

BRIEF REPORT

Community-based Youth Participatory Action Research studies with a focus on youth health and well-being: A systematic review

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Abstract

On the basis of the systematic literature review, we investigate the characteristics of community-based Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) programs with a focus on health and well-being and their recommendations for future programs. The study was based on Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses diagram. Most included a case study design, mixed or qualitative methodology, interview as data collection, and YPAR youth in data reporting. The sample differs between studies, and most of the work took place in the United States. The stages (raise awareness, capacitation, design, motivation, implementation, evaluation, dissemination, and replication) are evident as a fundamental strategy in these programs.

1 | INTRODUCTION

With various terminologies—as Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), Youth-Adult Partnership, Community-based Participatory Research, youth-led, youth engagement, youth involvement, youth empowerment, youth leadership, youth advocacy or youth decision-making—youth participatory research is by many, seen as opposed to traditional models (Lake & Wendland, 2018).

In a conceptualization, Rodriguez and Brown (2009), argue that the YPAR programs are based on three principles: (a) Research topics centered on the youth lives and their concerns; (b) youth participation; (c) transformative character through the change of knowledge and practices that benefit youth lives and their communities. Although youth participation studies are mainly centered in the school context (Baggett & Andrzejewski, 2017), and few examples of studies are based on the community with a focus on health are known (Lindquist-Grantz & Abraczinskas, 2018), the impact these few are widely recognized.

On the basis of the youth leadership for the benefit of their communities and of itself (Kruse, 2019, p. 26), youth are at the same time resources and agents of change in the contexts in which they are involved (Ozer & Piatt, 2017a; Zeldin, Camino, & Calvert, 2007). In the study of the problems that directly affect them, through their voice and experiences (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Kim, 2016; Livingstone, Celemencki & Melissa, 2014), youth derive solutions that promote better well-being and development (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). In this demand for more positive youth development (Powers & Tiffany, 2006), YPAR act as a source of change in organizations (Shamrova & Cummings, 2017) and in the community (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Checkoway & Richards-Schuster, 2003). On the basis of their key-processes: (a) Power-sharing between youth and adults; (b) training in research methods and advocacy; (c) training in critical thinking for social change; and (d) building alliances with stakeholders (Ozer & Douglas, 2015), it is possible to promote a systemic change through YPAR (Freire, 1998).

At this moment, stands out three systematic reviews in the YPAR field. The first (Jacquez, Vaughn, & Wagner, 2012) focuses on the role of youth in research programs, noting that youth are not fully engaged in all stages of the research process. Most developed with youth from middle school or higher, there are 56 studies out of a total of 399, developed in partnership with youth. Being young commonly included in the different phases of the projects, especially the identification of research questions, design and research. Health issues were the most common topic among identified studies.

The second (Shamrova & Cummings, 2017) based on the research of 45 studies, focuses on the analysis of the methodological characteristics, concluding that participants only participate in the advanced stages and are rarely included in the data analysis; and the impacts of genuine participation:

- In youth—greater awareness of social justice and increase in knowledge; leadership role; the relationship with adults emerges as a topic of reflection for researchers; feeling of increased sense of connection and belonging to the community; and opportunities to become agents of change in their community;
- In organizations—change in organizational culture; awareness for the needs and youth inclusion; and awareness and advocacy campaigns have youth perspectives;
- In community—promotion of intergenerational dialogue; training or strengthening youth voice; involvement in community awareness and educational campaigns; advocacy in the effort to change policies; and improvement of infrastructures.

Finally, a third one (Anyon, Bender, Kennedy, & Dechants, 2018) with 130 studies included, centered in the YPAR characteristics and impacts on youth. In this, in a study of programs exclusively developed in the United States between 1995 and 2015, positive impacts on youth at agency and leadership, academic or professional, social, interpersonal, and cognitive levels are reported. In their characteristics, the studies present the main source of data based on qualitative methodology, case study design, data types based on observation and interview, and the young people participating in the project as the main source of data.

With this study, in addition to increasing knowledge related to the specific characteristics of community YPAR programs and focus on health and/or well-being, it is intended to unify the recommendations arising from the YPAR programs. It is believed that with this study specifically focusing on community, we can raise awareness to the importance of prioritizing this context in YPAR interventions and increase the effectiveness of future programs (by defining the steps and tasks to be included).

2 | METHODS

This systematic review was developed and registered based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) diagram (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, Altman, & PRISMA Group, 2009). The main objective was to gather information related to the characteristics of community-based YPAR, with a focus on

youth health and well-being, as well as their recommendations to improve the development of other community-based YPAR programs, with focus on health and well-being.

2.1 | Search and sampling strategy

In the research of YPAR studies developed in the community with a focus on youth health and/or well-being, three databases were searched: Web of Science, EBSCO host, and Cochrane Library. To gather as much information as possible, the review was not based on the criteria "year of publication," thus including all scientific articles. To identify the publications to be included, the terms Booleans AND/OR, with an asterisk in words that could start with the same letter combination, but ending differently, were included. Search terms include terms associated with the study population: "emerging adult" OR "youth" OR "minor*" OR "juvenile*" OR "adolescent*" OR "teen*" AND terms associated with the intervention: "youth involvement" OR "youth voice" OR "youth organizing" OR "youth empower*" OR "youth leadership" OR "youth advocacy" OR "youth decision-making" OR "youth participatory action research" OR "youth engage*" OR "youth-led" OR "youth-adult partnership" AND search terms related to setting: "community" OR "community-based" AND focus: "health" OR "well-being" OR "wellbeing."

2.2 | YPAR criteria and data extraction process

The criteria of the YPAR studies to be included were based on the fulfillment of the following: (a) Participatory research of young people; (b) power-sharing with adults; and (c) transformative character through the acquisition of knowledge or with impact on practices to improve youth or their communities (Rodriguez & Brown, 2009). The verification of criteria fulfillment was performed and compared by two authors (C. B. and G. T.).

The data extraction was developed based on the PRISMA diagram guidelines (Moher et al., 2009). Relevant data were extracted from the manuscript by an author (C. B.), who also performed their coding, and then was verified by two authors (C. B. and G. T.) and supervised by another author (M. G. M.). Disagreements were solved through discussion among the authors (85% agreements). The data extracted included the following elements: Author/year, study design (case study, ethnographic, longitudinal, quasi-experimental, and review), methodology (mixed, qualitative, and quantitative), data type (focus group, interviews, literature review, PhotoVoice, survey, and other), data source (YPAR youth, YPAR adults, community members, and other), interventions' duration, sample size, country, and general recommendations.

3 | RESULTS

3.1 | Literature search

The diagram of the studies included in this systematic review is presented in Figure 1. The research carried out returned a total of 499 scientific articles relevant to the study, of which 391 abstracts were accessed for eligibility after the exclusion of duplicates ($n = 108$). A total of 356 articles were rejected after reading titles and abstracts. Subsequently, a total of 35 articles were considered as potentially relevant studies, but after a careful analysis, studies that not present: Population under 25 years; not include conceptualization, intervention, or reviews in the field of health promotion and/or youth well-being; were developed in a school or political context or do not constitute scientific article, were excluded ($n = 22$). At the end, 13 articles were included in the present study.

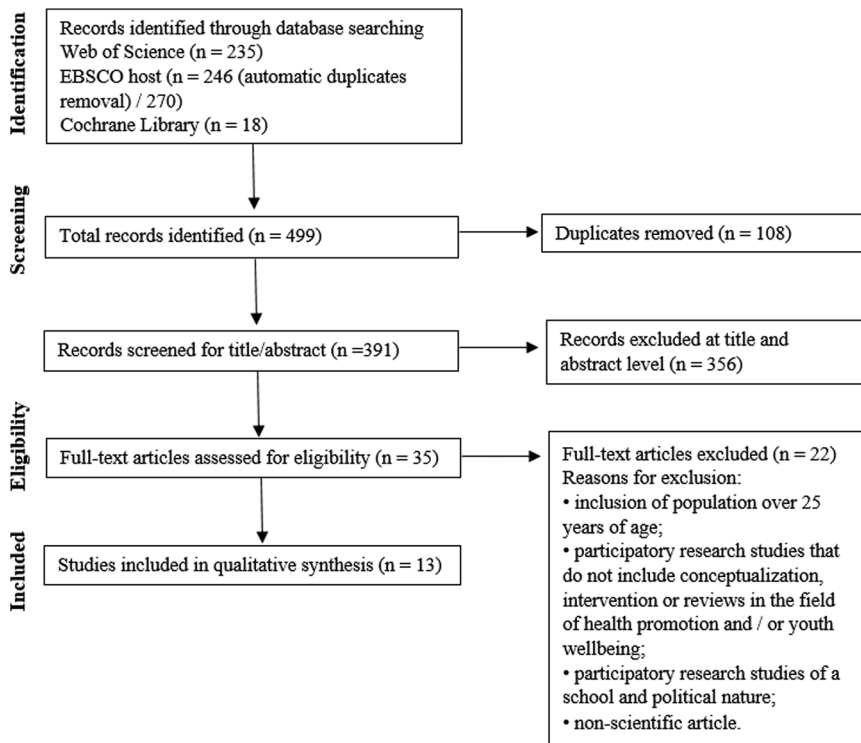


FIGURE 1 Identification, screening, eligibility, and included studies. Source: Moher et al. (2009)

3.2 | Included study characteristics

The characteristics of the 13 included studies are described in Table 1.

Since many of the studies present more than one design (longitudinal, case study, ethnographic, quasi-experimental, and review), the number of studies that include the design in question is described. For the most part, the studies are based on a case study design (n = 8), sometimes shared with an ethnographic design (n = 3). In the analysis of the methods, only studies with a mixed (n = 7) and qualitative (n = 6) approach are represented. With several types of data, the interviews (n = 7) and surveys (n = 6) were the most frequent methods of information retrieval. YPAR youth (n = 10) and YPAR adults (n = 4) are the most frequent sources of information.

The intervention times are also divergent, with a minimum period of 8 months and a maximum of 36 months. Most studies were developed in the United States (n = 8) and have populations with <150 participants (n = 9).

3.3 | Included sample characteristics

Without similarities in the population ages, youth were between 11 and 25 years old.

3.4 | Main findings

The results of the 13 included studies are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 1 Study characteristics

Reference	Design	Methods	Data type	Data source	Youth sample	Ages	Duration (months)	Country	General recommendations
Cargo, Grams, Ottoson, Ward, and Green (2003)	Longitudinal	Qualitative	Interviews, documents, and observations	YPAR youth, YPAR adults	123	12–19	32	Canada	Youth–adults partnership in youth empowerment. Power transferred to young people (voice, decision making, and actions), with adults in supporting and facilitating the process, sharing information and motivating.
DeJonckheere et al. (2017)	Longitudinal	Mixed	Survey	YPAR youth	114	14–24	12	United States	Text messages as a strategy to engage youth over time, to collect real-time data, analysis, and dissemination of research findings. Text messaging as an inclusive, comfortable, and cost-effective method. The participation of advisory groups, peer leaders, and community researchers promotes the research quality
Ealey et al. (2006)	Case study	Mixed	Survey, feedback forms, reports	YPAR adults	2,100	–	–	United States	All community residents may have the opportunity to contribute to a better community for young people, including youth. Use of three primary strategies: Multimedia campaign; technical assistance and support to local communities; mini-grant opportunities
Ferrera et al. (2015)	Ethnographic, quasi-experimental	Mixed	Survey, interviews	YPAR youth, community	23	14–19	– (>12)	United States	Shared decisions between adults and young people. Strong partners' inclusion enhances the relevance and effectiveness as a research method.

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Reference	Design	Methods	Data type	Data source	Youth sample	Ages	Duration (months)	Country	General recommendations
Ford, Rasmus, and Allen (2012)	Case study	Qualitative	Interviews, action groups	YPAR youth	25	11–18	–	United States	Formation of a local committee including young people, adults, leaders, and seniors. Establishment of young people as co-researchers. Implementation of youth action groups. Youth should not understand the process of the investigation but live it.
Frasquilho et al. (2018)	Quasi-experimental	Mixed	Survey	YPAR youth	147	11–18	– (>8)	Portugal	Online tools play an important role in involving young people, as well as providing partnerships with researchers, society, and stakeholders. Development of debate, communication, negotiation, and decision-making skills. It is important to emphasize the importance of a significant space where young people can have a voice.
Kulbok et al. (2015)	Ethnographic, case study	Qualitative	Interviews, PhotoVoice	Community, YPAR youth, YPAR parents	12	16–18	–	– (Small rural country)	Active listening, nominal groups, acting on youths' recommendations, bonus awards for their active participation and skills development to take on different roles during the project, can enhance participation. Youth involvement at all stages of the process. An ethnographic approach may increase success.

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Reference	Design	Methods	Data type	Data source	Youth sample	Ages	Duration (months)	Country	General recommendations
Livingood et al. (2017)	Case study	Qualitative	Focus group, PhotoVoice	YPAR youth	30	15–19	36	United States	Youth-informed digital technologies are important to address youth health issues. Inclusion of community members. Young people in the development, implementation, and interpretation of results. Qualitative analysis in data analysis.
Ozer (2017)	Review	Qualitative	Literature review	Literature	-	-	-	-	Young people in problem identification, young-adult power sharing, facilitated communication and trust in adults, young people in choosing design and research methods (with training) to consider each other's strengths and weaknesses. This methodology should be scaled up to enrich other systems such as education, juvenile justice, urban planning, and healthcare.
Ramey and Rose-Krasnor (2015)	Case study	Mixed	Interviews, focus group, documents, field notes	YPAR youth	58	13–25	24	Canada	Young-adult partnership, with knowledge of the engagement model used. The program must have a clear view of objectives, expectations, as well as flexible structure and deadlines.

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Reference	Design	Methods	Data type	Data source	Youth sample	Ages	Duration (months)	Country	General recommendations
Reed, Miller, and AMTN HIV/AIDS (2014)	Ethnographic, case study	Qualitative	Reports, interviews	YPAR adults	-	18-24	36	United States	Support for structural changes may enhance when their members are included in design and implementation. Coalition leaders should include youth and be aware of barriers to youth participation. Community member's involvement.
Ross and Connors (2018)	Ethnographic, case study	Mixed	Survey, focus group, documents, reports, meeting agendas, and minutes	YPAR youth and adults, Coalition, Task Force	18	-	24	United States	Adults should be aware of the advantages of this methodology, and replicate it on a young-adult partnership in adult spaces. Young people and adults in the interpretation of data, resulting in a strategic plan. Preparation of youth and adults for joint work. Adults work to realize the vision of young people.
Villa et al. (2018)	Case study	Mixed	Survey (questionnaire), interviews (individual)	YPAR youth	130	14-18	8	United States	Strong relationships with adults are enhanced by trust, free judgment and safe. Adults in the empowerment of young leaders and promoting their interest in research. Quantitative and qualitative methods in data collection.

Abbreviation: YPAR, Youth Participatory Action Research.

TABLE 2 Research characteristics among studies

Research characteristics	n
Study design	
Case study	8
Ethnographic	4
Longitudinal	2
Quasi-experimental	2
Review	1
Methods	
Mixed	7
Qualitative	6
Quantitative	0
Data type	
Focus group	3
Interviews	7
Literature review	1
PhotoVoice	2
Survey	6
Other (documents, observations, feedback forms, reports, action groups, field notes, meeting agendas, and minutes)	5
Data source	
YPAR youth	10
YPAR adults	4
Community members	2
Other (parents, coalitions, and literature)	3
Duration of the intervention (6 missings)	
≤12 months	2
12–24 months	2
24–36 months	3
Sample size (3 missings)	
≤50	4
50–100	1
100–150	4
150–200	0
>200	1
Sample characteristics	
Country (2 missings)	
Canada	2
Portugal	1
United States	8

Abbreviation: YPAR, Youth Participatory Action Research.

On the basis of the systematic review performed in this paper, the recommendations were analyzed according to the following steps: (a) Raise awareness; (b) capacitation; (c) design; (d) motivation; (e) implementation; (f) evaluation; (g) dissemination; and (h) replication. These stages are believed to be fundamental to all YPAR programs (Image 1).

In the studies analyzed, the following recommendations are highlighted:

- (a) Raise awareness—to alert adults to the advantages of programs and the importance of listening to the voice of young people; stakeholders should be aware of the importance of participation and its barriers; young people's prior awareness of the participation model to be used.

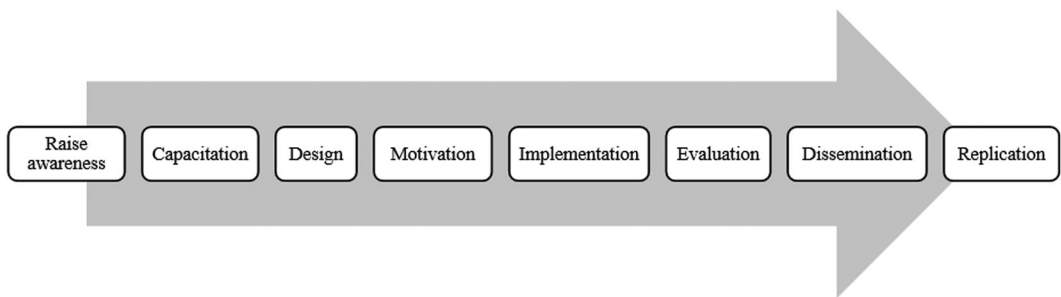


IMAGE 1 Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) stages

- (b) Capacitation—youth–adult partnership in the empowerment of youth leadership skills and competencies (e.g., debate, communication, negotiation, and decision-making) related to each of the activities and roles it will assume during the project; skills development of adults and young people to facilitate their work in partnership.
- (c) Design—set clear objectives and expectations with flexible structure and deadlines; youth should be genuinely included in all process stages, including the definition of research questions; creation of advisory groups that include young people, adults, stakeholders, peer leaders, community (adding senior) to enhance research; start-up multimedia campaign, and online tools to facilitate youth–researcher relationship.
- (d) Motivation—in a young–adult relationship based on trust, security, and lack of judgment, provide a space in which youth feel their voice heard. Adults should take an active listening posture, prioritizing the promotion of nominal groups and act based on recommendations of young people; text messaging is identified as an important tool to engage youth over time; bonus for more active participants.
- (e) Implementation—adult–youth transactional partnership, with adults as facilitators and promoters of young people's interests. The adult is responsible for sharing information and decisions as well as motivating participants; ethnographic approach, with subsequent inclusion of community members, advisory groups, peer leaders, researchers, and stakeholders; implementation of youth action groups; text messaging as a tool in the program development.
- (f) Evaluation—qualitative and quantitative methods in data analysis; build a strategic plan.
- (g) Dissemination—text messaging in the presentation and dissemination of program results.
- (h) Replication—apply in adult spaces. Scale to another level, such as education, juvenile justice, urban planning, and healthcare.

4 | DISCUSSION

Mostly case studies, with mixed or qualitative analysis, and data collected through interviews and surveys, have YPAR youth as the main source of information. Anyon et al. (2018), report an equal predominance of studies with case study design, mixed analysis, interview, and YPAR youth as a data source.

Interventions targeting adolescents and young people aged between 11 and 25, do not have a common age pattern. At the duration of intervention, the pattern remains, varying the duration between 8 and 36 months. Most studies have been developed in the United States. Scarce in the European Union, there are numerous studies of community scope developed in the United States (e.g., Teixeira, 2014; Wagaman, 2015; Walker & Saito, 2011).

Although health intervention practices are generally categorized into three phases: Design, implementation, and evaluation (Lindquist-Grantz & Abraczinskas, 2018), the data collected were analyzed based on the addition of a few more steps that we believe should be included in the YPAR programs.

- (a) *Raise awareness* to the advantages of YPAR and to listen to the youth voice. As a social group with its own value, it is fundamental to accept youth as important resources (Tsekoura, 2016), capable of generating a real and specialized knowledge of their problems (Ozer & Piatt, 2017b, p. 97). To facilitate the development of YPAR programs, it is important to alert stakeholders to the importance of using this methodology, as well as for its barriers. Stakeholders are important agents of change and their integration promotes not only the impacts of research (Boaz, Hanney, Borst, O'Shea & Kook, 2018) but also their commitment to use the results (Morris, 2002). Young people should be aware of the YPAR model to be used.
- (b) *Capacitation* of young people at the level of leadership skills, and others related to the roles they will play throughout YPAR. The YPAR is based on the promotion of equity, and it is essential that the young person adapts from the standpoint of research skills (Ozer & Douglas, 2015; Ozer & Piatt, 2017a). Young people and adults should be provided with teamwork skills.
- (c) *Design* the program to include youth in all stages of the process. Although YPAR programs are frequent, few truly include young people (Jacquez et al., 2012). It is necessary that these programs continue to investigate ways to meaningfully engage young people at all stages of the process (Foster-Fishman, Law, Lichty, & Aoun, 2010).

It is critical that the objectives and expectations of YPAR programs are clear and their structure and deadlines be flexible. Multimedia campaigns can be an important resource at the beginning of the project, and online tools in its development. To enhance research, advisory groups should be created.

- (d) *Motivation* of young people to participate through text messaging and the provision of a space in which they feel their voice heard. Support the process based on the development of nominal groups, in an active listening process, supporting actions according to the recommendations of the youth. Bonus to the most active participants.

In a study developed by Akom, Shah, Nakai, and Cruz (2016), digital tools are presented as a motivating resource for participation. It allows not only shaping the context of youth involvement, but also their relationships (Literat, Kligler-Vilenchik, Brough, & Blum-Ross, 2018). Adults should promote feelings of trust and confidence in their relationship with youth and avoid judgments.

- (e) *Implementation* from a youth-adult transactional partnership, counteracting relational barriers, such as lack of trust and unequal power between youth and adults (Kim, 2016), characteristic of many YPAR programs (Jacquez et al., 2012). It is still common for the researcher to have the role of speaking for, rather than empowering young people (Lake & Wendland, 2018). At this stage, the adult is responsible for sharing information, decisions, as well as motivating the participants.

Use of ethnographic approach, with subsequent inclusion of the community, advisory groups, peer leaders, researchers, and stakeholders. On the basis of the critical-epistemological structure, YPAR focus on young people, communities, professionals, and researchers in the production of knowledge (Caraballo, Lozenski, Lyiscott, & Morrell, 2017).

- (f) *Evaluation* supported by quantitative and qualitative methods for the development of a strategic plan. In the study of programs and interventions, qualitative research has proved to be a valuable form of data collection (Neal, Neal, VanDyke & Kornbluh, 2015). This is the most used methodology in the YPAR programs (Anyon et al., 2018).
- (g) *Dissemination* the results through text messaging. The merits of the YPAR programs should not only be viewed from the research point of view, but also to improve practices (Pritchard, 2004). The dissemination of practices is fundamental. In a study of best practices to increase study visibility and dissemination, Tripathy et al. (2017) argue that researchers should leverage the use of social network platforms.
- (h) *Replication* of YPAR programs in adult spaces and scaling up programs in education, youth justice, urban planning, and healthcare. Considered by the authors Lindquist-Grantz and Abraczinskas (2018) a strong strategy of intervention and knowledge production, they defend YPAR as an innovative approach in the field of public health.

5 | STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

This review was developed based on the guidelines of the PRISMA method (Moher et al., 2009), reporting all the steps taken throughout the process. As a strength, we also emphasize the noninclusion of the criteria “year of publication,” allowing to reach a greater number of works in this field that has a small number of studies only based on the community context. Its integrative nature of the literature and systematic reviews previously developed is also considered a strength.

Some limitations regarding the design of the studies, size, and specificity of their population and intervention time, suggest some caution in results interpretation.

Our research only included scientific articles published in academic journals. Although it is recognized the importance of the inclusion of gray literature and other nonscientific publications, it was intended to be as judicious as possible in the quality of the information included. The impossibility of using a tool to attest the quality of the articles included, insofar as this type of study does not report all the criteria to be evaluated, is also considered a limitation. It should be noted as well the heterogeneity of words related to the concept of youth participatory research, and the lack of information in some of the articles that may have compromised the codification and analysis process.

6 | CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE FUTURE

Supporting the idea that YPARs is an innovative approach in public health (Lindquist-Grantz & Abraczinskas, 2018), confronting traditional models (Lake & Wendland, 2018), the following are to be considered necessary.

- Community-based YPAR comes to be a common practice in Europe. With different needs and problems, young Europeans can be important actors and resources in promoting health and well-being in Europe.
- Largely developed with minorities, it is important to broaden their focus to young people in general. This is fundamental to develop such programs in decision-making structures that directly affect the youth's lives.
- Method—(a) raise awareness; (b) capacitation; (c) design; (d) motivation; (e) implementation; (f) evaluation; (g) dissemination; (h) replication, when we develop an YPAR program. To ensure a careful solid replication, it is vital to disseminate these programs in the scientific community, and carefully detailing their procedures and methodologies.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there are no conflict of interests.

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