

RESILIENCE AND INCLUSIVITY OF GENERATION Z YOUTH COUNSELING THROUGH A SUSTAINABLE DIGITAL SELF-DEFENSE PROGRAM IN LUMAJANG REGENCY

RESILIENSI DAN INKLUSIVITAS KONSELING PEMUDA GENERASI Z MELALUI PROGRAM PERTAHANAN DIRI DIGITAL BERKELANJUTAN DI KABUPATEN LUMAJANG

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Abstract

The expansion of digital technology has widened Generation Z's spaces of interaction while simultaneously increasing exposure to cyberbullying, disinformation, excessive device use, and limited awareness of digital self-protection. These challenges become more complex in semi-rural settings where youth support is often sporadic, insufficiently participatory, and not fully inclusive. This community engagement programme aimed to strengthen young people's resilience, inclusivity, and digital self-protection capacity through a community-based Digital Self-Defense programme. The programme was implemented in Gesang, Selokbesuki, and Denok Villages, Lumajang Regency, using Participatory Action Research (PAR), comprising participatory problem mapping, joint action planning, implementation, observation of change, and collaborative reflection and evaluation. Programme achievement was assessed qualitatively by triangulating participatory observation, focus group discussions, reflective notes, activity documentation, performance during risk-mitigation simulations, and member checking with partners. Approximately 25 participants from diverse community backgrounds took part in the process. The end-of-programme evaluation identified three consistent outcomes. First, participants increasingly recognised digital risks as shared community concerns rather than isolated individual problems. Second, youth participation shifted from initial passivity towards active involvement in determining priorities, timing, and forms of assistance. Third, participants demonstrated emerging capacity to formulate self-protection responses, media-ethics considerations, and peer-support mechanisms through digital literacy activities, practical simulations, and community forums. These findings suggest that a PAR-based approach can provide a contextual and inclusive strategy for strengthening the social-digital resilience of Generation Z in semi-rural communities.

Keywords: *resilience of young people; Generation Z; digital self-defence; inclusive support; participatory action research*

Abstrak

Perkembangan teknologi digital telah memperluas ruang interaksi Generasi Z sekaligus meningkatkan paparan terhadap perundungan siber, disinformasi, penggunaan gawai secara berlebihan, dan lemahnya kesadaran perlindungan diri digital. Kondisi tersebut menjadi lebih kompleks di wilayah semi-perdesaan ketika pendampingan remaja masih bersifat sporadis, kurang partisipatif, dan belum sepenuhnya inklusif. Kegiatan pengabdian ini bertujuan memperkuat resiliensi, inklusivitas, dan kapasitas perlindungan diri digital remaja melalui program *Digital Self-Defense* yang disusun bersama masyarakat. Program dilaksanakan di Desa Gesang, Selokbesuki, dan Denok, Kabupaten Lumajang, dengan pendekatan *Participatory Action Research* (PAR) yang mencakup pemetaan masalah, perencanaan aksi, pelaksanaan pendampingan, observasi perubahan, serta refleksi dan evaluasi kolaboratif. Evaluasi ketercapaian program dilakukan secara kualitatif melalui triangulasi hasil observasi partisipatif, diskusi kelompok terarah, catatan reflektif, dokumentasi kegiatan, penilaian performa dalam simulasi, dan *member checking*. Sekitar 25 peserta dengan latar yang beragam terlibat dalam proses kegiatan. Hasil akhir menunjukkan tiga perubahan utama: peserta mampu mengenali risiko digital sebagai persoalan bersama dan bukan sekadar masalah individual; keterlibatan remaja berkembang dari kecenderungan pasif menuju partisipasi dalam penyusunan prioritas dan bentuk kegiatan; serta muncul kapasitas awal untuk merumuskan respons perlindungan diri, etika bermedia, dan dukungan sebaya melalui kegiatan literasi, simulasi mitigasi risiko, dan forum komunitas. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa pendampingan berbasis PAR dapat menjadi strategi kontekstual untuk membangun ketahanan sosial-digital remaja secara inklusif dan berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: *resiliensi remaja; generasi z; digital self-defense; pendampingan inklusif; participatory action research*

INTRODUCTION

Generation Z adolescents conduct a substantial part of their social interaction in digitally mediated environments. Although these environments provide opportunities for learning, creativity, and social connection, they also expose young people to misinformation, cyberbullying, social exclusion, identity pressure, and unhealthy patterns of device use. Intensive digital exposure profoundly shapes youth social behaviour and identity formation, with social media enabling identity exploration while also posing risks such as addiction, anxiety, aggression, and cognitive impairments (Khanal, 2025; Handayani et al., 2026; Swasti et al., 2026). However, these outcomes are mediated by social, cultural, and community

resources, which can either buffer or amplify negative effects, highlighting the need for community-level interventions rather than viewing digital risks as purely individual problems (Swasti et al., 2026; Khanal, 2025).

Resilience therefore provides an appropriate framework for community-based youth assistance. Resilience is defined as a dynamic process of navigating access to resources that sustain well-being, a view supported by contemporary scholarship that frames it as an adaptive, developmental capacity rather than a fixed trait (Ong & Cammarata, 2020; Schmidt & Schultze-Lutter, 2020; Manjula & Srivastava, 2022). Resilience is bolstered not only by individual skills but also by supportive relationships and inclusive community spaces, with protective factors such as social support and coping strategies being key (Feder et al., 2016; Grigoraş et al., 2024). Equally, inclusive participation ensuring equal access, recognition of diversity, and opportunities to contribute is essential for equitable decision-making and health equity (Mishra et al., 2026).

The challenge is particularly relevant in rural and semi-rural communities where access to structured digital mentoring may be limited. Initial observation and participatory dialogue in Gesang, Selokbesuki, and Denok Villages indicated that existing youth assistance tended to be episodic and that adolescents were not always positioned as active actors in identifying and solving their own social-digital problems. Some young people were initially reluctant to express their experiences openly, while opportunities for collective reflection and practical rehearsal of responses to digital risks remained limited.

Top-down interventions may be less effective than other approaches because they can make participants feel like passive recipients of information. By contrast, Merçon (2024) discusses dialogical learning and doing things together in practical ways, whereas Díaz-Arévalo & Ruíz-Galván (2024) argue for methods that let people participate and set priorities themselves. In fact, this is one of the reasons Participatory Action Research (PAR) is particularly suited for such work, as it is



characterised by a process of doing things together, reflecting, and then acting again in a loop or cycle (Kemmis et al., 2014). This collaborative and cyclical approach actively engages participants as co-researchers rather than passive subjects, ensuring that the research process is genuinely democratic and transformative. Youth settings provide an example of a different but similar case in point for participatory methods, as not only can they give more chance and voice to young people, but they also make sure that programmes will reflect the needs and desires of the youth, that is, how they live and feel about it, rather than what outsiders have in mind (Sharaf et al., 2020)

From the underlying principles, the programme created a Digital Self-Defense model for sustainable use that was based on four pillars, namely, digital safety literacy, a code of conduct regarding digital media, risk-mitigation role play, and peer-oriented community support. The session sought to reinforce four things in terms of the participants, namely: (1) the critical awareness of risks from online life/space/digital socialization, (2) the ability practically to come up with protective responses, (3) the inclusive participation in the planning and learning, and (4) the setting of a local mechanism for continued peer support after the facilitators' intervention. What made the activity valuable was showcasing ways in which Participatory Action Research (PAR) can become a method of involvement while at the same time serving as a framework for detecting changes in the level and mode of the youth's participation as well as their practices of self-protection from the digital world.

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METHOD

This community service programme used Participatory Action Research (PAR) as the main framework for designing, implementing, and evaluating assistance with community partners. The participatory work of this community service programme has been planned, carried out, and assessed through a collaborative method named PAR involving community partners as co-researchers and partners in action. PAR was chosen since, unlike in other models, the participants become the main actors in the generation and utilization of knowledge and actions, rather than just being on the receiving end. It belongs to a tradition of critical-participatory action research, where continuous cycles of action and reflection lead to transformation and community empowerment. For example, Fals-Rahman (2021) and Kemmis et al., (2014) described these kinds of cycles.

A community participatory approach that aims at equal partnership, joint decision-making, disclosure, and interpretation of the results was a principle of the programme (Roberts, 2013).

The program was held in Gemeinde Gesang, Community of Selokbesuki, and Denok Village, Lumajang District. More or less, the program was attended by 25 young and mature people with varied backgrounds; the community leaders; and others who have an interest in joining the event as members of the village. The programme also aimed at engaging women and persons with disabilities. The



information about the programme and the processes was collected by means of Focus Group Discussion (FGD), Semi-structured Dialogue (SD), Participatory observation, Reflective Notes, Activity Documentation, and Simulation-based Exercises. In our study, focus group discussions were one of the methods used to find out the common experiences and priorities of the community. In contrast, group sharing could be used to examine and identify collective meanings (Finamore et al., 2021). Furthermore, semi-structured dialogue was used to get deeper insight into participant experiences (Steger et al., 2008).

The PAR cycle consisted of five operational phases: (1) participatory problem identification and mapping; (2) joint action planning; (3) implementation of Digital Self-Defense assistance; (4) observation and documentation of change; and (5) collaborative reflection and programme evaluation. The cycle was not treated as a rigid sequence; findings from each phase were used to refine the next activity.

Programme achievement was evaluated qualitatively rather than through a numerical pre-test/post-test design. Before implementation, the team and partners agreed on observable indicators of change related to critical awareness, participation, practical self-protection responses, inclusivity, and sustainability. Evidence was then triangulated across observation notes, FGD summaries, documentation, participant performance during risk-mitigation simulations, and end-of-cycle reflection. Member checking was conducted by presenting the team's summary of findings to partners for confirmation or correction. This procedure allowed the evaluation to focus on whether the expected changes were evidenced in participant discourse, behaviour, and collective practice rather than merely on attendance or completion of activities.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are organised according to the five PAR phases. Each subsection first reports the observed process and evidence, then interprets the finding in relation to the study focus. Claims are limited to changes supported by FGD summaries, observation, documentation, simulation records, reflective notes, and member checking. The results therefore distinguish observable process outcomes from theoretical interpretation.

The implementation of this community service activity took place through a series of interrelated stages that formed a cycle of Participatory Action Research (PAR). The results of the implementation are not only demonstrated by the administrative implementation of activities, but also by the dynamics of partner participation, the quality of social interaction, and changes in understanding and practices that arise during the assistance process. Therefore, the discussion in this section integrates a description of the activities at each stage with an analysis of partner participation as the main indicator of the success of the process.

The initial stage of the activity began with participatory problem identification and mapping. At this stage, activities focused on opening a space for dialogue with partners in three villages. The community service team facilitated initial discussions to explore the experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by partners, especially teenagers, in their daily social lives. This process is carried out through focused group discussions and participatory observation, which allow partners to express issues in their own language and perspective. The results at this stage show that partners are able to identify key issues that were previously considered individual problems, but through collective dialogue are recognized as common community issues. This finding is in line with PAR's view that the process of identifying problems is a means of forming critical consciousness, which is the foundation for social change.



In terms of participation, the involvement of partners in the problem mapping stage showed varying levels of activity. Some adolescents were initially passive and waited for instructions, but gradually began to express their views after being facilitated in a dialogical and non-hierarchical atmosphere. This condition reinforces the literature findings that participation in a participatory approach is gradual and requires a safe space for the target group to feel recognized as subjects. The involvement of local figures and local facilitators also contributed to increasing the partners' trust in the facilitation process.

The next stage was joint action planning, which was a transition from understanding the problem to formulating solutions. At this stage, activities are directed towards agreeing on intermediate goals, the form of assistance, and the roles of each party. There were around 25 participants in this program, with diverse profiles. Participants included housewives and young people who had a high interest in village development. There were also representatives of people with disabilities who actively contributed to discussions and activities, creating an inclusive and supportive atmosphere.

The first phase used FGDs and participatory observation in the three target villages to identify social-digital problems from participants' own perspectives. The evidence showed that participants discussed cyberbullying, disinformation, excessive device use, weak awareness of digital safety, and limited opportunities to discuss online problems with trusted peers or adults. An important change during the phase was that issues initially described as personal experiences were increasingly discussed as concerns shared by other participants. This finding was recorded in discussion summaries and observation notes.

Participation was initially uneven. Several adolescents waited for facilitator prompts and were hesitant to express their experiences. During the dialogue, more participants began to contribute examples and respond to others' experiences. The change was confirmed through observation and reflection records. Thus, the



evidence supports an emerging increase in participation and shared problem recognition during the activity, rather than a claim of permanent behavioural change.



Figure 1 Participants in the joint action, housewives and youth from Gesang Village

The second phase translated the mapped problems into jointly agreed priorities and activity arrangements. Approximately 25 participants with diverse backgrounds contributed to discussions about priorities, timing, facilitation, and forms of practical learning. Women and representatives of persons with disabilities were also involved in the discussion process. The planning records show that participants did not merely receive a predetermined schedule; they contributed to decisions about what would be discussed and how activities would be organised.

Evaluation notes indicate that several young participants moved from waiting for direction to expressing preferences about activity priorities and schedules. This evidence supports an observable shift towards co-design during the planning phase. The finding is consistent with participatory practice, in which community involvement in shaping activities can strengthen contextual relevance and ownership (Belgrave et al., 2022). However, the result is interpreted as an observed participation outcome within the programme period. The activities can be summarized as follows:

1. Community Involvement from the Outset

It is crucial to involve the community in the planning and implementation of programs from the outset. This creates a greater sense of ownership and responsibility for the program's outcomes. Therefore, a good practice for this activity is to hold discussion forums to listen to the aspirations of residents, so that the programs implemented are more in line with their needs.

2. Skills-Based Education and Training

Training that focuses on practical skills, such as entrepreneurship and financial management training, has shown significant results in increasing community income. Therefore, village governments can design training programs that are relevant to local potential, ensuring that the training material is easy to understand and can be directly applied.

The action phase consisted specifically of Digital Self-Defense activities: digital safety literacy, media ethics, case-based discussion, and risk-mitigation simulations. The activities required participants to analyse examples of digital risks and discuss possible responses. Facilitator notes from the simulations recorded whether participants could identify the risk, propose a protective response, and explain the reason for the response. Participants increasingly connected digital behaviour with consequences for personal safety, peer relationships, and community interaction.

The simulation records provide the main evidence for the self-protection outcome. Participants were able to formulate responses to the presented risk situations, although the evidence was qualitative and did not produce a numerical score. The finding therefore indicates an emerging practical capacity demonstrated during the activity, not a quantified increase in digital self-protection or evidence that the behaviour was retained after the programme.





Figure 2 Training

3. Use of Technology for Access to Information

The application of information technology to share information and best practices is very helpful in increasing community knowledge. To maximize this program, villages can utilize digital platforms to build communication networks between farmers and the community, thereby facilitating the exchange of useful information.

4. Social Network Development

Strengthening social networks among residents, including involving vulnerable groups such as women and people with disabilities, increases solidarity and collaboration. Establishing working groups or communities in other villages can help create social support and reduce gaps in participation.

5. Local Culture-Based Approach

Understanding and integrating local culture into programs is very helpful in gaining community support. Therefore, to facilitate the implementation of inclusion, other villages can conduct preliminary research to understand the prevailing values and norms, so that the proposed program is more easily accepted.

The results show that the planning process not only produced activity plans, but also became a social learning arena for partners. Youth began to engage in discussions about activity priorities, determining appropriate timing, and the types

of activities they considered relevant and interesting. This process demonstrated a shift in the position of partners from “program recipients” to “co-designers,” which is a key feature of PAR practices.

Observation and documentation were conducted throughout the programme. The team recorded participation patterns, discussion summaries, reflective notes, documentation, and responses during simulations (Krishnan et al., 2020; Roberts, 2013). Across these sources, three recurring patterns were identified: participants increasingly discussed digital risks using collective rather than solely individual framing; adolescents who were initially passive contributed more often during planning and reflection; and the activity provided opportunities for diverse community groups to participate in discussion and support youth activities. These patterns were compared across sources during reflection and member checking (Smith & Blumenthal, 2012; Stewart et al., 2009)

The observed changes are interpreted as process outcomes. They demonstrate emerging awareness, participation, and self-protection reasoning during the activity, but they do not establish long-term behavioural change. Likewise, the involvement of diverse groups demonstrates inclusive participation during the programme, but it does not by itself prove a sustained increase in community solidarity. This distinction follows the evaluation design and the available evidence.

In the final PAR phase, the team and partners reviewed the evidence from the preceding phases. Member checking was used to confirm whether the team's summary represented participants' experiences. The final evaluation identified three strongest outcomes: shared recognition of digital risks, greater youth involvement in programme decisions, and emerging ability to formulate self-protection responses during simulations. The evaluation also confirmed that diverse participants had been involved in the activity and dialogue.



The reflection also identified a limitation in sustainability. Participants discussed continued peer communication and follow-up mechanisms, but these mechanisms had not yet been demonstrated through a post-programme follow-up. Accordingly, sustainability was classified as partially achieved in the evaluation table. The immediate follow-up priority identified with partners was to strengthen local facilitators and establish routine peer-learning or community forums. This is a proposed continuation mechanism, not evidence of an already established long-term effect.

CONCLUSION

The PAR-based Digital Self-Defense activity in Gesang, Selokbesuki, and Denok Villages achieved its immediate process objectives. The final evaluation showed that participants increasingly recognised cyberbullying, disinformation, excessive device use, and digital safety as shared concerns; youth participation developed from initial passivity towards involvement in determining priorities and activity arrangements; and participants demonstrated an emerging capacity to formulate responses to digital-risk cases during simulations. Inclusive participation was evident through the involvement of youth, women, and representatives of persons with disabilities. The sustainability indicator was only partially achieved because peer-support and follow-up mechanisms still require local facilitators and routine continuation. The activity therefore provides evidence of emerging social-digital resilience and self-protection capacity during the programme, not statistical or long-term behavioural effects. Follow-up should focus on training local facilitators, scheduling regular peer-learning forums, and applying a simple follow-up evaluation instrument; a future PAR cycle may also add pre- and post-activity quantitative measures to complement the qualitative evidence.



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