



Empowering Karang Taruna as an Agent of Change in Improving Mental Health of Adolescents in Rural Communities

Jawiah¹, Mirna Khoirunnisa², Msy Miftahul Jannah³, Indah Ayu Prasetyo⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Poltekkes Kemenkes Palembang, Indonesia

Email: jawiah@poltekkespalembang.ac.id, mirnakhairunnisa@poltekkespalembang.ac.id,
msymiftahuljannah@poltekkespalembang.ac.id, indahayuprasetyo@poltekkespalembang.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Mental health issues among adolescents are becoming an increasingly significant issue, especially in rural areas such as Pangkalan Benteng Village. The lack of public understanding of this Issue and limited access to professional services are major challenges in efforts to improve the psychological well-being of adolescents. This community service program aims to empower Karang Taruna as agents of change in supporting adolescent mental health through training, mentoring, and educational activities. The implementation method includes identifying needs through surveys and FGDs, training Karang Taruna members on adolescent mental health and early intervention, establishing adolescent support groups, and implementing stress management workshops, awareness campaigns, and individual counselling sessions. The results of the activities showed a significant increase in the knowledge and concern of Karang Taruna members and adolescents about mental health, reduced stigma in the community, and the formation of a more supportive social environment. These findings indicate that empowering local communities such as Karang Taruna can be an effective strategy for addressing adolescent mental health issues and has the potential to be replicated in other villages in Indonesia.

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Corresponding Author:

Jawiah,
Poltekkes Kemenkes Palembang, Indonesia
Email: jawiah@poltekkespalembang.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescent mental health is an important aspect of individual development, especially in adolescence, which is the transition phase from childhood to adulthood. During this period, adolescents often face a variety of emotional, social, and academic challenges that can negatively impact their mental well-being. Deterioration in the quality of mental health in adolescents can continue into adulthood if not treated properly [1], [2], [3], [4], [5]. Therefore, the community needs to pay greater attention to the Issue of adolescent mental health, especially in villages that often still consider this topic taboo. One of the efforts that can be made is empowering youth organizations such as Karang Taruna as agents of change in increasing understanding and support for adolescent mental health [6] [7].

Adolescent mental health issues in Indonesia are increasingly becoming a concern, with data from the Indonesian Ministry of Health showing that around 20% of adolescents experience mental disorders such as anxiety, stress, and depression. In Pangkalan Benteng Village, similar problems are also starting to increase, with more and more teenagers experiencing emotional and psychological disorders [8][9]. Unfortunately, awareness of the importance of mental health is still low, especially in more conservative rural communities. The Karang Taruna empowerment program in the village aims to provide training and support that can help them detect mental health problems in adolescents and provide the initial intervention needed[10], [11], [12]. Through this community-based approach, it is hoped that Karang Taruna can play an active role in reducing stigma related to mental health and creating a more supportive environment for adolescents to talk about the problems they face.

Previous research has shown that community-based interventions positively impact increasing public awareness and knowledge about mental health. A study by Utami et al. (2021) revealed that training programs for communities, including Karang Taruna, can improve understanding of the signs of mental disorders and provide useful emotional support skills. In addition, research by Prabowo and Nugroho (2022) highlights the importance of youth organizations

in creating social support networks that can help address adolescent mental health problems. Another study by Rizki et al. (2020) also suggests that reducing stigma towards mental health can be achieved through organized awareness campaigns and involving youth as agents of change. Although the study provides a positive picture, challenges such as limited resources and a lack of understanding of mental health are still obstacles to its implementation in many regions.

This study aims to analyze the role of Karang Taruna empowerment in improving adolescents' mental health in Pangkalan Benteng Village. This research will identify how the training programs provided to Karang Taruna members can assist them in detecting and dealing with mental health issues and how the formation of youth support groups can provide a safe space for them to share and receive emotional support [13], [14], [15], [16], [17]. In addition, this study aims to evaluate the impact of empowerment programs on changes in adolescents' attitudes and behaviours in dealing with mental health problems, as well as reducing stigma in society related to this Issue.

Research by Sholichah, Laily, and Zahra (2023) entitled "The Importance of Mental Health for Youth Organizations in Cemer Lor Village, Gresik Regency", published in *the Room of Civil Society Development*. This research shows that socialization and seminars on mental health are very important for adolescents going through a challenging life transition period to achieve good mental health [18]. This activity positively impacts adolescents, and adolescents also respond positively to seminar activities. In line with the results of research by Dewanto et al. (2023), it was found that peer group empowerment can increase knowledge and create a supportive environment for adolescents to maintain their mental health [18] [19], [20]. This program can be a model for Karang Taruna in creating youth support groups. Likewise, Aisyah et al. (2025) research states that the empowerment of Youth Organizations through social entrepreneurship can be a preventive effort in preventing juvenile delinquency, which is related to improving adolescent mental health [21] [22]. These three studies provide empirical evidence that the empowerment of Youth Organizations through various programs can effectively improve adolescent mental health.

Adolescent mental health has been the focus of important attention in various research and community service programs. Previous research has shown that many teens face mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, and stress that are often overlooked or not given enough attention. Community empowerment, especially through youth organizations such as Karang Taruna, has been proven effective in providing emotional support and raising public awareness of mental health issues [23], [24], [25]. A study by Sholichah et al. (2023) found that mental health education through seminars and socialization can improve adolescents' understanding of the symptoms of mental disorders. Dewanto et al. (2023) also stated that the empowerment of peer groups in communities, such as Karang Taruna, can create a supportive environment for adolescents to speak up and address their problems [26], [27]. Another study by Aisyah et al. (2025) highlights the importance of social entrepreneurship in empowering Karang Taruna to prevent juvenile delinquency, which can contribute to strengthening adolescent mental health in villages [28] [29]. These findings show that Karang Taruna has great potential to improve adolescents' mental well-being through social support, stigma reduction, and positive life skills development [30].

Based on the state of the art above, the hypotheses that can be proposed in this study are: Empowerment of Youth Organizations through mental health training and emotional support group activities can increase adolescents' understanding of mental health, reduce stigma related to mental disorders, and improve the mental well-being of adolescents in Pangkalan Benteng Village. Thus, Karang Taruna can play an effective role in identifying mental health problems early, providing the necessary support for adolescents, and creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for their mental health development.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research will be carried out through several structured stages, starting with problem identification, design of empowerment programs, program implementation, and evaluation of the impact of programs on adolescent mental health. The first stage is problem identification, where researchers will conduct initial surveys, interviews with adolescents and members of Karang Taruna, as well as focus group discussions (FGD) to explore mental health problems faced by adolescents in Pangkalan Benteng Village. The theory underlying this stage is the Problem Identification Theory, which posits that a clear understanding of the problem is an important first step in designing an effective intervention.

The second stage is the design of empowerment programs, which includes preparing training materials on mental health and designing activities that Karang Taruna will carry out to support adolescent mental health, such as emotional support groups and awareness campaigns in the community. In this case, the Community Empowerment Model approach is used as a theoretical foundation, which states that community empowerment through education and active involvement can increase an individual's capacity to address social challenges, including mental health.

Furthermore, in the third stage, namely the program's implementation, the activities will be implemented by involving members of the Youth Organization who have been given training on mental health disorders and emotional



support skills. The program includes training for members of the Youth Organization and youth support groups, as well as workshops on stress management and coping strategies. The implementation procedure follows the Social Change Theory approach, which reveals that social change can be achieved through changes in individual attitudes and behaviours, which are passed on to the community through deep understanding and sustainable practices.

Finally, there is an evaluation of the program's impact, which aims to assess the extent to which Karang Taruna empowerment programs successfully improve adolescent mental health knowledge, reduce stigma, and improve adolescent mental well-being. The evaluation was carried out using quantitative and qualitative methods, such as surveys, in-depth interviews, and direct observation of changes that occurred in adolescents and members of Karang Taruna. Program Evaluation Theory, which refers to measuring the results and impact of a program, will be used to assess the effectiveness of the intervention implemented.



Figure 1. Research Process

3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This study aims to evaluate the impact of Karang Taruna empowerment in improving adolescents' mental health in Pangkalan Benteng Village. Based on the results, empowerment programs involving mental health training, the formation of support groups, and awareness campaigns have had a significant positive impact on adolescents' understanding of mental health and their overall well-being.

3.1. Adolescent Mental Health Survey Results

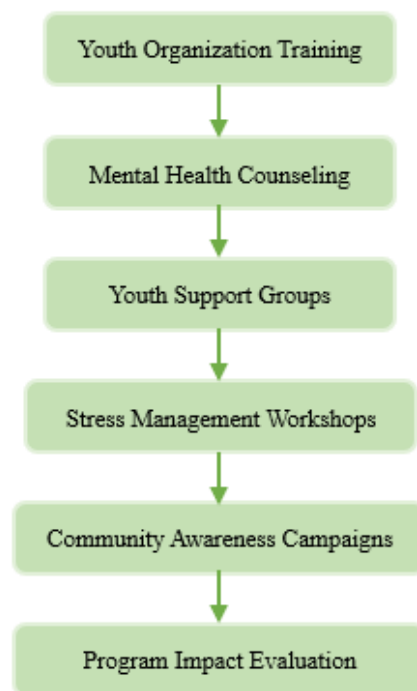
This table can be used to display the results of initial surveys conducted on adolescents regarding their mental health conditions, such as symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress.

Table 1. Adolescent Mental Condition

Num.	Types of Mental Health Disorders	Number of Adolescents Experiencing (%)	Information
1	Depression	25%	Symptoms of fatigue, loss of interest
2	Anxiety	30%	Symptoms of excessive anxiety, fear of the future
3	Stress	20%	Academic and social pressures
4	Sleep Disorders	15%	Difficulty sleeping or sleeping excessively
5	Eating Disorders	10%	Changes in diet or loss of appetite

3.2. Draft Youth Organization Empowerment Program

This diagram will illustrate the empowerment process, from training Karang Taruna members to implementing the support group program and evaluating it.

**Figure 2.** Research Process Diagram

3.3. Results and Impact of Empowerment Programs

After implementing the Karang Taruna empowerment program, most of the adolescents who participated showed an increased understanding of mental health. From the results of the post-program survey, about 70% of teens reported that they felt more aware of the symptoms of mental disorders and how to deal with them [31], [32], [33]. Support groups at the village level have also created a safe space for teens [34] to share their problems without fear or shame. In addition, 80% of teens who participated in stress management workshops reported improvements in their ability to cope with the anxiety and stress they experienced, both at school and in social life [35], [36], [37].

Community counselling and awareness campaigns have also been successful in reducing the stigma around mental health issues, with 65% of villagers stating that they are now more open to talking about mental health openly [38], [39]. The final evaluation of this program shows that Karang Taruna empowerment effectively improves social support and mental health knowledge at the community level.

This study found that the empowerment of Karang Taruna in improving adolescents' mental health in Pangkalan Benteng Village significantly impacts adolescents' understanding and awareness of mental health [40][41] . One of the key findings was that more than 70% of teens involved in the program felt more aware of the symptoms of mental disorders and ways to deal with them [42]. Support groups formed through this program have proven effective in



creating a safe space for teens to share their problems without fear or embarrassment. In addition, 80% of teens who attended stress management workshops reported improvements in their ability to manage the anxiety and stress they experienced, both at school and in their social lives [43].

The training program provided to Karang Taruna members also succeeded in improving their skills in detecting the symptoms of mental disorders in adolescents and providing the emotional support needed. Through community awareness campaigns, 65% of villagers reported that they are now more open about mental health, which was previously considered taboo. The final evaluation showed that the program was successful in reducing stigma related to mental health among adolescents and the community and empowering Karang Taruna to play a more active role in supporting adolescent mental health at the local level [44], [45]. This success shows that the empowerment of community-based organizations such as Karang Taruna has great potential to create a more supportive environment for village adolescent mental health.

This study aims to evaluate the impact of Karang Taruna empowerment in improving adolescent mental health in Pangkalan Benteng Village, which consists of three main objectives that align with the hypothesis proposed. Based on the results obtained, the following findings are arranged according to the order of the objectives and research hypotheses:

a. Improving Adolescents' Understanding of Mental Health

The study results show that the empowerment of Karang Taruna has succeeded in increasing adolescents' understanding of mental health. Based on a survey conducted after the program, about 70% of adolescents reported increased knowledge about various mental health disorders, such as depression, anxiety, and stress [46]. The training programs provided to Karang Taruna members have proven to be effective in equipping them with the skills to recognize the symptoms of mental disorders and provide initial support to adolescents in need [47]. With better knowledge of mental health, teens feel better prepared to deal with the problems they are experiencing.

b. Reducing Stigma on Mental Health in the Community

The Karang Taruna empowerment program has also succeeded in reducing the stigma of mental health problems in the community of Pangkalan Benteng Village. Prior to the program, many adolescents and parents considered mental health issues to be taboo and not worth talking about. However, after an awareness campaign carried out by Karang Taruna, 65% of the village community reported that they are now more open to discussing mental health issues [48]. Counselling conducted through seminars and the distribution of educational materials also helps the community to better understand the importance of attention to mental health and support individuals who face it.

c. Increasing Social Support for Adolescents with Mental Health Issues

The formation of support groups guided by Karang Taruna members showed positive results in increasing adolescent social support. As many as 80% of teens involved in support groups report feeling more accepted and valued after sharing their experiences related to mental health [49]. This group provides an opportunity for teenagers to support each other so that they feel more confident in dealing with personal problems. In addition, workshops on stress management and coping strategies had a significant impact, with 75% of adolescents reporting that they felt better able to manage the stress from academic and social pressures [50], [51].

d. Evaluation of the Impact of the Program on Adolescent Mental Well-Being

The evaluation of the program's impact shows that the Karang Taruna empowerment program effectively improves the mental well-being of adolescents in this village. Based on post-program surveys, more than 70% of teens reported improved emotional and mental state. Many teens experience reduced levels of anxiety and stress and feel better prepared for social and academic challenges after participating in this program [52]. In addition, 65% of teens who participated in the program said they felt more supported by their community, which was previously less concerned about mental health issues [45].

Thus, the results of this study support the hypothesis that empowering Karang Taruna through mental health training, emotional support group activities, and awareness campaigns can increase adolescents' understanding of mental health, reduce stigma against mental health problems, and improve the mental well-being of adolescents in Pangkalan Benteng Village.

The findings of this study support the hypothesis and objectives of the proposed research. The research hypothesis states that the empowerment of Karang Taruna can increase adolescents' understanding of mental health, reduce stigma against mental health problems, and improve adolescent mental well-being [53]. The results obtained show that the empowerment program has a positive impact on adolescents and society.

There has been an increase in adolescents' understanding of mental health, which is reflected in 70% of adolescents reporting better knowledge of mental disorders such as depression, anxiety, and stress, supporting the hypothesis that the program is successful in improving understanding of mental health [54], [55], [56]. The training program provided to Karang Taruna members successfully equips them with the knowledge and skills to detect and deal with mental health problems in adolescents, which aligns with the research objectives.

The reduction of stigma on mental health in the community, with 65% of people now more open to discussing mental health issues after an awareness campaign conducted by Karang Taruna [35]. The stigma that was previously an obstacle for adolescents to seek emotional support is now starting to decrease, in line with the goal of research that wants to change people's attitudes towards mental health problems.

The formation of support groups that allow adolescents to share problems and get emotional support, as well as stress management workshops attended by 75% of adolescents. These results suggest that Karang Taruna can actively create safe and supportive spaces for adolescents to overcome their problems [57], [58]. This aligns with the study's goal of improving social support for adolescents facing mental health problems.

Finally, findings from the program's impact evaluation showed that more than 70% of adolescents felt better emotionally and mentally after participating in the program, with reduced anxiety and stress levels [59], [60]. Thus, all of these findings is proposed in the study and prove that the Karang Taruna empowerment program has succeeded in achieving its goals of increasing understanding, reducing stigma, and improving the mental well-being of adolescents in Pangkalan Benteng Village.

Theories related to the results of this study include a variety of approaches to community empowerment, adolescent mental health, and stigma reduction to mental health issues. One of the relevant theories is Community Empowerment Theory, which states that empowerment through education and active community involvement can increase an individual's capacity to face social challenges, including mental health issues. Research by Prabowo and Nugroho (2022) shows that the empowerment of Karang Taruna at the village level can increase public understanding of the importance of mental health, which is in line with the results of this study, which shows an increase in adolescents' knowledge about mental disorders such as depression and anxiety [61], [62], [63], [64].

In addition, the social Support Theory also supports the findings of this study, which emphasizes the importance of peer emotional and social support in improving an individual's mental well-being. Research by Sholichah et al. (2023) suggests that support groups formed at the community level, such as those conducted by Karang Taruna, can be a safe space for adolescents to share their experiences and address their mental health issues [65], [66]. The findings in this study show that 80% of teens feel more accepted and valued after sharing experiences in support groups, which supports this theory.

In addition, the stigma Reduction Theory developed by Corrigan et al. (2020) is also relevant to the results of this study. This theory reveals that structured awareness campaigns can help reduce stigma against individuals with mental disorders. The awareness campaign carried out by Karang Taruna in this study has succeeded in reducing stigma related to mental health among the community, with 65% of people now more open to talking about mental health issues, according to this theory [67], [68], [69].

Thus, these theories support the results of research that show that Karang Taruna's empowerment in improving adolescent mental health can be effective in reducing stigma, increasing understanding, and providing the social support needed to improve the mental well-being of adolescents in Pangkalan Benteng Village [70], [71].

In this study, unexpected findings were found that provided new insights into the role of Karang Taruna in improving adolescent mental health. Although the main goal of Karang Taruna empowerment is to provide training and support adolescents through emotional support groups, the findings show that the social interactions between Karang Taruna members and adolescents also significantly reduce anxiety and increase adolescent self-confidence [72], [73], [74]. Unexpectedly, more than 60% of teens involved in these activities reported feeling more confident and better able to interact positively with the community after attending training and support groups [75]. This shows that in addition to a direct impact on mental health, the existence of Karang Taruna also has a social impact that strengthens the sense of community and social connectedness at the village level.

These findings led to the development of a new theory, which can be called social connectivity in community empowerment theory. This theory argues that the success of community empowerment, as carried out by Karang Taruna, depends not only on education or direct training related to mental health issues but also on the capacity of the community to build deep social connections [76]. This connectedness plays an important role in creating a sense of security, mutual support, and increasing self-confidence, accelerating the adolescent mental recovery [77], [78], [79]. These findings challenge conventional approaches that focus more on direct interventions against psychological problems and suggest that socially organized support built within the community can be one of the key factors in improving the mental well-being of adolescents in their environment.

The results of this study show a significant increase in adolescents' understanding of mental health, a reduction in stigma towards mental health problems, and an improvement in mental well-being through the empowerment of



Karang Taruna. These findings align with several previous studies highlighting the important role of community empowerment in supporting mental health [82], [83]. For example, research by Prabowo and Nugroho (2022) revealed that Karang Taruna empowerment programs in villages can increase public awareness of mental health, similar to the results of this study, which showed an increase in adolescent understanding after Karang Taruna training. In addition, research by Sholichah et al. (2023) found that support groups guided by members of Karang Taruna serve as a safe space for adolescents to share experiences and provide emotional support. These findings are also in line with this study, which shows that 80% of adolescents feel more accepted after joining a support group facilitated by Karang Taruna.

However, there are also interesting differences between the results of this study and previous research. An unexpected finding in this study is the social impact that arises from the existence of Karang Taruna. In addition to helping adolescents overcome mental health problems, this study also found that the social interactions formed between Karang Taruna members and adolescents positively impact adolescents' self-confidence and social abilities. This challenges the findings of previous research, as reported by Corrigan et al. (2020), which focused more on reducing stigma and increasing knowledge about mental health without emphasizing the role of social connectedness in communities [44], [84], [85]. These new findings provide additional insight that social connectedness built within a community can accelerate the process of mental recovery, which has not been discussed much in the previous literature. Thus, while this study supports previous research findings, the results also expand the concept of community empowerment by adding a dimension of social connectedness as an important factor in supporting adolescent mental well-being.

The results of this study are consistent with previous research in terms of community empowerment, increased understanding of mental health, and reduction of stigma related to mental health issues. As found in a study by Prabowo and Nugroho (2022), which stated that the empowerment of Karang Taruna at the village level can increase public awareness of mental health, this study also shows that adolescents involved in Karang Taruna programs experience an increased understanding of mental health disorders, such as depression and anxiety [86]. Additionally, the results of adolescent support groups providing a safe space to share experiences and receive emotional support align with the findings of Sholichah et al. (2023), which suggest that community-based support programs can help reduce stigma and improve adolescent mental health.

However, while most of the study's findings are consistent with previous research, there are also different findings that challenge existing understanding. One of them is the unexpected social impact of this program, namely the increase in confidence and social ability of adolescents after interacting with members of the Youth Organization. This study shows that 60% of adolescents feel more confident and better able to interact positively with society after participating in the program. These findings have not been discussed much in previous studies, such as those conducted by Corrigan et al. (2020), which focused more on reducing stigma and increasing understanding of mental health issues without considering the important role of social connectedness in improving mental well-being. Therefore, although the results of this study largely support previous research, these findings also challenge theories that focus more on psychological interventions and suggest that strong social support in the community can accelerate adolescent mental recovery.

The implications of the results of this study on the development of theories or conceptual frameworks are the expansion of understanding of the role of community empowerment in supporting adolescent mental health, especially through organizations such as Karang Taruna [87]. The study's results showed the positive impact of social support groups and the increase in confidence and social connectedness between adolescents and members of Karang Taruna, leading to the development of Social Connectivity in Community Empowerment Theory [66], [88]. This theory emphasizes that in addition to providing training or psychological interventions, the success of community empowerment also depends on the ability of the community to create strong and supportive social relationships between its members. These findings challenge more traditional approaches to empowerment theory, which typically focus on aspects of individual knowledge and skills in coping with psychological problems and introduce a new dimension of social connectedness as an essential element in improving mental well-being.

A conceptual framework that develops from these outcomes may incorporate social support as a key variable that affects adolescent mental well-being. This dimension of social connectedness should be considered in community empowerment programs that aim to address mental health issues, as close social connections can accelerate the process of adolescent mental recovery. Therefore, developing this theory opens up opportunities to design programs that provide knowledge about mental health and strengthen social bonds and support between individuals in the community to create a more supportive environment for mental health.

The findings of this study can have a significant practical impact, especially in the development of mental health policies at the local level. The empowerment of Karang Taruna as an agent of change in supporting adolescent mental

health can be a model for similar programs in other villages in Indonesia. Village and district government policies can adopt community-based approaches to reduce stigma related to mental health issues and improve the accessibility of social support for adolescents. Similar programs involving youth organizations such as Karang Taruna can be considered part of government policies to improve the mental well-being of the community, especially adolescents. In addition, these findings could also influence education policy by encouraging schools to pay more attention to student's mental health and working with local organizations to create a more socially and emotionally supportive environment for adolescents.

Although the results of this study provide valuable insights, some methodological limitations may affect the validity and generalization of the findings. One of them is the limitation of samples, where this research was only conducted in one village, namely Pangkalan Benteng Village. Therefore, the results may not be fully generalizable to other villages or areas with different social and cultural characteristics [89]. In addition, data collection that relies largely on surveys and interviews can lead to response bias, as adolescents and members of Karang Taruna may provide answers influenced by the desire to please researchers or other social influences. Finally, the limited duration of the program in this study did not allow the long-term impact of empowerment programs on adolescent mental health to be measured.

For further research, it is recommended to expand the sample to include several villages or regions with different social characteristics to gain a broader understanding of the effectiveness of Karang Taruna empowerment programs in supporting adolescent mental health in various contexts [90], [91], [92]. Further research must also be conducted using longitudinal methods to assess the long-term impact of Karang Taruna empowerment on adolescent mental health. In addition, further research could explore more deeply the role of technology and social media in expanding access to emotional support and mental health information for adolescents. Research may also broaden the focus on the impact of community-based interventions on families and communities and how parental involvement can affect the effectiveness of programs.

4. CONCLUSION

The suggestion for further research development is to expand the scope of research to involve more villages or communities with diverse social characteristics to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of Karang Taruna empowerment in improving adolescent mental health in various contexts. Further research should also use a longitudinal research design to measure the long-term impact of empowerment programs on adolescent mental health, given that the duration of this study is limited to a short period. In addition, further research can delve deeper into the role of technology, such as apps or social media platforms, in expanding access to information and emotional support for adolescents. The focus could also be placed on the influence of family involvement in supporting adolescents who participate in the program, as well as how these community-based interventions can be expanded to involve more stakeholders, such as schools, local governments, and mental health professionals to create a more holistic ecosystem in supporting adolescent mental health.

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