



THE RIPPLE EFFECT OF GIVING: HOW YOUTH FOOD SHARING FOSTERS SOCIAL HAPPINESS AND CAPABILITY

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Abstrak

Kegiatan aksi berbagi makanan bertujuan untuk menganalisis dampak inisiatif Pelayanan Masyarakat berbasis pemuda terhadap kesejahteraan sosial dan kebahagiaan kolektif masyarakat perkotaan di Surabaya, di tengah berlanjutnya kerentanan pangan meskipun angka kemiskinan menunjukkan tren penurunan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan Keterlibatan Komunitas Partisipatif, yang memposisikan pemuda dan komunitas penerima manfaat sebagai aktor aktif dalam perancangan, pelaksanaan, dan refleksi program intervensi sosial. Analisis dikembangkan dengan mengintegrasikan teori modal sosial, pendekatan kemampuan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan dua lapisan dampak yang saling berkelindan. Pada tingkat komunitas, aksi berbagi makanan tidak hanya berkontribusi pada pemenuhan kebutuhan gizi dasar, tetapi juga meningkatkan kesejahteraan psikososial melalui penguatan rasa aman, pengakuan sosial, dan inklusi di kalangan pekerja informal serta rumah tangga rentan secara ekonomi. Pada tingkat pemuda, keterlibatan dalam program PkM terbukti memperkuat kemampuan sosial, empati, rasa tujuan hidup, dan kesejahteraan emosional. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa inisiatif berbagi makanan yang digerakkan oleh pemuda melampaui praktik karitatif, dan berfungsi sebagai intervensi sosial partisipatif yang memperkuat kohesi sosial dan kapasitas komunitas. Studi ini memberikan kontribusi orisinal dengan mengonseptualisasikan PkM berbasis pemuda sebagai model layanan partisipatif yang berpotensi diskalakan, serta memiliki implikasi strategis bagi kebijakan ketahanan sosial perkotaan dan pengembangan kajian prososialitas, kebahagiaan, dan pembangunan komunitas.

Kata kunci: *Pemuda Pelayanan Masyarakat; Berbagi Makanan; Kesejahteraan Sosial.*

Abstract

The food-sharing activity aims to analyze the impact of youth-based Community Service initiatives on the social welfare and collective happiness of urban communities in Surabaya, amid ongoing food insecurity despite a declining trend in poverty rates. This study employs a Participatory Community Engagement approach, positioning youth and beneficiary communities as active actors in the design, implementation, and reflection on social intervention programs. The analysis is developed by integrating social capital theory and a capability approach. The results of this study demonstrate two intertwined layers of impact. At the community level, food sharing not only helps meet basic nutritional needs but also enhances psychosocial well-being by strengthening a sense of security, social recognition, and inclusion among informal workers and economically vulnerable households. At the youth level, involvement in the Community Empowerment Program has been shown to strengthen social skills, empathy, a sense of purpose, and emotional well-being. These findings confirm that youth-driven food-sharing initiatives extend beyond charitable practices and function as participatory social interventions that strengthen social cohesion

and community capacity. This study makes an original contribution by conceptualizing youth-based community services as a potentially scalable participatory service model, with strategic implications for urban social resilience policy and for research on prosociality, happiness, and community development.

Keywords: Youth-Led Community Service; Food Sharing; Social Well-Being.

INTRODUCTION

The issues of food security, social inequality, and declining social concern are multidimensional challenges that are increasingly complex in various countries (Setyorini et al., 2025). International organizations note the existence of a global paradox, where an abundant food surplus on the one hand coincides with increasing food insecurity, especially in marginalized groups (Zahro et al., 2025). This condition shows that food problems are not only related to availability, but also distribution and social justice (Fitriana et al., 2024). This reality is reflected in the fact that there are still many vulnerable groups who have difficulty accessing proper and nutritious food, while the potential for social solidarity in the community has not been fully organized and optimally utilized (Hidayati et al., 2025). The practice of sharing food comes as a socially relevant approach, not only to help meet basic needs, but also as a means of strengthening social cohesion and promoting community well-being in a sustainable manner (Maharani et al., 2024).

Despite having great potential as an instrument for strengthening social solidarity, youth involvement in the practice of sharing food still faces various structural and cultural challenges (Sarmigi et al., 2025). One of the main problems is the lack of an organized and sustainable forum to systematically channel youth participation, so sharing activities often take place sporadically and uncoordinated (Sukri et al., 2024). In addition, youth social literacy related to the concept of food sharing is still relatively low, especially in understanding the practice of sharing as a social empowerment strategy, not just an act of giving (Poyoi et al., 2024). Food sharing activities have also not been widely integrated with the learning process and capacity building of youth, such as strengthening empathy, leadership, cooperation, and social responsibility (Yamabe-Ledoux, 2023). As a result, these activities are often perceived as short-term charitable activities oriented towards momentary assistance, without a clear sustainability design. This condition causes the resulting social impact to be not optimal and has not been able to create long-term changes in increasing social happiness and strengthening the capabilities of youth as agents of social change.

In response to these problems, this community service activity initiated and developed a youth-based food sharing program that was designed in a structured, participatory, and sustainable manner. This program not only focuses on distributing food to community groups in need, but also places youth as the main actors in planning, implementing, and evaluating activities (Berns, 2021). Through this active involvement, youth are encouraged to understand the values of empathy,

solidarity, cooperation, and social responsibility directly through real experiences in the field (Winarsih, 2024). In addition, this program integrates the social learning process with the development of youth capabilities, such as communication skills, leadership, resource management, and collective work (Aknin et al., 2011). With a community-based approach, food sharing activities are not only a momentary charitable activity, but also function as a sustainable social learning medium, as well as strengthening social cohesion and encouraging the creation of common prosperity (Trisnowati, 2022).

Various previous community service activities have shown various approaches in handling food issues, but still have limitations in terms of youth empowerment. Sadiyin et al., (2022) This service focuses on the distribution of food aid directly to the poor or vulnerable groups in response to food insecurity, with the main orientation on meeting short-term needs without actively involving youth in the planning and evaluation process. Community-based service activities have involved youth as volunteers, but their role is still limited to the technical aspects of implementation, so they have not been directed to the development of sustainable capabilities, leadership, and social awareness (Salim, 2024). There are also service programs that emphasize food security education or sustainable food management, but have not integrated the dimensions of social happiness and the psychological transformation of youth as the main actors of activities (Alvares et al., 2025). Therefore, this service activity presents novelty by integrating food sharing practices, strengthening social happiness, and developing youth capabilities holistically.

This service activity aims to increase social happiness and youth capabilities through structured and sustainable food sharing practices. In addition to providing direct benefits to the recipient community, this activity can be a model of youth-based service that encourages social solidarity, empathy, and empowerment. Academically and practically, this activity contributes to enriching a community service approach that integrates aspects of social welfare and human resource development.

METHODS

The community service method employed in this food-sharing program adopts a Participatory Community Engagement approach, an empowerment-oriented model that positions both community members and youth groups as active subjects throughout the entire process. This approach was selected for its capacity to foster social ownership, enhance collaboration, and amplify the psychosocial effects of prosocial actions such as food sharing. This service activity was carried out in Dukuh Kupang, Surabaya. The number of assisted communities is 25. The selection of this location is based on the community's socio-economic conditions, which still entail limited access to adequate food and high social vulnerability among



certain groups. In addition, the Dukuh Kupang area has strong potential for social capital, characterized by close resident ties and the presence of youth who are active in social activities but have not been optimally supported in sustainable empowerment programs. This condition makes Dukuh Kupang a relevant and strategic location for implementing youth-based food-sharing programs and an effective social learning space for strengthening solidarity, social well-being, and community capacity development.

The program began with a needs assessment to identify community groups most vulnerable to food insecurity, particularly underprivileged households and informal-sector workers. This mapping process was conducted through field observations and initial consultations with local officials to ensure contextual accuracy and community relevance (Poth & Shannon-baker, 2022). Following the needs assessment, participatory planning was conducted with youth groups to determine the number of food packages, the nutritional composition of the meals, and appropriate distribution strategies to ensure accurate targeting. This stage reflects the principles of collaborative planning that emphasize shared deliberation and joint decision-making in community empowerment initiatives (Mantula & Mpofo, 2024). The intervention was implemented through direct food distribution of nutritious, ready-to-eat meals in public spaces, residential areas, and informal workplaces. During implementation, youth volunteers assumed multiple roles as field coordinators, distributors, and social motivators, translating values of care and shared happiness into concrete action.

The final stage involved evaluation and reflection to assess program effectiveness and its social and emotional impacts on both recipients and youth participants. Data were collected through brief semi-structured interviews, activity documentation, and structured written reflections. These qualitative data were then analyzed thematically, using the theoretical lenses of social capital and the capability approach to interpret patterns related to social cohesion, well-being, and capability enhancement. To further reinforce the participatory dimension, the evaluation process also included participatory group reflection sessions with the youth implementers. This reflective stage is essential for identifying best practices, strengthening program sustainability, and deepening collective understanding of how food sharing functions as a catalyst for communal happiness and social solidarity (Zastrow & Sorkin, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Community Service Through Food Sharing Action by Youth Groups

The Community Service program on food sharing, implemented by a youth group, produced empirically observable outcomes at both the community and youth levels. These findings are derived from direct field observations, semi-structured

interviews with beneficiaries and youth volunteers, and activity documentation in the form of photographs with contextual descriptions. The discussion that follows links these empirical results to relevant theoretical frameworks to interpret their broader social significance. First, observational data collected during the distribution activities indicate a noticeable increase in social interaction and cooperation among community members. During food distribution in public spaces and informal workplaces, residents were observed engaging in spontaneous conversations, assisting one another in organizing queues, and facilitating access for elderly recipients. Interviews with local residents revealed that beneficiaries perceived the presence of youth volunteers as a sign of social concern and collective responsibility.

Second, the psychosocial impact of food sharing was clearly evident in beneficiary interviews and field notes. Beneficiaries consistently emphasized that the assistance was meaningful not only because of the food itself, but because of the emotional experience accompanying it. Several respondents reported feeling calm, secure, and happy after receiving the food packages, particularly those with unstable daily incomes. Photographic documentation supports this finding, capturing moments of interaction between youth volunteers and recipients, such as direct handovers of food accompanied by verbal expressions of gratitude and informal conversation. These visual records, documented with descriptive captions, illustrate how food functioned as both a material resource and a symbolic medium of care and social recognition. This empirical evidence aligns with the basic needs perspective, which recognizes food as foundational to both physical survival and emotional well-being.

Third, from a capability-oriented perspective, the reduction of food deprivation observed during the activity had implications beyond immediate consumption. Interviews with beneficiaries indicated that receiving food assistance helped them allocate limited financial resources to other essential needs, such as transportation for work or children's schooling. Informal workers, in particular, reported that the assistance reduced daily stress related to meeting basic needs. These findings support argument that development interventions should be assessed based on their ability to expand real freedoms and capabilities. In this case, food sharing functioned as an empirically demonstrated capability-enhancing intervention by alleviating basic deprivation and enabling greater participation in social and economic life.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that food sharing within this PkM program is empirically effective in strengthening social solidarity, enhancing psychosocial well-being, and expanding the capabilities of both beneficiaries and youth actors. The integration of field data with social capital and capability perspectives provides a robust analytical foundation, positioning youth-led food sharing not merely as a



charitable action but as a verifiable, community-based social intervention model with sustainable social impact and strong academic relevance.

Empirical Findings on Happiness Generated Through Youth Food-Sharing Activities

The food-sharing activity conducted by the team of community services produced empirically observable psychological and social outcomes for both recipients and youth volunteers. These findings are based on direct field observations during food distribution, semi-structured interviews with beneficiaries and youth participants, and photographic documentation taken at each stage of the activity to record interactions, emotional expressions, and community responses. Theoretical perspectives from positive psychology and social psychology are used here to interpret, not replace, these empirical findings.

First, happiness among beneficiaries emerged through the experience of being cared for and socially acknowledged. Field observations recorded that youth volunteers consistently approached community members to greet them, maintained eye contact, and engaged in brief conversations before handing over food packages. Interviews with informal workers such as pedicab drivers, day laborers, small traders, and scavengers revealed that recipients perceived the activity as a sign of genuine social concern. One respondent stated,

“It’s not just the food; it’s the feeling that someone still remembers us.”

Figure 1 describes direct handovers of food, accompanied by smiles and verbal exchanges, to document expressions of social recognition and interpersonal warmth. Interpreted through the lens of positive psychology, these findings illustrate how prosocial actions evoke gratitude and emotional affirmation, which are empirically associated with increased subjective well-being.



Figure 1. Prosocial Actions Evoke Gratitude and Emotional Affirmation

Based on field observations during food distribution activities and interviews with informal-sector workers and low-income families, beneficiaries demonstrated a positive emotional response when receiving food directly, accompanied by a greeting and brief interaction. Several respondents reported that

their happiness stemmed not only from the food but also from the experience of being noticed and remembered by their social circle. These findings are supported by photographic documentation that captured facial expressions, eye contact, and brief conversations between youth and beneficiaries during the distribution process.

Second, the activity provided a sense of emotional security by temporarily alleviating anxiety about food access. Interview data indicate that low-income families experienced reduced worry about meeting daily food needs on the day of distribution. Several beneficiaries reported that receiving ready-to-eat meals enabled them to reallocate limited income to other necessities. Observation notes recorded calmer emotional expressions and relaxed body language among recipients after distribution. Interviews indicated that beneficiaries, particularly families with irregular incomes, experienced reduced anxiety about meeting their food needs on the day of the activity. Observation notes noted a shift in emotional expression from tension to greater relaxation after receiving the food. Photographs taken in the beneficiaries' homes revealed a calmer atmosphere and more positive family interactions after the distribution, indicating improved short-term emotional stability.

Third, social joy emerged through warm interactions and collective togetherness. During the distribution process, observers noted spontaneous joking, shared laughter, and brief storytelling between youth and residents. These micro-interactions were consistently mentioned in beneficiary interviews as moments that made the day feel lighter. During the activity, researchers observed spontaneous social interactions, including greetings, lighthearted jokes, and brief conversations among youth, residents, and beneficiaries. Interviews confirmed that these moments were perceived as enjoyable social experiences that are rare in urban routines. Photo documentation in public spaces captured group interactions that demonstrated social closeness and a friendly atmosphere.

Fourth, beneficiaries experienced moral joy derived from witnessing altruistic behavior among youth. Several interviewees expressed hope and optimism upon observing young people voluntarily engaging in social action. One elderly recipient remarked,

“Seeing young people care like this makes me believe our society still has a future.”

Emotional satisfaction and social hope were elicited by witnessing young people voluntarily share food. Respondents stated that this action fostered the belief that the value of social care remains evident among the younger generation. Observation notes and photographic documentation captured residents' nonverbal reactions, such as smiles and appreciative gestures, during the distribution process, indicating the emergence of happiness grounded in moral values.



At the youth level, reflective notes and group reflection sessions revealed increased empathy, self-efficacy, and a strengthened sense of purpose. Youth participants reported that direct interaction with beneficiaries transformed abstract notions of “helping others” into lived moral experiences. These reflections were documented through structured written reflections and participatory group discussions. Interpreted through prosocial behavior theory, these findings are consistent with evidence that giving enhances the giver’s happiness and psychological well-being.

Overall, the empirical findings demonstrate that sharing happiness through food is not merely a symbolic or theoretical construct but a verifiable psychosocial outcome observable in real community settings. The integration of observational data, interviews, and photographic documentation confirms that youth-led food sharing functions as an effective community-based intervention that enhances emotional well-being, strengthens social bonds, and fosters collective happiness. Theoretical frameworks serve to deepen understanding of these findings, positioning youth not only as distributors of food but as active agents of psychological and social well-being in urban communities.

Discussion

The relevance of these findings is further reinforced by contextual poverty data from the Surabaya City Statistics Agency (BPS). Although the official poverty rate declined to 3.96% in March 2024, this figure still indicates that more than 116,000 individuals remain economically vulnerable (BPS Surabaya City, 2024). Field interviews confirm that many program beneficiaries were employed in informal sectors characterized by irregular income and high exposure to food insecurity, consistent with BPS poverty profiles (BPS Surabaya City, 2024). This convergence between statistical data and field-level findings strengthens the validity of the program’s target selection and underscores the urgency of food sharing as a community-based response to persistent urban vulnerability.

Reflective notes and group discussions conducted after the activity reveal significant developmental outcomes. Youth volunteers reported increased empathy, heightened awareness of social inequality, and a stronger sense of purpose in engaging with community issues. Several participants noted that direct interaction with beneficiaries reshaped their understanding of poverty from an abstract concept to a lived reality. These reflections were documented through written reflection sheets and participatory group reflection sessions. Interpreted through the lens of social psychology, these findings are consistent with evidence that prosocial actions enhance emotional well-being and a sense of meaning among those who engage in them (Aknin et al., 2013).

Finally, the participatory implementation process itself contributed to youth capacity building. Observation of planning meetings and evaluation sessions shows that youth developed practical skills in needs assessment, coordination,

communication, and reflective evaluation. Photographs documenting these stages, such as group discussions during planning and collective reflection after distribution, illustrate youth engagement as active social actors rather than passive volunteers. This supports the Attribution & License (2015) participatory engagement framework, which emphasizes learning through action and reflection.

The finding that food sharing strengthens solidarity and social trust is reinforced by recent studies indicating that community-based food sharing functions as an effective mechanism for social cohesion and community resilience, particularly in urban settings. Sunu et al., (2025) demonstrate that volunteer-based food distribution enhances both bonding and bridging social capital, especially in economically vulnerable communities. This aligns closely with the findings of this Community Service field study, in which direct, repeated interactions between youth volunteers and community members foster sustained social connectedness and mutual trust.

Within the Southeast Asian context, (Saa, 2024) show that food-based mutual cooperation practices in urban Indonesia play a significant role in maintaining social stability in the post-pandemic period. Their findings suggest that food sharing should not be understood merely as a situational or emergency response, but rather as part of adaptive social mechanisms that enable communities to cope with structural vulnerabilities. This perspective strengthens the argument that youth-led food-sharing initiatives in this community services constitute a form of community resilience rather than short-term charity.

From a capability perspective, the finding that reducing food deprivation contributes to improved emotional well-being and social participation is consistent with (Ratna & Pattinasarany, 2025) who argue that meeting basic needs has indirect but significant effects on psychological health and civic engagement. Food, in this framework, is understood as an enabling condition that expands individuals' capabilities to participate socially and experience well-being, rather than an end in itself. This interpretation aligns with empirical observations from the PkM, in which recipients reported increased emotional security and greater willingness to engage socially.

Similarly, Widyastuti et al., (2024) find that food-sharing programs in urban Indonesia enhance recipients' sense of dignity and social security. Their study highlights that the emotional impact of food sharing extends beyond nutritional fulfillment to symbolic recognition and social inclusion. This strongly corresponds with the PkM field reports, where expressions of happiness among recipients were closely tied to feelings of being valued, respected, and acknowledged within the community. The finding that happiness is experienced by both recipients and volunteers is supported by Binder, (2012), who emphasizes that prosocial actions foster eudaimonic well-being through enhanced meaning in life and strengthened social relationships. This confirms that happiness generated by Community Service



activities is not hedonistic in nature but is deeply rooted in relational meaning and moral purpose. In addition, (Upasen & Saengpanya, 2022) show that compassion-based collective actions, including food sharing, contribute to reduced community stress and improved collective mental health. These insights support positioning community services food sharing as a community-based psychosocial intervention rather than merely a social or charitable activity.

Finally, the role of youth as agents of social happiness is reinforced by Fierna et al., (2025), who find that youth engagement in community philanthropy strengthens moral identity, social empathy, and long-term commitment to social change. This is consistent with reflections from youth participants in the community services, who reported increased empathy, moral awareness, and a deeper understanding of their social responsibilities. These findings underline the strategic importance of youth-led initiatives in sustaining social well-being and collective happiness within urban communities.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The Surabaya youth food-sharing activity is a social practice that strengthens collective well-being and improves the community's psychological health. Sharing food not only fulfills physical needs but also fosters social connectedness, empathy, and a sense of meaning in life, consistent with findings in positive psychology that happiness arises from prosocial actions and warm social relationships. For the people of Surabaya, who have a culture of egalitarianism and solidarity typical of large, multicultural cities, this act of sharing strengthens the community's moral identity and creates a space for interaction that reduces stress and improves emotional well-being. Thus, the youth's practice of sharing food is not merely charity but a more substantial transformation of the value of happiness: from individual happiness to inclusive and sustainable social happiness.

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