



Family Roles in Overcoming Picky Eating Children and Its Effect on Childs' Nutrition Status

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ABSTRACT

Nutritional status is a measuring scale based on the body's condition due to food consumption or nutritional intake. Picky eating is a behavior that often occurs in preschool children, which can affect the child's nutritional status. The role of parents is very influential in overcoming picky eaters. This study aimed to understand the role of the family in overcoming picky eater behavior in children and to measure the nutritional status of children with picky eater behavior at Kindergarten X Palembang. This study was qualitative research with a phenomenological approach. The informants were mothers of picky eating children based on CEBQ criteria. The data were collected using in-depth interviews and anthropometric measurements, and the data was analyzed quantitatively. This research found that parents played a role in trying to overcome picky eater behavior in children Including restrictive guidance, pressure to eat, rewarding food consumption materially, rewarding with praise, accessibility, however, their child's picky eater behavior was not resolved, and based on the results of anthropometric measurements, most children with picky eater behavior had normal nutritional status (64.7%). In comparison, 17.64% of children experience wasted nutritional status, 11.7% are severely wasted, and 5.8% are obese.

Keyword: Family Roles; Picky Eaters; Nutritional status

ABSTRAK

Status gizi adalah skala ukur berdasarkan keadaan tubuh akibat konsumsi makanan atau asupan nutrisi ke dalam tubuh. Picky eater merupakan perilaku yang sering terjadi pada anak usia prasekolah yang dapat mempengaruhi status gizi pada anak. Peran orang tua contohnya dalam bentuk penerapan pola asuh dan pola makan sangat berpengaruh dalam mengatasi picky eater agar status gizi anak tidak terganggu. Penelitian ini dilakukan bertujuan untuk memahami peran keluarga dalam mengatasi perilaku picky eater pada anak dan mengetahui gambaran status gizi anak dengan perilaku picky eater di TK X Palembang. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan pendekatan fenomenologi. Informan yang didapatkan terpilih melalui teknik purposive sampling, yaitu Ibu dari anak yang mengalami picky eater berdasarkan kriteria CEBQ. Wawancara mendalam dan pengukuran antropometri digunakan sebagai teknik pengumpulan data, dan analisis data dilakukan secara kualitatif. Penelitian ini mendapatkan hasil bahwa orang tua melakukan peran mereka dalam bentuk pembatasan, paksaan untuk makan, imbalan berupa materi, imbalan berupa pujian, dan aksesibilitas namun secara kualitatif belum berhasil mengatasi picky eater pada anak. Berdasarkan hasil pengukuran antropometri, anak dengan perilaku picky eater memiliki status gizi baik yaitu sebanyak 64,7%, gizi buruk 17,64%, gizi kurang 11,7%, dan obesitas 5,8%.

Keyword: Peran Keluarga; Picky Eater; Status Gizi



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1. Introduction

Nutritional status is a scale of measurement based on the body's condition due to food consumption or nutrient intake into the body. Good nutritional status can serve as a foundation for health that will optimize growth and development, reduce morbidity, disability, and mortality, thereby affecting the quality of human resources. On the other hand, poor nutrition or excessive nutrition has adverse effects both in the short and long term.

Children who are malnourished are highly susceptible to disease and may also experience a decline in intelligence, leading to decreased productivity in the future (Kadir, 2019).

One of the problems in meeting children's nutritional needs is the habit of picky eating. Picky eater is a term used for children who have the habit of only eating certain foods, limiting themselves to certain types of food, restricting the amount of certain foods, or not wanting to try new types of food (Chao & Chang, 2017). If a child consistently only eats certain foods or refuses some types of food, of course, this can affect the child's nutritional intake; a child may not get enough vitamins, minerals, or other essential nutrients. The lack of nutritional intake can result in the child's nutritional status and growth and development being disrupted (Patel, M. Donovan, & Lee, 2020).

The prevalence of picky eater behavior during preschool age is quite high. Research in Singapore shows that the prevalence of picky eaters is highest at the age of 3-5 years, at 29.9%. The prevalence of picky eaters among children aged 3-5 years in Taiwan is 72% (Chao & Chang, 2017). The prevalence of picky eaters in Indonesia is higher compared to neighboring countries, with 60.3% among toddlers in Surabaya, 65.7% among preschoolers in Pekanbaru, and 51.6% among kindergarteners in Surabaya (Hakiki & Muniroh, 2023; Purnamasari & Adriani, 2020; Subecca, Apriyanti, & Lasepa, 2024).

The role of the family is very influential in overcoming picky eating. Some preschoolers who are picky eaters come from families with democratic and permissive parenting styles (Mauludi, Firdaus, & Hasina, 2024). The better the parenting style, the fewer children exhibit picky eater behavior. Conversely, the worse the parenting style applied, the more children exhibit picky eater behavior. This shows that the parenting style applied to children affects the picky eating behavior in preschoolers (Idhayanti, Puspitaningrum, Arfiana, Munayarokh, & Mundarti, 2022).

The purpose of this research is to determine the role of the families of TK X Palembang students in addressing picky eaters and to measure the nutritional status of picky eater children.

2. Methods

This research is a qualitative descriptive observational study that uses a phenomenological design. The research was conducted at Kindergarten (TK) After identifying the names of children who fell into the picky eater category, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with the mothers of those children. The interview conducted was related to the family's role in addressing picky eating. The informant's answers were recorded and then translated into text without altering the content. The answers were then coded and presented in text form. The researchers then measured the children's height (centimeters) using a height measuring tool and their weight (kilograms) using a weighing scale. Interpretation of children's nutritional status uses the WHO Child Growth Standard curve with the variable of weight-for-height.

This research has received ethical approval from the Bioethics, Humanities, and Islamic Medicine Commission of the Faculty of Medicine, Muhammadiyah University of Palembang, Indonesia, number 155/EC/KBHKKI/FK-UMP/XI/2023.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1 Picky-eater screening

Before conducting in-depth interviews, the researcher first screened for picky eaters to identify children with picky eating habits using the CEBQ questionnaire. The results of the CEBQ scoring found 17 children who are picky-eater. A child is considered a picky eater if the score in the food avoidant category is higher than the score in the food approach category.

3.2 In-depth Interview

Family role in food restrictive guidance

Based on the results of in-depth interviews, it was found that the standard type of food served is home-cooked meals. The side dishes served follow the children's preferences, with no restrictions on whether the food is healthy or unhealthy.

"Eating rice seems a bit difficult. (He) prefer eating noodles, sometimes with nuggets, sometimes with sausages. (He) does not like tofu, tempeh, and meat" (Informant 1).

"He likes fried foods, chicken, nuggets, sausages, he likes them... He only eat about 2 spoonfuls rice at school and eats the side dishes only" (Informant 2).

Picky eaters tend to prefer snacks with a dominant sweet flavor over salty and savory foods.

"My child likes sweet food." (Informant 3).

"Prefer sweet foods, wafer snacks, breads. If it's crisps, he doesn't like them" (Informant 4).

Children also really like instant noodles. This is reflected in several statements from informants who say that children's eating duration will be faster when instant noodles are served.

"He eats noodles quickly. Faster to eat instant noodles than rice." (Informant 2).

"If it's instant noodles, no need to say, he eats quickly" (Informant 5).

Family role in providing rewards for eating behavior

All informants stated that they have a habit of giving compliments when the child finishes their food as a form of motivation and emotional support.

"I give him a compliment when he finished his meal, saying that if he finished his food, he would grow up quickly and healthy." (Informant 5).

"I said 'wow, you're smart... great..." (Informant 6).

Family role in healthy food accessibility

The family has provided access to healthy food for the child. Based on the interview, it appears that the family provides various types of vegetables. However, the picky eater children only like easy to chew-vegetables).

"He eats a lot of vegetables. He likes vegetable soup, long beans. It takes a long time (for him) to chew (the vegetables)." (Informant 1).

"If it's vegetables, he is picky. He prefers the carrots and do not like leafy vegetables, such as spinach, because it's hard for him to chew it." (Informant 2).

Family role in pressure to eat

In an in-depth interview, the parents explained that they have a fixed meal schedule, starting with breakfast around 8 AM, then lunch around 11-12 AM, and dinner around 5-6 PM. The informants admitted that they never scold their children. They choose to advise the child, explain the benefits of the food the child should eat, and give praise when the food they eat is finished.

"We never scolded him. We just let him eat whatever he wants. If we get angry with him, he gets even angrier and doesn't want to eat more. So, we give him (meal) alternatives that he might want to eat." (Informant 2).

"Not angry, just advised, 'Eat... if you don't eat rice, you'll get sick.' My husband never gets angry either." (Informant 3).

However, there is a mother who admits that she often shows anger towards her child when they refuse to eat the food that has been served.

"Yeah, I'm angry...just rambling. I have already cooked (food)." (Informant 6).

3.3 Nutritional Status of Picky Eater Children

The results of anthropometric measurements and nutritional status interpretation are summarized in Table 1.

Based on the above anthropometric measurements, it was found that 11 students (64.7%), consisting of 6 female students and 5 male students, had good nutritional status. Then there are 3 students (17.6%), consisting of 2 female students and 1 male student, who are experiencing malnutrition. Followed by students with undernutrition status, consisting of 2 male students (11.7%). Meanwhile, the remaining 1 male student (5.8%) has an obese nutritional status (Table 1).

Table 1. Nutritional Status of Picky-eater Childrens (N=17 persons)

Sex	Z-score < -3SD	Z-score Between -3 and -2 SD	Z-score Between -2 and 2 SD	Z-score Between 2 and 3 SD	Z-score Between >3 SD
Female	2 (11.7%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (35.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Male	1 (5.9%)	2 (11.7%)	5 (29.4%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (5.9%)
Total	3 (17.6%)	2 (11.7%)	11 (64.7%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (5.9%)

The family plays a role in children's eating behavior by providing food, modeling appropriate eating behavior, frequently exposing children to various types of food, training parenting skills, and creating a conducive emotional atmosphere at home (Horst, 2012). Families in this study have not yet shown a firm role in terms of restrictive guidance (food restrictions). Parents tend to adopt a permissive parenting style when their child is a picky eater. This is illustrated by the results of interviews with informants who chose to follow the child's wishes in determining the type of food they want to eat. The informants choose to serve food based on what the children like, even if it is unhealthy food such as instant noodles, nuggets, and sausages. Previous qualitative research reported that children often bring food with the same menu for several days (Wijayanti, Astuti, & Riawati, 2020).

Parenting patterns have a significant influence on picky eating behavior in children (Idhayanti et al., 2022). A study shows that various parenting styles can still produce picky eaters. As many as 38.9% of picky eater children have parents with authoritarian parenting styles, 37.7% with democratic parenting styles, and 23.3% with permissive parenting styles (Fertycia, Novayelinda, & Nopriadi, 2022).

The role of the family in providing good accessibility to healthy food can increase the likelihood of children consuming healthy food compared to unhealthy food (Yee, Lwin, & Ho, 2017). In this study, the accessibility of healthy foods such as vegetables, fish, chicken, and meat is depicted. However, permissive behavior causes parents to allow their children to eat unhealthy foods like instant noodles. The informant of this research explained that the child became voracious and quick in consuming instant noodles. One of the informants admitted that he often provided his child with that fast food.

The role of the family in creating a conducive emotional atmosphere at home for children can be achieved by giving rewards, either in the form of material gifts or words of praise for the child. The informants in this study explained that they give praise when the child finishes their meal. These results are consistent with previous systematic review research that shows that for children under the age of 6, providing rewards in the form of praise can be more effective in promoting healthy eating habits and preventing unhealthy eating habits. Praise for children can build their self-confidence, foster intrinsic needs, and also promote their autonomy. With praise, the child will feel a sense of satisfaction within themselves (Yee et al., 2017).

Some informants in this study explained that they gave "reprimands" or threats to their picky eater children. Even though threats have been given, the child still shows no interest in consuming the food. In previous research, it was explained that forcing a child to eat can indeed make them eat, which is expected to solve the problem of picky eaters. However, this only applies in the short term. In the long run, coercion will actually cause the child to be reluctant to eat due to feelings of pressure and compulsion, leading the child to increasingly avoid eating activities and become less interested in healthy foods (Yee et al., 2017).

Based on the results of the anthropometric measurements that have been conducted, it was found that the majority of picky eater children have good nutritional status (64.7%), followed by children with poor nutritional status (17.64%), undernutrition (11.7%), and obesity at only 5.8%. The results of this study are consistent with previous research that reported that out of 17 preschool children who were picky eaters, 14 children (82.3%) had good nutritional status (Cerdasari, Hadisuyitno, Sutjiati, & Adelina, 2022). A similar quantitative study in Surabaya reported that there is no significant relationship between picky eating behavior and the nutritional status of preschool children (Pramesty, Yunitasari, & Puspitasari, 2021).

In this study, the majority of informants explained that their children liked fried side dishes such as fried chicken and fried fish. This is the reason for the child's good nutritional status. Previous research reported that there is no difference in energy intake and protein intake between picky-eater children and non-picky eater children (Cerdasari et al., 2022). As many as 98.6% of early childhood education children in Surabaya have good protein adequacy levels and 94.5% have good fat adequacy levels (Purnamasari & Adriani, 2020).

4. Conclusions

The role of parents in children's eating behavior, such as restrictions, forcing them to eat, providing rewards in the form of material goods or praise, and qualitative accessibility, has not yet succeeded in addressing picky eating in children. The majority of children with picky eating habits have good nutritional status, but there are still children who experience undernutrition or even obesity due to selective eating patterns. Further research can be focused on quantitative studies to identify the factors influencing picky eating behavior in preschool-aged children. For parents, they can try to enhance the family's role in providing examples of consuming a variety of healthy foods because children tend to imitate the behavior of those around them.

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6. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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