

STUNTING PREVENTION THROUGH THE PROVISION OF SUPPLEMENTARY FOOD BASED ON LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

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ABSTRACT

Stunting, or impaired growth due to chronic malnutrition during the first 1,000 days of life, remains one of the major public health challenges in Indonesia. Its impacts include delays in physical and cognitive development as well as an increased risk of future diseases. Addressing stunting requires a holistic approach involving nutrition, culture, and community participation.

This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of stunting prevention efforts through the provision of supplementary food based on local knowledge in Blang Geulumpang's Community Health Centre area. Using a qualitative descriptive method with a case study approach, data were collected via in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document studies involving mothers of toddlers and healthcare workers. Over a 60-day period (May to July), the program demonstrated positive outcomes, with an average weight gain of 1.8 kg and height increase of 3 cm among 12 children.

These results indicate that locally sourced and nutrient-rich food interventions improve nutritional status and can be adapted in other regions. These findings underscore the potential for local food-based supplementary feeding programs to significantly improve child nutrition and prevent stunting. To maximize impact, scaling these culturally relevant interventions across diverse regions is imperative. Policymakers, healthcare practitioners, and community leaders must collaborate to integrate such programs into national strategies, ensuring sustainable and equitable implementation that addresses the broader determinants of child health and nutrition.

Keywords: *stunting, supplementary food, nutrition.*

INTRODUCTION

Stunting remains one of the most pressing global health challenges, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, where its impact extends beyond the immediate health of affected individuals to broader societal and developmental consequences. Defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as low height for age, stunting is a clear indicator of chronic malnutrition, which compromises not only physical development but also cognitive function, ultimately limiting a child's potential and contributing to long-term economic and social disadvantages (UNICEF, 2020; WHO, 2021). This phenomenon is deeply entwined with poverty, poor maternal health, inadequate nutrition, and insufficient healthcare services, factors that contribute to the cycle of malnutrition and underdevelopment (Victora et al., 2008).

One of the key global frameworks addressing stunting is the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically Goal 2, which aims to end hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture by 2030. Within this framework, stunting prevention plays a critical role, as it is essential to eradicating malnutrition in all its forms. The global target set under the SDGs is to reduce stunting by 40% by 2025, with a broader goal of ensuring that no child suffers from the consequences of stunting (United Nations, 2015). Despite significant progress, the challenge remains formidable, especially in regions such as Southeast Asia, where stunting rates are alarmingly high (UNICEF, 2020).

According to the latest data from UNICEF, WHO, and the World Bank Group, the global number of children under five suffering from stunting in 2019 was estimated at approximately 149 million, with a slight decrease to 21.8 million in 2020. This data reveals a slight improvement but underscores the urgent need for more effective interventions. In Southeast Asia, the number of stunted children dropped from 38.5 million in 2019 to 24.7 million in 2020, showing that progress is being made (UNICEF, 2021; World Bank, 2020). However, the rates remain unacceptably high, particularly in countries like Indonesia, which, with a stunting prevalence rate of 31.8%, ranks second in Southeast Asia, only behind Timor Leste, which has a stunting prevalence of 48% (SSGI, 2022).

In Indonesia, despite a notable decrease in the stunting prevalence rate from 24.4% in 2021 to 21.6% in 2022, the country still falls short of its national target of reducing stunting to 14% by 2024 (SSGI, 2022). This data suggests that while governmental efforts, including various nutrition-focused interventions and public health campaigns, have yielded positive results, more comprehensive and contextually appropriate solutions are required to achieve the 2024 target and beyond. The government of Indonesia has implemented several strategies, such as maternal and child health interventions, nutrition education, and food supplementation programs, to combat stunting, but the

effectiveness of these strategies must be continuously evaluated and refined (Kementerian Kesehatan RI, 2020).

Addressing the root causes of stunting requires multifaceted approaches that focus not only on improving food availability but also on changing social, economic, and health-related behaviors (Black et al., 2013). Traditional knowledge and local practices offer an invaluable resource in these efforts. The use of locally sourced foods in the provision of supplementary nutrition has gained attention as a sustainable and culturally relevant method to combat stunting. Local knowledge about nutritious food sources, preparation methods, and dietary habits can enhance the effectiveness of supplementary feeding programs, making them more accessible and acceptable to communities (Suhartini et al., 2019).

This article explores the role of supplementary food provision, specifically based on local knowledge, in the prevention of stunting. Through the integration of culturally relevant, nutritious food options into national and community-based nutrition programs, it is possible to address the issue of stunting while also promoting sustainability and community empowerment (Reinbott et al., 2018). The subsequent sections will discuss various initiatives and case studies that have successfully utilized local knowledge in nutrition interventions, highlighting their impact on reducing stunting in various regions, particularly in Southeast Asia. Additionally, the article will delve into the importance of collaboration between governments, local communities, and international organizations in ensuring the sustainability and scalability of stunting prevention programs (Barrera et al., 2019).

Given the complexity of stunting, which involves multiple factors such as poor maternal health, inadequate early childhood care, lack of access to health services, and poor feeding practices, this article will also address the need for comprehensive strategies that go beyond food supplementation. The broader determinants of health, such as education, sanitation, and access to healthcare, must be considered in any attempt to reduce stunting rates (World Health Organization, 2014). A multi-sectoral approach, which includes improvements in education, health, and economic opportunities, is crucial for breaking the cycle of malnutrition and promoting long-term development (UNICEF, 2019).

In conclusion, while stunting is a daunting challenge, it is not insurmountable. The integration of supplementary food programs based on local knowledge provides a promising avenue for stunting prevention, especially when coupled with broader efforts aimed at improving overall health and nutrition. By leveraging local expertise and combining it with evidence-based strategies, it is possible to make significant progress toward achieving the SDG targets and ensuring a healthier future for the next generation. The fight against stunting requires not only global and national commitment but also a deep understanding of local contexts and the active involvement of

communities in crafting solutions that are both effective and sustainable (Prentice & Schoenmakers, 2020)

METHODS

This qualitative study employed a descriptive approach to explore the provision of supplementary food based on local knowledge. Data were collected using triangulation methods: (1) In-depth Interviews; Conducted with mothers of toddlers and healthcare workers to gather insights into local food practices, community perceptions, and challenges, (2) Participatory Observations; Observing the preparation, distribution, and acceptance of local food-based supplementary feeding, (3) Document Analysis; Reviewing records from the health center, including nutritional data and program implementation details.

This method aligns with Creswell's (2014) view that qualitative research aims to describe phenomena holistically, considering the context and perceptions of the research subjects in their natural settings. This approach also corresponds with Yin's (2018) emphasis on the importance of case studies in social research, as they provide a deep understanding of the dynamics within specific phenomena.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The total population in the Blang Geulumpang Community Health Center area, based on the latest data from 2024, is 719 toddlers, with the number of toddlers as follows 355 male toddlers, and 364 female toddlers.

The cultural traditions of the Blang Geulumpang community uphold a strong social structure, with the practice of cooperation (*gotong royong*) still highly valued. The community helps each other in various activities, including rituals such as *kenduri*, which are held to celebrate events like births, circumcisions, or thanksgiving ceremonies. These activities utilize local, nutrient-rich food ingredients, such as rice, fish, vegetables, and spices. This reflects the local local expertise in utilizing natural resources.

Most parents interviewed had basic knowledge of stunting as a condition involving poor child growth (e.g., short stature, low weight). However, they lacked deeper understanding of its causes (e.g., nutritional deficiencies during pregnancy, improper feeding practices) and long-term effects (e.g., cognitive and health issues). While some parents recognized local foods as potentially beneficial for improving their child's health, they often did not fully comprehend how these foods could specifically prevent stunting or how to prepare them to maximize nutritional value.

This study found that providing supplementary feeding based on local knowledge positively impacts stunting prevention. The Blang Geulumpang Health Center utilized locally available food, such as milkfish, shrimp, and local vegetables, which are nutritious and easily accessible to the community. The research revealed the following key points:

Effectiveness of Local Supplementary Feeding in Stunting Prevention

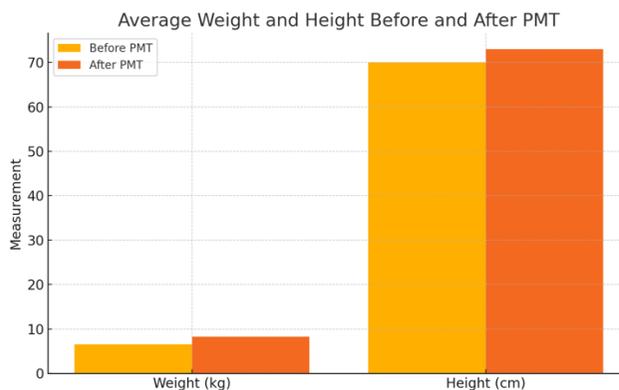
Supplementary feeding over 60 days resulted in weight and height increases in stunted toddlers. For instance, the children gained an average of 1.5–2 kg in weight and 1–2 cm in height after the program. Using local ingredients like tilapia and shrimp provided high animal protein while reducing dependence on imported foods. A study by Munawarah et al. (2023) found that using local ingredients such as fish and legumes significantly improved the nutritional status of toddlers. A similar program in Sulawesi reported an average weight gain of 1.8 kg after eight weeks of local supplementary feeding.

Table 1 Weight and Height Changes

Child ID	Gender	Before		After		Nutritional Status
		Weight	Height	Weight	Height	
Child 1	M	9.4 kg	84 cm	10.1	85 cm	stunted
Child 2	M	8.1 kg	77 cm	9 kg	79.2 cm	severely stunted
Child 3	M	6 kg	68 cm	7.6 kg	69 cm	severely stunted
Child 4	M	7 kg	75 cm	8 kg	76 cm	stunted
Child 5	F	6 kg	68 cm	7.6 kg	69 cm	severely stunted
Child 6	M	6.2 kg	65 cm	8 kg	70 cm	severely stunted
Child 7	M	6.2 kg	65 cm	8 kg	70 cm	severely stunted
Child 8	M	8 kg	73 cm	8 kg	70 cm	severely stunted
Child 9	F	5.8 kg	64.5 cm	6.7 kg	67 cm	stunted
Child 10	F	9 kg	89.1 cm	9.5 kg	89.3 cm	severely stunted
Child 11	F	7.9 kg	75 cm	8.2 kg	78 cm	stunted
Child 12	M	9.7 kg	80.5 cm	9.9 kg	82 cm	stunted

Source: Profile of Blang Geulumpang Community Health Center

Based on the table 1, over 60 days, children experienced an average weight gain of 1.8 kg and a height increase of 3 cm. This aligns with findings from similar studies in Southeast Asia, emphasizing the effectiveness of locally sourced food.



The bar chart illustrates the positive impact of the 60-day supplementary feeding program (PMT) on the nutritional status of children. The average weight increased from 6.5 kg to 8.3 kg, showing an average gain of 1.8 kg, while the average height rose from 70 cm to 73 cm, reflecting an average growth of 3 cm.

All children experienced an increase in both weight and height after receiving PMT, though the degree of improvement varied. Despite these physical changes, most children remained in the stunted or severely stunted categories, indicating that the intervention had limited impact on addressing chronic nutritional issues. None of the children transitioned to a normal nutritional status during the program.

This suggests that while PMT contributes to weight and height gains, additional measures may be required to effectively address stunting. These measures could include educating parents about proper nutrition, promoting healthier diets, and providing more comprehensive health monitoring. Furthermore, the program's effectiveness needs to be evaluated, as the 60-day duration might not be sufficient to produce significant improvements in the children's nutritional status.

Education and Raising Community Awareness

The program successfully increased community awareness of the importance of nutritious food. Education was delivered through direct sessions at health posts (Posyandu), brochures, and cooking training to maintain food nutrient value. However, knowledge levels varied, especially among those with lower education levels.

According to Pratiwi et al. (2022), nutrition education for mothers of toddlers is a critical component of the success of supplementary feeding programs. Education on preparing local food can increase nutrient absorption by up to 25%. This research emphasized the need for easy-to-understand information delivery, especially in rural communities.

Utilizing local food reflects cultural integration and sustainability. Besides improving nutritional status, the program preserved cultural values by using traditional recipes. This approach helped the community understand the importance of nutrition without drastically changing their eating habits.

Some of the challenges include; limited community knowledge about proper food preparation, logistical difficulties, such as distributing food to remote areas, ensuring a consistent supply of food ingredients.

Romadhona et al. (2021) showed that involving communities and local leaders in child health programs enhances their effectiveness. Integrating local cultural values makes supplementary feeding programs more acceptable to the community. A study by Sugianto et al. (2021) noted that food accessibility is a major challenge in remote areas. A proposed solution is developing local networks to ensure the availability of food ingredients, as implemented in Blang Geulumpang.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the critical role of local wisdom-based supplementary feeding in addressing stunting, a pressing public health issue in Indonesia. By leveraging locally sourced and nutrient-rich foods, the program implemented in the Blang Geulumpang Health Center not only improved the nutritional status of stunted children but also fostered cultural preservation and community engagement. The findings emphasize the value of integrating local food resources into public health initiatives, making interventions more sustainable and contextually appropriate.

Beyond its immediate impact on weight and height gains among toddlers, the program demonstrated that community-driven solutions could bridge gaps in food security and

access to nutrition. Education and active involvement of parents were key drivers of success, underscoring the importance of empowering families with knowledge and practical skills for long-term dietary improvements. However, challenges such as inconsistent food availability and limited understanding of food preparation highlight areas where further efforts are needed.

Future research should explore scalable models for replicating this approach in diverse settings, focusing on optimizing logistics, enhancing educational outreach, and incorporating technological tools to strengthen community participation. By building on the insights from this study, stakeholders can create comprehensive and sustainable strategies to reduce stunting and improve child health outcomes globally.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to express their appreciation to the participants involved in this study for their cooperation and willingness to contribute their time and insights. We extend our deepest gratitude to Universitas Bina Bangsa Getsempena for their invaluable support in facilitating the publication of this article as part of the proceedings of the international seminar. Lastly, we sincerely acknowledge the support and encouragement from everyone who contributed to the success of this research, whose unwavering dedication and assistance were instrumental in its completion.

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APPENDIX

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