



Empowering Advocates: Evaluating a Skill-Booster Intervention for Companions of Gender-Based and Child Violence Victims

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Abstract:

Companions in cases of violence against women and children play an essential role in providing protection and recovery services for victims. This study aims to enhance companion capacity through a skill booster program focused on case management standards, victim-centred assessment, cross-agency coordination, and ethical gender-sensitive assistance. The program was implemented using a participatory capacity-building approach involving workshops, case studies, simulations, and focus group discussions. Evaluation used pre-test and post-test questionnaires, analysed with Respondent Achievement Level analysis. Results show an increase in mean score from 3.81 to 4.16, indicating improved competencies in case management understanding, victim assessment skills, and ethical practice implementation, while coordination across service networks remains limited. The findings imply that continuous capacity development is required to strengthen integrated service systems, improve inter-institutional collaboration, and enhance the professionalism and responsiveness of companions in handling violence cases against women and children. Strengthening referral mechanisms and periodic training is recommended to ensure sustainable service quality and effective victim protection outcomes at the institutional level through a continuous monitoring and evaluation system improvement cycle.

INTRODUCTION

Companions in cases of violence against women and children represent a critical component in the protection ecosystem because they connect victims with legal, health, and psychosocial services. Empirical evidence shows that victims need structured and continuous assistance to ensure safety, recovery, and access to justice (Holmberg et al., 2021; Omojo & Anyanabia, 2025; Suzuki, 2023). However, the effectiveness of this role is often constrained by inconsistent capacity among companions, weak inter-agency coordination, and limited standardized training. These conditions create gaps in service delivery, including delays in referrals, uneven application of victim-centred approaches, and risks of secondary victimization during handling processes. Strengthening companion capacity through standardized training, integrated referral systems, and continuous professional development is therefore essential to ensure that victim rights are protected and that violence response systems operate in a coordinated, effective, and sustainable manner.

The general problem in this context is the increasing complexity of violence against women and children cases that exceeds the current capacity of many companions. Cases are shaped by unequal gender relations, socio-economic vulnerability, and cultural normalization of violence that weakens reporting and response mechanisms. This condition is evident in various regions where victims often experience delayed access to services or incomplete assistance. Research highlights that structural inequality and limited institutional readiness intensify victim vulnerability (Kaulino & Matus, 2023; Paik & Romanello, 2025; Sweet, 2023). The main issue is not only the number of cases but also the quality of response. Many companions still rely on informal understanding rather than standardized procedures. As a result, case handling becomes inconsistent and less systematic, potentially risking victim safety, recovery, and confidentiality in practical implementation contexts.

Field research in the Special Region of Yogyakarta shows that case handling often faces coordination challenges among institutions involved in victim services. Health services, legal aid, social protection units, and community-based organizations frequently operate in parallel without optimal integration. This condition delays referrals and reduces the effectiveness of services for victims. Studies indicate that increasing case diversity, sociocultural dynamics, and limited interagency coordination contribute to fragmented responses (Davidson et al., 2025; Kamais, 2024). In practice, companions often encounter difficulties navigating referral systems and maintaining service continuity. This situation makes capacity strengthening highly relevant because it directly affects community-level outcomes. Improving companion competence is expected to lead to stronger coordination, faster response times, and more consistent protection services for women and children victims in real field conditions.

Previous studies emphasise that standardised case management is a key foundation of victim assistance systems. Case handling must follow structured stages including identification, assessment, intervention planning, referral, monitoring, and termination of services to ensure accountability and effectiveness (Chiu et al., 2026; Islam, 2024; Karam et al., 2021). However, research also shows that many companions have not fully mastered these procedures, leading to partial implementation in the field. Gaps remain in documentation practices, procedural consistency, and authority boundaries in handling cases. Strengthening structured understanding is therefore essential to improve service quality. Other findings indicate that case management training improves systematic working practices and supports better victim tracking and compliance with confidentiality requirements (Haddad et al., 2022; Khan, 2023; Martinez-Ortigosa et al., 2023). Despite these contributions, few studies focus on integrated skill booster models that combine technical knowledge with practical simulations in community-based companion capacity-building contexts.

The literature also shows that effective victim assistance requires a victim-centred, multidisciplinary approach. Victims have diverse needs, including physical, psychological, legal, social, and economic dimensions that must be addressed simultaneously (Halbreich, 2022; Hariram et al., 2023). Studies emphasise that assessment skills must consider vulnerability factors and power relations to ensure appropriate intervention planning (Orru et al., 2023; Wisner, 2025). Coordination across institutions such as health, law enforcement, and social services is also essential for

integrated response systems. However, challenges persist in communication and role clarity among actors. Ethical standards remain critical, including confidentiality, anti-victim blaming, and respect for victim autonomy. Gender sensitivity and child protection principles must be strengthened to avoid bias in service delivery (Keddell, 2022; LaBrenz et al., 2023; Munzhelele et al., 2025). These findings indicate the need for comprehensive capacity-building models.

Based on the identified gaps, the main problem in this community service activity is the limited capacity of companions to apply standardized case management, conduct comprehensive victim-centred assessments, and coordinate effectively across service institutions in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. These limitations contribute to inconsistent service quality, delayed referrals, and suboptimal protection outcomes for victims of violence against women and children. The specific issues include inadequate understanding of procedural stages, weak interagency communication, and limited practical skills in ethical decision-making during case handling. Therefore, a structured intervention is required to address these gaps through targeted capacity strengthening. This condition serves as the basis for implementing a skill booster program designed to improve both the technical competence and practical readiness of companions in handling complex cases in a systematic and accountable manner.

The objective of this community service program is to strengthen the capacity of companions in handling cases of violence against women and children through a structured skill-booster approach. The program focuses on improving understanding of case management standards, enhancing victim-centred assessment skills, strengthening cross-agency coordination, and reinforcing ethical and gender sensitive assistance practices. The scope of the activity includes participatory training methods such as workshops, case studies, simulations, and focus group discussions to ensure practical skill development. This initiative aligns with broader community goals to improve service integration, accelerate victims' access to protection systems, and enhance recovery outcomes. By strengthening companion competencies, the program is expected to contribute to more responsive, coordinated, and rights-based service delivery systems that support sustainable protection mechanisms for women and children victims at the institutional and community levels.

RESEARCH METHODS

This community service activity uses a capacity-building design based on a skill-booster program with a participatory learning approach (Bacon, 2023; Silverman & Patterson, 2021). This design is selected because it enables structured competence development by integrating knowledge transfer, practical simulation, and reflective learning. The approach is considered appropriate for improving the capacity of companions in handling cases of violence against women and children because it emphasizes active participation, experiential learning, and continuous reflection on field practices. This combination ensures that learning outcomes are not limited to theoretical understanding but also translated into practical skills and professional attitudes. The selection of this design is based on the need for an adaptive learning model that can respond to complex case-handling requirements and improve service quality in real-world practice contexts.

The activity was held at the DPD DIY building in the Special Region of Yogyakarta on Saturday, February 28, 2026. This location was selected due to its strategic function

as a coordination and meeting centre for service institutions and community organizations involved in handling cases of violence against women and children. The site also provides accessibility for participants from various service agencies, including companions from government institutions, community organizations, and volunteer groups. The selection of this location is relevant because Yogyakarta represents a region with complex case characteristics influenced by socio-cultural diversity and inter-agency coordination challenges. This setting supports contextual learning that aligns with real field service conditions.

Data collection techniques in this activity included participatory observation, structured questionnaires, pre- and post-test instruments, documentation, and focused group discussions (FGD). Participants were actively involved in simulations, case studies, and reflective sessions to develop both cognitive and practical competence. Pre-test and post-test instruments were used to measure changes in participant understanding before and after the skill booster intervention. Documentation was used to record training processes, participant responses, and learning outputs. FGDs were conducted to explore participants' experiences, challenges, and perceptions of case-handling practices.

Data analysis was conducted using an interactive model consisting of data condensation, data reduction, data display, and data verification (Nurfajriani et al., 2024; Salmona & Kaczynski, 2024). Data condensation involved selecting relevant information from field notes, questionnaires, and FGDs. Data reduction was applied to simplify and categorize findings into key themes, including case management, victim assessment, and inter-agency coordination. Data display was carried out through narrative descriptions and tabular presentation of pre-test and post-test results. Data verification was conducted through method and source triangulation to ensure the consistency and accuracy of findings. The validity of the data was ensured through methodological triangulation, source triangulation, and member checking to confirm the credibility and reliability of participants' responses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section presents the results of the skill booster program and discusses its contribution to improving the capacity of companions in handling cases of violence against women and children.

Activity Approach

The approach used was participatory, participant-centred learning, positioning companions as active participants in the learning process. Participants' field experiences were used as the main learning resource to link the training materials with the real context of handling cases of violence against women and children.

Implementation Stages, The activity was carried out through four main stages as follows: The preparation stage included: (1) mapping the needs of companions through preliminary discussions with the participants; (2) developing the skill booster module, which covered standard case management, comprehensive victim-centered assessment, coordination of cross-agency networks, and ethical assistance practices that are gender-sensitive, child-friendly, and based on victims' rights; (3) developing measurement tools

and evaluation instruments in the form of pretest–posttest questionnaires; and (4) technical coordination of the activity with partners and service networks.

Table 1. Measurement Tools and Evaluation Instruments

No	Indicator	Description
1	Understanding Standard Case Management	Understanding the stages of standard case management in handling violence cases (identification, assessment, intervention planning, referral, monitoring, and termination). Understanding the roles and limits of authority of companions in each stage of case management. Understanding the importance of systematic and secure case recording. Applying principles of confidentiality and protection of victim data in case management.
2	Comprehensive and Victim-Centered Assessment	Ability to conduct an initial comprehensive assessment of victims' needs (physical, psychological, social, and legal). Ability to obtain information from victims through empathetic and non-judgmental communication. Ability to identify risk factors and victim vulnerabilities (age, power relations, economic dependency, trauma). Ability to develop an assistance plan based on the needs and best interests of the victim.
3	Coordination and Cross-Agency Networks in DIY	Understanding the roles of related service institutions (health services, police, legal aid, psychologists, shelters) in handling companions in cases of violence against women and children. Ability to refer cases to appropriate institutions according to victims' needs. Confidence in coordinating with cross-agency networks in handling companions in cases of violence against women and children. Ability to actively contribute to building synergy among service institutions.
4	Ethical, Gender- and Child-Sensitive, and Victim Rights–Based Practices	Applying the principle of non–victim blaming in every assistance process. Understanding the importance of gender perspectives and the best interests of the child in cases of violence against women and children in cases of assistance. Ability to maintain professional ethics (professional boundaries, confidentiality, and victim safety). Prioritising victims' rights (rights to protection, recovery, information, and justice) in case of assistance.

Table 1 presents the measurement tools and evaluation instruments for the skill booster program, including standard case management, comprehensive victim-centred assessment, cross-agency network coordination, and ethical, gender- and child-sensitive, and victim rights–based assistance practices.

Table 2 results of the validity and reliability

Indicator	Code	Validity	Cronbach's Alpha
Case Management	C1	0,641	0,764
	C2	0,668	
	C3	0,692	
	C4	0,657	
Assessment	A1	0,673	0,781
	A2	0,684	
	A3	0,651	
	A4	0,697	
Networking	J1	0,628	0,736
	J2	0,645	
	J3	0,671	
	J4	0,689	
Practice	P1	0,662	0,792

Based on Table 2, the validity test results, all items in each dimension had validity coefficients ranging from 0.60 to 0.70; therefore, all items were considered valid. The reliability test results also showed Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.60, indicating that all dimensions had good internal consistency and were reliable for use in evaluating the skill booster program.

The Respondent Achievement Level (RAL) was used to describe respondents' assessment of the variables or indicators studied. The RAL calculation used a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates the lowest assessment and 5 the highest.

To determine the categories of respondents' assessments, the scale range was divided using the following formula:

$$TCR = \frac{\text{Maximum Score} - \text{Minimum Score}}{\text{Number of Categories}} = \frac{5 - 1}{3} = 1$$

Table 3. Respondent Achievement Level (RAL)

No	RAL Range	Criteria
1	1,10 – 2,33	Poor
2	2,34 – 3,67	Good
3	3,68 – 5,0	Excellent

The criteria for the Respondent Achievement Level (RAL) are presented in Table 3. Table 3 outlines the interval scores used to classify respondents' achievement levels in a structured, measurable way. These interval ranges are established to ensure consistent interpretation of questionnaire results across all indicators. Based on this classification system, respondents' achievement levels are grouped into three categories, namely poor, good, and excellent. Each category represents a defined score range that reflects the degree of respondents' understanding and competence regarding the assessed indicators. The use of this structured categorization allows the data to be interpreted systematically and supports objective comparison between respondents. It also provides a clear benchmark for evaluating performance levels in a quantitative research framework, ensuring that all assessment outcomes are standardized and comparable across the study.

Before implementing the skill booster activity, a pre-test was conducted to assess participants' initial understanding and perceptions of case handling practices. The pre-test was administered via a structured questionnaire distributed to all program participants. A Likert scale was consistently applied to measure the Respondent Achievement Level for each indicator. The indicators assessed included understanding of standard case management procedures, the ability to conduct comprehensive victim-centred assessments, coordination and cross-agency networking, and the application of ethical assistance principles that are gender-sensitive, child-sensitive, and aligned with victims' rights. The collected responses provided baseline data that reflected the participants' initial competencies before receiving the intervention.

The data obtained from the pre-test were analyzed using the Respondent Achievement Level (RAL) approach to determine the classification of respondents for each indicator. Each response was processed and converted to interval-based scores to

identify participants' achievement categories. The analysis results were then grouped into the predetermined categories of poor, good, and excellent based on the established scoring criteria. This analytical approach enabled a clear mapping of participants' initial competencies across all measured dimensions. The results served as a reference point for evaluating changes in knowledge and skills after the implementation of the skill booster activity, ensuring that improvements could be measured systematically and objectively.

Table 4. Pre-Test Skill Booster

Indicator	Code	Frequency Distribution (Likert Scale)					RAL Score	Weight Average
		1	2	3	4	5		
Case Management	C1	4	1	4	8	12	110	3,79
	C2	4	2	6	11	6	100	3,45
	C3	4	2	3	9	11	108	3,72
	C4	3	0	2	10	14	119	4,10
Assessment	A1	3	3	7	7	9	103	3,55
	A2	3	2	4	6	14	113	3,89
	A3	4	3	4	10	8	102	3,52
	A4	4	3	5	10	7	100	3,45
Networking	J1	4	3	4	10	8	102	3,52
	J2	2	0	5	11	11	116	4
	J3	3	3	7	7	9	103	3,56
	J4	3	0	2	10	14	119	4,10
Practice	P1	3	0	3	12	11	115	3,97
	P2	2	0	5	11	11	116	4
	P3	3	0	0	11	15	122	4,21
	P4	3	0	1	11	14	120	4,138
Average							110	3,81

The pre-test results in table 4 show that almost all respondents' average scores are above 3. These results indicate that most questionnaire indicators fall into the excellent category, although several indicators are still categorized as good. In the case management indicator, the sub-indicator related to understanding the roles and limits of authority of companions in each stage of case management (C2) is categorized as good. In the assessment indicator, most items are categorized as good, except for A2, which falls into the excellent category, namely the ability to obtain information from victims through empathetic and non-judgmental communication. In the networking indicator, J1 and J3 are categorized as good, namely the understanding of the roles of related service institutions (health services, police, legal aid, psychologists, shelters) in handling cases of violence against women and children, and the level of confidence in coordinating with cross-agency networks in handling such cases. Meanwhile, ethical, gender and child sensitive, and victim rights based practices are already categorized as excellent.

Skill Booster Implementation stage

The implementation of the activity was carried out through an intensive workshop designed to strengthen participants' competencies in handling cases of violence against women and children. The learning process combined interactive material presentations to reinforce understanding of standard case management and the principles of victim assistance. This was followed by structured case studies that trained participants to analyse situations and make decisions based on the specific needs of victims.

In addition, the workshop emphasised practical skill development through simulations and role play to build empathetic communication skills, victim assessment abilities, and coordination in cross-agency referral processes. Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were also conducted to encourage reflection on field experiences and peer learning among companions. Participants also engaged in exercises to develop structured assistance plans, aiming to ensure systematic, victim-centred intervention planning.

Assistance and Network Strengthening Stage

After the workshop, the response network was strengthened through facilitated discussions among service institutions. This stage aimed to clarify referral pathways, the roles of each actor, and coordination mechanisms in handling cases of violence against women and children. Companions were also encouraged to establish ongoing communication with service networks as a follow-up to the program.

Evaluation was conducted using a post-test questionnaire to measure improvements in companions' capacities in several areas, including mastery of standard case management, the ability to conduct comprehensive victim-centred assessments, coordination of cross-agency networks, and ethical assistance practices that are gender- and child-sensitive and grounded in victims' rights.

Tabel 5. Pos-Test Skill Booster

Indicator	Code	Frequency Distribution (Likert Scale)					RAL Score	Weight Average
		1	2	3	4	5		
Case Management	C1	0	1	5	9	14	123	4,24
	C2	0	2	6	9	12	118	4,07
	C3	0	0	2	9	18	124	4,28
	C4	0	0	2	10	14	132	4,56
Assessment	A1	0	3	7	7	12	115	3,97
	A2	0	2	4	6	17	125	4,31
	A3	0	3	4	10	12	118	4,07
	A4	0	3	5	10	11	116	4
Networking	J1	0	3	4	10	12	122	3,52
	J2	0	0	5	11	13	126	4
	J3	0	3	7	7	12	118	3,56
	J4	0	0	2	10	17	134	4,10
Practice	P1	0	0	3	12	14	127	4,38
	P2	0	0	4	11	14	126	4,35
	P3	0	0	0	11	18	134	4,62
	P4	0	0	1	11	17	132	4,56
Average							124	4,16

The quantitative reflection results show that in Table 5, almost all respondents' responses increased, with average scores above 4. These results indicate that after the skill booster program was implemented, participants' competencies improved. However, the networking indicators (J1 and J3) remained in the good category, namely the understanding of the roles of related service institutions (health services, police, legal aid, psychologists, shelters) in handling cases of violence against women and children, and the level of confidence in coordinating with cross-agency networks in handling such cases.



Figure 1. Documentation of the Skill Booster Workshop

Figure 1 above shows participants in the Skill Booster for Companions in Cases of Violence Against Women and Children program, including representatives from Fatayat Nahdlatul Ulama, Muslimat Nahdlatul Ulama, paralegals, and community companions from various districts and cities across Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta. The activity was conducted to strengthen participants' competencies in case management, victim assessment, ethical and gender-sensitive assistance, and cross-agency coordination in handling cases of violence against women and children.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that the skill booster program has a positive impact on improving the capacity of companions in handling cases of violence against women and children. The increase from the pre-test mean score of 3.81 to the post-test score of 4.16 indicates a clear improvement in knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes (Nurfajriani et al., 2024; Salmona & Kaczynski, 2024). This confirms that participatory and practice-based training is effective in strengthening applied competencies. The results also show that learning processes that combine discussion, simulation, and reflection are more effective than purely theoretical approaches. The improvement suggests that structured capacity building can directly influence the quality of service delivery by companions in real case handling situations.

In the area of case management, the study demonstrates a notable improvement in participants' understanding of standardized procedures, including case identification, assessment, intervention planning, referral, monitoring, and termination (Graboyes et al., 2021; Islam, 2024). Before the intervention, some participants showed inconsistent understanding of their roles and limitations. After the program, participants demonstrated better procedural awareness and more structured thinking in handling cases. However, the improvement also reveals that some aspects, particularly documentation practices and consistency in applying standards, still require reinforcement. This indicates that training alone is insufficient without continuous practice and institutional support to ensure long-term behavioural change in service delivery.

The results of the victim-centred assessment also show significant improvement. Participants became more capable of identifying victim needs across physical, psychological, social, and legal dimensions. The use of simulation and case-based learning

helped participants develop empathy and analytical thinking in assessing complex victim conditions (Jakobsen, 2021; Nina & Paulina, 2022). After the training, participants demonstrated a better understanding of how to design intervention plans based on victims' needs rather than procedural convenience. This improvement reflects that experiential learning approaches are effective in building practical assessment skills. It also shows that participants are more aware of the importance of prioritizing victim safety, dignity, and recovery in every stage of assistance.

However, the weakest improvement is in networking and cross-agency coordination. Although participants showed a better understanding of institutional roles, their ability to implement effective coordination in practice remains limited (Duan-Porter et al., 2021; Gooding et al., 2022). Many participants still face challenges in navigating referral systems and building consistent communication across institutions. This suggests that coordination skills require more than individual training, as they depend heavily on institutional structures and collaboration systems. The findings highlight that networking competence develops more slowly compared to individual technical skills. Therefore, continuous inter-agency engagement is needed to strengthen real coordination practices in the field.

From a theoretical perspective, this study confirms that experiential and participatory learning models are effective in improving professional competencies in social service contexts. Learning through direct experience, reflection, and case simulation strengthens both cognitive and practical dimensions of competence (Clarke et al., 2023; Elendu et al., 2024). In practice, the results show that skill booster programs can serve as an effective training model to improve companions' performance in handling sensitive social cases. The program provides a structured approach to simultaneously improve knowledge, skills, and attitudes, making it suitable for community-based service systems that require practical readiness and ethical responsibility in fieldwork.

This study contributes by providing an empirically tested training model that integrates case management, victim-centred assessment, ethical practice, and coordination skills within a single capacity-building framework. The use of pre-test and post-test evaluation provides measurable evidence of competency improvement. The model can be applied in similar community service programs to strengthen human resource capacity in victim assistance systems. It also highlights the importance of combining individual skill development with system-level support to ensure sustainable improvement. Overall, the study offers a practical framework for improving the quality and professionalism of companions in violence response services.

CONCLUSION

The Skill Booster program for companions assisting cases of violence against women and children demonstrates a clear improvement in participant capacity, as reflected in the increase in the average score from 3.81 in the pre-test to 4.16 in the post-test, indicating an overall shift toward the excellent category. The main findings show that the program effectively enhances competencies in case management, victim-centred assessment, and ethical, gender-sensitive assistance, which are essential for improving the quality of victim protection services in the community. These results indicate that participatory and practice-based training can be applied more broadly as a

strategy to strengthen frontline service providers and improve the responsiveness of support systems for victims. The program also shows that real-case simulation and collaborative learning contribute to better professional readiness among companions. Based on these findings, it is recommended that similar training programs be implemented on a wider scale with longer duration, stronger institutional support, and structured inter-agency coordination mechanisms. For future studies, further research is needed to evaluate the long-term impacts, the sustainability of competency improvement, and the effectiveness of cross-sector collaboration after training implementation, especially across different regional contexts and service ecosystems.

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