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Interactive storytelling intervention to improve adolescent mental health awareness and prevent cyberbullying

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Cyberbullying;
Health promotion;
Interactive storytelling;
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ABSTRACT

Background: Cyberbullying has emerged as an important challenge among adolescents and may negatively affect their psychological well-being. Conventional health education approaches may be less engaging for adolescents, particularly in rural settings with limited access to mental health promotion programs. Interactive storytelling offers a participatory approach that combines narratives, role-play, discussion, and reflection to strengthen adolescents' understanding and responses to cyberbullying. This community service program aimed to improve adolescents' knowledge, attitudes, empathy, and practical skills related to cyberbullying prevention and mental health promotion through interactive storytelling.

Methods: The program was conducted among 15 high school students in Bissolorro Village, Gowa Regency, South Sulawesi. The intervention included mental health and cyberbullying education, interactive storytelling, role-play, group discussions, simulations, and reflection. Knowledge was assessed using pre- and post-tests, while attitudes, empathy, and practical skills were evaluated through reflection sheets and facilitator observations.

Results: The mean knowledge score increased from 52.0 before the intervention to 84.1 after the intervention, representing a 32.1-point improvement. Positive attitudes were also observed: 93.3% of participants rejected cyberbullying, while 96.7% expressed willingness to support victims. All groups successfully identified cyberbullying scenarios, and 80% demonstrated appropriate response strategies and assertive communication skills.

Conclusion: Interactive storytelling was an engaging and participatory approach for improving adolescents' knowledge, attitudes, empathy, and practical skills related to mental health promotion and cyberbullying prevention. The approach has potential for continued implementation in school-based health promotion programs.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital technology has substantially changed how adolescents communicate, establish social relationships, and express themselves. Social media, instant messaging, and other online platforms have become integral parts of adolescents' daily lives. Although these technologies provide opportunities for communication, education, and social participation, they have also created new forms of interpersonal harm, particularly cyberbullying. Cyberbullying involves harmful or aggressive behavior conducted through electronic and digital media. It is increasingly recognized as a public health concern because of its potential consequences for adolescents' psychological well-being and social development (Zhu et al., 2021).

Globally, cyberbullying affects a considerable proportion of children and adolescents. A comprehensive systematic review involving 63 studies reported cyberbullying victimization rates ranging from 13.99% to 57.5%, while perpetration rates ranged from 6.0% to 46.3% (Anwar et al., 2025). These wide variations reflect differences in population characteristics, measurement methods, digital environments, and definitions of cyberbullying. Nevertheless, the evidence demonstrates that cyberbullying is not an isolated behavioral problem. Exposure to online harassment has been associated with depression, anxiety, loneliness, reduced self-esteem, school absenteeism, and other psychological difficulties (Santre, 2023; Roberts et al., 2026). These consequences highlight the importance of integrating cyberbullying prevention with adolescent mental health promotion.

The Indonesian context presents similar concerns. Adolescents are increasingly exposed to social media and online communication, while their knowledge of responsible digital behavior and appropriate responses to cyberbullying may remain inadequate (Suprapto et al., 2026). Cyberbullying has also been associated with psychological problems and suicidal ideation among adolescents, reinforcing the need for preventive interventions that address both digital behavior and mental health (Dewi et al., 2023; Roggendorf & Volkov, 2025). Educational interventions should therefore extend beyond increasing knowledge to strengthening empathy, emotional awareness, communication skills, help-seeking behavior, and the ability to respond constructively when cyberbullying occurs.

This need was particularly evident among the community partners in Bissolorro Village, Bungaya District, Gowa Regency, South Sulawesi. Although access to cellular technology in the village was relatively adequate, digital literacy regarding internet ethics and online safety remained limited. Preliminary observations and discussions with teachers indicated that bullying involving social media had begun to emerge among students but had not been systematically addressed. Moreover, the school and local health services had not implemented a specific program integrating cyberbullying prevention with adolescent mental health promotion. These conditions demonstrated a clear need for a contextual, accessible, and engaging school-based intervention.

Conventional lecture-based education may be insufficient to address the emotional and interpersonal dimensions of cyberbullying. Evidence from systematic reviews suggests that anti-cyberbullying educational programs can reduce cyber-aggression and victimization, particularly when interventions actively involve students and promote interpersonal interaction rather than merely providing information (Lan et al., 2022). Interactive and participatory approaches are therefore particularly relevant because they provide opportunities for adolescents to recognize

problematic situations, consider different perspectives, develop empathy, and practice appropriate responses.

To address this need, the community service program implemented interactive storytelling as its primary educational intervention. The approach combined narrative-based learning with role-play, case discussion, simulation, and reflection. Students were encouraged to identify cyberbullying situations, explore the emotions experienced by victims and perpetrators, discuss possible consequences, and practice appropriate responses in a supportive learning environment. The approach was designed to transform students from passive recipients of information into active participants in the learning process.

Accordingly, this community service activity aimed to improve high school students' knowledge of cyberbullying and its mental health consequences, strengthen their ability to recognize and respond appropriately to cyberbullying, promote positive attitudes and empathy toward victims, and encourage responsible digital behavior through interactive storytelling. The program also sought to foster solidarity among students and contribute to the development of a safer and more supportive school environment.

METHOD

Implementation method

This Community Service Program (PKM) employed a participatory educational intervention with a pre-test–post-test evaluation approach. The program was designed to promote adolescent mental health while strengthening students' knowledge and practical skills related to cyberbullying prevention. Interactive storytelling served as the core educational strategy and was complemented by psychoeducation, role-play, group discussion, case simulation, and reflection. Rather than positioning students as passive recipients of information, the activities encouraged them to interpret cyberbullying scenarios, explore emotional responses, and practice appropriate actions when encountering harmful behavior in digital environments. This approach was consistent with the program's objective of developing knowledge, empathy, and practical response skills.

Setting and time

The activity was conducted at a senior high school in Bissolorro Village, Bungaya District, Gowa Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The school was selected because it serves adolescents from Bissolorro and surrounding villages and had not previously implemented a specific program integrating cyberbullying prevention and adolescent mental health promotion. The main implementation was reported as taking place in June 2026. The report, however, contains inconsistent dates: Chapter V states 25 June 2026, whereas the logbook and several other sections state 29 June 2026. Therefore, the final manuscript should use the date verified from the official attendance sheet or activity documentation.

Participants

The primary target group consisted of 15 senior high school students, representing different classes and selected in coordination with the school. The activity also involved three accompanying teachers, the school principal, the Head of Bissolorro Village, a representative of the Postgraduate Program, and five members of the implementation team. Overall, 25 individuals participated in the activity, while the 15 students constituted the primary participants receiving and completing the intervention and evaluation.

Table 1. Stages of program implementation

Stage	Main Activities	Description	Evaluation/Output
Pre-implementation	Coordination and preparation	Coordination with the school and local stakeholders; preparation of the venue, educational materials, interactive storytelling scenarios, and evaluation instruments.	Readiness of materials, activity sheets, storytelling props, and evaluation forms.
	Baseline assessment	Students completed a pre-test before receiving the intervention to assess baseline knowledge of adolescent mental health and cyberbullying.	Baseline pre-test scores.
Implementation	Psychoeducation	Delivery of educational material on adolescent mental health, forms and consequences of cyberbullying, and appropriate prevention and response strategies.	Improved understanding of cyberbullying and mental health issues.
	Interactive storytelling	Implementation of the scenario *"Jejak Digital: Siapa di Balik Layar?"* (*"Digital Footprints: Who Is Behind the Screen?"*).	Active student participation in story-based learning.
	Role-play and group activities	Students participated in role-play, case discussions, and simulations to identify cyberbullying situations and determine appropriate responses.	Ability to identify cyberbullying and practice assertive responses.
	Reflection and commitment	Students reflected on their experiences and formulated a shared anti-cyberbullying commitment.	Shared anti-cyberbullying commitment.
Evaluation	Post-test	Students completed a post-test after all educational activities.	Post-test scores and changes in knowledge.
	Attitude and empathy assessment	Reflection activities were used to assess attitudes and empathy toward cyberbullying and its victims.	Information on attitudes, empathy, and willingness to support victims.
	Skills assessment	Facilitators observed students during group simulations to assess practical response skills.	Ability to identify cases, choose appropriate actions, and communicate assertively.
	Participation monitoring	Facilitators monitored students' engagement throughout the activity.	Level of participation and involvement during the program.

Evaluation instruments and data analysis

Three principal evaluation methods were applied: pre- and post-tests, facilitator observation, and participant reflection/evaluation forms. The pre-test and post-test assessed knowledge concerning the definition and forms of cyberbullying, its mental health consequences, and appropriate prevention and response strategies. Comparison of the scores was used to determine changes in knowledge following the intervention. Observation sheets were used during simulations to assess students' ability to identify cyberbullying, select appropriate responses, and demonstrate assertive communication. Reflection sheets were used to assess attitudes and empathy, including rejection of cyberbullying, willingness to report incidents, and willingness to support victims. The results were summarized descriptively using mean scores, score changes, frequencies, and percentages.

RESULT

The community service program was completed with full participation from the targeted groups. All 15 students attended the activity, together with three accompanying teachers, the school principal, the Head of Bissolorro Village, one representative of the Postgraduate Program, and five members of the implementation team. Overall participation therefore reached 25 individuals, corresponding to 100% of the planned attendance reported in the activity results.

Changes in knowledge before and after the intervention

The pre-test and post-test results showed consistent improvements across all three knowledge domains assessed. The largest improvement occurred in knowledge regarding cyberbullying prevention and response, followed by knowledge of its mental health consequences and understanding of its definition and forms.

Table 2. Changes in students' knowledge before and after the interactive storytelling intervention

Knowledge domain	Pre-test mean	Post-test mean	Change
Definition and forms of cyberbullying	58.3	86.7	+28.4
Mental health consequences of cyberbullying	52.1	84.5	+32.4
Cyberbullying prevention and response	45.6	81.2	+35.6
Overall mean	52.0	84.1	+32.1

The overall mean score increased from 52.0 before the intervention to 84.1 after the intervention, representing an absolute increase of 32.1 points. The program report describes this as a 61.7% improvement relative to the baseline score. The greatest absolute increase was observed for knowledge of prevention and response strategies (+35.6 points), suggesting that the intervention was particularly useful in strengthening practical understanding of what students could do when encountering cyberbullying.

Attitudes and empathy

Positive responses were also documented following the interactive storytelling activities. According to the reflection data reported in the PKM document, 93.3% of students expressed rejection of cyberbullying, 90.0% demonstrated empathy toward victims, 86.7% were willing to report cyberbullying incidents, and 96.7% expressed willingness to support peers who experienced cyberbullying.

Table 3. Students' attitudes and empathy following the intervention

Indicator	Positive response
Rejection of cyberbullying	93.3%
Empathy toward victims	90.0%
Willingness to report cyberbullying	86.7%
Willingness to support victims	96.7%

The reported positive responses were above 85% across all indicators. The strongest response concerned willingness to support peers who became victims of cyberbullying. These findings indicate that the activity addressed not only cognitive understanding but also attitudes related to peer support and empathy.

Practical skills in responding to cyberbullying

Practical skills were evaluated through group simulations. All five groups (100%) were able to identify the type of cyberbullying presented in the scenarios. Four of the five groups (80%) selected appropriate response strategies, such as reporting the incident, avoiding further dissemination of harmful content, and supporting the victim. Similarly, four groups (80%) demonstrated assertive communication during the simulations.

Table 4. Practical skills demonstrated during cyberbullying simulations

Skill indicator	Achievement
Correctly identified cyberbullying scenarios	100% (5/5 groups)
Selected appropriate response strategies	80% (4/5 groups)
Demonstrated assertive communication	80% (4/5 groups)

Overall, the descriptive results showed improvement in knowledge after the intervention alongside favorable attitudes, empathy, and practical response skills. The increase from 52.0 to 84.1 in overall knowledge was accompanied by high proportions of positive attitudes and successful performance during group simulations. These findings support the practical value of combining psychoeducation with interactive storytelling, role-play, discussion, and simulation in this community service setting. Important reporting note: the attachment provides descriptive pre–post scores but does not report a paired statistical significance test, standard deviations, confidence intervals, or individual-level paired data. Therefore, this Results section appropriately uses terms such as "increased," "improved," and "showed", rather than claiming a statistically significant intervention effect. This keeps the article methodologically consistent with the available PKM data.

Knowledge scores before and after the intervention

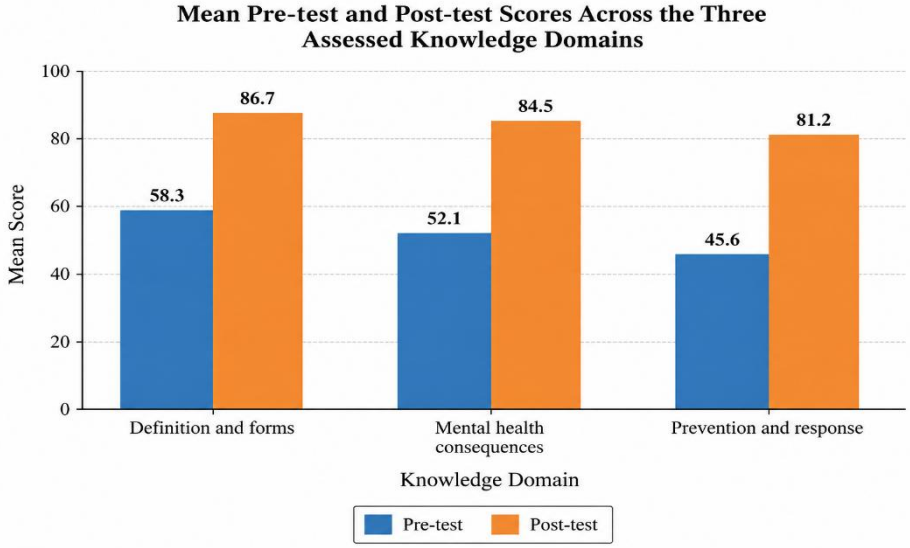

Figure 1. Mean pre-test and post-test knowledge scores across the three assessed domains following the interactive storytelling intervention.

Figure 1. Comparison of mean pre-test and post-test scores for knowledge of cyberbullying definitions and forms, mental health consequences, and prevention and response strategies following the interactive storytelling intervention.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this community service program indicate that an interactive storytelling-based intervention was followed by meaningful descriptive improvements in students' knowledge of cyberbullying and adolescent mental health. The overall mean knowledge score increased from 52.0 at pre-test to 84.1 at post-test, an absolute gain of 32.1 points. Improvement occurred across all assessed domains: understanding the definition and forms of cyberbullying increased by 28.4 points, knowledge of mental health consequences by 32.4 points, and knowledge of prevention and response strategies by 35.6 points. The largest gain in prevention and response is particularly relevant because effective cyberbullying education should equip adolescents not only to recognize harmful online behavior but also to make appropriate decisions when they encounter it.

These findings are consistent with evidence that educational interventions can improve cyberbullying-related outcomes when students are actively involved in the learning process. Cruickshank et al., (2026), in a systematic review and meta-analysis of 19 anti-cyberbullying educational programs, found that programs emphasizing interpersonal interaction and activating student or teacher agency were more effective than interventions that merely delivered information (Luis et al., 2026; Maji & Abhiram, 2023). This supports the design of the present program, which did not rely solely on lectures. Students participated in storytelling, role-play, case discussions, simulations, and reflection. These activities allowed them to interpret situations from different perspectives and translate conceptual information into possible actions (Nagata et al., 2025; Prabadewi & Surjaningrum, 2022).

The improvement in knowledge is also broadly consistent with recent evidence from school-based interventions. Shi et al., (2025), in a systematic review and meta-analysis of 44 randomized controlled trials involving 65,707 participants from 15 countries, found that school-based interventions produced a significant improvement in cyberbullying-related knowledge,

although the pooled effect was relatively small. The review also found reductions in cyberbullying perpetration and victimization after intervention (Kim & Oh, 2026; C. Li et al., 2024). Similarly, Henares-Montiel et al., (2023) reviewed 36 different interventions and reported that most programs assessing overall cyberbullying, cybervictimization, cyberperpetration, or combined outcomes were effective or partially effective. Taken together, these studies reinforce the value of schools as practical settings for preventive interventions (Y. Li et al., 2026; Lokittithonkul et al., 2026).

Beyond knowledge, the present program documented favorable attitudes following the intervention. The activity report recorded high positive responses for rejection of cyberbullying, empathy toward victims, willingness to report incidents, and willingness to support affected peers. This aspect is important because cyberbullying is a social phenomenon involving not only perpetrators and victims but also peers who may act as bystanders, defenders, or participants in the dissemination of harmful content (Khan, 2026; Lee et al., 2026). Interactive storytelling may be particularly useful in this context because narratives allow students to consider a situation from the perspective of different characters rather than discussing cyberbullying only as an abstract concept (Keles-Gordesli et al., 2025; Leegstra et al., 2024).

Recent experimental evidence provides particularly relevant support for this interpretation. Dağcı-Günal & Ayaz-Alkaya, (2026) evaluated a structured four-session storytelling program in a randomized controlled trial involving 71 adolescents. Compared with controls, adolescents receiving the storytelling intervention demonstrated lower cyberbullying scores and higher empathy after the intervention and at subsequent follow-ups, with statistically significant differences and substantial intervention effects. Although the present PKM program differs substantially in design and cannot be directly compared with a randomized controlled trial, the findings point in the same direction: storytelling may create an emotionally engaging learning environment in which adolescents can consider consequences, develop perspective-taking, and discuss prosocial responses.

Another important finding was the students' performance during group simulations. All five groups correctly identified the cyberbullying situations presented, while four of five groups selected appropriate response strategies and demonstrated assertive communication. These results suggest that the intervention provided opportunities to move beyond factual knowledge toward applied skills. The scenario "Digital Footprints: Who Is Behind the Screen?", combined with role-play and discussion, required students to analyze situations and determine how they would respond. This participatory structure is compatible with the socio-ecological perspective described by Donia et al., (2025), which emphasizes interpersonal interaction and stakeholder agency as important features of more effective anti-cyberbullying education.

The results nevertheless require cautious interpretation. The activity involved only 15 student participants, had no comparison group, and assessed outcomes immediately after the intervention. In addition, the available report provides descriptive pre-test and post-test scores without standard deviations, individual paired observations, inferential statistical testing, or longer-term follow-up. Consequently, the observed increase cannot establish a causal or statistically significant intervention effect. This limitation is relevant because Eyadat et al., (2026) noted that the certainty of evidence for school-based cyberbullying interventions remains low or very low and that intervention duration may influence effectiveness. Future implementation should therefore include a larger sample, validated measurement instruments, repeated follow-up assessments, and, where feasible, a comparison group (Henares-Montiel et al., 2023). Despite these limitations, the present program provides practical evidence that interactive storytelling

combined with psychoeducation, role-play, simulation, and reflection is a feasible and engaging approach for integrating cyberbullying prevention with adolescent mental health promotion in a rural high-school setting.

CONCLUSION

The interactive storytelling-based community service program demonstrated positive outcomes in improving students' knowledge, attitudes, and practical skills related to cyberbullying prevention and adolescent mental health. The overall mean knowledge score increased from 52.0 in the pre-test to 84.1 in the post-test, with the greatest improvement observed in knowledge of prevention and response strategies. Students also showed favorable attitudes toward rejecting cyberbullying, supporting victims, and reporting harmful online behavior. During group simulations, all five groups successfully identified cyberbullying situations, while four groups demonstrated appropriate response strategies and assertive communication. These findings suggest that combining storytelling with psychoeducation, role-play, discussion, and simulation provides an engaging approach to adolescent mental health promotion and cyberbullying prevention. For program sustainability, schools are encouraged to integrate interactive cyberbullying education into regular counseling, health promotion, and digital literacy activities. Periodic sessions should be conducted each semester, supported by trained teachers and student peer educators. Establishing student anti-cyberbullying ambassadors and a safe, confidential reporting mechanism may further strengthen early prevention and peer support. Continued collaboration among schools, families, health services, universities, and village stakeholders is also recommended to maintain a safer and more supportive digital and school environment.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to the implementation, evaluation, or publication of this community service program.

Declaration of Generative AI Use

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) to assist with language editing, improving clarity, and refining the organization of the manuscript. The authors critically reviewed and revised all AI-assisted content and take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and final content of the manuscript. Generative AI was not used to generate, modify, or interpret the research data or results.

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