



# Qualitative Study of the Role of Fathers in Stunting Incidence in South Central Timor Regency

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**Abstract:** Stunting is a condition of chronic malnutrition accompanied by disease complications, which has negative impacts, both short and long term. In the short term, children will be at risk and susceptible to infectious diseases, while in the long term, in adulthood they will be at risk of suffering from chronic diseases. Low income affects household nutrition. The incidence of stunting cannot be separated from habits, cultural beliefs, knowledge and perceptions of local communities regarding fulfilling family nutrition. These beliefs have an influence on child care. The aim of this research is to identify the role of fathers in the incidence of stunting in South Central Timor Regency. This type of qualitative research uses focus group discussion (FGD) methods and in-depth interviews. The respondents involved for the qualitative approach were government figures (village heads and sub-district heads), religious leaders, traditional leaders, health services, community health centers and fathers with toddlers totaling 7 people from each village. The results obtained on average are that fathers know the direct causes of stunting, not because of their knowledge but because fathers are less aware of their child's parenting patterns. Parenting patterns regarding monitoring children's meal times, personal hygiene and providing diverse and nutritious food are lacking. On average, a father is busy earning a living, many even work outside the city so their children are entrusted to their grandparents, there is a lack of control in the family so there are many early marriages under the age of 20, the family economy is weak so people have less purchasing power to earn money. nutritious food ingredients. The conclusion from this research is that the role of fathers is one of the causes of stunting in South Central Timor Regency.

**Keywords:** Father's role; Qualitative study; Stunting incident

## Introduction

Stunting is still a priority health problem in Indonesia (Adji et al., 2019; Sufri et al., 2023). Based on the results of the Indonesian Nutritional Status Study (SSGI) in 2021, the prevalence of stunting in Indonesia is 24.4 percent (Ahmadi & Triwinarto, 2019; Suryana & Azis, 2023), while in East Nusa Tenggara Province (NTT) it is 37.8 percent. According to Carlos Zondha (2023) Griayasa et al. (2024), and Pingge et al. (2023), South Central Timor Regency reached 48.3 percent, which

shows the highest stunting prevalence rate in NTT Province. The emergence of presidential regulation of the republic of Indonesia number 72 of 2021 concerning the acceleration of stunting reduction (Diana et al., 2023; Radjulaeni et al., 2024; Sumantri et al., 2023), followed by South Central Timor Regent Regulation No. 37 of 2019, is a step towards convergence in activities related to stunting prevention. The South-Central Timor district health service, in collaboration with the Association of Indonesian Nutritionists (PERSAGI), is carrying out an innovation program, the movement of fathers as counselors (GASELOR) in an effort to prevent stunting,

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which is contained in the Decree of the Head of the South-Central Timor District Health Service No. 81 of 2022. However, this program is not optimal because various kinds of obstacles and barriers to developing this program.

To support the achievement of convergence on stunting reduction policies in the regions, the role of assisting universities to local governments is needed (Andayani et al., 2022; Priyono, 2020; Purnomo et al., 2023). Assistance to higher education institutions in accelerating the reduction of stunting is part of the tri dharma of higher education. Thus, the activities of assisting universities with regional governments in accelerating the reduction of stunting must be encouraged as an implementation of existing innovations in universities within the framework of accelerating the reduction of stunting. One of the outcomes of the university assistance activities for regional governments in accelerating stunting reduction is to produce an innovative convergence model for accelerating stunting reduction through efforts to increase the role of fathers in the stunting reduction acceleration program in South Central Timor Regency (Partadisastra & Octaria, 2023; Prianto et al., 2025; Purnomo et al., 2022; Siswati et al., 2022).

The purpose of developing this model is due to the lack of role of a father or husband in the household. For this reason, it is necessary to increase the complete involvement of fathers in accompanying and motivating their wives during pregnancy, breastfeeding and caring for their children during their growth and development, including providing diverse and nutritious food in their household. Most of his domesticated livestock, such as cows, pigs, and chickens, are sold or served to guests who visit his house rather than consumed by his family. The culture of patrilineality in South Central Timor Regency is that men's position is considered higher in a family. A father plays a very important role, because all decisions in the family must be made by the head of the family, even when a wife wants to prepare food for her family, the best dishes are always served to the head of the family first (Aziza, 2020).

## Method

This research uses a qualitative approach, namely to identify in depth the most dominant risk factors for stunting incidents in South-Central Timor Regency (Sukamto et al., 2021), especially those related to the role of fathers in stunting incidents. The location of this research was carried out in Tobu Village and Noesiu Village, South Central Timor Regency with a research period of January - August 2023.

The research subjects in this study were informants who came from government figures (village heads),

religious leaders, traditional leaders, heads of Health Service, nutrition management staff at community health centers/Village Health Workers and fathers who have 14 toddlers from 2 villages, namely Tobu Village and Noesiu Village.

The technique for determining informants is through coordination and recommendations from the village officials (Izzuddin & Widiyarta, 2024; Syamsuadi et al., 2023). Data collection was carried out using the Focus group discussion (FGD) method and in-depth interviews. To collect data from information sources (informants), researchers are the main instrument, then research requires supporting instruments. The assistance instruments used are in-depth interview guides and questionnaires. Open questions were used for in-depth interviews and closed questions to determine the father's knowledge, attitudes and behavior.

Researchers use recording equipment using cell phones, photo cameras and video cameras to record interview results, to make it easier if there are difficulties in recording interview results. The data processing process after the data has been collected, both primary data and secondary data, then the recorded data is extracted according to information needs. After processing the data according to variable requirements, it is then analyzed and interpreted qualitatively (Tahir et al., 2023).

## Result and Discussion

### *Perceptions of Stunting*

Stunting is a chronic nutritional problem due to lack of nutritional intake which causes long-term disruption of growth and development processes (Millward, 2017; Nurhayati et al., 2024; Pebriandi et al., 2023). The results of an in-depth interview with the Noesiu village, Mr. YB, said "... an effect that is not good for the child's physical and brain development...", while the perception with the Tobu village, Mr. AH, said "... stunting is indeed a national problem that is currently trending in our country, Indonesia. and this is also a national target, President Jokowi's target is to complete, not even complete, but reduce the stunting rate itself because lately humans are getting shorter, more stunted. Well, that can't be separated from the problems that arise through the family. Children who are born are short or stunted because initially it is not a genetic problem but actually there is a problem in eating and drinking from the age of 0 to 3 months. So 1000 HPK is a very serious concern for parents who plan to have children or give birth to children, it must be above 1000 HPK itself..."

Thus, serious efforts are needed in dealing with the nutritional problem of stunting at an early age, even in the first 1000 days of life as a golden period in preventing

stunting growth (Aramico et al., 2020; Hanifah & Syahrizal, 2024; Sarliana & Admasari, 2022; Teguh et al., 2023). To prevent the problem of stunting, holistic and integrated efforts are needed. Information dissemination and advocacy need to be carried out by stakeholders (Hall et al., 2018; Herawati & Sunjaya, 2022; Purnama et al., 2021).

#### *Causes of Stunting*

There are two groups of factors that cause stunting, namely direct causes caused by the intake of nutritious food and repeated infections over a certain period of time, and indirect causes caused by less than optimal parenting patterns, lack of access to health services, hygiene practices or environmental health problems that affect access to clean water and sanitation (Arlinda et al., 2022; Ismawati et al., 2020; Widayati et al., 2021). Based on the results obtained from information from informants from health workers regarding the causes of stunting, they are of the opinion that the stunting that occurs in South Central Timor Stunting Regency is multifactorial, including four factors that often occur, namely eating patterns, parenting patterns, clean water sanitation, and access to health services (Jayanti et al., 2021). Apart from that, anemia in pregnant women, pregnant women with CED, marriage and early pregnancy. Cases like this often occur in pregnant women in South Central Timor Regency. As stated by one of KT's mothers "...Prospective brides and grooms too, because that's the program, right, prospective brides and grooms have to prepare, so not only women, men also don't smoke, don't drink alcohol. And on average here you get pregnant first. Yes, automatically we do the first 1000 days of life, right? The first 1000 days of life start from 0 days, if necessary, from 3 months before marriage we prepare the uterus. Well, this isn't it. Getting pregnant first may not even be approved by the family blah blah blah in the end there is no intake for the baby, there is no food for the fetus, so in the end you get stunting. So we are like a circle, which one is going to end..." Next, YB explained "...the reason is because sometimes mothers who are pregnant early on don't provide complete information to the health workers in the village so that we can help them with their food and drink needs. -other needs resulting in stunting. Sometimes young people who become pregnant out of wedlock hide, afraid of this or that, embarrassed. So it is not monitored from 0 days of life..."

#### *The Role of Fathers in Combating Stunting*

The role of fathers in South Central Timor Regency is still very low, they still think it is the wife's job, this is because the father considers his job as a father to be to find work and earn a living for the family, it is the mother's job to care for and look after the children at

home. Like the information that researchers got from KT's mother, "...The father's role is definitely there, right? Then there is the time to give birth. I already have a husband on standby. So don't let her husband just stand by. But he has to motivate. He must also monitor the child's growth period. For example, when a child is immunized, on average the mother goes. Father sonde. They go by motorbike taxi. Or with grandma. father not accompany.... I even once asked a father, why do you take your child to the *posyandu*? He said he was embarrassed to have a stunted child. He didn't know what stunting meant. This is a teacher. "Why are you embarrassed", apparently because he was too busy working, not paying attention to the child's development. His wife also works. So the child was taken to the *Posyandu*, not these two people: another person, his grandmother. Grandma, who knows? So father must know that in the red book it is below the line/there is already a sign towards yellow, that is already an alarm. Not mom, mom, she's quite tired. Women must wake up, wash clothes, cook and so on. Indeed, I know that the father's job is to earn a living, but I have to know how to see the development of the child. And to be honest, if the children finish eating sonde, mom will definitely scream, hit her, pinch her, and she (the child) won't eat. But if it's Dad, he just glares like this and the child will definitely eat. So the role of the father is very important..." This agrees with research by Rollè et al. (2019) which states that father involvement in child care is very important, because it will influence various aspects of the child's life, such as cognitive, emotional and social. In school-age children, father's involvement can increase the drive for achievement, be active in school activities, and influence academic achievement at school (Grolnick et al., 2009). In the emotional aspect, father involvement has a positive effect on cognitive development, perception of self-competence and less likelihood of experiencing depression. Father's involvement also has a positive effect on the development of children's social competence, specifically the child's ability to initiate social relationships.

The four participants from Noesiu Village and Tobu Village stated that father involvement is very important and fathers must play an active role in guiding and developing children. A father's duties apart from being responsible for various things include parenting. However, sometimes there are factors that influence fathers' involvement in parenting, namely fathers who are too busy working to earn a living and are rarely at home. Apart from that, YB explained that some fathers cannot be involved in parenting because the parents have decided to separate so that the mother alone takes care of the child or the father alone becomes a single parent. One of the villages is one of the model

villages that has successfully implemented a program from the South-Central Timor District Health Service in collaboration with the South-Central Timor District nutrition experts association. An innovation program of the Movement of Fathers as Counselors (GASELOR) in efforts to prevent stunting which is contained in the Decree of the Head of the South-Central Timor District Health Service No. 81 of 2022. A Mr. JA argued that '...What we are monitoring is only in the working area of the Nulle Health Center, that's them has a *Posyandu* called *Posyandu* GASELOR. We tried to do training for the fathers, we trained them to use the LiLA tape to be able to measure pregnant women. He had to know that his mother had CED, what did he do? Then we also train, provide education on how a father should act as a supervisor in taking blood supplement tablets, for teenage girls, for his teenage daughters aged 12 - 18 years and also for his wife who is pregnant. This was carried out by nutrition workers at the Community Health Center. So they hope that the *posyandu* will become a model. There, every month, more and more fathers come. In fact, they always take photos, so the reward is that the fathers have their photos taken. So they were asked to stand together and then there was counseling or even promotions given, namely fathers with their children, holding their children to have their photos taken. There is their motivation for attending, one of which is making photos, this is the Gaselor of Posyandu A, Posyandu B. So they are proud, not ashamed but proud..."

However, the role of fathers in South-Central Timor Regency has not been maximized in handling stunting at all stunting loci because of various obstacles and barriers to developing this program, as one of the opinions of Mr. JA said '...From ourselves, we actually want to maximize it. The first factor is why my father was less involved there. Then also, from the perspective of the perpetrators, the village government and sub-district level are still not optimal in supporting this GASELOR. This is still from our side, in the field of health services. We hope that in the future all sectors will be involved, especially those that have the capacity, power and authority to do so. So one of the things we hope for is an example from the village that there is some kind of policy that is made in village regulations. We hope that the village regulations contain related content, for example every father is obliged to accompany pregnant mothers for pregnancy checks, accompany toddlers and mothers to *posyandu*. We hope that there will be policy and budget support."

#### *Hope for Further Handling of Stunting*

Optimal growth and development must be strengthened through various stimuli or stimuli. One way is through parenting behavior carried out by

parents. Parents here are not only mothers, but fathers too. Ideally, fathers and mothers take complementary roles in domestic and marital life, including acting as complete models for children (Coltrane, 1996; Seltzer, 1991; Yogman et al., 2016). The father's role in directing the child to grow and develop towards maturity needs to be demonstrated through the father's involvement with the child. as one of the opinions of Mr JA '...Hopefully in the future there will also be fathers who become motivators. So later there will be a father who will become a motivator to mobilize fellow fathers in the nearby area. That's what we hope... We have also started doing this in several locations for fathers who happen to be active and quite vocal. We even had a priest in South Amanuban District, Panite. That's pretty amazing. How can this Pastor, apart from his main duties, always visit pregnant women? Then the Pastor will take the pregnant mother and her husband to the *posyandu* and community health center."

## Conclusion

The conclusion from this research is that the role of fathers is one of the causes of stunting in South-Central Timor Regency. The problem of stunting is not only due to insufficient food intake but is influenced by several factors, one of which is the lack of the father's role in the family. Father's involvement is still very lacking because he is busy with work, often sits in a community where people like to drink and smoke. A father should be responsible for accompanying his pregnant wife by taking her to routine pregnancy check-ups at the *Posyandu*, motivating his wife to diligently take blood supplement tablets, and eat nutritious and balanced food. Apart from that, he plays a role in his family's upbringing, such as monitoring the growth and development of his children, personal hygiene, hygiene, sanitation of his home environment, ensuring the availability of clean water and providing nutritious and balanced food for his family, including providing good education and assistance to his children when they grow up do not get married early.

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**Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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