MOTHERS' MOTIVATION IN CARING FOR STUNTING CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

Stunting is a chronic nutritional problem characterized by a child's height being lower than the standard for their age due to long-term malnutrition, repeated infections, and inadequate stimulation that frequently occurs in both poor and developing countries. Stunting impacts a child's quality of life and increases the risk of morbidity and mortality. Therefore, proper and careful prevention and management of stunting are crucial. Several factors influencing the success of stunting management include the mother's level of knowledge about toddler nutrition, her education, household income, family support, the number of family members, and the mother's motivation to care for the stunted child. This study was conducted to understand the extent to which maternal motivation influences the success of stunted child care. Research design using descriptive with crossectional approach. The sample was 96 respondents with purposive sampling technique. Data was taken using questionnaire. Data analysis used descriptive statistics. More than half had low motivation, namely 52 people (54.2%), 34 (35.4%) respondents had moderate motivation, and only 10 respondents (10.4%) had high motivation. Most respondents have low motivation in caring for children with stunting, this is influenced by several intrinsic factors including low levels of education, not working, lack of knowledge and understanding about stunting and low socioeconomic status.

Keyword: caring; mother motivation; stunting

INTRODUCTION

Stunting is a chronic nutritional problem characterized by a child's height being lower than the standard for their age due to long-term malnutrition, repeated infections, and inadequate stimulation (Sriyanah, 2023; Unicef, 2025). This is influenced by inadequate parenting patterns, especially during the first 1,000 days of life (SKI, 2023). According to the World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Childrens Fund (Unicef), stunting can lead to impaired physical and cognitive development and future productivity. In addition, stunting can put children at higher risk of developing non-communicable diseases as adults, such as diabetes mellitus, cancer, heart disease, hypertension, and others.

Stunting is a global nutritional problem that frequently occurs in both poor and developing countries. Indonesia has the second-highest prevalence of stunting in Southeast Asia, after Cambodia (Kemsesneg, 2018). Efforts to reduce stunting remain a national health priority in Indonesia. Based on data from the 2022 Indonesian Nutritional Status Survey (SSGI), the prevalence of stunting in toddlers was 21.6% and remained relatively stable at 21.5% in the 2023 Indonesian Health Survey (SKI). The 2024 Indonesian Nutritional Status Survey (SSGI) reported a decline in the national stunting prevalence to 19.8%. This indicates an improving trend from the previous prevalence of 21.6% (SSGI, 2022). However, this figure remains above the government's long-term target and demonstrates that stunting remains a significant public health problem.

Stunting impacts a child's quality of life and increases the risk of morbidity and mortality (Sriyanah, 2023). Therefore, proper and careful prevention and management of stunting are crucial. Several factors influencing the success of stunting management include the mother's level of knowledge about toddler nutrition, her education, household income, family support, the number of family members, and the mother's motivation to care for the stunted child (Anwar, Hasan dan Nasution, 2023; Sriyanah, 2023).

Maternal motivation is a crucial element in stunting prevention efforts. This is because motivation drives mothers to apply good knowledge and attitudes regarding child health and nutrition. A motivated mother will ensure her child receives proper nutrition, complete immunizations, and achieves optimal growth and development according to age standards. Motivated mothers will strive to apply this knowledge and attitudes in their daily lives, despite challenges such as limited resources or environmental barriers.

Mothers' motivation, driven by their love and desire to see their children grow and develop healthily, is key to preventing and managing stunting. Therefore, mothers' role in preventing stunting extends beyond simply providing food, to also serving as educators, protectors, and key drivers of stunting prevention. They are at the forefront of efforts to prevent stunting and improve children's quality of life (Junaidi, Nugroho and Harsono, 2023). The role of mothers in preventing and treating stunting is crucial, given their primary role as primary caregivers. Maternal motivation directly influences the consistency and quality of critical care practices in preventing and treating stunted children. Maternal motivation in caring for stunted children will significantly impact the success of nutritional interventions, early breastfeeding initiation, exclusive breastfeeding, appropriate complementary feeding, meeting nutritional needs, and adherence to health programs such as integrated health posts (Posyandu) and visits to health facilities.

A mother's motivation to provide balanced nutrition to her child is influenced by intrinsic factors including awareness, desire, knowledge, and attitude, as well as extrinsic factors including family and community support, access to information, and socioeconomic conditions, beliefs, and culture (Lisa Lolowang et al., 2021). Furthermore, highly motivated mothers tend to be more consistent in providing care, complying with health care providers' advice, and seeking information needed to improve their child's health. Conversely, mothers with low motivation can hinder their child's recovery process, even when medical intervention and support are available. Given the critical role of maternal motivation, this study was conducted to understand the extent to which it influences the success of stunted child care. By understanding the factors that shape maternal motivation, it is hoped that more targeted intervention strategies can be formulated to accelerate the reduction of stunting rates in Indonesia.

METHOD

This study is a descriptive study with a cross-sectional approach. The sample in this study was 96 mothers who had stunted children with a purposive sampling technique. Data collection used a questionnaire that had been tested for validity and reliability. Univariate analysis used descriptive statistics which aimed to explain or describe the characteristics of each research variable (Nursalam, 2016). The results of the analysis are presented in the form of numbers and percentages.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study on the characteristics of respondents showed that the average age of respondents was 24.6 with the youngest age being 20 years and the oldest age being 38 years. Respondent characteristics based on occupation, the majority were unemployed, namely 81 respondents (84.4%), while for education, the majority had elementary school, namely 50 respondents (52.1%). The results showed that more than half had low motivation, namely 52 respondents (54.2%), while only 10 people (10.4%) had high motivation. In details can be seen in the table below.

Table 1.
Frequency Distribution of Respondents Based on Age

Variabel	Mean	Standar Deviasi	Min	Max	95%	
					Lower	Upper
Age	24.6	4.18	20	38	23.21	24.90

Table 2.
Frequency distribution based on occupation and education of respondents

Respondent Characteristics	f	%
Occupation		
Unemployed	81	84.4
Laborer	1	1.0
Farmer	3	3.1
Private Employe	10	10.4
Civil Servant	1	1.0
Education		
Elementary School	50	52.1
Junior High School	13	13.5
Senior High School	30	31.3
University	3	3.1

Table 3.
Frequency Distribution of Respondents Based on The Mother's motivation in caring for children with stunting (n= 52**)**

Mother's Motivation	f	%
Low	52	54.2
Medium	34	35.4
High	10	10.4

At age 20, individuals focus on establishing their self-identity and exploring their roles in society, which may include parenthood if they already have children. This stage often involves a search for identity, which can affect a mother's ability to handle new responsibilities such as caring for a stunted child. In addition, as a person gets older, their memory, comprehension, mindset and knowledge will also increase, which will affect a person's behavior (Pakpahan etall, 2021; Ajhuri, 2019).

Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986) suggests that individuals' motivation and behavior are influenced by observations, experiences, and support from their social environment. At age 20, family experiences and support can play a significant role in shaping individuals' motivation to care for their children, especially when facing challenges such as stunting. Wang et al. (2023) found that young mothers often face significant challenges in balancing new responsibilities with their search for identity. Emotional and practical support from family can be very helpful in caring for stunted children, who often require special attention and care. Another study by Smith and Lee (2024) showed that 20-year-old mothers who received support from their families, both practical and emotional, were more likely to maintain their motivation in childcare.

The results of this study indicate that the majority of mothers, 81 respondents, are unemployed. A person's occupation will have a distinct influence on their attitudes. Specifically, people's ways of thinking differ due to different occupations (Lestari, 2018). Mothers' domestic work can affect their ability and motivation to care for stunted children. Heavy and time-consuming domestic work can reduce the time and energy available to focus on childcare, including providing nutrition and stimulation, which are essential for child development.

In addition, mothers who are too busy with domestic work may miss the opportunity to attend parenting classes, integrated health posts (Posyandu), or other meetings that can improve knowledge and skills in caring for children, including preventing and managing stunting. If mothers do not receive sufficient

information about stunting and how to prevent it, they may be less motivated to take appropriate preventive and care measures, such as providing exclusive breastfeeding, nutritious food, or taking their children to the integrated health post (posyandu) regularly.

This study found that the majority of the respondent had elementary school, namely 50 respondents (52.1%). The higher a person's education level, the easier it is to receive information, thus increasing their knowledge. Conversely, a lack of education will hinder the development of a person's attitude toward newly introduced values (Lestari, 2018). In theory, elementary school education serves as a foundation for further learning and cognitive development. According to Piaget (1972), the stages of cognitive development that occur during this period significantly influence an individual's ability to understand and process more complex information later in life. Elementary school education also forms the foundation for problem-solving and decision-making skills, although limitations at this level can result in limited knowledge of more in-depth health and nutrition issues (Schunk, 2016). Research by Sihombing et al. (2022) revealed that mothers with less education tend to have less knowledge about healthy eating patterns and the importance of nutrition for child growth, which can exacerbate the risk of stunting. Meanwhile, mothers with higher education tend to have a better understanding of health and nutrition information, and are more motivated to provide the best care for their children.

The results of the study showed that more than half had low motivation, namely 52 respondents (54.2%). Motivation is an internal process that activates, guides, and maintains behavior over time. Motivation can be defined as the actualization of an inner drive that directs a person to perform an action over time (Hariyadi & Darmuki, 2019). Maternal motivation directly influences the consistency and quality of critical care practices for stunting prevention and recovery.

Abraham Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation provides an important framework. Maslow proposed that human motivation is influenced by needs arranged in a hierarchy, ranging from basic physiological needs to self-actualization. In the context of caring for stunted children, mothers' motivation may be influenced by meeting their basic needs, such as security and emotional support, before they can focus on child care. Kumar et al. (2024) reported that low maternal motivation is often associated with a lack of family support and limited resources. This study suggests that when mothers feel inadequately supported emotionally or practically, they may experience decreased motivation in child care, including addressing stunting. Consistent and effective family support can increase maternal motivation and help them focus more on child care efforts.

Maternal motivation is crucial in preventing and addressing stunting in children. Motivated mothers will be more proactive in providing adequate nutrition, ensuring complete immunizations, and regularly monitoring their children's growth and development. Support from family, community, and healthcare professionals also plays a crucial role in increasing maternal motivation. In this study, more than half of respondent had low motivation. This is because most of respondent are unemployed and have a low level of education.

CONSLUSION

The results of the study on the characteristics of respondents showed that the average age of respondents was 24.6 with the youngest age being 20 years and the oldest age being 38 years. Respondent characteristics based on occupation, the majority were unemployed, namely 81 respondents (84.4%), while for education, the majority had elementary school, namely 50 respondents (52.1%). The results showed that more than half had low motivation, namely 52 respondents (54.2%), while only 10 people (10.4%) had high motivation. Therefore, it is very important to conduct continuous health education

related to stunting prevention and management, motivational training, psychosocial support, and strengthening family/community networks continuously.

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