



The Family's Role in Meeting Nutritional Needs to Prevent Stunting in Early Childhood



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Article Information

Article History

Received: June 10, 2026

Revised: July 2, 2026

Accepted: Sept 2, 2026

Keywords:

*Stunting,
Nutritional Needs,
early childhood,
parenting*

Abstrak

Hingga saat ini, stunting masih menjadi tantangan utama di bidang gizi yang memperoleh perhatian luas, baik pada tingkat nasional maupun global, karena berdampak terhadap kualitas sumber daya manusia pada masa mendatang. Keluarga memiliki peran penting dalam memenuhi kebutuhan gizi anak untuk mencegah stunting sejak usia dini. Tujuan dari penelitian ini k menjelaskan bagaimana keluarga memastikan anak-anak mereka cukup gizi untuk mencegah stunting pada anak usia dini. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan pendekatan kualitatif dan fenomenologi sebagai alatnya. Partisipan penelitian berisi lima orang tua yang memiliki anak usia dini. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan reduksi data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa orang tua sangat memahami pentingnya gizi untuk pertumbuhan dan perkembangan anak. Keluarga berperan dalam menyediakan makanan bergizi, mendampingi anak saat makan, menerapkan pola makan yang sehat, serta memantau pertumbuhan anak sebagai Upaya pencegahan stunting. Kendala yang dihadapi meliputi keterbatasan ekonomi, kesulitan anak dalam mengonsumsi makanan tertentu, kebiasaan memilih makanan. Upaya yang dilakukan keluarga antara lain memberikan variasi menu, membujuk anak secara positif, serta memanfaatkan bahan makanan yang tersedia di lingkungan sekitar. Temuan penelitian menegaskan bahwa keterlibatan keluarga memiliki kontribusi penting dalam pemenuhan gizi dan pencegahan stunting pada anak usia dini.

Abstract

Stunting remains one of the nutritional issues receiving serious attention in Indonesia because it affects children's physical development, growth, and quality of life in the future. In order to prevent stunting in children from an early age, families are essential in providing for their nutritional needs. The purpose of this study is to explain how families can help young children avoid stunting by providing them with a healthy diet. The study used the phenomenological method in a qualitative manner. Five parents with little children participated in the study. Observation, interviews, and

documentation were used to gather data, which was then reduced, presented, and conclusions were drawn. The results indicate that parents have a fairly good understanding of the importance of nutrition for children's growth and development. Families play role in providing nutritious food, accompanying children during meals, implementing healthy eating habits, and monitoring children's growth as part of efforts to prevent stunting. Challenges faced include economic constraints, children's difficulty in consuming certain foods, and food-selection habits. Efforts made by families include providing a varied diet, using positive reinforcement to encourage children, and masking use of food available in the local community. The findings of this study confirm that family involvement plays a crucial role in ensuring adequate nutrition and preventing stunting in young children.



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ISSN 2579-7255 (Print)
ISSN 2524-004X (Online)

INTRODUCTION

As a determinant of the quality of future human resources, stunting remains one of the nutritional problems receiving serious attention at both the global and national levels. UNICEF (2023) states that stunting is the impairment of children's growth and development caused by prolonged nutritional deficiency, beginning from pregnancy through early life. Stunting is an important indicator for assessing the quality of children's growth and development, as this condition not only makes children shorter than the standard for their age but also affects cognitive development, productivity, and health in adulthood.

Stunting, as defined by Adriani et al. (2022), is a condition of failure to thrive in children caused by long-term nutritional deficiency, which generally occurs during the first 1,000 days of life. This condition affects not only children's physical growth but also brain development and cognitive ability, and increases the risk of long-term disease in adulthood. Moreover, stunting remains a widespread public health problem in developing countries, including Indonesia, and therefore requires sustained handling and attention. Stunting must be prevented from an early age through proper nutrition, appropriate care, and regular monitoring of children's growth.

Children with stunting are not only affected physically but also experience impaired cognitive development, learning ability, and productivity in adulthood. They also have

lower immunity, which makes them more susceptible to infectious diseases. In the long term, this condition also increases the risk of noncommunicable diseases, such as obesity and cardiovascular disease in adulthood (Trinanda, 2023). Consequently, stunting must be prevented from an early age through comprehensive efforts that involve the family as the child's first environment.

According to the 2024 Indonesian Nutritional Status Survey (SSGI), announced by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia in 2025, the stunting rate in Indonesia showed a declining trend, from 21.5% in 2023 to 19.8% in 2024. Despite this decline, the figure remains above the target set by the government. Consistent, ongoing measures are therefore needed to improve children's nutritional quality from an early age.

Stunting rates are influenced by various interrelated conditions rather than a single factor, such as inadequate nutritional intake, recurrent infections, parents' limited knowledge of nutrition, the family's socioeconomic condition, and suboptimal caregiving practices (Anwar et al., 2022). Among these factors, the family plays the primary role, as it is the closest environment and the first to interact with the child, and is responsible for meeting the child's basic needs, including nutrition. Parents are responsible for providing nutritious food, building healthy eating habits, tracking the child's development, and creating an environment that best supports the child's growth and development (Munawaroh et al., 2022).

A number of previous studies have examined the relationship between parental knowledge, parenting patterns, and the incidence of stunting. Cahyati's (2022) study found that low parental knowledge of nutrition can affect the practice of meeting children's nutritional needs. Munawaroh et al.'s (2022) study also explained that families play an important role in shaping children's eating habits and preventing stunting from an early age. In addition, Agustina and Dwijayanti (2023) found that parental involvement in nutrition and caregiving contributes to optimizing children's growth and development.

Numerous prior studies have examined stunting prevention. Their findings indicate that family support, parenting patterns, and balanced-nutrition guidance influence the success of stunting prevention. According to Palowa et al. (2023), there is a significant correlation between the stunting rate among young children and family support. More recently, Paridah and Gafur (2023) explained that balanced-nutrition counseling can improve mothers' knowledge of stunting-prevention efforts. However, most previous

studies have focused mainly on the relationships between variables or on the effectiveness of intervention programs. Studies that specifically explore families' experiences in meeting children's nutritional needs including the forms of their role, the challenges they face, and the strategies they employ in daily life remain relatively limited, which makes the present study important to conduct.

Previous studies have generally focused on the causes of stunting and the relationship between children's nutritional status and their health condition, while families' experiences in meeting children's nutritional needs remain largely unexplored. Studies examining families' direct experiences in meeting children's nutritional needs to prevent stunting, particularly using a phenomenological approach, are still scarce in the literature. This study therefore offers novelty in its effort to explore in depth families' experiences regarding their understanding of nutrition, feeding practices, family roles, the challenges they face, and the methods used to meet children's nutritional needs in order to prevent stunting. In light of these considerations, this study aims to investigate the family's function in meeting the nutritional needs of young children as one measure of stunting prevention.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Stunting is a growth disorder that occurs when children lack sufficient nutritional intake over a prolonged period, resulting in a height that does not match the standard for their age. This condition affects not only children's physical growth but can also hinder their cognitive development, learning ability, and productivity in the future (Nazidah, 2022). Various factors, both direct and indirect, can increase the risk of stunting, such as nutritional adequacy, a history of recurrent infections, the family's socioeconomic condition, and parenting patterns. Yani et al. (2023) also noted that family and household characteristics contribute to the rising rate of stunting among children under five.

Optimal fulfillment of nutritional needs is an important step in preventing stunting in young children. Children require a balanced nutritional intake consisting of carbohydrates, protein, fat, vitamins, and minerals to support their growth and development (Radiastu, 2024). Well-met nutritional needs contribute to physical growth, cognitive development, and the maintenance of immunity. Astuti et al. (2024) proposed that there is a relationship

between children's stunting risk and inappropriate feeding practices, low dietary diversity, and inadequate feeding frequency.

The family is the closest environment responsible for meeting a child's nutritional needs. Parents are also responsible for providing nutritious food, regulating eating patterns, and building healthy eating habits from an early age. Munawaroh et al. (2022) explained that parental knowledge, the family's economic condition, and feeding patterns affect a child's nutritional fulfillment, and thus play a significant role in preventing stunting.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative method with a phenomenological design. This approach was used to comprehensively understand and explain social phenomena based on the experiences of the research participants (Fattah, 2023). The phenomenological design was chosen because it enables the researcher to explore the meanings, understanding, experiences, and challenges faced by families in meeting children's nutritional needs to prevent stunting (Aflah & Murhayati, 2025).

This study was conducted in Griya Batara Asri Housing Complex, Dayeuh Village, Bogor Regency, West Java. The research participants consisted of five mothers with children aged 1–3 years. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, based on the suitability of their characteristics to the research objectives. The participant criteria included: (1) mothers with children aged 1–3 years, (2) direct involvement in meeting the child's nutritional needs within the family, and (3) willingness to participate in the study. The principle of data adequacy, also known as data saturation, occurs when the information obtained shows repetition and no new themes emerge. This principle determined the number of participants.

Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observation was used to directly examine children's nutritional-fulfillment practices, feeding patterns, mealtime accompaniment, and parents' behavior in daily life (Fattah, 2023). Semi-structured interviews were conducted in a flexible manner, allowing participants to explain their experiences and views in greater depth (Fadila, 2025). Supporting data in the form of photographs and notes related to the research focus were used as documentation (Pratiwi, 2023).

The Miles and Huberman model was used for data analysis, encompassing data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Fattah, 2023). During the data reduction stage, the researcher selected and prioritized data relevant to the research objectives. To facilitate interpretation, the data were presented in narrative form. The final stage involved drawing conclusions based on the patterns and themes identified in the research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Parents' Knowledge of Nutrition and Stunting

Based on interviews conducted with the five participants, it was found that all parents understood the importance of meeting the nutritional needs of young children. The participants understood that nutrition plays a role in supporting physical growth, brain development, and improved immunity, as well as in preventing stunting. One participant stated that "nutrition is the primary foundation for children's growth and development. Adequate nutrition helps children grow to a height and weight proportional to their age."

Observation results showed that parents made efforts to give their children healthy food, supporting the interview findings. Some participants were found to provide menus containing animal protein, vegetables, and fruit, such as chicken, eggs, carrots, broccoli, and bananas. Parents were also observed accompanying their children during meals and ensuring that the food given was clean.

The findings indicate that parents understand that meeting children's nutritional needs is very important for their growth and development. This finding is supported by Prasetyo et al. (2023), who explained that nutrition education plays a role in improving mothers' knowledge, perspective, and ability to meet children's nutritional needs, thereby contributing to the improvement of children's nutritional status.

Nevertheless, observation results showed that there remained a gap between parents' knowledge and their actual feeding practices. Some participants were found to provide menus dominated by rice and eggs, without additional vegetables or fruit. This finding indicates that although parents already understand the importance of nutrition, the application of balanced-nutrition principles has not yet been fully and consistently implemented in daily life.

This finding is further supported by Pratama and Rumawas (2023), who revealed that parents' knowledge of nutrition and stunting is very important for preventing stunting in children. Parents who are knowledgeable about stunting tend to pay closer attention to their

children's diet, growth, and development in daily life. In addition, this finding is reinforced by Migiarti and Hanifa (2024), who found an association with the incidence of stunting in children. Parents who understand the importance of balanced nutrition tend to be better able to meet their children's nutritional needs compared to parents who lack this understanding.

Therefore, parents' understanding of nutrition serves as a strong foundation for supporting various stunting-prevention efforts. However, this knowledge needs to be translated into consistent feeding practices in daily life.

Children's Feeding Patterns

Based on information obtained through interviews, most parents had made efforts to implement feeding patterns tailored to their children's nutritional needs. Parents provided food containing carbohydrates, protein, vegetables, and fruit, and ensured that their children's fluid needs were met. In addition, most participants also tried to maintain a regular meal schedule so that their children's nutritional needs could be properly fulfilled.

Observation findings revealed variation in feeding practices across families, influenced by differing conditions and habits. Most children received food containing animal protein and vegetables. However, several obstacles were still found in practice, such as children being easily distracted while eating, being selective about certain foods, or eating while playing or watching television. This condition shows that children's nutritional fulfillment is influenced not only by the type of food provided, but also by the child's eating behavior during the meal itself.

This finding is consistent with Fattikasary et al. (2025), who stated that meeting children's nutritional needs requires active family involvement through the provision of appropriate food and accompaniment during meals. The family environment serves as the first place where children form eating habits that will affect their health condition and nutritional status in the future.

This study also supports findings showing that responsive feeding practices, dietary diversity, and parental involvement during meals improve children's nutritional intake and reduce the risk of stunting. Conversely, the risk of growth disorders in children increases due to irregular eating patterns and limited dietary variety (Tambunan, 2023; Julianti et al., 2023). In addition, this study supports research findings indicating that responsive feeding practices, dietary diversity, and parental participation during meals are important factors in

supporting children's growth. In a systematic review and meta-analysis, Zeinalabedini et al. (2023) found that low dietary diversity is associated with the risk of stunting and poor nutritional outcomes in children. Furthermore, according to Duong et al. (2023), healthy dietary diversity patterns support better linear growth in children, whereas irregular eating habits and limited food variety can increase the likelihood of growth disorders.

The findings indicate that the success of feeding practices is influenced not only by the type of food provided, but also by parents' capacity to create a conducive eating environment and instill healthy eating habits in their children.

Challenges and Efforts to Overcome Challenges in Meeting Children's Nutritional Needs

The interview results showed that parents experienced various obstacles in their efforts to meet their children's nutritional needs. The most commonly found obstacles were children having difficulty eating, exhibiting mouth-closing behavior (refusal to eat, GTM), being picky about food, disliking vegetables, and being easily distracted.

Observation results showed that most of the challenges encountered were related to children's eating behavior. Some children appeared more interested in playing than in finishing their food. In addition, some children were easily distracted by their surroundings, causing the eating process to frequently stop before the food was fully consumed.

In addressing these challenges, parents employed various strategies, such as preparing varied menus, changing the way food was presented, offering gentle persuasion when children refused to eat, and creating a more comfortable eating atmosphere for the child. Observation results showed that parents actively accompanied their children throughout the eating process and sought strategies suited to each child's characteristics.

This finding is consistent with Swastika et al. (2025), who noted that various challenges in meeting children's nutritional needs have the potential to affect stunting-prevention efforts. In addition, Arifa et al. (2024) explained that the family's socioeconomic factors also determine the family's ability to provide varied and nutritious food for their children. Research by Santoso and Jaya (2024) further supports this finding, stating that family self-sufficiency is essential for preventing stunting, as it enables the family to meet the child's health and nutritional needs.

These findings are consistent with numerous previous studies indicating that the factors most frequently contributing to children's nutritional-fulfillment problems are the family's socioeconomic condition, limited dietary diversity, and poor feeding practices. Akseer et al. explained that nutritional intake is not the only factor influencing stunting; the family's economic condition, access to health services, and childcare methods are all contributing factors.

The various efforts made by parents reflect awareness and commitment to consistently meeting their children's nutritional needs. Successfully meeting a child's nutritional needs requires patience, consistency, and active parental involvement, so that the child's nutritional needs can be optimally fulfilled as part of stunting-prevention efforts from an early age.

Overall, the findings show that family involvement is essential in building healthy eating habits in children. Good knowledge, supportive parenting, and active family involvement in the feeding process form an important foundation for optimally supporting children's growth and development and reducing the risk of stunting.

CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that family involvement is a key factor in meeting children's nutritional needs, thereby supporting stunting-prevention efforts from an early age. Parents generally already possess fairly good knowledge of how important nutrition is for children's growth and development. This understanding is reflected in their efforts to provide food containing carbohydrates, protein, vegetables, and fruit, as well as in maintaining a relatively regular eating pattern. In addition, families play a role in preventing stunting through nutritional fulfillment starting from pregnancy, the provision of appropriate complementary feeding (MPASI), monitoring of children's growth, and accompaniment during meals. The findings also show that children's nutrition still faces various challenges, such as mouth-closing behavior (GTM), food-selectivity habits, refusal of vegetables, lack of focus while eating, and economic limitations in some families. To address these challenges, parents undertake various efforts, including creating varied food menus, modifying the form and presentation of food, providing accompaniment during meals, and applying various strategies tailored to each child's characteristics. This study makes an empirical contribution to the study of early childhood education and family health by showing that the availability of nutritious food and parental awareness are important factors in preventing stunting,

alongside parenting patterns, children's eating behavior, and overall family involvement. These findings reinforce the importance of the family as a home base for supporting children's growth and preventing stunting from an early age. Based on the overall findings, it can be understood that stunting prevention in young children is a shared responsibility that begins within the family environment. Parents' knowledge of nutrition needs to be followed by consistent feeding practices and support from all family members. Therefore, the family's function is not limited to meeting the child's food needs, but also includes supervision, accompaniment, and the provision of support that optimally promotes the child's growth and development.

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