


The Importance of Education and Knowledge of Prospective Parents in Preventing Stunting

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Abstract

Prospective parents have very minimal knowledge about the importance of nutrition for children. This research aims to explore the importance of education and knowledge of prospective parents in preventing stunting in children. This research approach is qualitative with a case study research design. Data collection was obtained through in-depth interviews, participatory exploration and group discussions. The research results show that prospective parents who have a good understanding of nutrition and health tend to be better able to provide appropriate nutritional intake for their children. A higher educational background also contributes to awareness and responsiveness to children's nutritional needs. However, there are significant obstacles such as limited access to information, low levels of formal education, and the influence of local culture that does not support the practice of providing nutritious food. This research recommends improving community-based health education programs for expectant parents, including providing materials that are easier to understand and relevant to the local context.

Keywords: Stunting, Prospective parents, Nutritional intake

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INTRODUCTION

Parents play a major role in children's nutritional intake. This is because parents are the first family a child has and are a place for them to grow and develop optimally with good nutritional fulfillment. There are several factors or roles of parents in preventing stunting, one of which is the level of education and knowledge. Parents who have basic knowledge of balanced nutrition tend to be better able to prepare nutritious food that children need for optimal growth. Nutrition education can include information about macronutrients (carbohydrates, protein, fat) and micronutrients (vitamins and minerals) that are important for children's growth and development. Parents who have higher education and knowledge generally understand the importance of good parenting practices, such as providing exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months, starting quality MPASI (Complementary Foods), and maintaining cleanliness and sanitation to prevent infectious diseases (Rachman, et al., 2021).

Education level affects a person in receiving information. A person with a better level of education will be easier to receive information than someone with a lower level of education. This information is used as a provision for mothers to care for their children in everyday life. Good education is also often associated with a higher economic level, which

allows parents to provide nutritious food and access quality health services. This helps prevent stunting by ensuring that children receive optimal nutrition and health care. The World Health Organization states that around 20% of stunting cases occur since the child is in the womb. This can occur because the food consumed by the mother during pregnancy is not nutritious enough so that the fetus does not get enough nutrition. Finally, the growth of the fetus in the womb begins to experience obstacles and continues until after birth. Therefore, it is important to ensure that the mother consumes nutritious food during pregnancy (Barus, et al., 2022).

Chronic malnutrition, especially in the first 1,000 days of life (from pregnancy to 2 years of age), can inhibit the growth of bones and vital organs. During this period, nutritional needs are very important for brain development, the immune system, and physical growth. Inadequate nutrition causes children to fail to reach their optimal growth potential. Deficiencies in vitamins and minerals, such as iron, zinc, vitamin A, and iodine, can affect children's physical and mental development. These micronutrients are important for various body functions, including metabolism, immunity, and brain development. Long-term micronutrient deficiencies can slow growth and cause stunting. Children who often experience infections or diseases such as diarrhea and worm infections can experience impaired nutrient absorption. This condition inhibits the intake of nutrients needed by the body and worsens nutritional status, thereby increasing the risk of stunting.

Monotonous diets and lack of variety in nutritious foods can lead to deficiencies in essential nutrients. For example, children who only get high-calorie foods but are low in protein and vitamins are more susceptible to malnutrition which impacts their growth. Economic limitations can affect a family's access to nutritious food. Parents who are unable to provide food that meets their child's nutritional needs, or who do not have knowledge about healthy eating patterns, are at greater risk of having children who experience stunting. Malnutrition that causes stunting not only impacts physical growth, but also has long-term impacts on cognitive development, school achievement, productivity in adulthood, and overall health. Therefore, ensuring that children get adequate nutrition, especially during the golden period of growth, is very important to prevent stunting and improve their quality of life in the future.

Children who experience stunting early, namely before the age of six months, will experience more severe stunting approaching the age of two years. Severe stunting in children will result in long-term deficits in physical and mental development so that they are unable to learn optimally at school, compared to children with normal height. Children with stunting tend to take longer to attend school and are more often absent from school than children with good nutritional status. This has consequences for the child's success in their future lives. Another impact of stunting that is no less detrimental is reducing the body's immune system. Stunted children are more susceptible to various infections. The immunity of stunted children is so vulnerable that they face the risk of death from repeated infections (Fauziah, et al., 2023).

Stunting in children will continue until they become adults. So before stunting has an impact on the growth and development of children as a whole, stunting must be prevented. The incidence of stunting in toddlers can be broken from the fetus in the womb by ensuring that the mother eats nutritious food since pregnancy. For mothers, adequate nutrition for children during pregnancy can be obtained through the consumption of various vegetables and fruits. Providing exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of a child's life and continuing breastfeeding until the age of 2 years or more can help children get optimal nutrition. After 6 months, children need nutritious and balanced Complementary Foods (MPASI) (Maywita, et al., 2019).

Preventing stunting is very important to ensure optimal growth and development in children. Parents should routinely monitor their child's weight and height to ensure

age-appropriate growth. If there is a delay or underweight, immediately consult a health post or health worker. Increasing parents' understanding of the importance of nutrition and a balanced diet can help families provide nutritious and balanced food for children. During adolescence, don't forget to adjust your child's nutritional intake and the amount of food for your child to ensure that their body and brain can grow optimally. Adequate nutrition for children during adolescence will be a very important asset for a woman later when she becomes pregnant (Husnaniyah, et al., 2020).

The quality of a nation is determined by the quality of the next generation. Mothers who have a high level of education and good knowledge will try to apply their knowledge in food processing to meet and guarantee the needs and nutrition of the fetus and the child they give birth to. The purpose of this study is to prevent stunting from an early age by increasing the education and knowledge of prospective parents. Adolescents are taught about the importance of proper nutritional intake before and during pregnancy to prevent stunting in children who will be born. As well as the importance of a healthy diet, clean living habits, and optimal health care, both for themselves and for the children they will have in the future (Masitah, 2022).

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore the importance of education and knowledge of prospective parents in preventing stunting in Mertan Village, Bendosari District, Sukoharjo Regency. With this case study, researchers interact with the community related to community understanding of stunting in early childhood. This is studied by researchers so that it can produce qualitative data in the form of expressions, views, thoughts and actions of individuals or holistic conditions (Tia et al., 2022) . The research participants consisted of 20 prospective parents with varying levels of education and were still preparing themselves before taking on the role of parents. This research was conducted in August-September, with data collection techniques through in-depth interviews, participatory exploration and focus group discussions (FGD). With an interesting research method and in accordance with scientific journal standards, this study is expected to provide an accurate picture of the importance of education and knowledge of prospective parents in preventing stunting. The results of this study will be a guide for making more effective policies and interventions in efforts to prevent and overcome stunting.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The problem of stunting is still a problem that is often encountered, especially in villages, lack of parental knowledge about the importance of fulfilling nutrition for children as an effort to prevent stunting, understanding the dangers of stunting is not only instilled in parents who already have children but also needs to be instilled in prospective parents or pre-married teenagers as an effort to prevent stunting earlier. In Mertan Village, there are still several cases of stunting that need special attention from the village, village midwives, and the community itself. Therefore, efforts need to be made to increase awareness and knowledge of pre-married teenagers about the importance of preventing stunting. The results of research by Arini, Mayasari and Rustam (2019) show that children's cognitive and motor development can be influenced by the degree of stunting. Stunted children can experience delays in the process of cognitive and motor development so that children are known to tend to be more withdrawn and more difficult to socialize with children their age.

The interview results revealed that most prospective parents who had good nutritional knowledge could clearly explain the importance of balanced nutritional intake during pregnancy and the first 1000 days of a child's life. They realized that malnutrition during this period can have serious consequences for a child's growth and development. In

contrast, prospective parents who lacked nutritional knowledge often did not understand the importance of food variety and tended to choose unbalanced foods. Good nutritional knowledge has been shown to be a key factor in preventing stunting. Prospective parents who understand their child's nutritional needs tend to provide more nutritious food, which can support optimal child growth. This study is in line with previous findings showing that nutritional knowledge is directly related to healthy eating behavior.

Based on the results of focus group discussions (FGD) through educational activities that have been carried out in Mertan Village regarding stunting prevention, it shows that the level of understanding and knowledge of parents determines their ability to carry out parenting patterns for children and fetuses. The better the knowledge of parents, the more capable they are of carrying out good parenting patterns that support the growth and development of children. Several other studies also show that the incidence of stunting in early childhood is caused by the emergence of maternal and child health problems due to the lack of parental knowledge about child care from the age of 0 years (Aridiyah, Rohmawati and Ririanty, 2015; Apriluana & Fikawati, 2018). In the question and answer session, the participants were very enthusiastic, this was shown by several questions asked to the speaker. One of the participants asked the speaker a question about how teenagers can help play a role in preventing children from stunting in the future. There are several things that can be done to improve the knowledge and behavior of teenagers so that they can play a role in efforts to prevent stunting and reduce stunting cases in the future. This can be done through family planning, knowledge of balanced nutritional patterns and knowledge of adolescent reproductive health (ARH) (Asmawariza, Sani, & Sulaiman, 2024).

Data shows that prospective parents with higher education backgrounds have better awareness of stunting prevention. They tend to be more proactive in seeking information about health and nutrition through various sources, such as the internet and counseling programs. In addition, they are more confident in making decisions regarding diet and child care. Formal education has a significant effect on the level of knowledge of prospective parents. Those with higher education not only obtain information more easily but also tend to be more critical in assessing the information received. This shows the need for efforts to improve access to education for the community, especially in areas with high stunting rates. Health workers at health centers also play an important role in providing education to prospective parents. Counseling on nutrition has not been carried out routinely so that many prospective parents still do not understand about nutritional intake, providing varied food. The involvement of health workers in counseling is an important aspect in increasing the knowledge of prospective parents. However, to achieve success, counseling methods must be adjusted to the needs and characteristics of the local community. More interactive activities, such as workshops and seminars, can increase the interest and participation of prospective parents.

Based on the research results, it is recommended that the government and related institutions strengthen nutrition and health education programs for prospective parents. In addition, there needs to be closer collaboration between health workers and the community to ensure effective and attractive counseling. These efforts are expected to reduce stunting rates and improve the quality of future generations.

CONCLUSION

Education and knowledge of prospective parents play a very important role in preventing stunting. The results of the study showed that prospective parents who have a good understanding of nutrition and health tend to be better able to provide the right nutritional intake for their children. Higher educational background also contributes to awareness and responsiveness to children's nutritional needs. The importance of effective interaction and counseling from health workers at the Community Health

Center cannot be ignored. Counseling programs that are designed in an interesting and interactive way will increase community participation and expand their knowledge about stunting prevention. Therefore, to reduce the prevalence of stunting in Indonesia, there needs to be increased access to education, better nutrition counseling, and collaboration between the government, community, and health workers. With these steps, it is hoped that a healthier and better quality generation can be created in the future.

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