



## MOTHERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES IN PREVENTING TODDLER DIARRHEA USING LOCAL WISDOM *PODA NA LIMA*: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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### ABSTRACT

Diarrhea remains one of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality among children under five in Indonesia. Prevention efforts based on local wisdom, such as Poda Na Lima, a traditional life philosophy of the Batak Angkola community, hold significant potential as a promotive and preventive approach to child health. This study aims to explore the experiences of mothers of children under five in implementing Poda Na Lima as a preventive measure against diarrhea in their children. A qualitative approach with a phenomenological method was employed. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, with the number determined by the principle of data saturation, resulting in a total of ten participants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews guided by a semi-structured interview protocol developed based on the five principles of Poda Na Lima. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. The findings of the study revealed five themes: maintaining cleanliness of the heart, maintaining personal hygiene, maintaining cleanliness of clothing, maintaining cleanliness of the home, and maintaining cleanliness of the yard. Mothers of young children perceive Poda Na Lima not merely as a traditional custom, but also as a guide for daily healthy living. Personal, family, and environmental hygiene practices are considered key to diarrhea prevention.

Keywords: child; culture; diarrhea/prevention and control; mothers; phenomenological

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## INTRODUCTION

Diarrheal disease is a leading cause of morbidity and mortality among children under five, accounting for approximately 1.6 million deaths annually worldwide, according to the World Health Organization. Diarrhea is often perceived by the community as a common illness, yet it can lead to fever, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, fatigue, and weight loss (Wolde et al., 2022). Despite collective efforts to improve access to healthcare services and promote preventive measures, such as vaccination campaigns and hygiene education initiatives, diarrheal disease remains a significant public health threat (Azanaw et al., 2024).

Behavioral changes among mothers regarding personal hygiene, increased awareness of diarrhea prevention, and the proper use of sanitation and clean water can effectively prevent diarrhea in young children. One key preventive measure is handwashing with soap (Fatmawati et al., 2024). Therefore, initiatives aimed at fostering a culture of regular handwashing have garnered significant attention (Akinsulie et al., 2024). Every community possesses distinct local concepts, behaviors, beliefs, traditions, and cultures. These local perspectives are often overlooked in health programs, which can result in program failure (Aubel & Chibanda, 2022). Access to healthcare facilities, previous treatment experiences, and the severity of the illness also influence individuals' decision-making in preventing and managing diarrheal disease (Elshabassi et al., 2023).

Cultural customs play a significant role in shaping an individual's health behavior. Such customs can either promote positive health practices or contribute to adverse health outcomes. The Batak Angkola-Mandailing community in North Sumatra possesses local wisdom known as Poda Na Lima, which translates to 'five teachings' or 'five advices.' This philosophy serves as a foundational life principle passed down through generations to guide daily living. The five core elements of Poda Na Lima are: Paias rohamu (cleanse your heart), Paias pamatangmu (cleanse your body), Paias parabitoimu (cleanse your clothing), Paias bagasimu (cleanse your house), and Paias pekaranganmu (cleanse your yard). The use of the term paias (cleanse) for each of these five target areas—heart, body, clothing, house, and environment—emphasizes the local wisdom's focus on personal and environmental cleanliness (Siregar et al., 2022). The findings of this study are expected to inform the community that the local wisdom of Poda Na Lima, which serves as a life guideline for the Batak Angkola people, can be utilized as a cultural concept in diarrhea prevention. This aligns with the principles of Transcultural Nursing, which emphasize that culture plays a crucial role in addressing health issues and improving health outcomes.

The values embodied in Poda Na Lima align closely with the fundamental principles of clean and healthy living behavior, which are relevant in efforts to prevent communicable diseases such as diarrhea. However, there is limited research exploring how such local wisdom values are practiced in daily life by mothers of young children as a tangible form of disease prevention. Investigating mothers' experiences in implementing Poda Na Lima can provide deeper insight into the role of local culture in enhancing family health behaviors and offer a foundation for more culturally tailored interventions. Therefore, this study aims to describe and understand the experiences of mothers of young children in applying Poda Na Lima as a diarrhea prevention strategy, as well as to identify the meanings, practices, challenges, and hopes they hold in upholding these values.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative approach using the phenomenological method to deeply explore the subjective experiences of mothers of young children in applying Poda Na Lima as a strategy for diarrhea prevention. The phenomenological approach was chosen because the focus of the study is to understand the meanings derived from daily life experiences within the cultural context of the Batak Angkola community. This design also allows for the direct exploration, analysis, and description of participants' experiences, providing valuable insights that cannot be captured through quantitative methodologies (Streubert & Carpenter, 2011). This study was conducted in Padangsidempuran City (North Sumatra, Indonesia) in 2025. Sample size in qualitative research is typically determined by data saturation, which occurs when no new information emerges and redundancy is reached (Polit & Beck, 2021). Participants in this study were mothers of young children residing in communities that uphold Batak cultural values, particularly those who understand and practice Poda Na Lima in their daily lives. Participants were purposively selected based on the following criteria: mothers with children aged 1 to 5 years, residing in areas where Batak Angkola cultural practices are maintained, and willing and able to openly share their experiences. The sample size was determined by the principle of data saturation, which occurred when no new information emerged from the interviews, resulting in a total of 10 participants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews guided by a semi-structured interview protocol developed around the five principles of Poda Na Lima. Interviews were conducted face-to-face at participants' homes or mutually agreed-upon locations. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Care was taken to ensure that interview settings were quiet and free from interruptions (Streubert & Carpenter, 2011). Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following these steps: thoroughly reading the transcripts, coding the data, grouping codes into themes and subthemes, and interpreting the meanings based on the framework of Poda Na Lima (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). This study received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the Deli Husada Health Institute, Deli Tua, under approval number 609/KEP-IKDH/VIII/2025.

## RESULT

Table 1.  
Theme Matrix  
Mothers' Experiences in Preventing Diarrhea in Toddlers Using the Local Wisdom of *Poda Na Lima* in Padangsidempuran City

Theme	Subtheme	Description/Codes
Theme 1: <i>Poda Paias Rohamu</i> (Maintaining Cleanliness of the Heart)	1. Responsibility in Caring for Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Commitment to caring for the child</li> <li>○ Commitment to maintaining the child's health</li> </ul>
	2. Patience as a Mother	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Patience in caring for the child</li> <li>○ Promptly seeking solutions when the child is ill</li> </ul>
Theme 2: <i>Poda Paias Pamatangmu</i> (Maintaining Personal Hygiene)	1. Mother's Hygiene Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Regular bathing</li> <li>○ Handwashing</li> </ul>
	2. Child's Hygiene Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Bathing the child regularly</li> <li>○ Encouraging the child to wash their hands</li> </ul>
	3. Early Hygiene Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Teaching children to wash their hands with soap</li> <li>○ Encouraging children to maintain hand cleanliness</li> </ul>
Theme 3: <i>Poda Paias Parabitoimu</i> (Maintaining Cleanliness of Clothing)	1. Routine Washing of Children's Clothes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Washing clothes daily</li> <li>○ Wearing clean clothes</li> <li>○ Changing wet or dirty clothes promptly</li> </ul>
	2. Cleanliness of Children's Accessories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Regular washing of towels, blankets, and bedding</li> <li>○ Drying clothes thoroughly in the sun</li> </ul>
Theme 4: <i>Poda Paias Bagasmu</i> (Maintaining Cleanliness of the House)	1. Maintaining Clean and Dry Floors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Keeping the house floor clean</li> <li>○ Ensuring the floor is dry</li> </ul>
	2. Maintaining a Clean Kitchen Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Keeping eating utensils clean</li> <li>○ Covering food properly</li> </ul>
	3. Maintaining Clean Toilets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Regular cleaning of toilets</li> </ul>
	4. Availability of Clean Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Providing clean drinking water</li> <li>○ Storing water in closed containers</li> </ul>
	5. Safe and Clean Play Area for Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Keeping play areas free from dirt</li> <li>○ Preventing children from playing in the kitchen or near trash</li> </ul>
Theme 5: <i>Poda Paias Pekaranganmu</i> (Maintaining Cleanliness of the Yard)	1. Cleanliness of the Yard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Cleaning the yard daily</li> <li>○ Disposing of accumulated garbage properly</li> </ul>
	2. Control of Water Puddles and Drainage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Draining stagnant water</li> <li>○ Cleaning gutters and drainage systems</li> </ul>
	3. Educating Children to Play in a Clean Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Teaching children not to touch soil directly</li> <li>○ Encouraging the use of footwear when playing outside</li> </ul>

### Theme 1: *Poda Paias Rohamu* (Maintaining the Cleanliness of the Heart)

The study findings indicate that participants maintain the cleanliness of the heart as a means to prevent diarrhea in toddlers. Maintaining the cleanliness of the heart reflects a healthy mental and emotional state, characterized by a sense of responsibility in caring for the child, awareness of their role as a mother, and patience in nurturing the child's health as a preventive measure against diarrhea.

#### Responsibility in Caring for the Child

*"It is our responsibility as mothers to care for our children to prevent the occurrence of diarrhea."*  
[Participant 1]

*"As a mother, I have to maintain my child's health to protect them from various illnesses, especially diarrhea." [Participant 3]*

#### Patience in Motherhood

*"One must be patient in caring for and nurturing the child to prevent illness." [Participant 2]*

*"If there are early signs of diarrhea, such as stomach pain and frequent bowel movements, the child should be promptly taken to the health center or other medical facilities." [Participant 5]*

#### Theme 2: *Poda Paias Pamatangmu* (Maintaining Personal Hygiene)

Participants stated that maintaining their children's hygiene is a responsibility to prevent diarrhea. This includes practicing self-hygiene, ensuring the child's cleanliness, and providing education to children about maintaining hygiene.

##### Mother's Hygiene Practices

*"We must keep our bodies clean by bathing twice a day using soap and clean water to eliminate germs." [Participant 1]*

*"As mothers, we should also maintain clean hands; for example, before feeding the child, we must wash our hands thoroughly with soap." [Participant 2]*

##### Child's Hygiene Practices

*"Since young children still need assistance, we bathe them twice daily using soap." [Participant 9]*

*"We train our children to wash their hands before eating." [Participant 8]*

##### Early Hygiene Education

*"We teach children to wash their hands with soap before and after meals because even young children can understand and learn these habits." [Participant 6]*

*"If children are accustomed from an early age to maintaining hand cleanliness, they will develop lifelong hygiene habits." [Participant 4]*

#### Theme 3: *Poda Paias Parabitonmu* (Maintaining Cleanliness of Clothing)

Participants reported that maintaining the cleanliness of clothing is very important, as clean and dry clothes help prevent the proliferation of germs on the body.

##### Routine Washing of Children's Clothes

*"Washing clothes and changing them twice a day." [Participant 7]*

*"Ensure that the child wears clean clothes." [Participant 10]*

*"If the clothes, especially underwear, become damp or wet, they should be changed immediately." [Participant 8]*

##### Maintaining the Cleanliness of Children's Accessories

*"Towels, blankets, and similar items should be changed frequently to prevent germs from adhering to the child's body." [Participant 5]*

*"Clothes should be thoroughly dried in the sun, and if possible, ironed before dressing the child." [Participant 9]*

#### Theme 4: *Poda Paias Bagasmu* (Maintaining Cleanliness of the Home)

According to participants, maintaining cleanliness of the home—particularly the floors, kitchen, clean water supply, toilets, and children's play areas—plays a crucial role in preventing diarrhea.

##### Maintaining the Cleanliness of the House Floor

*"A mother should frequently clean the house floor daily because children often play on the floor." [Participant 10]*

*"The house floor must be kept clean and dry." [Participant 2]*

#### Maintaining the Cleanliness of the Kitchen Area

*“Utensils used for eating must be thoroughly cleaned with soap to eliminate germs.” [Participant 5]*

*“Food storage containers should be covered to prevent flies from entering, as flies can cause diarrhea.” [Participant 6]*

#### Maintaining the Cleanliness of the Toilet

*“The bathroom, especially the toilet area, should be cleaned daily since many germs accumulate there.” [Participant 2]*

*“Toilets should be scrubbed daily with soap to kill germs.” [Participant 9]*

#### Ensuring Availability of Clean Water

*“Water used must be clean, especially for washing clothes and other household uses.” [Participant 1]*

#### Maintaining the Cleanliness of Children's Play Areas

*“Areas where children usually play should be cleaned and mopped regularly.” [Participant 7]*

*“Children should avoid playing in the kitchen because it is dirty, and they should stay away from trash areas to avoid exposure to dirt and germs.” [Participant 6]*

#### Theme 5: *Poda Paias Pekaranganmu* (Maintaining Cleanliness of the Yard)

Participants expressed that maintaining the cleanliness and safety of the yard should not be neglected, as the outdoor environment can also serve as a source of diseases that may cause diarrhea.

##### Cleanliness of the Yard

*“The yard should be cleaned daily.” [Participant 2]*

*“If there is trash, it should be burned or disposed of properly; trash should never be left unattended.” [Participant 3]*

##### Control of Stagnant Water and Drainage

*“Stagnant water in the yard should be removed to prevent children from playing in it.” [Participant 4]*

*“Drains in the yard should be cleaned regularly to prevent odors and the proliferation of germs.” [Participant 7]*

##### Educating Children to Play in a Clean Environment

*“Children should be discouraged from playing directly on the soil; if they do, they must wash their hands thoroughly afterward.” [Participant 5]*

*“Teach children to wear sandals when going outside; over time, they will become accustomed to wearing footwear.” [Participant 1]*

## DISCUSSION

Cleanliness of the Heart (*Bersihkan Hatimu*) can be interpreted literally as the continual effort to keep the heart free from thoughts that may contaminate the mind, embodying sincerity and freedom from anxiety in daily life. The actualization of this value involves avoiding behaviors that disrupt mental peace and consistently maintaining strong motivation while adopting an optimistic and positive attitude in all aspects of life (Priyono et al., 2022; Siregar & Puansah, 2025). In Batak culture, *Poda Paias Rohamu* means advice to cleanse one's heart or a directive to maintain inner purity. This concept extends beyond spirituality to encompass how an individual—particularly a mother—cultivates attitudes, thoughts, and actions to consistently act wisely and responsibly in life, including in child-rearing. When applied in the context of child health, especially diarrhea prevention, *Poda Paias Rohamu* serves as a strong moral and cultural foundation that motivates mothers to be more aware, caring, and disciplined in maintaining the health of their young children. Diarrhea in toddlers is a common health issue, but it is preventable through clean and healthy living

behaviors. In this regard, parents, especially mothers, hold the primary role and responsibility in safeguarding their children's health, including preventing the occurrence of diarrhea (Pebrina et al., 2023). A mother who feels responsible and is aware of her role will strive to provide the best care for her child, particularly in preventing illnesses such as diarrhea. A positive maternal attitude, demonstrated through nurturing and maintaining the child's health—such as providing nutritious food—can effectively prevent diarrhea in young children (Hermanita et al., 2022).

In the philosophy of *Poda Na Lima*, *Paias Pamatangmu* means cleansing the body. Personal hygiene is a behavior that requires maintaining bodily cleanliness at all times. This value serves as a guiding principle for the Batak Angkola community to cleanse the body from dirt and impurities in order to prevent illness. The Batak Angkola people have a traditional bathing practice using herbs such as cloves, flowers, and betel leaves that are boiled to produce a fragrant body wash (Priyono et al., 2022). For mothers with young children, this principle holds significant meaning as a preventive effort against diseases such as diarrhea. Diarrheal illness in toddlers is often caused by inadequate hand, body, and environmental hygiene, which leads to the introduction of pathogens into the child's body through contaminated food, drink, or unclean fingers (Sujipto & Tesa, 2024).

Good personal hygiene practices begin with the mother as the primary caregiver. Mothers who understand the importance of personal cleanliness will adopt habits such as regular bathing, washing hands with soap, keeping nails clean and trimmed, and wearing clean clothes, especially when breastfeeding or feeding their children. These behaviors reflect a positive maternal approach to preventing diarrhea in children. Such practices include knowledge about diarrhea, a proactive attitude towards its prevention, and the implementation of preventive measures (Julamnur et al., 2024). In addition to maintaining their hygiene, mothers are also responsible for ensuring their children's cleanliness. Regularly bathing toddlers, keeping their nails clean, and encouraging handwashing are concrete applications of the *Paias Pamatangmu* principle. This is especially important because young children are unable to maintain personal hygiene independently and are highly susceptible to infections. Diarrhea in toddlers can be prevented through consistent handwashing habits by both mothers and children using running water and soap (Halimah et al., 2022). Beyond basic care, *Paias Pamatangmu* also encompasses an educational aspect. From an early age, children need to be introduced to hygiene habits such as washing hands before eating and after defecation, as well as avoiding putting dirty hands or objects into their mouths. This education does not have to be formal but can be conveyed through daily routines and modeled behavior by the mother. Mothers can motivate their children to cultivate the habit of regular handwashing (Wulandhani et al., 2024).

In the philosophy of *Poda Na Lima*, *Paias Parabitonmu* refers to maintaining the cleanliness of clothing. The value of clothing hygiene emphasizes the continuous upkeep of cleanliness and neatness in one's attire. Among the Batak Angkola community, the practice of *parabiton* carries a profound meaning related to clothing hygiene, where a person's character can be judged by their manner of dress. Wearing clean, tidy clothes that adequately cover the body is important to prevent illness. Additionally, clothing should be changed daily and washed thoroughly to maintain hygiene (Priyono et al., 2022). In the context of mothers with young children, this principle encompasses habits such as regularly washing clothes, using clean garments, and maintaining the cleanliness of all the child's belongings as part of efforts to promote health and prevent infectious diseases, including diarrhea. It also involves keeping children's items, such as toys and soiled clothing, out of reach of others and washing them thoroughly with hot soapy water (Lakew et al., 2024). Soiled clothing can serve as a medium for transmitting pathogens, especially when contaminated with saliva, feces, vomit, or sweat. Similarly, children's belongings, such as feeding bottles, spoons, toys, pillows, and blankets, if not cleaned regularly, can become breeding grounds for bacteria and viruses. Pathogens from these items can easily transfer to the child's hands, then enter the mouth, leading to infection (Reynolds et al., 2022).

The value of maintaining a clean home (*Paias Bagasmu*) emphasizes keeping the house free from dirt to prevent disease. This principle serves as a guideline for the Batak Angkola community in maintaining household cleanliness, including activities such as sweeping the house. The tradition of regularly cleaning the home is still preserved to this day (Priyono et al., 2022). In the context of maternal and child health, the home is not only a place of residence but also a critical environment for a child's growth and development that must be clean, safe, and healthy. A dirty or disorganized home can be a primary source of infectious diseases, including diarrhea, to which young children are particularly vulnerable. The floor is the area most frequently in contact with the child's body, especially toddlers who are learning to crawl and walk. If the floor is not cleaned regularly, dirt, dust, and food residues can become breeding grounds for bacteria and viruses. Children playing on the floor are highly susceptible to pathogens, as their hands and toys often enter their mouths. Therefore, maintaining a clean floor through daily cleaning is essential (Hamijah, 2021). The kitchen is also a critical area for maintaining household cleanliness. A dirty or cluttered kitchen can attract flies, cockroaches, and rodents, which are carriers of pathogens that cause diarrhea. Food residues, unclean dishwashing areas, or cooking utensils that are rarely cleaned can lead to contamination of food consumed by mothers and children. Therefore, eating and cooking utensils must be thoroughly cleaned before use, and the kitchen should be kept clean at all times (Hutasoit, 2020).

Additionally, maintaining the cleanliness of the household toilet is essential, as it harbors numerous disease-causing pathogens. Clean water is a fundamental element of a healthy household. The use of contaminated water for drinking, washing bottles, or bathing can trigger diarrhea and other infections in children. Ensuring the cleanliness of toilets and the availability of clean water are integral components of clean and healthy living behaviors that can prevent diarrhea (Pujianti et al., 2022). A home that practices *Paias Bagasmu* ensures that water used comes from safe sources and is stored in clean containers. Water storage areas should be cleaned regularly to prevent the breeding of mosquitoes and bacteria. Children's play areas at home must also receive careful attention. Toys should be washed frequently, play mats cleaned routinely, and play zones kept away from the kitchen or garbage areas. Children accustomed to playing in clean environments are better protected from infections and develop healthy environmental habits from an early age.

The value of maintaining yard cleanliness (*Paias Pekaranganmu*) is a local wisdom that governs environmental hygiene, including proper waste disposal, cleaning drainage channels, clearing ditches, and removing overgrown vegetation in residential areas, among other practices related to environmental cleanliness. *Poda Paias Pekaranganmu* reflects a conscious awareness and responsibility to maintain the cleanliness of the surrounding environment (Priyono et al., 2022). For families, especially those with young children, the yard is not only an outdoor space but also a place for children to play, learn, and grow. If not properly managed, the yard can become a source of diseases, particularly diarrhea, skin infections, and vector-borne illnesses such as dengue fever. One of the key aspects of maintaining a clean yard is effective waste management. Improper disposal or uncontrolled burning of trash in the yard can pollute the air and soil, while attracting flies, rodents, and cockroaches that carry diseases (Bayu et al., 2024). As the household manager, the mother plays a crucial role in teaching children not to litter and in maintaining yard cleanliness. Standing water in the yard must be carefully monitored, as it can serve as a breeding site for *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes, the vectors of dengue fever. Additionally, stagnant water can harbor worms and bacteria, posing health risks if children use it as a play area. All open containers, such as flower pots, buckets, discarded cans, and unused tires, should be emptied or disposed of. Drainage channels in the yard also require regular cleaning to prevent water accumulation. Maintaining environmental sanitation is essential for preventing diarrhea and other infectious diseases (Rasyidah, 2019). Encouraging children to play outdoors is beneficial for their growth and development. However, play areas must be clean, safe, and free from sharp objects, animal waste, or garbage. Simple education, such as wearing footwear while playing, washing hands afterward, and avoiding putting

hands in the mouth after touching the ground, is part of teaching hygienic living habits that mothers should instill from an early age. Maintaining yard cleanliness also reflects a social responsibility toward neighbors and the surrounding environment. A clean yard promotes fresh air and a pleasant view. Poor environmental sanitation significantly contributes to the spread of diseases, particularly infectious diseases. A clean home environment, access to safe drinking water, proper sanitation facilities, and effective waste disposal are essential to prevent illnesses such as diarrhea and reduce the risk of infectious disease transmission (Gurusinga et al., 2021). By practicing *Paias Pekaranganmu*, mothers not only safeguard their family's health but also foster a sustainable culture of cleanliness within their community.

## CONCLUSION

Poda Na Lima, a local wisdom inherited from the Batak Angkola community, holds important values that align with the principles of Clean and Healthy Living Behavior (PHBS). When combined, these provide an effective and relevant approach to preventing diarrhea, especially in children and families. For mothers, protecting their young children's health goes beyond feeding and giving medicine; it starts with daily habits of cleanliness. Through the philosophy of Poda Na Lima, we return to the basic values of life: cleansing the heart, body, clothing, home, and surrounding environment. *Paias Rohamu* encourages mothers to have sincere intentions in caring for their children. *Paias Pamatangmu* highlights the importance of personal hygiene to prevent germs from entering the child's body. *Paias Parabitonmu* emphasizes that clean clothes and belongings protect children from infections. *Paias Bagasmu* reminds us that a clean home is a safe place for children to grow. Finally, *Paias Pekaranganmu* teaches responsibility in keeping the outdoor environment clean so children can play healthily and safely. These are not difficult tasks but small daily habits done with love. By applying Poda Na Lima in everyday life, mothers play an essential role as their children's first protectors against disease, starting from the home.

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