



Socio-cultural Impact of Stunting Phenomenon on Children's Health in Medan City

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ABSTRACT

Stunting is a health disorder that affects the growth and development of children caused by chronic nutrition and impacts cognitive and motor development. Other factors, such as the social and economic environment, can cause stunting. Medan City also has many stunting cases, which is caused by a lack of public understanding of the phenomenon. This research used a descriptive qualitative research method with a literature review approach. Data collection techniques through secondary data in the form of previous research, online media, and journals. Data analysis techniques using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results of the study show that the efforts made by the Medan City government, such as nutritional interventions to conduct socialization in the community, still need to be improved. This is due to cultural perceptions that stunting is not a severe disease but is caused by several factors, such as genetics, misconceptions, and religion.

Keyword: Cultural Perceptions, Stunting, Child Health

ABSTRAK

Stunting merupakan gangguan kesehatan yang mempengaruhi tumbuh kembang anak yang disebabkan oleh gizi kronis serta berdampak pada perkembangan kognitif dan motorik. Fenomena stunting dapat juga disebabkan oleh faktor lain, seperti lingkungan sosial dan perekonomian. Kota Medan juga termasuk dalam angka kasus stunting yang masih tinggi dan diakibatkan oleh kurangnya pemahaman masyarakat terhadap fenomena stunting. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan metode penelitian kualitatif deskriptif dengan pendekatan literatur review. Teknik pengumpulan data melalui data primer dan data sekunder berupa penelitian terdahulu, media online, dan jurnal. Teknik analisis data menggunakan reduksi data, display data, penarikan kesimpulan. Dari hasil penelitian, dapat diketahui bahwa Upaya yang dilakukan pemerintah Kota Medan, seperti intervensi gizi hingga melakukan sosialisasi terhadap masyarakat masih belum maksimal. Hal ini dikarenakan persepsi budaya yang menganggap bahwa stunting bukanlah penyakit serius melainkan disebabkan oleh beberapa faktor seperti genetik, miskonsepsi, hingga agama.

Kata Kunci: Persepsi Budaya, Stunting, Kesehatan Anak



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1. Introduction

When children's growth and development are stunted due to persistent malnutrition, it is referred to as the stunting phenomenon, making them grow shorter than their peers (Masnarivan et al., 2022). Poor living conditions, low birth weight, and inadequate nutrition cause stunting (Mistari et al., 2022). It was recorded in 2019 that the prevalence of stunting cases in North Sumatra was 30.11% and continued to increase in 2020, namely 27,7% (Cnnindonesia.com, 2022). The stunting phenomenon also affected the capital of North Sumatra, Medan City, with a prevalence of 6.8% in 2020 (Kemendagri, 2021). Until now, the problem of

stunting in Medan City is still a significant health program for the Medan City government, which has shown a decrease but is not yet significant. Efforts made by the government include accelerating the reduction of stunting, collaborating between government agencies, and providing assistance and counseling to families before and after marriage.

In overcoming the problem of stunting, the world of Health always does new things to suppress the increase in stunting rates. One of the efforts always made in the world of Health is to conduct Health Education by empowering families by conducting nutritional demonstrations and health checks on families (Kadir, 2022). In addition, nutritional improvements such as providing food and macronutrients are needed for infants diagnosed with stunting (Juanda et al., 2022). However, to make these efforts, the government, especially in Medan City, still needs help gaining the community's trust in counseling and dealing with stunting issues.

The difficulty of handling stunting by the Medan City government is because many people do not believe in the existence of this stunting phenomenon. The public believes stunting is not a disease but a growth failure with physical signs such as short stature due to heredity. Meanwhile, stunting is not just a physical condition but can also have long-term consequences for cognitive development, educational attainment, and economic productivity (Soliman et al., 2021). In addition, another problem in society is that there is stigma and discrimination against families diagnosed with stunting (Wahyuningsih et al., 2022).

The author sees that this problem has been discussed in previous research about the assumption that stunting is caused by genetic factors (Kusuma, 2020). This is due to the lack of public understanding and the stigma of laziness or lack of parental attention to children, which makes misconceptions about stunting occur in society (Wahyuningsih et al., 2022). Some people consider stunting a phenomenon determined by fate, and nothing can be done to stop it (Sari, 2021). People also associate the problem of stunting with religion, and prayer is a spiritual tool to influence how people view food and drink (Sari, 2021). Meanwhile, previous research explains that stunting is a severe problem and affects a person's quality of life. Stunting can cause permanent damage, lasting a lifetime and impacting the next generation (Widanti, 2016). This is because children stunted in the first two years of life are at risk of having an IQ <89 compared to children who are not stunted (Erwina & Keb, 2020). Stunting can also affect economic productivity due to reduced cognitive and physical abilities (Yuwanti et al., 2021). Stunted children are more susceptible to disease and have a higher risk of death (Mochtar & Ali, 2021).

Therefore, this study wants to see the influence and relationship of cultural perceptions on stunting. Cultural perception views culture as society's overall knowledge, beliefs, and values (Mulyana, 2016). Cultural perceptions can provide certain assumptions about a phenomenon. Cultural perceptions can influence many aspects of life, including parenting, Health, and even emergency medicine (Bornstein, 2013). This research can provide recommendations and become a discovery about the causes of the implementation of stunting handling that is not optimal, which is influenced by the socio-cultural impact of the community.

2. Method

This research uses descriptive qualitative research methods with a literature review approach. The qualitative research method is a method to describe, examine, and understand the meaning that comes from an individual or group of people who are considered to come from social problems (Creswell, 2017). Meanwhile, the descriptive research method is a method that uses objects, group status, conditions, frameworks, or events that are happening, intending to make descriptions that include systematic, factual, and accurate information about facts, laws, and related phenomena (Nazir, 2003). In addition, descriptive qualitative research methods use a literature review approach to link factual information and phenomena with previous studies.

The author used this method because it was considered to be able to answer questions about the socio-cultural impact of the stunting phenomenon in Medan City. This research uses data collection techniques through literature studies, journals, and online media. Data sources consisted of secondary data sources. The author used qualitative data analysis techniques using the Miles & Huberman (2008) model, namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Socio-cultural Impact on Child Development

Cultural perception involves people's understanding of their world, which includes how they make sense of time, economic life, and social relationships. Cultural perception refers to how individuals or groups understand, interpret, and give meaning to the cultural elements in their lives (Sahlins, 2013). This includes how people perceive, feel, and understand the norms, values, symbols, actions, and traditions that define their culture or the culture of others. Cultural perception is not only limited to what is seen or heard but also involves how individuals bring their experiences, backgrounds, and identities into their understanding of culture. In

Dalton (1961), Herkovits and Malinowski mention Cultural Determinants, which means that all things that exist in a community group appear determined by the culture of that community group.

Cultural perceptions can influence how people respond to stunting growth disorders in children. The family determines a child's health status through parenting patterns in fulfilling food needs. Furthermore, children with poor health status, malnutrition, and stunting can be influenced starting from the mother's pregnancy and childbirth. Low socioeconomic conditions are more likely to lead to rapid disease transmission and malnutrition due to being in a densely populated housing environment. Low education and knowledge affect the level of health awareness and disease prevention. There are many possible causes of stunting in Indonesia, including direct factors influenced by maternal nutritional status, breastfeeding practices, complementary feeding practices, and exposure to infections, as well as indirect factors influenced by education, food systems, health care, water and sanitation, infrastructure and health services (Artanti & Garzia, 2022). In addition, social stigma associated with stunting can also arise in some cultures, which may hinder treatment efforts. Socio-cultural influences can impact child development through maternal parenting. Socio-cultural influences can significantly impact the phenomenon of stunting or stunted child growth. Stunting is a condition in which a child experiences stunted growth, usually occurring in early life, and can have long-term impacts on a child's health and development. According to Prof Ali Khomsan, parenting is one factor determining the quality of child nutrition, where mothers play an important role in childcare 94% (Khasanah, 2011).

In this case, socio-cultural influences have a significant impact on the growth and development of a child. The family's role in society, the parenting norms, and the values instilled in the culture influence how child care and nurturing are done. Culture often influences a toddler's early education, diet, and food preferences. Language and modes of communication, which profoundly affect a child's language and cognitive development, can also be reflected in the cultural context. In addition, social values, morals, and cultural traditions shape children's behavior, emotions, and cultural identity. Therefore, a deep understanding of the culture in a society is critical to providing education, care, and an environment that supports a child's healthy and balanced development.

3.2 Parents' Lack of Sensitisation towards Stunting in Medan City

The influence of cultural perceptions of the stunting phenomenon can result in a lack of parental sensitivity to child growth and development. This happens because parents' perceptions of stunting are only caused by genetic descent and do not question it. This mindset of parents must be changed and addressed with education from agencies that understand the phenomenon of stunting. Parents' lack of sensitivity to the phenomenon of stunting, a growth disorder in children caused by chronic malnutrition, severely impacts children's development. This insensitivity can stem from various factors, such as a lack of understanding of the importance of good nutrition, economic inability to provide nutritious food, or even cultural norms that may not prioritize nutrition as a top priority. As a result, children growing up in families insensitive to stunting may experience health problems, stunted growth, and physical and cognitive developmental problems.

Based on the author's observations, the community is not sensitive to stunting in children. The condition of a child's short body is considered normal. It is often said to be hereditary (genetic) from both parents, so many people accept it without doing anything to prevent it. Meanwhile, genetic factors are the least influential determinants of health compared to behavioral factors (knowledge, attitudes, and family support), environment (social, economic, cultural, political), and health services. Parents are very responsible for their children's growth and health. However, some parents neglect and abdicate their responsibilities in caring for their children. Nawal conveyed this as the Chairperson of the North Sumatra Village Family Empowerment and Welfare Movement Team (TP PKK) (Diskominfo.sumutprov, 2021):

"From the information I met here, I am disappointed and sad. Parents who use drugs neglect their children, causing stunting in children. I ask that if there is something like this again, the community immediately report it. The mothers of Family Welfare Empowerment (PKK) immediately report to me," (Diskominfo.sumutprov, 2021).

The results of the interview were obtained through Diskominfo.sumutprov that Nawal, as the Chairperson of the North Sumatra Village Family Empowerment and Welfare Movement Team (TP PKK), visited Medan City to see the phenomenon of stunting in Medan City (Diskominfo.sumutprov, 2021). Based on the above statement, one factor that supports a child's health is the environment. The statement above states that parents are an environmental factor responsible for children's health. This statement illustrates that some people in Medan City do not feel responsible for children.

The lack of knowledge about stunting causes the community's insensitivity to children's health. Suppose the community knows and realizes the impact of stunting that can cause growth failure and cognitive and motor development barriers. In that case, the community will undoubtedly pay attention to caring for their family's health (caring for pregnant women, infants, and toddlers). Moreover, if the community knows the long-term effects of stunting, such as decreased intellectual capacity and decreased ability to absorb lessons at school, it will affect adult productivity (Kementerian Perencanaan dan Pembangunan Nasional., 2018). Therefore, a holistic approach involving the government and the community on nutrition education, changes in dietary practices, and social support is needed to address this insensitivity and ensure children receive adequate nutrition to grow and develop well. The following is the Medan Mayor's explanation of the government's efforts to reduce stunting in Medan City (Pemko Medan, 2023):

"We do supplementary feeding for malnourished babies, implementing nutrition posts through the urban village fund budget. Then, the implementation of communication, information, education related to the prevention of stunting, exclusive breastfeeding, provision of mp-asi, Germas, management of malnutrition, monitoring and promotion of growth and the movement to love eating fish," (Pemko Medan, 2023).

From the above statement, it can be understood that the Medan City government continues to make efforts that directly target the community. The main effort is to provide direct education to the community by building communication and trust between the government and the community. The Mayor of Medan, in his interview, also explained that the Medan City government also made other efforts, such as planning 15 programs, 16 activities, and 29 sub-activities carried out by Regional Apparatus and Sub-districts. In addition, the Medan City Government has also held Rembuk Stunting, starting from the sub-district level to the city level. "There are five programs or innovations the Medan City Government has carried out to reduce the stunting rate. Among them is launching the Bapak Asuh Anak Stunting (BAAS) program, where various elements starting from the Medan City Government, Forkopimda elements, and the private sector work together to reduce the stunting rate by targeting stunting toddlers directly (Pemko Medan, 2023).

4. Conclusion

In order to address the phenomenon of stunting, it is essential to understand the socio-cultural context of specific communities and work with communities to develop intervention programs that are appropriate to their cultural values and practices. Efforts should be focussed on education, improved access to health care, promotion of balanced diets, and increased nutrition knowledge to reduce stunting in diverse cultural contexts. We know that cultural and food issues can cause nutritional problems that impact human health, so it is essential to carefully empower local communities with local wisdom and genius and continue to carry out nutrition counseling as an alternative to addressing cultural and food issues.

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