

UNDERSTANDING AND NEEDS OF ADOLESCENTS IN STUNTING PREVENTION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN GUNINGKIDUL REGENCY, INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

Stunting is the result of an interaction between lack of nutritional intake and increased nutritional needs, which has an impact on physical growth and cognitive development, as well as increasing the risk of chronic diseases. In Indonesia, the prevalence of stunting in 2023 will reach 20.8%, still far from the target of 14% in 2024. Adolescence is an important phase to build awareness of nutritional status, because adolescents who understand nutrition can prepare themselves for a healthy pregnancy and reduce the risk of stunting in the next generation. Objective: this study aims to explore the understanding and needs of adolescents related to stunting prevention. This study uses a phenomenological approach to explore adolescents' understanding of stunting prevention programs in Gunungkidul Regency, Yogyakarta. The subjects of the study were 12 adolescent girls aged 12-15 years, selected by purposive sampling based on their experiences. Data collection methods include in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). The validity of the data was obtained through triangulation and checking with informants. The results of FGD and interviews with adolescents identified three categories of needs: knowledge, behavior, and health conditions of adolescents. Limited access to nutritional information and unhealthy lifestyles increase the risk of stunting. The importance of balanced knowledge and clean living behaviors to support adolescent health is emphasized, especially in preventing future health problems. The social and cultural environment plays an important role in shaping adolescent behavior. The provision of easily accessible nutritional information, as well as support from families and communities, is urgently needed to support the role of adolescents in preventing stunting and ensuring their health and that of future generations.

Keywords: adolescent needs; understanding; stunting prevention

INTRODUCTION

Stunting is the result of the interaction of various factors, namely insufficient nutritional intake and/or increased nutritional needs. Stunting is a cycle of cause and effect from preconception to adulthood or referred to as stunting syndrome (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, 2022). Stunting not only has an impact on suboptimal height, but is also related to cognitive development, productivity, and the risk of chronic diseases later in life (Alam et al., 2020; Taslim et al., 2023). For this reason, stunting prevention efforts can be carried out by strengthening interventions to improve maternal nutrition and health, starting from adolescent girls (WHO, 2018). In Indonesia, stunting is still a major issue in the field of public health, with a high prevalence in children. In 2023, although it has shown a decrease from previous years, the prevalence of stunting is still at 20.8%, far from the RPJMN target of 14% in 2024. In Yogyakarta, the prevalence of stunting in 2023 is still at 18% with the highest district being Gunungkidul at 22.2% (Ministry of Health, 2023).

Adolescence is a transition period from childhood to adulthood, namely significant growth and development. The world's youth population is currently the largest in history, with the number of adolescents in the world reaching 1.2 billion people aged 10 to 18 years (WHO, 2018). Adolescents play an important role in stunting prevention, especially as prospective parents who will later form the next generation. Research shows that adolescents who understand the importance of nutritional status from an early age can prepare themselves for a healthy pregnancy and support their child's growth and development in the future, thereby reducing the risk of stunting between generations (Sumual & G.J. Sopotan, 2023; SPRING & Save the Children, 2018; Renyoet et al., 2023). Adolescents' understanding of stunting is very important because they are in a phase that determines the quality of their own health, as well as affecting the health condition of their children in the future. Lack of nutrition at this time can cause disturbances and obstacles in adolescent growth (Sutadarma, 2022) Adolescents' lack of understanding of stunting risk factors such as early marriage, teenage pregnancy, unbalanced nutrition, and clean and healthy living behaviors (PHBS) can worsen the prevalence of stunting.

There are still many adolescents who do not pay attention to their nutritional needs and run a diet without paying attention to nutritional intake will cause anemia which if not treated will cause chronic lack of energy (KEK) thereby increasing the risk of giving birth to stunted children. Understanding and needs of adolescents in preventing stunting are important issues because adolescence is a critical period in the human life cycle that affects their future health status The Health Belief Model (HBM) and Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) underline the importance of increasing adolescents' knowledge, attitudes, and self-efficacy regarding health. Adolescents who understand the risks of stunting are more likely to take preventive measures, such as adopting clean and healthy living behaviors (PHBS) and improving their diet. In this context, this study aims to explore the understanding and needs of adolescents related to stunting prevention. With a qualitative approach, this study will explore their views, knowledge, and needs for relevant information and support in shaping effective stunting prevention behaviors. This research is expected to provide new insights for the development of health education strategies for adolescents and contribute to stunting prevention efforts in Indonesia.

METHOD

This study uses a phenomenological approach. This approach was chosen to explore the views, understanding, and needs of adolescents related to stunting prevention. The location of the study is in Gunungkidul Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta, which is known for its relatively high level of stunting vulnerability. Participants in this study are 12 adolescent girls aged 12-15 years. The selection criteria for Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their ability to provide rich and relevant insights into adolescent intervention programs in stunting prevention. The data collection technique in this study was carried out by in-depth interview techniques and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). FGD activities for young girls were carried out for 1 hour in the hall of State Junior High School Karangmojo regional took place, and in-depth interview activities were carried out separately by Counseling Guidance teachers for 1 hour for each participant. In the data collection process, the researcher acted as the main instrument and was assisted by 3 research assistants. FGD and in-depth interviews were conducted using guidelines compiled based on literature reviews related to stunting prevention programs in adolescents. Other instruments used by researchers in data collection are recorders, cameras, and field notes.

The validity of the data in this study was carried out using a combination of in-depth interviews, FGDs, checking informants related to the main findings of the study and peer debriefing. The data analysis procedure carried out includes data transcript of FGD results and in-depth interviews, coding and theme preparation using NVivo software. In this study, data saturation was achieved after conducting in-depth interviews with a number of informants, namely adolescent girls. Interviews are conducted repeatedly until no new information or themes relevant to the research are found. At this point, the data obtained has provided a complete and comprehensive understanding of adolescents' experiences in stunting prevention programs that are already running.

This study has received informed consent from adolescents and parents as guardians explaining the purpose, procedures, and rights of participants to withdraw at any time during the study. The confidentiality of participants is maintained by disguising their identities in all research reports and publications. In addition, this research has received permission from the research ethics committee with number 1.538/VI/HREC/2024.

In this study, data collection using the FGD method and interviews were conducted on young women. In the focus group discussion was conducted on 10 young women Interviews and focus group discussions on adolescents were conducted in the hall of SMP regional karangmojo. Interviews and FGDs were conducted by researchers assisted by research assistants.

Table 1.
 Characteristics of Informants in FGD Activities

It	Participants	Age	Education	Work
1	Pna	14th	JUNIOR	Student
2	K	14th	JUNIOR	Student
3	D	14th	JUNIOR	Student
4	Ea	14th	JUNIOR	Student
5	Ca	13th	JUNIOR	Student
6	Vr	13th	JUNIOR	Student
7	Ta	14th	JUNIOR	Student
8	Rds	13th	JUNIOR	Student
9	Mrp	14th	JUNIOR	Student
10	Js	14th	JUNIOR	Student

There were 10 participants in the FGD activity. The age of the participants varied from 13 years to 14 years. Students have an age range between 13 to 14 years old and students are at the junior high school level.

Table 2.
 Characteristics of Participants in IDI Activities

It	Participants	Age	Education	Work
1	Eac	14th	JUNIOR	Junior High School Student
2	Vra	14th	JUNIOR	Junior High School Student

There were 2 junior high school student participants. The age of junior high school students is 14 years old. Participants are currently still at the junior high school education level. Based on the results of FGD activities and in-depth interviews conducted on adolescents, 3 categories related to the needs of adolescents were obtained, namely adolescent knowledge, adolescent behavior and the current condition of adolescents.

Youth Needs

The results of the study show that adolescents today face various challenges that have an impact on their health and well-being, including the risk of stunting. One of the main factors is limited access to information about nutrition and health. This lack of knowledge has an impact on unhealthy behavior and diet among adolescents, which in turn can increase the risk of stunting. Additionally, adolescents are often influenced by their social and cultural environment, which shapes their eating habits and daily lifestyle. Adolescent knowledge about the importance of balanced nutrition and a healthy lifestyle turns out to be very crucial in stunting prevention efforts. However, to achieve meaningful change, an approach that considers the influence of the environment and culture in their daily lives is needed, so that the understanding of proper nutrition can be more easily applied to their living habits

Adolescent condition

Research shows that reducing stunting rates requires attention not only to childhood, but also to the condition of adolescents, because this phase is a critical period in development that greatly affects health in the future. Based on the results of Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and in-depth interviews, several aspects of adolescent conditions that need to be considered include mental health, nutritional status, and the risk of promiscuity that can lead to teenage pregnancy and early marriage. These factors not only have a direct impact on adolescent health, but also have the potential to lead to reproductive disorders and other complications later in life. A better understanding of the importance of mental health, adequate nutrition, and positive environmental support is crucial in forming a healthier generation that is ready to face the risk of stunting effectively.

"Malnutrition" (K, 14^{years}, teenage FGD)

"Early marriage" (Vr, 13^{years}, teenage FGD)

"Promiscuity" (D, 14^{years}, teenage FGD)

Youth knowledge

The results of the study revealed that adolescents' knowledge about stunting prevention programs is still low, although this understanding is very important in shaping healthy behaviors that will have an impact on future generations. According to the informant, many adolescents do not have an adequate understanding of the nutritional needs of adolescents and the importance of balanced nutrition. They also have minimal knowledge about reproductive health, even though this knowledge is crucial to prevent stunting in the future.

In addition, the informant noted that adolescents' awareness of clean and healthy living practices, such as washing hands, maintaining sanitation, exercising, and avoiding bad habits, is also still low. Teenagers tend to only wash their hands if they feel dirty, not as a routine habit to prevent disease. Regarding teenage pregnancy, the informant revealed that factors such as curiosity and the notion that getting married is something fun encourage teens to engage in early marriage. A deep understanding of health and reproduction, as well as education about healthy lifestyles, seem indispensable to prevent stunting and improve the health of future generations.

"Because of promiscuity" (J, 14^{years}, teenage FGD)

"Promiscuity. Well, yes, promiscuity continues to appear lust".

"Curious" (J, 14^{years}, teenage FGD)

"About life, it means that you don't know marriage yet".

"I just know how good it is" (K, 14^{years}, teenage FGD).

Teenage behavior

Adolescent behavior plays an important role in stunting prevention, as their health-related habits and choices can affect their own well-being and that of future generations. One of the behaviors that has a significant effect is diet, which determines their nutritional intake. Based on the results of Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and in-depth interviews, it was revealed that most adolescents have not implemented healthy living behaviors, such as eating breakfast every morning, for a variety of different reasons. The habit of washing hands is also only done if they feel their hands are dirty, not as a routine preventive measure. Regarding diet, adolescents generally prefer to consume foods that they like, without considering the fulfillment of balanced nutritional needs that are essential for their growth. The informant also mentioned that the motivation of adolescents to habituate healthy behaviors often comes from external impulses, such as the desire to attract the attention of a partner or girlfriend. These results demonstrate the importance of effective health education, including an emphasis on balanced diets and healthy habits, so that adolescents are motivated to maintain health not only for social reasons, but for their well-being and that of future generations.

"If breakfast is rare" (T, 14^{years}, teenage FGD).

"Because I don't like breakfast, it's the same time" (Ea, 14^{years}, teenage FGD)

DISCUSSION

Adolescents today face significant challenges related to health and well-being. Limited access to nutrition and health information, coupled with unhealthy habits, are the main risk factors that contribute to the possibility of stunting later in life (Asebe et al., 2024; Danaei et al., 2016). Understanding the importance of balanced nutrition and a healthy lifestyle is crucial, as adolescence is a period where habits and understandings about health begin to form and can have long-term impacts (Moore Heslin & McNulty, 2023). In addition, the social and cultural environment often has a major influence on their eating habits and lifestyle. Peer roles, social trends, and cultural norms can shape adolescent behavior patterns, including food preferences and physical activity (Islam et al., 2019; Stock et al., 2015). In an effort to reduce stunting, special attention must be paid to adolescence, as this is a critical phase in individual development that affects future health (SPRING & Save the Children, 2018). There are several factors that need special attention in the current condition of adolescents, such as mental health, nutrition, the risk of teenage pregnancy, early marriage, and the risk of reproductive disorders in the future. Adolescents show concern about malnutrition as well as the risk of early marriage and promiscuity that can lead to teenage pregnancy.

Adolescent knowledge about stunting prevention and reproductive health programs is also very important, especially because this understanding will affect their lifestyle and influence the next generation (Marlinawati et al., 2023). From the interviews, it was revealed that their knowledge of balanced nutrition and reproductive health was still low. For example, some teens do not understand the importance of hygiene and healthy living practices, such as proper hand washing

and the importance of physical activity. Adolescents are also less likely to be aware of the long-term effects of unhealthy behaviors, including health risks related to promiscuity that can lead to early marriage or unwanted pregnancy. Adolescent behavior plays an important role in preventing stunting (Marlinawati et al., 2023). Daily behaviors, such as eating habits, can significantly affect their nutritional status. From the results of the FGD, it was found that many teenagers do not get used to eating breakfast, one of the reasons is because they "don't like breakfast", or only wash their hands when they feel their hands are dirty. In terms of diet, adolescents tend to choose foods they like without paying attention to nutritional balance, which results in their nutritional intake not being enough to meet the required daily nutritional needs (Daly et al., 2022). On the other hand, some teens are motivated to adopt healthy habits because they want to "have a boyfriend," which suggests that encouragement from the social environment also has a big influence (Huang et al., 2023). Overall, to support the role of adolescents in preventing stunting, there needs to be a comprehensive effort involving health education, the provision of easily accessible nutrition information, and support from families and communities (Fajar et al., 2023); (Setiawan et al., 2023). This aims to make adolescents more aware and skilled in carrying out healthy living behaviors, in order to support their own health and that of future generations.

CONCLUSION

Adolescents face a variety of significant challenges related to health and well-being, which can have an impact on the risk of stunting in the future. Limited access to nutrition and health information, as well as unhealthy habits, are key factors to consider. The social and cultural environment plays an important role in shaping adolescent behavior. Adolescent knowledge about stunting prevention and reproductive health programs is a vital aspect, because this understanding will have an impact on their lifestyle and the next generation. The results of the study show that there is still a lack of adolescent knowledge about healthy living practices and the importance of hygiene. Therefore, comprehensive efforts that include health education, the provision of easily accessible nutrition information, and support from families and communities are urgently needed to support the role of adolescents in preventing stunting and ensuring their health and that of future generations.

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