



THE CRITICAL ROLE OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS' ADHERENCE TO TAKING BLOOD SUPPLEMENT TABLETS AS A KEY TO PREVENTING EARLY STUNTING

Israeli*, Ari Nofitasari, Asbath Said, Sartini Risky, Islamiyah, Anisa Purnamasari

Faculty of Health Sciences, Universitas Mandala Waluya, Jl. Jend. AH. Nasution, Kambu, Kendari, Sulawesi Tenggara 93561, Indonesia

*israelimwkdi@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Anemia is a common health problem in adolescent girls that risks causing complications during pregnancy and stunting in children. Blood supplementation tablets are an effective intervention, but the compliance of adolescent girls in consuming them is still low. Objective: This study aimed to analyze adherence to taking blood supplement tablets in adolescent girls. Methods: With a mixed-method design and involving 124 respondents from a total population of 180 adolescent girls, this study used simple random sampling and chi-square statistical analysis to assess the relationship between knowledge variables and the role of parents, as well as in-depth interviews to assess the role of health workers and schools. Results: The results showed that there was a significant association between knowledge ($p < 0.001$) and parental role ($p < 0.001$) with the compliance of adolescent girls in taking blood supplement tablets. Interview findings also revealed that health workers and schools distribute blood supplement tablets every month to support efforts to increase adherence. Conclusion: knowledge, parental support, and the active role of health and school personnel play an important role in improving the adherence of adolescent girls to taking blood supplement tablets. It is recommended that all parties, especially parents and schools, collaborate to improve adolescents' understanding and adherence to taking blood supplement tablets.

Keywords: anemia; adolescent girls; adherence; blood supplement tablets; role of parents; health workers

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescent girls are the next generation of the nation who will one day play an important role as mothers. Adolescence is a transitional period from childhood to adulthood characterized by significant changes both physically and psychologically (Gainau, 2021, Lestari et al., 2023). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), adolescence is defined as the second decade of life in the age range of 10-19 years, which is an important period in which physical, psychological, and social changes occur intensively (Singh et al., 2019). During this period, adolescents are faced with various health challenges that can affect their future development. The primary factor supporting growth and development is dietary intake (Nofitasari, Israeli and Yusnayani, 2021). One of the most common health problems faced is nutrition, where adolescents often experience overnutrition or undernutrition due to unbalanced nutritional intake. This condition can lead to serious health problems such as anemia, obesity, chronic energy deficiency (CED), as well as deviant eating behaviors such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia (Lestari et al., 2023).

Anemia is one of the most common nutritional problems found in adolescent girls. They have a ten-fold higher risk compared to young men due to monthly menstruation, which causes the loss of blood and iron from the body. This condition has the potential to continue into pregnancy, which not only adversely affects fetal growth and development but also increases

the risk of complications during pregnancy and childbirth. If not addressed immediately, this can result in an increase in maternal morbidity and mortality, low birth weight babies, premature birth, and various health problems in babies who are born (Meikawati et al., 2022). The high risk of anemia in adolescents is also caused by nutrient needs that are not matched by adequate food intake. Iron and folic acid deficiencies are common among adolescent girls, both those who are still growing and those who have entered pregnancy. A less diverse diet and low intake of essential nutrients such as iron, folate, and vitamin B12 contribute to the high prevalence of anemia in this age group. This shows that anemia in adolescent girls is not only an individual problem but also reflects a public health problem that needs more serious attention (Annan et al., 2021).

As a preventive measure, the Indonesian Ministry of Health has included an anemia prevention program for adolescent girls in its Strategic Plan. By 2022, the coverage of blood supplement tablets among adolescent girls will reach 53.3% and is expected to increase to 80% by 2023. This program aims to enable adolescent girls to grow up healthy and become future mothers who can give birth to a healthy generation. The blood supplement tablets provided contain a minimum of 60 mg of iron and 0.4 mg of folic acid, which are consumed once a week on a certain day. During menstruation, adolescent girls are encouraged to take these tablets for ten consecutive days (Sab'ngatun and Riawati, 2021). Regular administration of blood supplement tablets, especially during menstruation, is more effective in preventing anemia, meeting increased iron requirements, and increasing hemoglobin levels compared to placebo or no-treatment interventions. This periodic administration method is also preferred as it has the potential to cause fewer side effects compared to continuous daily consumption (McLoughlin, 2020).

However, although various programs have been implemented, there are still challenges in their implementation. According to the 2018 Riskesdas, the coverage of blood supplementation tablets among adolescent girls was 76.2%. Of this, 80.9% of tablets were distributed through schools, but only 1.4% of adolescents consumed the recommended number of tablets (≥ 52 tablets per year). In contrast, 98.6% of adolescents consumed less than 52 tablets per year, indicating low awareness and adherence of adolescent girls to the importance of anemia prevention (Amir and Djokosujono, 2019). In Southeast Sulawesi, the coverage of blood supplement tablets among adolescent girls also fluctuates. In 2017, the coverage reached 78.81%, but in 2018, it decreased to 75.35% (Southeast Sulawesi Provincial Health Office, 2019). In Kendari City alone, in 2019, adolescent girls who received blood supplement tablets reached 15,597 out of a total target of 15,772 (Southeast Sulawesi Provincial Health Office, 2019), indicating that the distribution of blood supplement tablets has covered almost all of the target population.

Based on data at SMKN 4 Kendari, the total number of students is 1138 students. Class X has 193 students and 180 female students, class XI has 179 students and 202 female students, and class XII has 191 students and 193 female students. The distribution of blood supplement tablets is done every month to all students. Each student receives four blood supplement tablets per month when not menstruating and is distributed ten tablets when menstruating. Blood supplement tablets are consumed one tablet per week when not menstruating, and when menstruating, one tablet per day for ten consecutive days.

METHOD

This study used a mixed method design with a population of 180 respondents consisting of class X students of SMKN 4 Kendari. The main demographic characteristics of the participants focused on the age of adolescence as well as the factors that influence the adherence of adolescent girls to taking blood supplement tablets. The main variables observed

in this study were knowledge and parental role. In addition, an in-depth interview was conducted to determine the role of health workers and school officials, especially Counseling teachers, who are responsible for distributing blood supplement tablets in schools. This was considered a specific characteristic that could affect the compliance of adolescent girls in consuming these supplements. Sampling in this study was conducted using a simple random sampling technique, which ensures that each member of the population has an equal chance of being selected. The study was conducted at SMKN 4 Kendari, involving a total of 124 participating respondents. The selection of participants was based on pre-defined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the relevance and quality of the data collected and nilai significance 0.05.

RESULT

Table 1
Distribution of Respondents by Age (n=124)

Age (Years)	f	%
14	2	1,6
15	61	49.2
16	55	44,4
17	6	4,8
Total	124	100,0

Table 1 shows that the age of adolescent girls is mostly 15 years old, with as many as 61 (49.2%) respondents and a small proportion of 14 years old as many as 2 (1.6%) respondents.

Table 2
Distribution of Respondents Based on Variables (n=124)

Variabels	Teenage Girls	
	f	%
Compliance with blood supplement tablet consumption		
Obedient	33	26,6
Not obey	91	73,4
Knowledge		
Good	49	39,5
Not enough	75	60,5
The Role of Parents		
Good	26	21
Not enough	98	79
Total	124	100

Based on table 2 shows that 124 teenage girls whose compliance with the consumption of blood supplement tablets in the obedient category were 33 (26.6%) and in the non-compliant category were 91 (73.4%). For knowledge in the good category, as many as 49 (39.5%) and in the poor category as many as 75 (60.5%) and who got family support in the good category as many as 26 (21.0%) and in the poor category as many as 98 (79.0%).

Table 3
Distribution of Respondents Based on Variables

Variabels	Compliance with blood supplement tablet consumption		p-value
	Obedient	Not obey	
Knowledge			
Good	23 (69,7)	26 (28,6)	0,000
Not enough	10 (30,3)	65 (71,4)	
The Role of Parents			
Good	14 (42,4)	12 (13,2)	0,001
Not enough	19 (57,6)	79 (86,8)	

Based on Table 3, the results of the Chi-Square test for the relationship between knowledge and the role of parents with adherence to the consumption of blood tablets shows that the P-

value is 0.000 and the P -value is $0.001 < \alpha 0.05$, it can be concluded that there is a relationship between knowledge and adherence to the consumption of blood tablets.

Results of interviews with health workers and school officials (teachers)

The following is a summary of interview results from health workers and school teachers related to the distribution process of blood supplement tablets and health education for adolescent girls:

Interview Results with Health Workers

1. *Distribution of Blood Addition Tablets:* Health workers revealed that blood supplement tablets are distributed every month in collaboration with schools. Health workers routinely come to schools at scheduled times, usually in conjunction with other health activities. Health workers, in this case, the puskesmas, try to ensure that every student receives the tablets and provide a brief explanation of the importance of regular consumption.
2. *Counseling and Education:* Before the distribution of the tablets, our health team provided a brief education on anemia, its causes, its effects, and the importance of taking blood supplement tablets regularly. This education includes the symptoms of anemia and its adverse effects, especially for young women who will later enter childbearing age. We also emphasize that the consumption of tablets is not only for individual health but also for future health especially as a woman prepares for pregnancy and childbirth.
3. *Challenges Faced:* Health workers revealed that one of our challenges in improving compliance is the lack of awareness of the importance of taking blood supplement tablets. Some of the adolescent girls were hesitant or disliked taking the tablets, especially due to mild side effects such as nausea or changes in bowel movements. To address this, we try to convince students of the long-term benefits of blood supplement tablets and ways to reduce side effects, such as taking the tablets after meals.

Interview Results with School Teachers

1. *Teacher's Role in Distribution and Supervision:* Teachers act as liaison between health workers and students. We, as teachers assist in the distribution process by recording students who have received tablets and monitoring their consumption. Teachers also provide additional supervision to students who lack discipline in taking the tablets, such as giving reminders for students to take the tablets at school.
2. *Parent Support:* Teachers try to involve parents in the program by providing information on the benefits of blood supplement tablets through parent meetings or written messages. This is done to increase support from home, with the hope that parents can monitor and remember tablet consumption outside of school.
3. *Teachers' Barriers:* Some teachers reported that they faced challenges in motivating students to take tablets regularly. In addition, some students admitted to feeling awkward or embarrassed when they had to take tablets in front of their friends. To overcome this, teachers try to create a comfortable atmosphere and emphasize the importance of this habit as part of the school health program.

DISCUSSION

The analysis showed that out of 124 respondents, 49 respondents (39.5%) had good knowledge. Of this group, 23 people (69.7%) were recorded as compliant in taking blood supplement tablets, while 26 other respondents (28.6%) were not compliant. On the other hand, of the 75 respondents (60.5%) who had poor knowledge, only ten respondents (30.3%) were compliant, while the majority, 65 respondents (86.7%), were non-compliant. Factors influencing non-adherence in this group included forgetfulness, stopping consumption when feeling well, side effects, fishy taste and odor from the tablets, and lack of discipline in the consumption schedule. In addition, non-adherence can be influenced by low attachment to iron tablets, such as low motivation, lack of understanding of the benefits of tablets, and low

perception of the risk of anemia (Silitonga et al., 2023). The high level of compliance in the group of respondents with good knowledge was due to a deep understanding of the benefits of blood supplement tablets in preventing anemia. Good knowledge makes respondents more aware of the importance of maintaining iron balance, which encourages them to be more motivated to take the tablets regularly. Effective education from health workers also played a role in increasing their awareness. This is supported by research conducted (Pamangin, 2023), which showed that respondents with better knowledge tended to be more compliant in taking blood supplement tablets.

However, in the group that had less knowledge, only a few showed compliance in consuming blood supplement tablets. This low level of compliance is in line with research (Kurniawan, 2018), which found that most adolescent girls showed low compliance in taking blood supplement tablets, which amounted to 84.5%. Similar results were also found in a study conducted by (Runiari and Hartati, 2020), which reported that the majority of respondents were in the low compliance category (58.4%), and none of the respondents had high compliance. This condition indicates that a lack of knowledge can hinder the understanding of the importance of blood supplement tablets, which in turn has a negative impact on their intention to consume them. Research (Suharmanto, Mutmainnah and Zuraida, 2023) also revealed that although some respondents had good knowledge, compliance remained low because it was influenced by the intensity and lack of perception of the importance of these healthy behaviors, as well as the perceived side effects. Therefore, education and counseling programs need to be developed to overcome the barriers that exist in the practice of taking blood supplement tablets. Lack of motivation, disbelief in the benefits of tablets, as well as low support from the surrounding environment are also major contributing factors to non-compliance. This study confirms the importance of improving adolescent girls' knowledge of the importance of regular consumption of blood supplement tablets to prevent anemia and ensure optimal health. Education and counseling programs need to be developed to overcome the barriers that exist in the practice of taking blood supplement tablets.

Based on the results of the Chi-Square test in this study, there was a significant relationship between knowledge and compliance with blood supplement tablet consumption ($p=0.000$). This result is reinforced by research conducted (Wahyuningsih and Uswatun, 2019) at SMAN 1 Karang Anom, which also found a significant relationship between knowledge about anemia and compliance with blood supplement tablets consumption ($p=0.000$). Another study at SMAN 6 Denpasar (Runiari and Hartati, 2020) used the Kendall Tau statistical test, which resulted in a p -value of 0.03 (<0.05), indicating a correlation between knowledge and compliance with blood supplement tablet consumption in adolescent girls. The results of the analysis showed that out of 124 respondents, 26 respondents (21.0%) had a good parental role, with 14 of them (42.4%) recorded as compliant in taking blood supplement tablets, while 12 respondents (13.2%) were not compliant. In contrast, of the 98 respondents (79.0%) who had a poor parental role, only 19 (57.6%) were compliant, while the majority, 79 respondents (86.8%), were not compliant. These results indicate that the role of parents, both emotionally and physically, plays an important role in shaping the compliance behavior of adolescent girls in taking blood supplement tablets (Samputri and Herdiani, 2022).

The good role of parents in improving adherence of adolescent girls is due to their adequate understanding of the importance of blood supplement tablets to prevent anemia and maintain children's health. Parents who have good knowledge about nutrition tend to be more proactive in providing support and reminding their children to take tablets regularly. In addition, good communication between parents and children is the main key to increasing adolescents' awareness about the importance of taking blood supplement tablets. Another study (Amir and Djokosujono, 2019) supports these findings, where good parental knowledge about nutrition

and the positive effects of blood supplement tablets can encourage adolescent girls to comply with the consumption of these tablets. The role of parents in supporting children can be in the form of emotional encouragement such as giving praise, supervision in tablet consumption, and direct assistance when taking blood supplement tablets (Rahayuningtyas, Indraswari and Musthofa, 2021). Therefore, a good parental role includes supervision, motivation, and intensive communication so that children understand the benefits of tablet consumption.

In contrast, the group of respondents with a poor parental role had a low level of adherence. In this group, only 19 respondents (57.6%) were recorded as compliant, while the majority, 79 respondents (86.8%), were not compliant. Research (Harlisa et al., 2023) revealed that the low role of parents negatively affected adolescents' compliance in taking blood supplement tablets, with the percentage of non-compliance reaching 69.8%. Some of the factors underlying the low role of parents include lack of knowledge about blood supplement tablets, lack of free time to monitor children's consumption, and lack of effective communication between parents and children. Children who do not receive adequate attention from parents are less likely to be motivated to take the tablets, especially when facing side effects such as nausea or discomfort. Based on the results of the chi-square test in this study show that there is a significant relationship between the role of parents and compliance with the consumption of blood supplement tablets with a value of $p = 0.001$. Another study (Rahayuningtyas, Indraswari and Musthofa, 2021) also found a similar relationship, which shows that the role of parents directly affects the compliance of adolescent girls in taking blood supplement tablets. Research (Prayudhistya et al., 2023) at SMAIT Ukhuwah Banjarmasin supports these findings, where adolescent girls who get an active role from their parents are 3.09375 times more likely to adhere to taking blood supplement tablets than those who do not get this role. The role of parents can be in the form of reminding the tablet consumption schedule, providing foods that support iron absorption, and providing continuous motivation. The results of this study emphasize the importance of the active involvement of parents in shaping the consumption habits of blood supplement tablets in adolescent girls. Not only providing motivation, parents also need to ensure that their children understand the importance of the tablets and accompany them when consuming them. Therefore, there is a need for more intensive educational programs for parents to strengthen their role in supporting their children's health.

Health worker and teacher interviews

Collaboration between health workers and school teachers in blood supplementation tablet distribution and health education plays an important role in improving adolescent girls' adherence to blood supplementation tablet consumption. Health workers are responsible for direct counseling and routine distribution, while teachers assist in the supervision and reinforcement of this habit in the school environment. The main challenges encountered were low student awareness and some mild side effects of the tablets, which were overcome by continuous education and supervision. Health workers play a role in providing direct education to adolescent girls about the risks of anemia, the importance of taking blood supplement tablets, and its impact on reproductive health and long-term development and productivity (Helmyati et al., 2023). This education not only improves students' understanding of anemia but also helps build awareness of the importance of maintaining optimal hemoglobin levels. Tablet distribution is done routinely, often accompanied by brief counseling so that students understand the benefits of the tablets and how to consume them correctly. Education by health workers serves as an initial intervention to instill basic knowledge, provide factual information, and build positive attitudes toward taking blood supplement tablets. In this way, health workers also overcome barriers related to students' lack of knowledge and belief in the benefits of blood supplement tablets (Kemenkes RI, 2020).

School teachers play a role in supporting health workers by supervising and facilitating the consumption of tablets in schools. Teachers also play an active role in reminding students to take tablets according to the given schedule, as well as helping to ensure that they feel comfortable doing so in the school environment. With this approach, teachers are not only supporters but also reliable role models to help students adopt healthy habits. This is in line with previous research that supervision by teachers is very important apart from educational interventions (Ahmed et al., 2022). Through direct engagement with students on a day-to-day basis, teachers are strategically positioned to provide the emotional and social support that is essential in building long-term compliance. Teachers can also identify students who need more attention or who are likely to be reluctant to take the tablets, thus providing opportunities for further interventions, such as additional guidance or motivation.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that collaboration between health workers, school teachers, and support from families plays a significant role in increasing adolescent girls' compliance with consuming blood supplement tablets. This compliance is important to prevent anemia, which is a common health problem among adolescent girls and can have a negative impact on the reproductive health of adolescent girls in the future. Factors that are strongly correlated with compliance are the level of knowledge about anemia and the benefits of blood supplement tablets, the active role of parents in supporting tablet consumption, as well as the role of health workers and teachers who routinely provide education and supervise the distribution of blood supplement tablets in schools. The analysis shows that students with good knowledge and support from parents and schools are more compliant in taking blood supplement tablets. Based on the limitations of this research, it shows that there is a need to conduct further research so that a design that allows wider generalization can be suggested, such as using longitudinal methods or expanding the study area and population. In addition, using more objective data collection methods, such as observation or medical records of tablet consumption, and taking into account additional factors that influence compliance would also improve the quality and validity of research results.

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