



**FATHER'S INVOLVEMENT IN FEEDING AND STIMULATING CHILDREN'S GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT WITH THE INCIDENCE OF STUNTING**

**Valenty Rafaustine Rahma\*, Citra Windani Mambang Sari, Sri Hendrawati**

Faculty of Nursing, Universitas Padjadjaran, Jl. Raya Bandung Sumedang KM.21, Hegarmanah, Jatinangor, Sumedang, West Java 45363, Indonesia

\*[valenty20001@mail.unpad.ac.id](mailto:valenty20001@mail.unpad.ac.id)

**ABSTRACT**

Stunting is still the biggest nutritional problem from national to international scope. Indonesia is still closely related to patriarchal culture, although the parenting process requires the active involvement of fathers and mothers in caring for stunted children. The purpose of this study was. Objective to analyze the relationship between father's involvement in feeding and stimulation of child growth and growth and development with the incidence of stunting. This study used a cross-sectional correlational quantitative method with purposive sampling. The sample size was 79 people. Data were collected using the ECLS-B father self-administered questionnaire, which was adapted and modified with the results of the validity test declared valid because it was more than r table ( $r = 0.444$ ) and the results of the reliability test declared reliable with Cronbach Alpha of 0.852 and 0.741. Data analysis was performed using the Chi-Square test. The results showed no association between father's involvement in child feeding and stimulation of child growth and development with the incidence of stunting ( $p$  value=0.888 OR= 0,685; RR=1,128 and  $p$  value=0,435; OR=1,071; RR=1,048). This shows that there are other, more dominant factors that influence the incidence of stunting. These factors include inadequate dietary intake, economic constraints, and child feeding errors. Further interventions are needed to increase fathers' involvement in feeding and growth stimulation of stunted children, although there is no direct relationship.

Keywords: father involvement; feeding; growth stimulation; stunting

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**INTRODUCTION**

Stunting is still the biggest nutrition problem from national to international level. The Indonesian Nutrition Status Survey (SSGI) in 2022 reported that the prevalence of stunting among children under five in Indonesia was still at 21.6%, which was dominated by children aged 2-5 years (Kementerian Kesehatan RI, 2023). Sumedang Regency itself is the regency with the highest prevalence of stunting in West Java at 27.6% in 2022 (Kementerian Kesehatan RI, 2022). In 2023, the number of young children suffering from stunting in the working area of Jatinangor Health Center increased from 11.54% in February to 13.11% in August, or as many as 498 children under five suffering from stunting (Puskesmas Jatinangor, 2023).

One of the factors causing stunting that plays an important contribution to the family sphere is gender roles. Men play a very important role because they act as the head of the family who makes decisions for the family (Kitamura et al., 2022). Indonesia itself is still very much a patriarchal culture. The community believes that fathers are only responsible for earning a

living, while mothers are responsible for taking care of the children and all household needs (Idhayanti et al., 2019). Lamb and Tamis-Lemonda's theory in 1985 revised by Pleck in 2010, suggests that fathers' roles are not limited to earning a living, but are also involved in child care (Lamb & Tamis-Lemonda, 1985; Pleck, 2010). Father involvement includes positive engagement activities (playing, reading, and talking), warmth and responsiveness (hugging, supporting, and providing positive affirmations), control (setting rules for children's activities, food, whereabouts, and homework), indirect care (providing economic and social support), and process responsibility (responsible for food, health, and household needs) (Lamb & Tamis-Lemonda, 1985; Pleck, 2010). When grouped based on examples of their activities, the role of fathers in child care describes the provision of stimulation for children's growth and development and the satisfaction of children's needs, especially in the area of nutrition.

Stunted children need good nutrition, stimulation, and parenting to support optimal growth (Safitri et al., 2021). Research conducted on 61 mothers in the working area of Puskesmas Gatak Sukoharjo found that there was a relationship between feeding patterns that did not meet children's needs and the incidence of stunting (Putri & Irdawati, 2023). Meanwhile, research conducted on 112 mothers in Seberang Ulu 1 district explained that there was no relationship between the high involvement of fathers in child feeding and the incidence of stunting (Puteri, 2022). Parents who improve the quality and quantity of stimulation activities can improve the developmental delay of children aged 3 years (Leighton et al., 2023). Research on 100 parents in Bogor City states that parents in stimulating child growth and development are in the low category (Aritonang et al., 2020). In research on 236 children in Rwanda stated that father's involvement in stimulating growth and development provides 10.9 times better opportunities for mothers to stimulate growth and development to their children (Sulistiyowati, 2019).

Based on the observations and interviews from the field study, it was found that the phenomenon of patriarchal culture and inappropriate feeding of children is still common. In addition, it was also found that there was very little interaction with children because fathers were busy working. Research on the relationship between the level of fathers' involvement in feeding and stimulating children's growth and development and the incidence of stunting is still very limited in Indonesia. Considering the phenomenon and the existing research gap, the purpose of this study is to determine the relationship between the level of father's involvement (based on the mother's perspective) in feeding and stimulating children's growth and development with the incidence of stunting in the working area of Jatinangor Health Center.

## **METHOD**

The study used a cross-sectional correlational quantitative method with purposive sampling. The population of this study was 373 people with a total sample of 79 mothers who had stunted children aged 2-5 years in the working area of Jatinangor Health Center and lived together with their fathers. This research has been declared ethically feasible by KEPK FITKes Unjani on January 12, 2024 with the number: 018/KEPK/FITKes-Unjani/I/2024. The study was conducted in seven villages within the working area of Jatinangor Health Center, namely Cipacing Village, Cikeruh Village, Hegarmanah Village, Sayang Village, Cibeusi Village, Cileles Village and Cilayung Village. Data collection in this study was done by distributing questionnaires directly to randomly selected respondents. This research has obtained permission from Jatinangor Health Center, the local village head, and all respondents have signed an agreement sheet to participate in the study.

The questionnaire used is the ECLS-B Father Self-Administer Questionnaire adopted from Rohmah (2018), which consists of 14 questions about father's involvement in child feeding with the validity test results more than r table ( $r = 0.444$ ), namely 0.473-0.917 and the Cronbach alpha result of 0.852, so the question is declared valid and reliable. The results of measuring scores in the value range of 14-70, then categorized into two categories, Poor: 14-39.6 and Good: 39.61-70. The ECLS-B Father Self-Administer Questionnaire was also adopted and modified to measure father's involvement in stimulating child growth and development, which consisted of 28 questions with validity test results of more than r table ( $r = 0.444$ ), namely 0.492-0.789 and Cronbach alpha results of 0.741 so that the question is declared valid and reliable. The results of measuring scores in the value range of 28-140, then categorized into two categories, poor: 28-86.29 and good: 86.3-140. As for the incidence of stunting, anthropometry of children's height and weight was carried out, then the stunting category was determined according to height based on age for children aged 24-59 months, namely the Very Short category:  $<-3$  SD and the short category:  $<-2$  SD to  $-3$  SD. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and chi-squared test. The relationship between the level of father's involvement in feeding and stimulating children's growth and development with the incidence of stunting was considered significant when the value of *Asy. Sig.* (2-sided)  $< 0.05$ . In addition, to find out how likely the risk of stunting incidence is owned by young children, the Odds Ratio (OR) or odds ratio and Relative Risk (RR) or probability of chance are interpreted.

## RESULTS

The characteristics of the respondents and fathers are shown in Table 1. Most of the respondents had nuclear families and were between 26 and 35 years old, and their fathers earned less than IDR 1,986,000 per month. Almost all respondents had two children, and the father had a high school education and worked as a laborer. Almost all fathers were Muslim and of Sundanese ethnicity.

Table 1.  
Demographic Characteristics of Fathers (n=79)

Characteristics of respondents	f	%
Family type		
Nuclear family	57	72,2
Extended family	22	27,8
Number of children		
1 children	15	19,0
2 children	34	43,0
> 2 children	30	38,0
Mother's age		
< 26 years old	8	10,1
26-35 years old	47	59,5
>35 years old	24	30,4
Father's Religion		
Muslim	78	98,7
Catholic	1	1,3
Father's Education		
Elementary School	14	17,7
Junior High School	24	30,4
Senior High School	34	43,0
Academy/College	7	8,9
Father's Job		
Doesn't work	3	3,8
Laborer	32	40,5
Private	24	30,4
Civil Servants	2	2,5

Characteristics of respondents	f	%
Other	18	22,8
Father's Income		
< Rp 1.986.000	47	59,5
Rp 1.986.000-3.471.000	24	30,4
Rp 3.471.000	8	10,1
Father's Etnics		
Sundanese	78	98,7
Javanese	1	1,3

Fathers' involvement in feeding and stimulating children's growth and development is shown in Table 2. Most fathers are in the category of poor in feeding children, namely 37 people (46.8%). Most fathers were in the category of poor involvement in stimulating children's growth and development, 43 people (54.4%).

Table 2.  
Categories of Father's Involvement in Child Feeding and Growth Stimulation (n=79)

Variable	Category			
	Poor		Good	
	f	%	f	%
Father's Involvement in Child	37	46,8	42	53,2
Father's involvement in child growth and development stimulation	43	54,4	36	45,6

The description of the incidence of stunting in children aged 2-5 years in seven villages in the working area of the Jatinangor Health Center is given in Table 3. Most of the incidence of stunting in children under five years was in the short category, as many as 54 people (68,4%).

Table 3.  
Incidence of Stunting in Children Aged 2-5 Years (n=79)

Incidence of <i>Stunting</i>	f	%
Very short	25	31,6
Short	54	68,4

There were 12 people (15.2%) who had poor father's involvement in child feeding for very short toddlers. There were 25 people (31.6%) who had poor father's involvement in feeding children under five years old. The test results show the value of *Asy. Sig. (2-sided)* is 0.888, which means that  $H_0$  is accepted or there is no correlation between father's involvement in feeding children and the incidence of stunting. The results of the odds ratio risk estimate found that fathers who are poor involved in feeding have a 1.071 times greater risk of having very small children compared to fathers who are highly involved. While the relative risk estimate found that fathers who are poor involved in feeding are 1.048 times more likely to have very small children than fathers who are highly involved.

Tabel 4.  
Crosstabulation of Father's Involvement in Child Feeding with Incidence of Stunting (n=79)

Variable	Category	Incidence of <i>Stunting</i>				p value	Odds Ratio
		Very short		Short			
		f	%	f	%		
Child Feeding	Poor	12	15,2	25	31,6	0,888	1,071
	Good	13	16,5	29	36,7		
Total		25	31,7	54	68,3		
<i>Relative Risk</i>		1,048		0,979			

There were 12 (15.2%) fathers who were poor involved in stimulating child growth and development in very short children. There are 31 people (39.2%) who have poor father involvement in stimulating child growth and development in short toddlers. The test results show that the value of *Asy. Sig. (2-sided)* is 0.435, which means that  $H_0$  is accepted or there is no correlation between father's involvement in stimulating child's development and the

incidence of stunting. The odds ratio results indicate that fathers who are poor involved in stimulating growth and development are 0.685 times more likely to have stunted children compared to fathers who are highly involved. While the relative risk estimate found that fathers who are poor involved in growth and development stimulation are 1.128 times more likely to have small children than fathers who are highly involved.

Tabel 5.

Crosstabulation of Father's Involvement in Child Growth and Development Stimulation with Incidence of Stunting (n=79)

Variabel	Categor y	Incidence of <i>Stunting</i>				ρ value	Odds Ratio
		Very short		Short			
		f	%	f	%		
Child Growth And Development Stimulation	Poor	12	15,2	31	39,2	0,435	0,685
	Good	13	16,5	23	29,1		
Total		25	31,7	54	68,3		
Relative Risk		0,773		1,128			

## DISCUSSION

### Father's involvement in child feeding

This study shows that almost some fathers have poor involvement in feeding and fulfilling child nutrition (46.8%), which means that fathers are involved in the process of feeding children only 3-4 times a week. This situation is due to the fact that almost all fathers work and are only occasionally positively involved in the process of feeding children. The results of this study are in line with the research of Bogale et al. (2022), which showed that the involvement of fathers in feeding children was in the poor category with 43.1%. This is also in line with the research by Sachdeva dan Gupta (2022) which shows that as many as 57% of fathers have poor involvement in child feeding. However, the findings of this study contradict the research of Saaka et al. (2022) which states that father's involvement in child feeding is in the high category at 63.5% although fathers are only involved in providing money to mothers to buy food for children.

### Father's involvement in stimulating children's growth and development

The results showed that most fathers had low involvement in stimulating children's growth and development (54.4%), which means that fathers were only involved in stimulating children's growth and development 3-4 times per week. According to Idhayanti et al. (2019), fathers who play a lesser role in stimulation activities are caused by fathers' knowledge of stimulation activities in the moderate or average category. The lack of time that fathers have to participate in education and training on stimulation of child growth and development is likely to be one of the factors that cause fathers to have insufficient knowledge (Idhayanti et al., 2019; Kitamura et al., 2022; Moura et al., 2023; Rakotomanana et al., 2023).

The results of this study are in line with the research of Aritonang et al. (2020) that the role of parents in stimulating children's growth and development is in the low category in Bogor City. Also in line with the research of Cuartas et al. (2020) and Kitamura et al. (2022) which states that only 11.9% and 14.1% of fathers are involved in providing four or more growth and development stimulating activities to their children. This is due to the fact that working fathers are busy at work, so fathers do not have time to be involved in childcare, especially in stimulating children's growth and development (Aritonang et al., 2020; Cuartas et al., 2020; Kitamura et al., 2022).

### **Incidence of stunting**

The results showed that most of the incidence of stunting in children under five were in the short category, namely 54 people (68.4%) and as many as 25 people (31.6%) under five were in the very short category. Based on the results of these observations and research, it reinforces the underlying cause of stunting, namely the difficulty in accessing nutrient-rich foods (containing vitamins, minerals, animal protein) and inappropriate feeding practices and early childhood stimulation (UNICEF, 2021).

In addition, the observation results also reinforce the risk factors for stunting, such as lack of hygiene and cleanliness of the home environment, the economic conditions of the family obtained by the father, and the age of the pregnant mother (under 20 years or over 35 years) (Rahayuwati et al., 2020; Sari & Sartika, 2021). The observation results showed that almost all of the respondents' houses were located in the alley, where some of them had inadequate sanitation and hygiene. The results of maternal demographic data also show that there are 24 mothers who are over 35 years old, which can increase the risk of stunting twice (Sari & Sartika, 2021). Meanwhile, the results of paternal demographic data show that to meet the needs of their families, most fathers have an income of less than IDR 1,986,000 per month, which can increase the risk of stunting in children four times higher due to lack of daily nutritional intake (Vonaesch et al., 2017). The incidence of stunting has a negative impact on children, such as experiencing physical growth and developmental disorders (Kemkes RI, 2018). The results of this study can only show that children are experiencing obstacles in their physical growth. However, from the results of a brief observation, it was found that most of the children looked active while playing and talking with their friends.

### **The Relationship Between Father's Involvement in Child Feeding and the Incidence of Stunting**

Based on the results of the study, it was found that fathers have good involvement in child feeding resulting in toddlers who are short as many as 29 people (36.7%) and producing toddlers who are very short as many as 13 people (16.5%). This proves that father's involvement in child feeding is not necessarily optimal to make children of normal height. From the Pearson chi-square correlation test, the significance value and correlation prove that there is no significant relationship between father's involvement in child feeding and the incidence of stunting. This shows that the level of father's involvement in feeding has no effect on the incidence of stunting in young children.

The results of this study are consistent with the research of Inbaraj et al. (2020), which states that there is no relationship between malnutrition and the father's feeding style of the child. The study explained that the father's child feeding style tends to be indulgent, so children are likely to be given the food they want, even if it does not meet their nutritional needs (Inbaraj et al., 2020). It has also been explained that fathers tend to be less concerned about their children's nutrition and may limit the money given to mothers to buy nutritious foods that children need (Inbaraj et al., 2020).

The results of this study are inversely proportional to the research of Putri dan Irdawati (2023) who found that there is a relationship between feeding patterns that do not meet the needs of children and the incidence of stunting. The study explained that children who are given inappropriate diets such as lack of protein and fat intake can cause children to suffer from stunting (Putri & Irdawati, 2023). Another study also mentioned that high father involvement in feeding activities can increase children's nutritional intake (Saaka et al., 2022). The study further explained that fathers who are actively involved in child care are 3,3 times more likely

to increase children's dietary intake because fathers become more aware of the optimal nutritional needs of children (Saaka et al., 2022).

Based on the odds ratio (OR) results, it was found that fathers who were less involved in feeding were 1.071 times more likely to have very low birth weight children compared to fathers who were highly involved. These results demonstrate that there are several other factors that are more dominant in causing there to be no relationship between fathers' involvement in child feeding and the incidence of stunting. First, economic constraints result in fathers providing only foods that contain carbohydrates, but have difficulty providing foods that contain protein, vitamins, and fats (Kukeba et al., 2021; Martin et al., 2021). Second, fathers often provide "cheat meals," such as foods high in sugar and salt, so that children already feel full and do not want to eat more nutritious staple foods (Moura dan Philippe, 2023). Third, fathers are busy earning a living, making it difficult for them to take time to feed their children or to eat with their children (Inbaraj et al., 2020).

The analysis of the respondents' answers shows that fathers are often involved in providing carbohydrate foods and snacks, while protein, fat, and vitamin foods are only occasionally provided by fathers. This will affect the fulfillment of child nutrition, where children will be less fulfilled nutritional intake that should be obtained from animal protein, vegetable protein, fat, and vitamins that are needed for the growth process (Kementrian Kesehatan RI, 2023). Although fathers have good involvement in feeding, such as feeding children or eating frequently with children, if fathers do not adopt healthy eating behaviors, do not motivate children to eat healthy foods, and do not provide foods with the nutritional intake needed by children, the quality of children's nutrition will not improve (Davison et al., 2020; Moura & Philippe, 2023).

Father's involvement in child nutrition can be considered good when the father is able to fulfill his duties and obligations in process responsibility and indirect care, namely in providing nutritious food to children and families (Pleck, 2010). In accordance with several studies, which state that father's involvement in feeding consists of providing food ingredients, processing food, serving nutritious food to children, feeding children, and eating together with children (Bogale et al., 2022; Inbaraj et al., 2020; Sachdeva & Gupta, 2022).

### **The Relationship between Father's Involvement in Stimulating Children's Growth and Development with the Incidence of Stunting**

The results showed that fathers who were poor involved in stimulating their children's growth and development produced 31 toddlers with short stature (39.2%) and 12 toddlers with very short stature (15.2%). From the Pearson chi-square correlation test, the significance value and correlation prove that there is no significant relationship between father's involvement in stimulating children's growth and development and the incidence of stunting. This shows that the level of father's involvement in stimulating children's growth and development has no influence on the incidence of stunting in young children.

The results of this study open up new perspectives because existing research has shown opposite results, such as in the research of Astria et al. (2023) and Leighton et al. (2023). According to Astria et al. (2023), fathers who are well involved in parenting can lead to normal child development. The study explains that fathers who are actively involved physically, affectively (giving affection), cognitively (training thinking skills), protectively (protecting children), provisionally (meeting children's material needs), and formatively

(training children's social skills) can produce quality interactions so that they can enhance normal child growth and development (Astria et al., 2023).

Meanwhile, according to Leighton et al. (2023), increasing the quantity and quality of growth and developmental stimulation provided by both parents can improve developmental delays in children aged 3 years. The study explained that increasing the variety of play materials in the home, reducing negative parenting, and increasing positive parenting practices by fathers and mothers, such as training children's motor, cognitive, language, and socioemotional skills, can improve child development (Leighton et al., 2023).

The results of the risk ratio (RR) found that fathers who are poor involved in stimulating growth and development are 1.128 times more likely to have small children than fathers who are highly involved. This confirms that there are other factors that are more dominant in causing there to be no relationship between paternal involvement in stimulating children's growth and development and the incidence of stunting. This factor is the inadequate food intake of children (WHO, 2021). This proves that if a child does not receive adequate nutrition during the golden years, the child will still experience stunting even if the father has good involvement in stimulating children's growth and development (Hartijar, 2023; Yunita, 2018).

This study also provides evidence that fathers still have not applied Lamb, Tamis-Lemonda, and Pleck's concept of father involvement with their children, namely, not implementing the components of positive involvement activities, warmth and responsiveness, and control (Pleck, 2010). Based on the analysis of the respondents' answers, it is known that most of them often do eight out of 19 positive activities that fathers can do with their children, even though they only do it 3-4 times a week. The eight activities are accompanying the children to play, talking, going for walks, putting the children to bed at night, encouraging the children to keep the house clean, and spending time with the children. Fathers are also quite present in their children's daily lives, even if only at night or on holidays. This study also found that most fathers most often display a warm attitude and show affection to their children by hugging, kissing, comforting, and reassuring them. As the authority figure in the family, fathers were quite consistent in following the rules they set for the family. For example, fathers make decisions about matters related to children and fathers discipline children when children misbehave, although most fathers do so only occasionally.

The results of the analysis of the respondents' answers confirm the research of Rakotomanana et al. (2021) and Kitamura et al. (2022), where fathers are actually very willing and have the opportunity to be involved in child stimulating activities such as playing, talking to children, going for walks and spending time with children, provided that it is only when fathers are not busy working. This is in line with the research of Moura et al. (2023) who found that when fathers spend time with their children frequently, the bond between father and child is stronger. In fact, all of the fathers in the study indicated that spending time with children is important, they do not want children to become shy and slow if they do not interact with their fathers (Moura et al., 2023).

## **CONCLUSION**

The conclusion of this study is that there is no relationship between fathers' involvement in feeding and stimulating children's growth and development and the incidence of stunting. This shows that there are other more dominant factors that influence the incidence of stunting.

These factors are inadequate food intake, lack of home sanitation and hygiene, maternal age above 35 years, economic constraints, and child feeding errors.

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