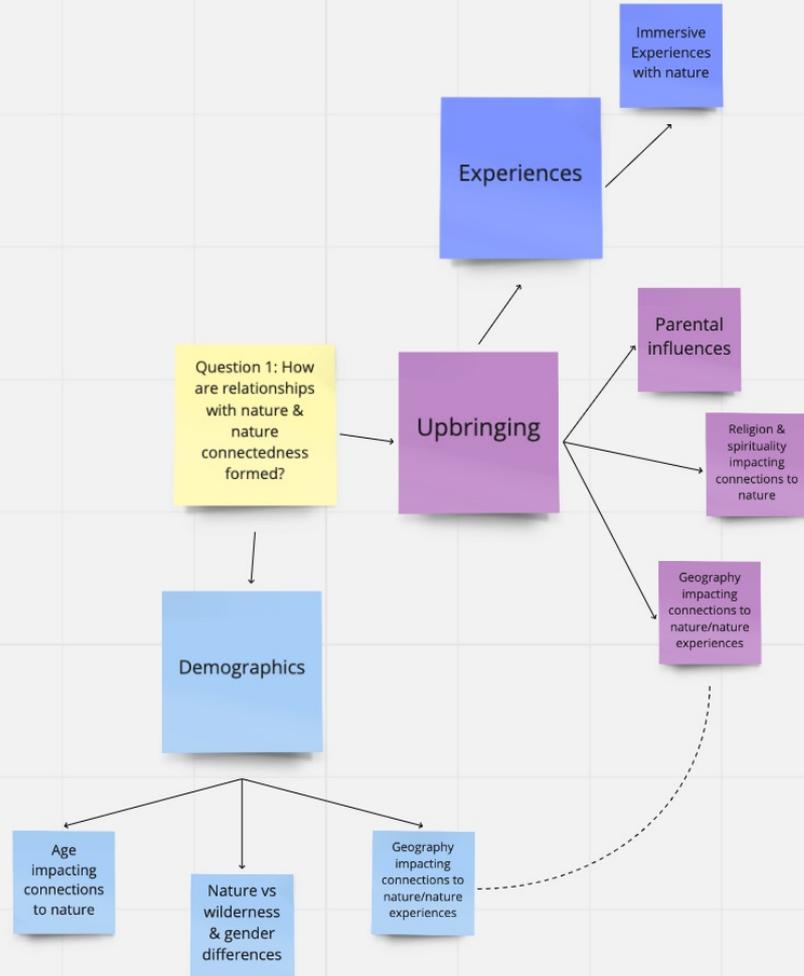
- Top Right:** A mind map with a central red node 'Connecting to support' and several surrounding blue nodes.
- Middle Right:** A mind map with a central purple node 'Learning' and several surrounding nodes in yellow, green, and blue.
- Bottom Center:** A large, complex mind map with a central purple node 'Learning' and many surrounding nodes in various colors.
- Bottom Right:** A diagram with a central pink node 'Security of Policy on mental health' and several surrounding blue nodes.
- Other elements:** A horizontal row of blue sticky notes, a small yellow and blue mind map, and a small diagram with a central pink node.

At the bottom of the workspace, there is a toolbar with icons for erasing, text, sticky notes, shapes, arrows, lasso, zoom, and a menu. In the bottom right corner, there is a small white box containing the text '4%'.

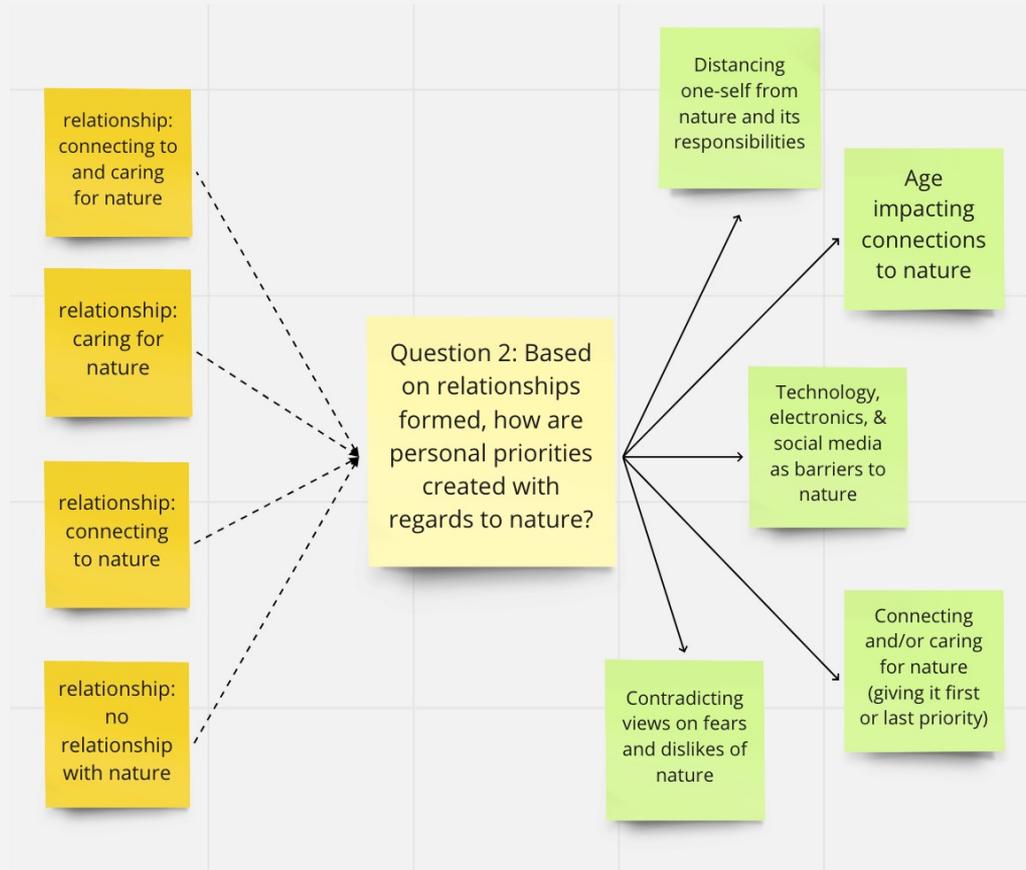
# PRELIMINARY RESULTS & FINDINGS



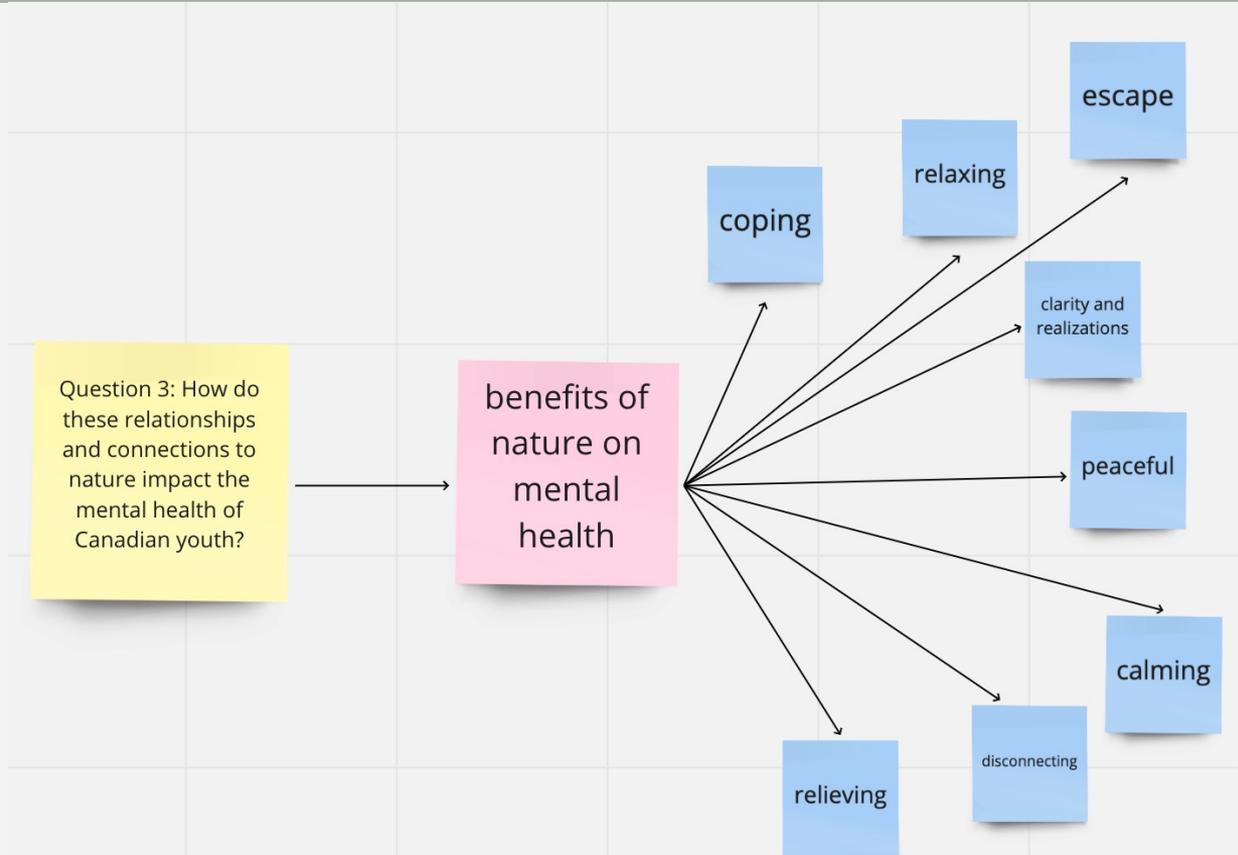
# Q1: How are relationships with nature & nature connectedness formed?



# Q2: Based on relationships formed, how are personal priorities created with regards to nature?



# Q3: How do these relationships and connections to nature impact the mental health of Canadian youth?



# Impacts of nature on youth mental health



2A-14-F: “If you don’t have enough exposure to the sun it will have an impact on your mental health.”



4A-14-F: “I think people get so caught up in social media and stuff like snap chat that they don’t realize that connecting to nature helps you cope with the stress you have other than just going on your phone”



N14-10-F: “Being in nature sort of...it is something about the simplicity and letting go and being in the present.”

# Impacts of nature on youth mental health



N3-18-F: Yeah. A lot go out to hunt but not really to hunt.

When you hunt, you are determined to find food but sometimes people just go out and relax with friends and if they find something, they find something. But they don't go out and look too hard.

I: So why would they go?

N3-18-F: To calm down



3C-12-F: "That is why when people feel sad or upset, they go outside to calm themselves down."



# IMPLICATIONS & NEXT STEPS

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**How has nature impacted YOUR mental health?  
How can we help youth foster connections to  
nature?**

# THANK YOU



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