

STUNTING IN INDONESIA: UNDERSTANDING THE ROOTS OF THE PROBLEM AND SOLUTIONS

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Abstract

Stunting is still a serious problem for children in Indonesia today. This paper explores the root of the problem and the solutions to stunting. Malnutrition, an unhealthy environment, poor maternal health, lack of nutrition education, low public awareness, socio-economic factors, and inequality cause stunting. A solution with a holistic approach is needed that involves the government, society, and related stakeholders. Efforts that need to be made are poverty alleviation, nutrition education, public awareness, promotion of food diversification, parental education and guidance, and increasing access to health services. Therefore, the role of Commission IX DPR RI is important in carrying out oversees to ensure the coordination and cooperation of all parties in overcoming stunting in children and creating healthy and quality future generations.

Introduction

National Children's Day every July 23 commemoration is an important moment to reflect on the problem of stunting in Indonesia. Stunting is a serious problem experienced by Indonesian children due to prolonged malnutrition. The high stunting rate indicates that many children are chronically malnourished, which affects their growth and development and requires fast action.

According to the Indonesian Ministry of Health's Nutritional Status Study report, the prevalence of stunting in Indonesia fell from 27.7 percent in 2019, 24.4 percent in 2021, to 21.6 percent in 2022, with the majority occurring in children aged 3–4 years. However, this figure is still not by WHO standards, which target less than 20 percent. For this reason, the government is trying to reduce the stunting rate to 17 percent in 2023 and 14 percent in 2024 (Rokom, January 25, 2023).



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Stunting is a health problem and has social and economic impacts. Stunted children experience impaired physical and mental development, low immunity, impaired nutrition and health, and low academic achievement, impacting productivity and the economy in the long term (Putri, 2023).

This paper explores the root causes and solutions of stunting, analyzes the main causes, and how to overcome them. With a better understanding and effective steps, it is hoped that stunting can be fought and that Indonesian children have a healthier and better future.

The Root Causes of the Stunting Problem

According to Presidential Regulation No. 72 of 2021 concerning the Acceleration of the Reduction of Stunting, the definition of stunting is a disorder of child development caused by chronic malnutrition and recurrent infections. A height below the standard the Ministry of Health sets characterizes this disorder.

Stunting, also known as chronic malnutrition, occurs when a child experiences stunted growth and their height does not match their age. This problem affects children's physical growth and long-term impacts cognition, learning ability, and productivity in adulthood (Kominfo.go.id, February 17, 2021).

One source of the stunting problem is malnutrition in mothers and children. The lack of nutritional intake in mothers before pregnancy, during pregnancy, and in the first 1,000 days of a child's life can hinder their growth, leading to a high

stunting rate in Indonesia. Economic issues also play an important role. Low-income families have limited access to nutritious food, so their children need more nutrition. Economic inequality exacerbates this situation as only a few people can access resources and opportunities (Ministry of Health, 2022b).

Public knowledge and awareness about good nutrition need to be improved. Many parents in Indonesia need to be fully aware of the importance of nutritious food and have sufficient knowledge about a balanced diet. Improper feeding practices also contribute to malnutrition in children. As a result, children do not get the nutrition they need to grow properly (Kompas.com, January 30, 2012).

Sanitary and environmental conditions also play an important role. Infections and diseases, such as diarrhea and parasitic diseases, can affect a child's absorption of nutrients and growth. Poor sanitation and limited access to clean water and adequate sanitation facilities also contribute to the problem of stunting, especially in rural areas.

Limited access to health services is another source of problems. Limited health facilities, especially in rural areas, can hinder early identification and treatment of malnutrition in children. Lack of knowledge and awareness about the importance of routine nutrition checks also affects efforts to prevent and treat malnutrition.

Solutions to Address the Problem

Stunting occurs when a child's physical growth is stunted due to a lack of adequate nutritional intake

and essential substances for growth. For that reason, integrated solutions are needed. The government has taken significant steps in dealing with stunting, and there are three main interventions to prevent stunting in women.

First, giving Blood Supplement Tablets to young women through a nutrition action program at school. In addition, physical activity is also encouraged, and balanced nutritious food consumption is promoted.

Second, providing iron tablets, conducting pregnancy checks, and offering additional animal protein food to children aged 6–24 months. The type of animal protein given is adjusted based on availability in each area (Ministry of Health, 2022).

Third, in addition to these interventions, measurements are carried out to monitor program effectiveness and obtain accurate data. Hemoglobin (HB) levels in the blood are measured for young women who receive iron tablets. In contrast, pregnant women are examined for iron and nutritional levels, and an ultrasound examination (USG) is performed to monitor fetal development in the womb.

Apart from the three interventions above, several other steps can be taken to address the root causes of malnutrition in Indonesia.

First, poverty alleviation programs need to be improved to reduce poverty levels. Social assistance and poverty alleviation can help low-income families meet the nutritional needs of their children.

Second, there is a need for integrated nutrition education in schools, health centers, and through

campaigns on social media or mass media. Additionally, promoting food diversification to improve children’s nutrition is necessary. Education and outreach programs should be carried out to introduce people to diverse and nutritious foods. Education and guidance for parents are also essential to provide children with information and skills about healthy eating patterns. Nutrition education should focus on proper feeding practices for children, such as exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life, appropriate complementary foods after six months, and a balanced diet for toddlers. Nutrition education stimulates changes in people’s behavior in choosing, cooking, consuming nutritious food, and adopting a healthy diet.

Improved sanitation and environmental health must also be part of the stunting solution. Developing sanitation infrastructure and increasing access to clean water should be a priority. Counseling on personal hygiene and good sanitation should be carried out regularly.

Regarding limited access to health services, it is necessary to increase access, especially in rural, underdeveloped, border, and remote areas. Improving health facilities, training health workers, and conducting regular check-ups on child nutrition can help prevent and treat malnutrition more effectively.

Collaboration between sectors and active participation from the government, NGOs, the private sector, and the community is crucial in tackling stunting. Through strong cooperation and synergy, real change can happen. Comprehensive intervention programs involv-

ing all parties should be introduced, including cross-sectoral coordination in implementing nutrition and health programs and increasing access to quality health services.

Strong commitment from the government is also essential in overcoming stunting in children in Indonesia. Increasing the budget allocation for nutrition and health programs should be prioritized. Sustainability and strict supervision of these programs also need to be guaranteed. Routine monitoring and evaluation of the program are also required to ensure its effectiveness and sustainable positive impact.

Conclusion

The root causes of stunting in Indonesia include malnutrition, poor environment, sanitation, poor maternal health, lack of nutrition education and public awareness, and socio-economic factors and inequality. A holistic approach involving the government, the community, and related stakeholders is needed to address stunting. This approach should include increasing access to quality nutrition, improving health services, providing adequate nutrition education, and raising public awareness. Additionally, socioeconomic factors must be considered to ensure equal access to resources and opportunities. For this reason, Commission IX of the DPR RI is conducting oversight to ensure that the government makes coordinated efforts and cooperates with all parties in overcoming stunting.

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