



Characteristic Community Empowerment Transformation to Prevent Stunting

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Abstract: Stunting is a crucial health problem in Indonesia, especially in children under five years. Various factors influence this condition, including nutrition, economics, environment, and health. Empowering communities with character is an effective strategy to prevent stunting by actively involving the community in decision-making and program implementation. This article discusses the transformation of community empowerment with character to prevent stunting through a participatory approach, capacity building, and culture-based interventions. This study examines the transformation of community empowerment with character to prevent stunting. This study uses a qualitative method with a case study type. Data collection uses observation and interviews. Data are analyzed descriptively and qualitatively. The study results indicate that empowerment transformation is an approach to prevent stunting characterized by developing modules on nutrition, stakeholder involvement, and conducting evaluations for the sustainability of community empowerment. The impact of community empowerment transformation is that they have greater capacity to maintain the health and well-being of their children.

Keywords: transformation, community development, stunting

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INTRODUCTION

Stunting is a condition characterized by a child's height growth that is inappropriate for their age. Stunting occurs when the baby is still in the womb, but does not appear until the child is two years old. Growth delays can affect the health status of children. In line with this, it is argued that four main factors influence the occurrence of Stunting in infants, including nutrition and hygiene (Widyastuti, 2019). Stunting is a problem of chronic malnutrition caused by a lack of nutritional intake over a long period, which causes problems in the future, namely, experiencing difficulties in achieving optimal physical and cognitive development. Stunted children have a lower Intelligence Quotient (IQ) than the average IQ of normal children (Stunting Bulletin. Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, 2018). Stunting is defined as a condition where the child's nutritional status according to TB/U results in a Z Score = ≤ -2 SD, which indicates a short or very short body condition resulting from growth failure. Stunting in children is also a risk factor for death, problems with low motor development, low language skills, and functional imbalance (Anwar et al., 2014). Stunting is a



form of growth failure (growth faltering) due to the accumulation of nutritional deficiencies that last for a long time from pregnancy to 24 months of age (Hoffman et al., 2000). This situation is exacerbated by the lack of adequate catch-up growth (Hoffman et al., 2000).

More than 149 million (22%) toddlers worldwide experience stunting, of which 6.3 million are young children or stunted toddlers, namely Indonesian toddlers. According to UNICEF, stunting is caused by children being malnourished within two years of their age, mothers lacking nutrition during pregnancy, and poor sanitation. Currently, the prevalence of stunting in Indonesia is 21.6%, while the target is 14% by 2024. For this reason, joint efforts are needed to achieve the targets set, one of which starts from the smallest unit in society, namely the family (Stunting Prevention through Community Based Nutrition Interventions, 2018).

The problem of stunting is a nutritional problem faced by the world, inferior and developing countries. Stunting is growth failure due to the accumulation of inadequate nutrition that lasts for a long time from pregnancy to 24 months of age. Many factors cause the high incidence of stunting in toddlers. The public is not yet aware of stunting as a problem compared to other malnutrition problems. Globally, the policies implemented to reduce the incidence of stunting are focused on the first 1000 days group, or Scaling Up Nutrition. WHO recommends reducing stunting by 3.9% per year to meet the target of a 40% reduction in stunting by 2025. Interventions are carried out throughout the life cycle in both the health and non-health sectors involving various levels of society such as government, private sector, civil society, the UN through collective action to increase nutritional improvements, both short term (specific interventions) and long term (sensitive) (LPPM STIKes Hang Tuah Pekanbaru, 2015).

Asia is the continent with the highest number of stunted children, with 83.6 million stunted children. Indonesia is one of the countries with a high stunting rate. In 2015-2017, the average prevalence of stunting in Indonesia was 36.4%.² In 2018, the stunting rate in Indonesia managed to decrease to 30.8%.³ However, this figure is still relatively high, and the reduction in stunting rates is still considered not under the World Health Organization's (WHO) recommendations. According to WHO recommendations, the prevalence of stunting in a country cannot be more than 20%.⁴ Therefore, stunting is still a chronic nutritional problem in Indonesia, so through the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RJPM) Program, the government targets that by 2025, it will reduce the number of stunted toddlers by 40% (Aninnas, 2023).

This problem is triggered by chronic malnutrition from pregnancy to the first two years of life. Indonesia has a relatively high prevalence of stunting, which impacts the quality of human resources and the nation's productivity. Stunting is a problem of failure to thrive experienced by babies under five years old who experience malnutrition from the time they are in the womb until the moment the baby is born, stunting itself will begin to appear when the baby is two years old (National Team for the Acceleration of Poverty Reduction, 2017). According to Schmidt, stunting is a problem of malnutrition over a long period, resulting in height growth disorders in children who are lower or shorter (stunted) than their age standard (Charles & Schmidt, 2014).

Empowering communities with character can be a potential solution in preventing stunting by building community knowledge, attitudes, and behavior towards healthy parenting, nutrition, and sanitation. Stunting is a failure to thrive in children under five due to chronic malnutrition, usually occurring in the first 1,000 days of life. This condition impacts height, brain development, future productivity, and the individual's quality of life. In Indonesia, the prevalence of stunting is still one of the highest in the world. Transformative community empowerment is an approach that involves fundamental changes in the way people understand and deal with their problems. By strengthening community character, such as responsibility and togetherness, this empowerment can create sustainable solutions to prevent Stunting.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study type. Data collection uses interviews and observations. The indicator instruments of data collection are as follows:

No	Indicators	Data Collection
1.	Community empowerment in health programs	Interview
2.	Increasing the capacity of cadres and volunteers	Interview
3.	Local culture-based approach	Interview
4.	Increased access to facilities	Observation

The data obtained were analyzed descriptively and presented in narrative form.

RESULT

1. Community empowerment in health programs

Interview results from the A (PKK Cadre) community participation are key in efforts to prevent stunting:

“The involvement of residents in nutrition education, parenting training, and maternal and child health programs significantly influences behavior change. Through this activity, the community can learn the importance of providing exclusive breastfeeding, balanced MP-ASI, and a clean environment. This is relevant as per the research findings”.

a. Improved Nutrition

Interview results from B (PKK Cadre) show that improving nutrition is an effort to ensure that individuals.

“Especially vulnerable groups such as pregnant women, babies, and toddlers receive adequate food intake both in quantity and quality to meet the body’s needs for energy, macronutrients (carbohydrates, protein, fat), and micronutrients (vitamins and minerals). The main goal of improving nutrition is to support optimal growth, prevent malnutrition, and reduce the risk of nutrition-related diseases such as stunting, anemia, or obesity.”

b. Increased Knowledge and Behavior

Interview results from C (PKK Cadre) “increasing knowledge and behavior regarding stunting is an effort to educate the public about the causes, impacts, and ways to prevent stunting, as well as encouraging behavioral changes towards healthy lifestyles, adequate nutritional intake, and optimal parenting practices”.

c. Environmental Capacity Building

Interviews with community leaders AB revealed that “increasing environmental capacity to prevent stunting is a series of efforts to create a physical, social, and cultural environment that supports children’s optimal growth and development. Stunting is a chronic nutritional problem caused by inadequate dietary intake for a long time, and influenced by environmental factors, parenting patterns, and public health. Efforts to increase environmental capacity include: improving access to sanitation and clean water, managing waste and rubbish, providing safe and nutritious food, raising public awareness and education, controlling infectious diseases, and developing supporting infrastructure.

d. Improving the Economy and Community Welfare

Low economic conditions often affect families’ access to nutritious food, health services, and adequate sanitation. Several studies show that children from low-income families have a higher risk of stunting than those from better-off families. Interviews

with community leaders CC revealed that several economic improvement efforts can be made to prevent stunting are economic empowerment program, strengthening social security programs, increasing access to microcredit, and investing in health and sanitation infrastructure. Apart from improving the economy, community welfare also includes non-material aspects such as nutrition awareness education, women's empowerment and community participation

e. Food Fulfillment

Interviews with nutritionists revealed information that “this study concluded that stunting prevention interventions in the fulfillment of nutrition in toddlers with lipid based nutrient supplements (LNS), animal protein source complementary foods, complementary feeding, combination of fish oil supplementation, provision of nutritious biscuits, and provision of foods containing hibiscus sabrida can increase stunting prevention and increase linear growth in toddlers”.

Nutrition is essential for the development of toddlers; therefore, the role of mothers is vital in choosing and applying various types of healthy and varied foods for the toddler's diet. As well as the need for assistance and training in infant and child feeding for health workers to assist mothers of toddlers, especially in making good complementary feeding.

2. Handling in various Multisectors

Based on interviews with FG community leaders, it was obtained that handling in various multi-sectors “to prevent stunting is a collaborative effort involving the health, food and nutrition, sanitation, education, social welfare, and government sectors. This approach aims to ensure that children get adequate nutrition, a healthy environment, and access to health and education services to support their optimal growth”.

A multi-sectoral approach to preventing stunting is essential to ensure children thrive and develop optimally. With synergy between the health, nutrition, sanitation, education, social, and policy sectors, stunting rates can be significantly reduced, creating a healthier and more productive generation.

3. Increasing the capacity of cadres and volunteers

Interview results from community leaders, D obtained that information, “health cadres and volunteers act as agents of change in society. Intensive training on child nutrition, parenting patterns, and the health of pregnant women can improve their skills in providing education and assistance. The cadre formation program also includes developing effective communication skills to build public trust in health information”.

The Indonesian government has a strategic responsibility to ensure the fulfillment of women's reproductive health rights to prevent future stunting. The analysis in this article shows that current stunting mitigation efforts tend to be short-term and have not fully considered fulfilling women's rights as beneficiaries of the policy. Toddlers suffering from stunting are often separated from the issues of reproductive health rights and gender justice that their mothers should receive. Therefore, even though a decrease in stunting rates seems encouraging, the potential temporary impact is significant given that women's health issues have not been fully addressed (Litaay & Batjo, 2024).

4. Local culture-based approach

Interview with F community leaders obtained that information, “the cultural approach has a major influence on the success of empowerment programs. Each region has different local customs, beliefs, and practices related to diet and parenting. Respecting and understanding local culture can be an entry point to convey nutritional information that is relevant and well received by the community”.

5. Increased access to facilities

Based on the observations, data was obtained that increasing access to basic facilities such as clean water, sanitation, and basic health services is an integral part of empowerment. With support from local governments and the community, this infrastructure can minimize the risk of infectious diseases, which cause stunting. According to the theory, the recommended program is a sensitive intervention to improve sanitation facilities and increase knowledge and perceptions about sanitation.

DISCUSSION

Devita, et.al (Devita, 2024). Empowerment refers to the ability to obtain opportunities and access human resources to improve the quality of life. In this case, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the government will act as liaisons (facilitators) in assisting and helping to find solutions to problems in improving community welfare (Khiftiyah & Nilamsari, 2022). Social transformation involves changing the community paradigm, especially understanding efforts to deal with stunting through community empowerment through health programs, increasing the capacity of cadres and volunteers, local culture-based approaches, and improving basic health facilities.

1. Community empowerment in health programs

Ministry of National Development Planning/Bappenas (2020), efforts to handle stunting in Indonesia will differ from those in various countries. This is because the factors that cause stunting are also different. Several causes of nutritional problems in children in Indonesia include stunting in children due to lack of nutritional intake and access to health status and environmental sanitation facilities (Hasan & Kadarusman, 2019), parental knowledge (Adriany et al., 2021).

Hardiyanto Rahman, Mutia Rahmah, Nur Saribulan (2023). The efforts to deal with stunting in Indonesia that have been published can be identified through content analysis carried out on all articles that have been captured. It was found that there are 12 categorizations of effort, as follows:

a. Improved Nutrition

This is relevant to research findings that providing additional food can improve the nutritional status of stunted toddlers, with the result that the majority have good nutritional status; there is an increase from poor dietary status to poor and good nutritional status. After providing additional food, poor nutritional status was no longer found. There was a significant change in the nutritional status of stunted toddlers after participating in the supplementary feeding program (Hartini et al., 2023).

The most apparent impact of nutrition on children is on physical growth. Every toddler has genetic potential for physical, mental, and emotional development. Optimal nutrition can be achieved by providing food that meets all potential growth needs. Zerfu, T. A., Umeta, M., & Baye, K (2016). Nurul's research (2011) shows that nutrition plays a vital role in children's development and growth patterns. Research by Arifin et al (2012) found that a lack of nutritional intake carries a 2.6 times greater risk of stunting than toddlers with good nutrition.

b. Increased Knowledge and Behavior

Knowledge is a critical domain for the formation of one's actions. Providing knowledge can be done by providing education, which can be done by offering education to mothers who have toddlers, which aims to prevent cases of stunting (Fitriami & Vindo, 2022). Educational efforts for mothers with toddlers and promotion of stunting health include nutrition/nutrition education for toddlers, children and the whole family and clean and healthy living behaviors that families must carry out and

all members of the community to create a healthy environment for children to live in (Medinawati et al., 2022)

The main goal is to reduce the prevalence of stunting by building awareness and empowering individuals and communities to take appropriate action. Education in accelerating the reduction of stunting today is critical when seen from the results of various literature searches, almost as a whole there has been a significant change in attitude (Anggraeni et al., 2022), especially in research conducted by Melati et al. 6% and a positive attitude to prevent stunting. In addition, exposure to electronic media will have a good impact on changing the mindset of mothers in preventing stunting in toddlers. Ade Emaniar, et al (2023). There is stunting in toddlers in RW 02 RT 01, 02, and 03 in Bandarharjo. Stunting cases can be triggered by risk factors affecting stunted toddler growth and development. To handle stunting cases in RW 02, RT 01, 02, and 03 in Bandarharjo, counseling activities were carried out on the importance of preventing stunting, attended by mothers and toddlers, conducting nutritious food demonstrations, distributing posters of processed fruit creations to toddlers, and distributing PMT (Supplementary Feeding). Based on the pre-test and post-test results, the Wilcoxon Test was used to determine if there was a difference after counseling and to show increased maternal knowledge about stunting.

c. Environmental Capacity Building

Stakeholders' engagement will further improve the research quality and help public health researchers to gain insight into 'policy windows' or opportunities for positive changes (Warren et al., 2021). This is relevant to the research findings conducted by Mei Neni Sitaresmi, et al (2023). This study concludes that involving stakeholders in stunting prevention and control efforts is necessary. Engaging stakeholders could be started by conducting a needs assessment and developing methods, strategies, and key messages by considering the results of the needs assessment. Furthermore, capacity building is essential to improve the stakeholders' self-efficacy in conducting activities aimed at community empowerment. Syahrul & Ikhsan (2022). The government's efforts to prevent child stunting at the village level, Sungai Mas Sub-district, and West Aceh Regency are carried out through several stages: the prevention planning stage, program implementation, HR competency improvement, and stunting data reporting. Based on stunting prevention efforts, it was found that the implementation of stunting prevention efforts had been carried out, but had not been carried out optimally according to the previously designed plan. However, there has been a decrease in data on the number of confirmed stunted children in the last three months.

Increasing the capacity of the village government plays a vital role in handling stunting in the village. Some ways to increase the capacity of local governments are by providing knowledge about the relationship between the central and local governments, providing a deep understanding related to the Undang-Undang Nomor 6 Tahun (Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 6 of 2014 Concerning Villages., 2014) on Villages, providing knowledge about program and activity planning, managing village funds, building outreach and communication, and building partnerships with other stakeholders. The village government can run optimally if supported by the competence of professional village officials. Therefore, guidance and competency development must continue. To reach an independent village, the village government must also be supported by the potential of village communities. To deal with stunting, the competence of cadres from the community is the spearhead of early detection of stunting in each Posyandu in the villages to be improved. Health workers in the Puskesmas must always be willing to provide knowledge and experience to the cadres. The socialization and communication with the community to come to the posyandu

must also be intensified so that the data collection can occur optimally. Therefore, the community stunting problem can be solved without requiring a referral to the hospital (Candarmaweni & Rahayu, 2020).

d. Improving the Economy and Community Welfare

This is by research findings by Nathalia Debora Sidabutar, Muhammad Jufri, Hasriani (Jufri & Sidabutar, 2024) based on the analysis of stunting prevalence in South Sulawesi, it was found that factors such as food access, nutritional intake, social factors, and economic conditions have significant relationships with the stunting rates in children in the region. Regression analysis provides a deeper understanding of the factors influencing stunting and lays the groundwork for developing more effective intervention strategies to reduce stunting prevalence and enhance child welfare. The implications of this research underscore the importance of developing targeted and sustainable interventions to combat chronic nutritional issues such as stunting. The government and relevant stakeholders must consider adequate food access, proper dietary intake, social factors, and economic conditions to prevent stunting. This study significantly improves the health and well-being of children in South Sulawesi by better understanding the factors that influence stunting and developing appropriate interventions to address this issue.

The implications of these findings highlight the importance of empowering PKK cadres as an effective strategy in combating stunting and emphasize their vital role in supporting child health and sustainable community development ((Ningtias et al., 2024). Improving the economy and community welfare is not only a solution to the problem of poverty but is also a strategic step in preventing stunting. By strengthening the family economy, increasing access to health services, and empowering communities, we can create a healthier, more innovative, and more productive generation. Stunting prevention is not only an individual responsibility but is a joint investment for national development

e. Food Fulfillment

Fulfilling food to prevent stunting is a vital community empowerment program, especially in developing countries. One thing that can be done is to teach families how to use local, highly nutritious food for children's meals. Optimal nutrition is essential for children's normal growth and physical and intellectual development (Sadiyah, 2024). This is based on Albrina Roza Rezkillah, Anton Surjoputro, and Ayun Sriatmi's (2023) findings, providing an overview of stunting prevention interventions in fulfilling nutrition in toddlers. Six interventions are provided: lipid-based nutrient supplements (LNS), animal protein source complementary foods, complementary breastfeeding, a combination of fish oil supplementation, nutritious biscuits, and food containing hibiscus sabdariffa.

2. Handling in various Multisectors

The results of this study indicate that the prevalence of stunting has evidence of directional causality from poverty and long-term economic growth of 0.02%. Stunting reduction needs to be focused on in all provinces in Indonesia. Stunting can not be done alone because it will not significantly impact. Efforts to prevent stunting must be carried out in an integrated and convergent manner with a multi-sector approach (Kustanto, 2021).

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also provide healthcare and educational services to communities vulnerable to stunting (Bhutta et al., 2020). Moreover, the private sector can contribute by offering technological innovations and solutions to enhance

access to quality food and healthcare services. Collaboration among all sectors is vital for the effective and sustainable prevention of stunting (Mediani et al., 2022).

3. Increasing the capacity of cadres and volunteers

The Indonesian government has a strategic responsibility to ensure the fulfillment of women's reproductive health rights to prevent future stunting. The analysis in this article shows that current stunting mitigation efforts tend to be short-term and have not fully considered fulfilling women's rights as beneficiaries of the policy. Toddlers suffering from stunting are often separated from the issues of reproductive health rights and gender justice that their mothers should receive. Therefore, even though a decrease in stunting rates seems encouraging, the potential temporary impact is significant given that women's health issues have not been fully addressed (Litaay & Batjo, 2024).

4. Local culture-based approach

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that education using a culture-based anti-stunting education package significantly impacts the transformation of knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of coastal communities. This education is delivered through an anti-stunting education package (Handayani et al., 2024). This is in the opinion of Inriati Lewa, Erni Erawati, and Yusuf Ismail (2022), who state that basic facilities for stunting prevention should be improved through a cultural approach. Local wisdom can be a reference for other researchers interested in using the same approach in looking at other health problems that require medical treatment and a prevention model based on cultural and local wisdom.

5. Increased access to facilities

Improving sanitation facilities means increasing access to gooseneck latrines with septic tanks and access to clean water. Increasing knowledge and perception of the importance of sanitation to prevent stunting is carried out intensively and routinely through community activities and optimizing the role of community leaders, both formal and non-formal (Irawati, 2023).

Marni, et al. (2022). This research is in the form of a literature study on published articles from 2017 to 2022, with the research variable being the prevention and treatment of shunting in infants. So the results of this literature review detect that the factors that influence the occurrence of shunting include: nutrition, economic status, geography of residence, parents' education, environmental sanitation, age of parents, marital status, health education provided by health workers, and treatment given to parents of their babies.

Stunting is a failure to thrive in children under five due to chronic malnutrition, usually occurring in the first 1,000 days of life. This condition impacts height, brain development, future productivity, and the individual's quality of life. In Indonesia, the prevalence of stunting is still one of the highest in the world. Transformative community empowerment is an approach that involves fundamental changes in the way people understand and deal with their problems. By strengthening community character, such as responsibility and togetherness, this empowerment can create sustainable solutions to prevent stunting.

CONCLUSION

Transformative and character-based community empowerment is an effective strategy to prevent stunting. The community can be actively involved in improving children's nutrition

and health by utilizing character values such as mutual cooperation, responsibility, and sustainability. Recommendations for the future include:

1. Development of local culture-based nutrition education modules
2. Multi-stakeholder involvement, including government, private sector, and community.
3. Monitoring and evaluating empowerment programs to ensure the sustainability of their impact.

Transforming community empowerment with character can be an effective strategy in preventing stunting. A participatory approach that involves the community in planning and implementing child health programs, increasing cadre capacity, and local cultural approaches has been proven to strengthen community commitment and awareness. This transformation not only improves children's health status but also empowers communities to be independent in maintaining the welfare of their families.

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