

## **MOTHER'S PARENTING PATTERNS RELATED TO NUTRITION AND DIET FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to provide a strong and clear overview based on relevant and reliable sources regarding the impact of maternal nutritional parenting patterns, especially in economically constrained families, on the physical development of early childhood. This research was conducted using a descriptive qualitative method. The study involved interviewing mothers of children aged 3-5 years in the Rawamangun area, East Jakarta, in May 2023. The results showed that out of 20 respondents, 7 mothers had good nutritional parenting patterns, while 13 mothers had poor ones. Among them, 11 children, or 55%, experienced stunting. It can be concluded from our research that the physical growth of children depends on the parenting approach, particularly in terms of nutrition and diet. However, to ensure children grow healthily, mothers need a solid understanding of good parenting practices. Therefore, to prevent growth delays in early childhood, especially in economically challenged families, it is essential to conduct socialization efforts on good nutritional parenting. This would help address nutritional issues faced by young children in financially struggling families. Such socialization should target not only the mothers but also the children and can be conducted at local community health centers (posyandu).

Keywords: Early Childhood, Environment, Mother's Education, Parenting Style

### **INTRODUCTION**

Nutrition is a fundamental need for every human to survive. With proper nutrition, our body organs can function well, allowing us to grow and develop from birth until old age. Nutrition also plays a crucial role in determining our health. Recent advancements in research analysis have enhanced our understanding of metabolism and highlighted the vital role of nutrition and its metabolites in regulating gene expression and cell functions. Beyond being structural building blocks and energy sources, nutrients and their metabolites modify protein functions, act as powerful signaling molecules, and influence gene expression. Many of these substances play roles in regulating gene expression by modulating transcription factor activity and adjusting epigenetic marks in the genome. A growing perspective is that optimal cellular homeostasis is essential for maintaining health and preventing diseases related to nutrient deficiency or excess. Additionally, intrinsic factors (such as sex, age, and genetic variation), extrinsic factors (such as diet, xenobiotics, and environment), and host-microbiota interactions can affect the assimilation, transformation, and action of nutrients and non-nutritional components in food (Chen, 2018).

Awareness of the importance of nutrition for health has existed for thousands of years. According to Ahsan (2022), people in ancient times discovered solutions to address their health

issues, many of which were related to nutrition. For example, doctors advised patients to consume juice from the liver of a black cow or rooster to address vision problems. Symptoms of anemia were treated by adding iron powder to a glass of wine before drinking, and goiter was believed to be treatable by chewing seaweed or burned sponges.

Young children require adequate nutrition and nutrients to ensure that their organs not only function well but also develop optimally. During this period, children experience rapid growth and development, with noticeable physical differences between ages 1 and 5. Nutrition and nutrients play a crucial role, particularly in neurocognitive development such as neural pathways, DNA synthesis, and neurotransmitters that are essential for brain development. Additionally, nutrition is also important for the immune system. This review highlights the critical role of vitamins and micronutrients in activating the immune system, helping to enhance resistance to viral respiratory tract infections. The European food safety authority emphasizes the importance of consuming adequate amounts of vitamins and minerals to maintain the immune system as a preventive measure against respiratory infections. Therefore, it is important to recognize and adapt these nutrients into children's daily diet (Khera, 2022).

Where it is explained that for a child to grow and develop normally, the role of nutrition is very necessary and should be considered as early as possible. By fulfilling nutritional needs such as carbohydrates as a source of energy, proteins as building substances, and vitamins or minerals as regulatory substances, it will help prevent diseases that can hinder a child's growth and development. The correct nutritional composition will stimulate growth and development. Meanwhile, good food is food that is adjusted to the age level and type of activity. Children aged 0-60 months, referred to as toddlers, experience rapid growth and development during this period, which is considered both a golden and critical period. Babies and children at this stage need food that meets their nutritional needs to ensure their growth and development are not disrupted (Mayar, 2021).

According to Nuzuliyah (2019), an adequate menu concept emphasizes the importance of nutritional elements needed by the body in the right balance. These nutritional elements are classified as sources of energy, supporting growth, development, and maintenance of body tissues, as well as regulating metabolism and balance within body cells. A highly influential factor is dietary patterns. Nadia (2021) states that dietary patterns refer to the behavior of individuals or groups in fulfilling food needs, including attitudes, beliefs, and food choices shaped by physiological, psychological, cultural, and social influences. A balanced diet, which aligns with needs and involves the selection of appropriate food ingredients, will result in good nutritional status (Arifin, 2015).

The term nutritional status refers to the body's condition as a result of the intake of nutrients and the nutritional substances contained in food. Nutritional status has several categories, namely overnutrition, adequate nutrition, undernutrition, good nutrition, and poor nutrition. Nutrient or food intake will impact a person's nutritional status. A person falls into the category of undernutrition when one or more essential nutrients are deficient in the body. Nutrient deficiencies, particularly in children, can have negative effects both in the short term (acute) and long term (chronic). Children experiencing acute malnutrition appear physically weak, and those with chronic malnutrition may have stunted physical growth, such as being shorter than their peers, especially under the age of two (Istiany, 2013).

Children experiencing malnutrition can face obstacles in their intellectual development and physical growth, which ultimately affects economic growth and work productivity. Nutritional status reflects a person's quality of life. According to Purwani and Mariyam (2013), toddlers with disrupted eating patterns will also experience barriers in physical growth, marked by poor nutrition, thin bodies, and stunting (short stature in toddlers). Therefore, it is important for mothers to ensure that their children's eating patterns are well-maintained (Yunita, 2021).

The fact is that a lack of nutrition can disrupt physical development in young children, such as stunting. The phenomenon of short stature in toddlers, commonly referred to as stunting, is one of the nutritional problems occurring in children. According to data from WHO (2018), stunting affects approximately 150.8 million (22.2%) children under five years old worldwide. Asia has the highest prevalence of stunting globally, with around 55%, followed by the African continent with 39% of children experiencing stunting. In Asia, there are 83.6 million stunted children. Stunting is most prevalent in South Asia at 58.7%, while the lowest prevalence of 0.9% is found in Central Asia. In Indonesia, according to the Ministry of Health (2016), the prevalence is quite high, with around 30.8% in 2018, consisting of 19.3% short children and 11.5% very short children.

Stunting cases in Indonesia can certainly be reduced by improving the nutritional and dietary patterns of young children across the country. However, this is not an easy task. Firstly, young children consume whatever is provided by their parents. Children who still rely on their parents as caregivers significantly depend on the nutrition provided to them. If a child's nutrition is lacking, it can lead to hindered growth and brain development, decreased immunity, and low resistance to infections, which are common issues in stunted children (Rahmayana, 2015).

Stunting not only affects physical growth disorders but also makes children susceptible to illness and experiencing brain and intelligence development disorders. This makes stunting a serious threat to the quality of human resources in Indonesia. Presidential Regulation Number 72 of 2021 concerning the Acceleration of Stunting Reduction outlines that stunting is a growth and development disorder in children caused by chronic malnutrition and recurrent infections, characterized by height or length below the standards set by the minister of health. The impact of stunting on the quality of human resources includes both short-term and long-term effects. In the short term, stunting causes growth failure in children or toddlers, obstacles in cognitive and motor development, as well as low height and other health problems. In the long term, stunting reduces intellectual capacity or intelligence in adulthood, which affects low productivity. This problem is also related to nerves and brain cells, thus affecting absorption in the learning process and increasing the risk of diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke, hypertension, and obesity (Rahman, 2023).

The causes of stunting include infants with a history of low birth weight, a history of infectious diseases, and parental caregiving patterns regarding nutrition. Other influencing factors are exclusive breastfeeding, food availability, parental education, as well as social, cultural, and economic aspects. Poor caregiving practices also contribute to stunting, such as the mother's lack of knowledge about fulfilling nutritional needs during pregnancy and the nutritional preparations required when preparing for pregnancy and after giving birth to enhance optimal breast milk production (Ariyanti, 2015).

Children who still require parental care are significantly influenced by the nutrition provided to them. Malnutrition in children can lead to impediments in growth and brain development, a decrease in immunity, and make them more susceptible to infections, especially in children experiencing stunting (Rahmayana, 2015). Furthermore, several important aspects need to be considered in parenting related to child nutrition, such as the quantity and quality of food intake. Parents, especially mothers, must understand the appropriate nutrition and nutrients for children, including maintaining food and environmental hygiene, and effectively utilizing healthcare facilities to address nutrition-related issues in children (Yudianti, 2016).

The relevant journal to this scientific article is the result of research conducted by Noorhasanah and her team in 2020 in the Cempaka sub-district, Banjarbaru city. The study discusses the relationship between maternal parenting styles and the incidence of stunting in children aged 12-59 months. They used a quantitative approach with a descriptive correlation design. The study population consisted of mothers of toddlers registered in the working area of the Cempaka Banjarbaru Health Center. Sampling was done using the accidental sampling

method, where samples were taken from individuals who happened to be at the research location at the designated time. This scientific article presents an update through sample selection, focusing on families in economically limited conditions, struggling to meet the daily nutritional standards. The aim of this article is to provide a strong and clear depiction, based on relevant and reliable sources, of the impact of nutritional parenting by mothers facing economic limitations on the physical development of young children. Through this information gathering, the researchers hope to obtain beneficial findings.

## **METHOD**

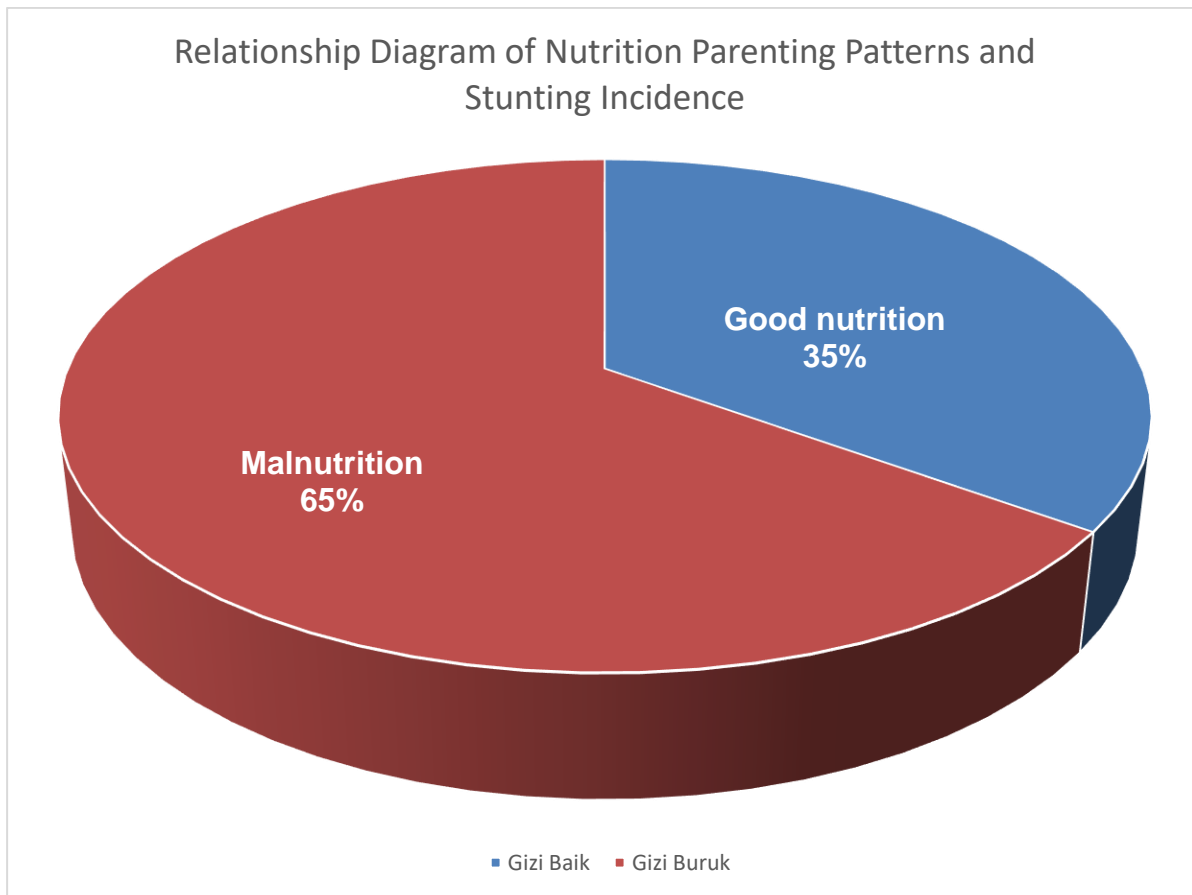
This study employs qualitative research methods with a descriptive and cross-sectional approach. The descriptive correlational research aims to explain the relationship between various variables. The cross-sectional study is conducted to measure the data of independent and dependent variables at a specific point in time. This research is conducted in the Rawamangun area, East Jakarta. The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of nutritional parenting by mothers with economic limitations on the physical development of early childhood.

Population refers to subjects that meet certain criteria. In this study, the population in question is mothers of toddlers experiencing economic difficulties in East Jakarta, specifically in Rawamangun. The sampling method used is accidental sampling, which involves selecting samples from people who happen to be present at the research site visited. Interviews were conducted in May with a sample size of 20 respondents. The inclusion criteria in this study include mothers with children aged 3-5 years, no communication barriers, and willing to participate as respondents. The research was conducted over one month in Rawamangun, East Jakarta, using interviews as the instrument to explore nutritional parenting patterns in early childhood. This study focuses on the participants' perspectives, and the research design evolves over time. The aim of the study is to provide education on maternal nutritional parenting patterns related to the physical development of early childhood.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Research has been conducted on the influence of maternal nutrition and dietary patterns on child development. This research is a series of scientific activities aimed at finding answers to problems or gaining new knowledge (Mekarisce, 2020). The study was conducted through direct interviews with mothers who have young children living in the Rawamangun area using a qualitative research method. Sugiyono (2017) stated that qualitative research methods can be interpreted as research methods based on the philosophy of postpositivism or interpretative. This method is used to study the natural conditions of the object, where the researcher is considered a key instrument in the research process. Data collection techniques involve sourcing materials from various sources, including books, articles, and other literature.

The research was conducted by interviewing the research targets, namely mothers and their children aged 3-5 years. Simbolon (2018) cited that the growth period of toddlers is a critical period that determines the quality of life, hence referred to as the golden period. This period is sensitive because the effects on the child during this time can be permanent and irreversible. The data collected includes the parents' understanding of nutritional parenting, the nutritional and dietary practices parents apply to their children, the children's height, and the parents' last level of education.



**Figure 1.** Diagram of the Relationship between Nutritional Parenting Patterns and the Incidence of Stunting

The results of this study were obtained from 20 respondents. The findings of the study on the relationship between nutritional parenting styles and the incidence of stunting showed that there are 7 or 35% of mothers with good nutritional and dietary parenting styles and 13 or 65% of mothers with poor nutritional and dietary parenting styles. Among the mothers with good nutritional and dietary parenting styles, 1 out of 7 children experienced stunting. In contrast, among the mothers with poor nutritional and dietary parenting styles, 10 out of 13 children experienced stunting. Overall, 11 or 55% of the children from the 20 respondents experienced stunting. The data on the mothers' last education levels showed that 50% were high school/vocational school graduates, 40% were middle school graduates, and 10% were college graduates. Based on interviews, mothers with lower education levels, such as middle school, tended to have poor nutritional and dietary parenting styles, while mothers with higher education levels, such as college graduates, tended to have good nutritional and dietary parenting styles. The economic status of the respondents was mostly in the lower-middle class.

According to Rahmadhita (2020), stunting is a chronic malnutrition problem caused by inadequate nutritional intake over a long period due to the provision of food that does not meet nutritional needs. Stunting has occurred in every region, and even major cities are not exempt from this issue, including Jakarta. Furthermore, according to Mitra (2015), stunting becomes a problem because it is associated with an increased risk of illness and death, suboptimal brain development leading to delayed motor development, and hindered mental growth. The long-term impacts of stunting on individuals and society include reduced cognitive and physical development, decreased productive capacity, poor health, and an increased risk of degenerative diseases such as diabetes mellitus. Stunting that occurs before the age of 2 years

affects low cognitive abilities and academic performance during school age and adolescence. If the problem of stunting is not addressed, it is estimated that by 2025, 125 million children under five will experience stunting (WHO, 2014).

Stunting, which is a challenge in children's physical development, is influenced by various factors, one of which is nutrition and dietary intake. The eating patterns of young children are regulated by their parents, especially mothers. Nutrition plays an important role in child development. According to research by Sukamti (2014), fulfilling nutritional needs such as carbohydrates as an energy source, protein as a building block, and vitamins and minerals as regulatory substances, can help prevent diseases that may hinder children's growth and development, as well as affect their intelligence. The right nutritional composition can promote growth and development, with food tailored to age and type of activity. Low income is usually associated with cheaper and less varied food consumption, while higher income tends to choose more expensive food, but this does not always guarantee good nutrition. Research in the city of Bandung by Sutriyawan (2021) shows that socioeconomic factors can influence the incidence of stunting. With adequate nutritional fulfillment, it is hoped that aspects like maintenance, growth, body repair, reproduction, physical work, and Specific Dynamic Action (SDA) will also be optimal. According to Uce (2018), the type of food consumed by children can affect their nutritional status. Variations in nutritional status can have different impacts on each child's development. If balanced nutritional needs are not met, children's growth and development can be hampered.

Based on the interview results, mothers who implement good nutrition and dietary parenting have a deep understanding of the proper intake for their children. They are well aware of the appropriate amounts of carbohydrates, proteins, and other essential nutrients suitable for young children. Additionally, these mothers limit their children's consumption of snacks from outside. As stated by one of the mothers:

**“Not only do I monitor the food intake at home, but I also pay attention to snacks outside. I tell my child what they are not allowed to buy and consume, and I also explain the reasons why they shouldn't buy those snacks, as they are not good for them.”**

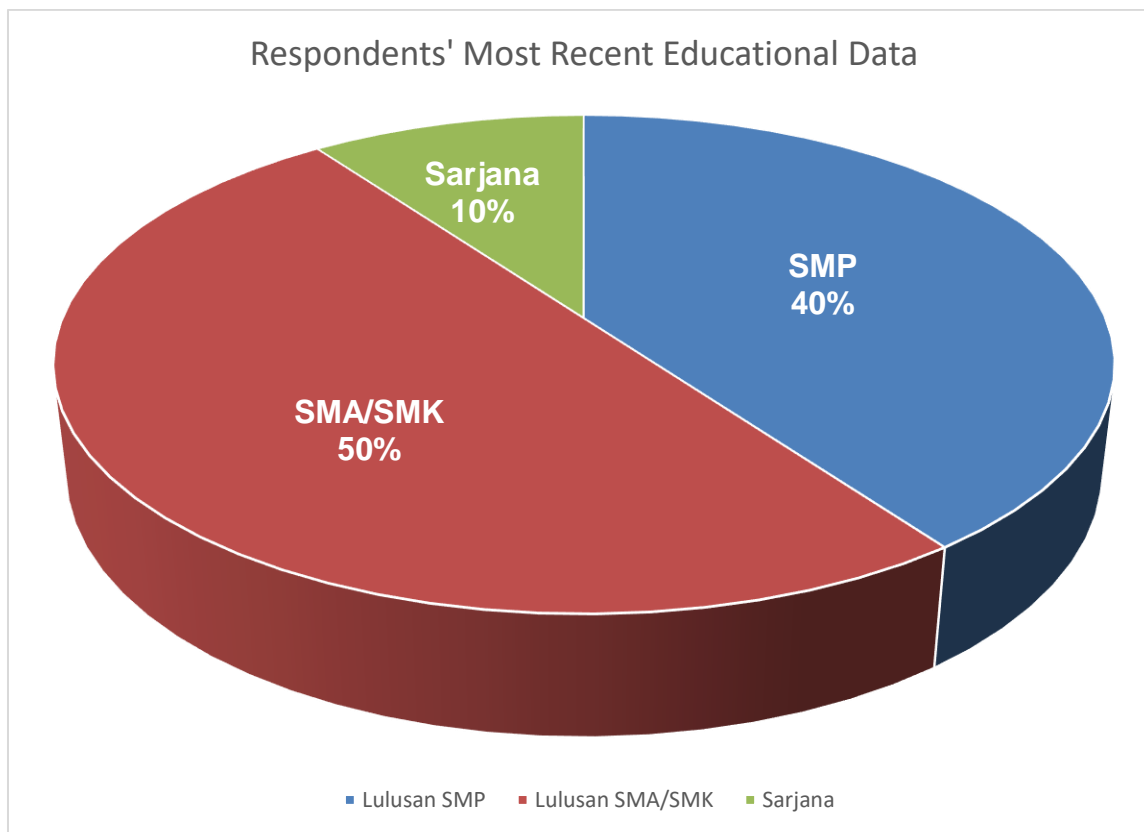
Then, mothers with poor nutrition and dietary parenting patterns have a low understanding of nutrition and dietary parenting. Compared to truly understanding, these mothers only have a superficial awareness. For example, one mother's response when asked about the nutrition and dietary parenting given to her child was:

**“The important thing is that I feed them regularly three times a day, and the meals follow the concept of a balanced diet with four healthy foods and the fifth being milk.”**

However, when asked further about the concept of "4 sehat 5 sempurna" itself, the woman appeared confused and struggled to answer. The lack of understanding regarding good nutrition and proper dietary intake was demonstrated by one mother who regularly bought food from outside rather than cooking meals and arranging the right nutritional portions for her child.

**“I usually prefer to buy food rather than cook it myself, as it's more convenient.”**

Mothers seem to give their children the freedom to choose snacks outside the home. This lack of proper understanding from mothers negatively impacts children's physical growth. Data shows that mothers with poor nutritional parenting tend to have more children experiencing stunting compared to mothers with good nutritional parenting, with a ratio of 11:26 (Ningtias, 2020). This indicates a relationship between mothers' attitudes and stunting incidents in toddlers. This proves that there is a connection between knowledge and attitude, where a positive attitude is influenced by good knowledge. A negative attitude from mothers can affect the nutritional parenting of toddlers (Pandai, 2021).



**Figure 2.** Diagram of Respondents' Last Education Data

The lack of understanding regarding proper nutrition and dietary parenting for young children can be attributed to the educational background of the mothers. Based on data, out of 20 respondents, 50% are high school/vocational school graduates, 40% are junior high school graduates, and 10% are university graduates. Through interviews, it was found that mothers with higher education levels, such as university graduates, have a better understanding of good nutrition and dietary parenting compared to mothers with lower education levels, such as junior high school graduates. This is related to the majority of respondents' economic difficulties. Afifah stated in 2014 that dropping out of school can be caused by economic and environmental factors. The economic factor refers to not all communities having the means to continue education. Meanwhile, the environmental factor refers to the influence received by someone due to their living environment, for instance, if a person lives in a community where the population is uneducated, they tend to follow their surroundings.

Malnutrition is a widespread issue affecting the global population at certain economic stages (Dukhi, 2020). The causes of malnutrition are multifactorial, including economic status, nutritional intake, parental education level, employment, number of children, knowledge, and parenting style (Semba, 2008). Research by Aramico (2016), Helina (2016), and Setiawati (2022) shows a significant relationship between nutritional status and parenting style, as well as the family's socioeconomic conditions. Families facing economic difficulties are unable to buy high-quality food, thus only affording basic food supplies, resulting in less varied meals and suboptimal fulfillment of children's nutritional needs. A good socioeconomic status supports the adoption of a healthier lifestyle, contributing to children's nutritional status. A good socioeconomic level allows for the fulfillment of nutritious food needs, improving children's nutritional status as all necessary nutrients are met. Parents with high economic status have better purchasing power to provide facilities, maintain home cleanliness, and access good drinking water sources (Wandani, 2021). However, children's nutritional status is not entirely

determined by their parents' socioeconomic status. It is more influenced by healthy living behaviors, nutritious food, and children's daily energy adequacy. Nonetheless, parents with better socioeconomic status can more easily meet the needs for healthy and balanced meals, so socioeconomic level can be said to influence children's nutritional status (Ahmad, 2013).

Based on research data, it is undeniable that many cases of stunting still occur out there to this day. Maternal nutrition and health status are crucial determinants of stunting. A malnourished mother is more likely to give birth to a stunted child, perpetuating the vicious cycle of malnutrition and poverty (Unicef, 2013). Additionally, the community is not yet aware that short stature in children is a problem because children with short stature are seen as having normal activity, unlike thin children who need immediate attention. Similarly, the importance of maternal nutrition during pregnancy is not fully realized by the community, as it contributes to the nutritional status of the baby to be born (Unicef Indonesia, 2013).

Nutritional issues are closely related to the availability of sufficient food. Additionally, long distribution chains sometimes cause variations in selling prices across different regions, making it difficult for many people, especially those living in remote or island areas, to access food due to the considerable distance or unaffordable prices. Understanding the nutritional content of the food we consume directly impacts the amount of nutrition we receive (Baihaki, 2017). Health issues are not uncommon in this community's life. Nutritional problems are issues throughout the life cycle, from pregnancy, infancy, toddlerhood, adolescence, to old age. Therefore, we should be grateful if we are still given the opportunity to consume nutritious food up until now.

## CONCLUSION

In this study, it can be concluded that the nutritional parenting and nutrition from mothers significantly influence the physical development of early childhood. Poor nutritional parenting and nutrition are likely to cause stunting in children. Poor nutritional parenting and nutrition can be caused by the mother's lack of understanding of good nutritional parenting for early childhood, the mother's level of education, and economic status. In addition to affecting the lack of understanding of good nutritional parenting, economic status can also directly influence the nutritional parenting and nutrition of early childhood because a good socioeconomic level helps fulfill the need for proper and nutritious food intake. Thus, indirectly, the child's nutritional status will also improve, as all the necessary nutrients required by the body can be adequately met.

The suggestions that can be given are as follows: first, it is important for parents to understand what stunting is, the impacts it can have on children, and how to prevent it so that mothers can be more aware of their children's nutrition and avoid stunting in early childhood. Second, there should be health outreach programs in the community, such as mobile health centers. Communities with lower to middle economic conditions, especially around Jakarta, should receive more attention. With mobile health centers in these areas, information and education can be provided to mothers on the importance of good nutrition and parenting. Third, future research should use different methods, such as quantitative-qualitative approaches, to obtain accurate data by aligning the factors influencing stunting. Then, provide education and health information related to appropriate nutritional parenting. It is hoped that children will have good nutritional status and prevent the risk of stunting.



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