



The Relationship of Parenting and Feeding Practices with Stunting in Toddlers

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Abstrak

Stunting masalah gizi kronis mempengaruhi pertumbuhan dan perkembangan anak di Indonesia. Prevalensi stunting masih menjadi masalah serius, sebagian dipengaruhi oleh praktik pemberian makan oleh pengasuh. Tujuan penelitian menemukan hubungan antara gaya pengasuhan dan praktik pemberian makan terhadap insidensi stunting pada anak usia lima tahun ke bawah. Metode menggunakan cross-sectional dengan data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara menggunakan kuesioner terstruktur. Sampel dipilih dari 150 anak usia antara 6-59 bulan dari lima desa di wilayah perbatasan Pusat Kesehatan Argamakmur, Arga Makmur, menggunakan teknik sampling kluster. Data dianalisis menerapkan uji analisis chi-square untuk menemukan hubungan antara beberapa variabel yang diteliti. Analisis menunjukkan hubungan signifikan secara statistik antara gaya pengasuhan (nilai $p = 0,010$) dan praktik pemberian makan (nilai $p = 0,015$) terhadap insiden stunting anak usia bawah lima tahun ke bawah. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa gaya pengasuhan dan pemberian makanan terdapat hubungan signifikan pada insiden stunting pada anak usia lima tahun ke bawah. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan pendekatan multisektor terintegrasi dalam intervensi perawatan dan praktik pemberian makan untuk pencegahan stunting pada anak usia lima tahun ke bawah.

Kata kunci: Stunting, Pengasuhan, Praktik Pemberian Makan, Balita

Abstract

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Stunting is a chronic nutritional problem affecting child growth and development in Indonesia. The prevalence of stunting remains a serious problem, influenced in part by caregiver feeding practices. The study aimed to find the relationship between parenting styles and feeding practices on the incidence of stunting in children aged five years and under. The method was cross-sectional with data collected through interviews using a structured questionnaire. Samples were selected from 150 children aged between 6 and 59 months from five villages in the border area of Argamakmur Health Centre, Arga Makmur, using a cluster sampling technique. Data were analysed applying the chi-square analysis test to find associations between some of the variables studied. The analysis showed statistically significant associations between parenting styles (p value = 0.010) and feeding practices (p value = 0.015) on the incidence of stunting of children aged under five years and below. This study concludes that parenting style and feeding practices have a significant association with the incidence of stunting in children aged five years and below. Therefore, an integrated multisectoral approach is needed in care interventions and feeding practices to prevent stunting in children aged five years and under.

Key words: Stunting, Care, Feeding Practices, Toddlers

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INTRODUCTION

Stunting is a form of chronic malnutrition that represents linear growth failure in children due to prolonged malnutrition, recurrent infections, and inadequate care. Globally, stunting remains a

significant public health challenge, with alarming prevalence in many developing countries. The problem has long-term impacts on children's cognitive development, health, and future productivity. This problem long-term affects children's mental development, health, and future productivity ([Adiratna et al., 2023](#)). Based on data from [Kemenkes RI \(2022\)](#) the prevalence of stunting in Indonesia still reaches 21.6%, which means that one in five toddlers experiences growth delays. These results indicate that intervention efforts have not been fully effective in reducing stunting, especially in the under-five age group ([Fallo et al., 2023](#); [Sari, 2018](#))

Based on [Kemenkes RI \(2022\)](#) , stunting in Bengkulu Province has reached 19.8%. This figure shows an improvement compared to 2021, which reached 22.1%, but still does not meet the achievement of the target set by the provincial government of 18.84%. The figure represents a decrease in stunting prevalence, which shows that the provincial government has not been entirely successful in spreading the intervention programme evenly. The data also indicates that the stunting rate in North Bengkulu Regency reached 22.8% in 2022, which is well above the national average of 21.6% and underperforms ([Daryati & Suryadi, 2025](#); [Susanto et al., 2017](#))

These interventions suggest that those implemented for the area have not been effective enough, especially those aimed at the under-five group most vulnerable to growth delays. This indicates the need for more contextualised strategies that focus on household behaviours with determinants of parenting and child feeding practices as part of a comprehensive and sustainable stunting reduction effort. One crucial factor often overlooked in the response is the structure of childcare, especially parental feeding practices. Previous research in this area shows that even when food supply is adequate, many families still have children with stunted growth status. ([Maryani, 2023](#))

The study aimed to analyse the association between parenting styles and feeding practices with the incidence of stunting in children aged 6-59 months in the working area of Arga Makmur Health Centre, North Bengkulu Regency. The results of this study are expected to serve as a foundation for developing more effective family-based interventions, especially in areas with high prevalence of stunting, as well as help advance national policy efforts in reducing stunting through a comprehensive and contextualised approach. This study integrates two key concepts: parenting styles and feeding practices. Parenting refers to how parents handle, educate, and meet children's physical and emotional needs. ([Desi et al., 2018](#); [Eka & Hatta, 2023](#); [Syafei et al., 2023](#)) . Responsive parenting supports children's needs and uses positive reinforcement, whereas poor parenting ignores or uses authoritarian styles. In the face of stunting, positive care can optimally support mental and physical development and support attendance in children ([Adimuntja, 2023](#); [Adiratna et al., 2023](#); [Yudianti & Saeni, 2017](#))

Parenting, especially feeding practices, is an important factor often overlooked in stunting management ([Adimuntja, 2023](#)). Parents play an essential role in determining the quality of food, the number of meals per day, and how to respond to children's eating behaviour. Unresponsive patterns of care and inadequate feeding practices can lead to malnutrition in children, which has a direct impact on

physical growth. The need to analyse the relationship between parenting styles and feeding practices and the prevalence of stunting is essential in finding deeper underlying issues ([Kania et al., 2024](#); [Yudianti & Saeni, 2017](#))

Feeding practices include how parents provide food to children, including timing, type of food, frequency, and how they handle children's refusal to eat ([Pratama & Saputra, 2025](#); [Suryawan et al., 2022](#)). Inappropriate practices, including forcing children to eat, providing foods that contain few nutrients, or ignoring children's hunger and fullness cues completely, can result in the intake of a nutrient-deficient diet. ([Nurhasanah & Khairunnisa, 2022](#))

The specific issue to be explored in this study is what impact parenting styles and feeding practices have on the stunting status of under-fives. Whether poor parenting and incorrect feeding practices increase the risk of stunting, this question is essential to develop more effective and contextualised family-oriented interventions. ([Tri Astuti et al., 2024](#)). This study also explores the extent to which specific characteristics of parenting styles and feeding practices in a particular community influence the nutritional status of under-fives.

The results of this study are expected to provide a foundation for the development of more effective family-oriented interventions, especially in areas with a high prevalence of stunting. ([Kania et al., 2024](#)). It also helps advance national policy efforts to reduce stunting by integrating a comprehensive and contextualised approach. [Tri Astuti et al \(2024\)](#) Significant constraints preventing stunting include parental knowledge, awareness, and competence to provide developmentally appropriate food and unresponsiveness to children's hunger and satiety signals. Thus, examining the relationship between parenting styles, feeding practices, and stunting prevalence is imperative to uncover deeper issues.

METHODOLOGY

Study Type

This study used a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional study design to assess the association between parenting styles, feeding practices, and stunting in under-fives. The cross-sectional design was chosen because it allows independent and dependent data from respondents to be collected at a single point in time.

Time and Place of Study

The schedule for completing this study was four months from March to June. The study was located in the working area of the Arga Makmur Health Centre, North Bengkulu Regency. This location was chosen based on data on the prevalence of stunting, which is still high in the area: population and Sample.

Target of the Study

The population in this study was all toddlers aged 6 - 59 months who lived in the working area of the Arga Makmur Health Centre, North Bengkulu Regency. The research sample was obtained using a cluster sampling technique, where 10 villages in the Arga Makmur Health Centre working area were randomly selected, of which five villages were randomly selected as Maryani clusters. Furthermore, from each selected village, a sample of toddlers aged 6-59 months who met the inclusion criteria of being free from chronic diseases and having parents willing to answer were selected proportionally. The total sample size obtained in this study was 150 under-fives.

Data Collection and Instrument Development

Data collection was conducted through structured interviews using a validated questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into respondent characteristics, parenting styles, and feeding practices. Parenting practices were assessed using an instrument adapted from the Responsive Parenting Questionnaire, and feeding practices were measured using the Toddler Feeding Practices Questionnaire.

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis will be conducted in stages, which include univariate, bivariate, and multivariate analyses. Univariate analyses were applied to describe respondents' characteristics, parenting styles, and feeding practices. Bivariate analysis using the chi-square test was used to examine the association between the independent variables (parenting and feeding practices) and the dependent variable (stunting incidence). Then, multivariate analysis was conducted using multiple logistic regression to determine the factors contributing most to stunting. All statistical analyses were performed using Statistical software.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

Stunting in children under five requires a focus on monitoring and evaluating the demographic characteristics of respondents, as this is one of the elements that can influence the occurrence of stunting. Demographic characteristics such as child gender, child age, mother's education, mother's occupation, and family income are essential variables that reflect the social and economic status of the family, which further interacts with care and feeding practices. This study aims to target more vulnerable groups with stunting distribution and identify gaps as well as underlying demographic determinants that may be the focal point of determinants of stunting incidence. Table 1 shows the frequency distribution of respondents concerning key characteristics that form the basis for more in-depth analysis in this study.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Respondents by Demographic Characteristics

Characteristics	Category	<i>f</i>	%
A. Child's Gender	Male	75	50
	Female	75	50
Total Number	150	100	
B. Child Age (month)	6-12	30	20
	13-24	40	26.67
	25-36	35	23.33
	37-48	25	16.67
	49-59	20	13.33
Total	150	100	
C. Mother's Education	Elementary school	30	20
	Junior High School	50	33.33
	SMA (senior high school)	40	26.67
	Higher education	30	20
Total Number	150	100	
D. Mother's Occupation	Housewife	80	53.33
	Private Worker	50	33.33
	Civil Servant	20	13.33
Total	150	100	
E. Family Income (per month)	< Rp1,500,000	60	40
	IDR1,500,000 - IDR3,000,000	70	46.67
	> Rp3,000,000	20	13.33
Total	150	100	

Based on the data in Table 1, several significant findings can be identified. Firstly, the balanced gender distribution of children (50% boys and 50% girls) allows for a more objective analysis of the factors affecting both groups. Second, the 13-24-month age group recorded the highest frequency, indicating the need for special attention to child development at this critical stage. Thirdly, most mothers had junior and senior high school education, suggesting that increased access and training for mothers may be needed to support better parenting.

The majority of respondents were homemakers, indicating their essential role in parenting. Meanwhile, family income data showed that around 87% of respondents had an income below IDR 3,000,000, emphasising the need for social interventions to support low-income families. Overall, the distribution of respondents' demographic characteristics provides a comprehensive picture of the socioeconomic background of families, which provides an essential context for analysing the relationship between parenting and feeding practices and stunting among under-fives.

This study aims to examine the relationship between parenting and feeding practices with stunting in children under five. Tables 2 and 3 present the Chi-Square test results, which show the frequency distribution of stunted and non-stunted toddlers based on parenting and feeding practices. In

addition to frequency, this table is also equipped with percentages to illustrate the proportion of stunting in each variable category.

Chi-Square (χ^2) values, degrees of freedom (df), and p-values are presented to test the statistical significance of the relationship between variables. These results are important to understand whether parenting and feeding practices play a significant role in the incidence of stunting so that they can be the basis for targeted intervention recommendations.

Table 2. Relationship between parenting style and stunting in toddlers

Parenting style	Stunting				Total	χ^2	p
	No		Yes				
	n	%	n	%			
Good	40	80	10	20	100	6.658	0,010
Not good	55	55	45	45	100		

Based on the Chi-Square test results presented in Table 2, there is a significant relationship between parenting style and stunting in toddlers ($\chi^2 = 6.658$, df = 1, p = 0.010). Toddlers who received good parenting had an 80% proportion of not stunting, while in the bad parenting group, the proportion of not stunting decreased to 55%. This suggests that good parenting is important in reducing the risk of stunting.

Table 3. Relationship between feeding practices and stunting in toddlers

Feeding practices	Stunting				Total	χ^2	p
	No		Yes				
	n	%	n	%			
Routine and Variety	45	75	15	25	100	10.983	0,001
Not Routine and Not	40	25	50	75	100		

Based on the Chi-Square test results presented in Table 3, there is a significant relationship between feeding practices and stunting ($\chi^2 = 10.983$, df = 1, p = 0.001). Toddlers who received regular and varied feeding practices had a proportion of not being stunted of 75%, much higher than those who received non-routine and non-varied feeding practices, which was only 44.4%. This confirms the importance of regular and varied feeding in preventing stunting.

The results of this study confirm that interventions that focus on improving parenting and feeding practices are critical to reducing stunting among children under five. These findings can inform recommendations for more effective public health policies and programmes.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study were that the characteristics of respondents were divided into attributes of toddlers and characteristics of parents. The total respondents involved in the study were 150 toddlers, 75 boys, and 75 girls, reflecting gender diversity. Under-fives' age distribution showed that most children were aged between 13 and 24 months, which is a critical period for growth and development. Regarding nutritional status, the data showed a significant proportion of stunted under-fives, corresponding to a stunting prevalence recorded in Bengkulu Utara of 27.8% (Beal et al., 2018).

Furthermore, analysis of parental characteristics revealed that most mothers had education levels below tertiary level, particularly junior secondary education (SMP), potentially affecting their understanding of good parenting and feeding (Yani et al., 2023). Regarding occupation, most mothers are housewives, suggesting dynamics in parenting that may be less nutrition knowledge-orientated. The number of children in the family also contributes to the burden of caregiving and access to nutrition resources, with more than half of the respondents having two children.

Relationship between parenting style and the incidence of stunting

The results showed a significant relationship between maternal parenting style and toddler stunting (p-value = 0.010). Responsive parenting, where parents actively attend to and fulfil children's needs, is more effective in supporting children's growth than non-responsive parenting (Beal et al., 2018). This is consistent with parenting theory, where good parenting contributes to children's physical and mental development.

This study is in line with research by Kurdaningsih and Lestari (2020), which found that good parenting is vital in promoting child growth and reducing the risk of stunting in children under 5.

This discussion refers to parenting theory, where responsive parenting provides the emotional support and attention necessary for children's physical and mental development. This parenting behaviour has a positive effect on children's nutritional status, referring to other studies that show that children raised in an emotionally responsive environment are more likely to have good nutritional status, under the findings of (Muti'ah et al., 2023). In addition, in a cultural context, the way parenting is influenced by traditional norms in the community also needs to be considered, because it can affect how parents provide care and diet to their children.

Relationship between feeding practices and the incidence of stunting

Good feeding practices, including appropriate meal frequency and sufficient food variety, were significantly associated with children's nutritional status (p-value = 0.015). This study revealed that children who received regular and varied meals had a lower risk of stunting. (Mega Fitria et al., 2023). Paying attention to children's hunger and satiety signals is essential to good feeding practices, helping to increase nutrient intake according to children's needs (Nakiranda et al., 2023).

Compared to the results of previous studies. Another study by Perdani et al (2017) A significant relationship was shown between good feeding practices and the nutritional status of children aged 3-5 years. This aligns with WHO/IDAI guidelines, which recommend that children be given a varied and nutritious diet according to their age. The conclusion of this study underscores the importance of educating parents on a healthy diet and how it can affect child growth, especially in preventing stunting.

3. Interactions between parenting styles and feeding practices

This study also examined the interaction between parenting styles and feeding practices, showing that both influence each other in the incidence of stunting. The analysis shows that responsive parenting practices reinforce good feeding practices, and vice versa. This discussion is thought-provoking about how one variable can dominate in a situational view, but in this context, both variables are mutually reinforcing in supporting optimal child development ([Huicho et al., 2019](#))

Theoretical interpretations of this interaction suggest that effectively addressing stunting requires a holistic approach that incorporates good parenting and feeding, and is based on a contextual understanding of family empowerment ([Beal et al., 2018](#)). Contextual factors in this study included socio-economic aspects, maternal education, and nutrition knowledge that play a role in parenting and feeding practices. Findings show that low maternal education correlates with stunting ([Yani et al., 2023](#)). Low education can lead to limited understanding of nutrition information and access to nutritious food sources.

In addition, access to health information and services is also an essential factor in this context. Communities with better access to nutrition counselling and health programmes tend to have children with better nutritional status. Discussions on local cultural norms that influence parenting behaviours are also relevant, as traditions and customs often impact parenting practices at the family level. ([Musheiguza et al., 2020](#))

This study has significant scientific implications for nutritional behaviour and parenting literature. Contributions to nutrition behaviour theory demonstrate the importance of integrating responsive parenting and good feeding practices to prevent stunting. From a practical perspective, recommendations for family-based interventions are fundamental, where nutrition education and parenting training should be integrated into child health programmes. This recommendation is in line with the national programme to accelerate stunting reduction, which requires strengthening the role of families in maintaining successful child nutrition and health. ([Danaei et al., 2016](#))

This study also has some limitations that need to be noted. Firstly, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw causal connections between variables. In addition, the instruments used, although tested for validity and reliability, can still be further developed for increased accuracy. It is recommended that future studies use longitudinal methods that will provide more complete data regarding changes in children's nutritional status over time and examine the effectiveness of direct interventions in improving nutrition education and good parenting in the community.

Based on these limitations, it is recommended that further research with a longitudinal design be conducted to identify cause-and-effect relationships between parenting, feeding practices, and stunting. Future research could also consider involving larger and more diverse samples and integrating qualitative methods (e.g., direct observation) to better understand parenting and feeding practices at the

household level. In addition, community-based intervention studies focusing on improving parenting and feeding practices could be conducted to directly test the program's effectiveness.

CONCLUSIONS

The results showed a significant relationship between parenting styles and the incidence of stunting and feeding practices and the incidence of stunting in children under five years of age in the Arga Makmur Health Centre area. These findings confirm the importance of behavioural factors at the household level, particularly parenting and feeding practices, to prevent stunting in children under five.

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