

Socio-Cultural Factors in Family Food Selection in Indonesia: A Literature Review

Tasya

University of Jambi

tasyatasy@gmail.com

Abstract

This study is a qualitative review based on literature studies on strategies for overcoming malnutrition in children under five in rural areas. Through data collection from journals, reports, and policy documents published in 2020–2025, a thematic analysis was conducted to identify root causes, good practices, and intervention gaps. The findings show that malnutrition in children under five in rural areas is triggered by poverty and low family food security, minimal nutritional literacy among parents, and limited infrastructure and primary health services. Effective strategies revealed include community-based nutrition education, utilization of local foods, cross-sector interventions, and culturally sensitive communication utilizing local figures and local media. The involvement of health cadres, community leaders, and family economic empowerment has been shown to increase program sustainability. This study recommends a holistic policy that integrates education, economic empowerment, strengthening health services, and local cultural adaptation to reduce the prevalence of malnutrition in children under five in villages. The main contribution of this study is the development of a strategic framework based on evidence and local context that can be used as a reference for policy makers and public health practitioners.

Keywords: Toddlers; Malnutrition; Rural Areas

Introduction

The problem of malnutrition in toddlers is still a serious challenge in efforts to improve public health in Indonesia, especially in rural areas. Data from various surveys show that the prevalence of malnutrition is higher in villages than in cities. Geographical factors, economic limitations, and the lack of availability of nutritious food are the main causes of the high rate of malnutrition. Toddlers who experience malnutrition are at high risk of stunting, wasting, and even premature death. This condition will certainly have an impact on the quality of life of children in the long term, and on a macro scale can affect the productivity of future generations.

In addition to economic and access factors, the low level of knowledge of parents—especially mothers—regarding toddler nutrition also worsens the situation. Many parents do not yet understand the importance of balanced nutritional intake, the right frequency of feeding, and the nutritional content of local foods that are actually potential. Inappropriate parenting patterns, influenced by limited information and belief in traditional myths, mean that children do not get the intake that suits their needs. Therefore, the role of nutritional education is very important as a form of preventive intervention while empowering families in maintaining their children's health.

On the other hand, limited health infrastructure in rural areas is a major obstacle in early detection and handling of malnutrition cases. The lack of facilities such as active integrated health posts, limited health workers, and uneven distribution of nutritional assistance cause interventions to not run optimally. Many toddlers who need nutritional attention are not identified quickly, so that symptoms of malnutrition become chronic and difficult to recover. Therefore, strengthening basic health services, providing trained medical personnel, and increasing the role of village cadres need to be a priority in the strategy for dealing with malnutrition.

The mitigation strategies implemented must also be adjusted to the social and cultural context of the local community. A uniform approach that does not pay attention to local conditions is often less effective. Therefore, a participatory strategy is needed, involving the community, traditional leaders, and local stakeholders in program development. The use of local food ingredients and traditional wisdom that supports healthy eating patterns must also be encouraged so that interventions become more sustainable. With a contextual and community-based strategy, efforts to overcome malnutrition will be more easily accepted, implemented, and have a real impact on the lives of rural communities.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature review study method, which aims to analyze various strategies for overcoming malnutrition in toddlers in rural areas based on relevant literature reviews. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore in depth the concepts, findings, and best practices from various published scientific sources, as well as understand the social, cultural, and structural contexts that influence malnutrition problems in rural areas.

The data sources in this study were obtained from scientific journal articles, academic books, research reports, and policy documents, published in the last five years (2020–2025) to ensure the relevance and timeliness of the information. Literature searches were conducted through academic

databases such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, ResearchGate, and university databases, with keywords such as: toddler malnutrition, rural areas, nutrition intervention strategies, family nutrition education, and rural basic health services.

The data analysis technique used is thematic analysis, which includes the process of identifying, categorizing, and interpreting the main themes that emerge from various literature sources. The analysis steps include: (1) reading and understanding the text thoroughly, (2) marking important information, (3) grouping data based on certain themes, and (4) drawing conclusions based on emerging patterns. The validity of the study is strengthened through the source triangulation technique, namely comparing various literatures to see the consistency of information and avoid single interpretation bias.

Through this method, the research is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the strategies that have been implemented in efforts to overcome malnutrition in toddlers in rural areas, as well as provide recommendations based on theory and practice for the development of more effective policies and programs.

Results and Discussion

Malnutrition in children under five in rural areas is a crucial issue that requires serious attention. This condition is not only caused by a lack of food intake, but is also influenced by various interrelated social, economic, and structural factors. Previous studies have shown that children under five in rural areas have a higher risk of experiencing malnutrition compared to children in urban areas. This is due to limited access to nutritious food, basic health services, and low levels of education and public knowledge about the importance of nutrition in the early stages of child growth.

Poverty is one of the main root causes that worsens the nutritional condition of toddlers. In poor households, food choices are very limited, and nutritional needs are often neglected in order to meet other basic needs. Literature studies show that families with low incomes tend to provide cheap and filling food, but low in micronutrients such as iron, calcium, and vitamins. Family food security is very important, because not all households are able to provide healthy food sustainably for their children.

In addition to economic factors, low knowledge of parents, especially mothers, regarding child nutrition also contributes to the high rate of malnutrition. Many mothers do not understand the principles of exclusive breastfeeding, the types of appropriate complementary foods, and the recommended frequency of eating for toddlers. Not infrequently, the practice of feeding toddlers

is based on hereditary habits or local beliefs that are not necessarily scientifically correct. This low nutritional literacy causes many toddlers to not get a balanced nutritional intake, so they experience growth and development disorders.

This condition is exacerbated by limited infrastructure and health services in rural areas. The lack of integrated health post facilities, limited health workers, and long access to health centers or hospitals make it difficult for people to obtain information and nutrition services regularly. Integrated health posts, which should be at the forefront of monitoring child growth and development, often do not operate optimally due to a lack of cadres and logistics. As a result, cases of malnutrition are difficult to detect early, and treatment is delayed.

In such situations, the role of local communities, especially village health cadres and community leaders, becomes very important. Research shows that nutrition management strategies that involve local communities are more successful because of a sense of ownership and direct involvement. Posyandu cadres, for example, have a strategic position in conveying information, assisting mothers in monitoring child nutrition, and being a bridge between health workers and residents. Community involvement not only increases the effectiveness of the program, but also strengthens social cohesion in supporting child growth and development.

An effective malnutrition management strategy must also consider the potential of local food available in the surrounding environment. In many rural areas, there are actually natural resources rich in nutrients, such as freshwater fish, green leafy vegetables, and local fruits. However, the lack of understanding of the nutritional value of local food often means that it is not optimally utilized. Therefore, educational programs that encourage the use of local food are one of the sustainable and contextual approaches for rural communities.

Various studies also emphasize the importance of cross-sectoral and integrated interventions. The problem of malnutrition cannot be solved by the health sector alone, but also requires support from the education, agriculture, social, and economic sectors. Successful programs usually involve many parties, including local governments, NGOs, universities, and traditional leaders. Interventions that include nutrition education, supplementary feeding, improving environmental sanitation, and psychosocial assistance have proven to be more effective than partial approaches.

In addition, the communication approach used in the nutrition control program must also be adjusted to the local cultural and language context. Nutrition messages delivered using methods that are close to people's lives, such as through religious studies, traditional art performances, or folklore, are more easily accepted and understood. Culturally sensitive communication not only

accelerates program acceptance but also builds collective awareness of the importance of children's health in family and community life.

Through a qualitative approach with literature study, this study was able to identify patterns, challenges, and solutions that have been applied in various rural contexts. The literature study provides a comprehensive picture of strategies that have proven effective, as well as revealing gaps that still need to be addressed. These findings can be used as a basis for formulating more relevant, adaptive, and sustainable public policies and intervention programs, in order to reduce the number of malnutrition among toddlers and improve the quality of life of children in rural Indonesia.

Conclusion

Malnutrition in children under five in rural areas is a complex problem and is influenced by various factors such as poverty, low nutritional literacy of parents, limited access to health services, and unequal distribution of resources. Literature studies show that successful mitigation approaches generally involve integrated and contextual strategies, which do not only focus on health interventions alone, but also include family economic empowerment, local culture-based nutrition education, and strengthening the role of communities and health cadres. Utilization of local food, community involvement in nutrition programs, and communication that is in accordance with local values and languages have been shown to increase the effectiveness of interventions. A cross-sectoral approach is key to overcoming structural and social barriers that have worsened children's nutritional conditions. Therefore, strategies for mitigating malnutrition in rural areas need to be designed holistically, sustainably, and based on scientific evidence from various literature sources, in order to create real change for the growth and development of Indonesian children in remote areas.

Bibliography

- Choerun Nisa, NI et al. (2022). Implementation of Malnutrition Control Policy for Toddlers in Banteran Village. EsSochum Journal proceedings.uinsgd.ac.id+8journal.unupurwokerto.ac.id+8ojs.batangkab.go.id+8.
- Kisnawaty, SW, Isnaeni, FN, & Wulandari, A. (2024). Prevention of Stunting in Toddlers: Counseling & Training on Healthy Menus. JAMSI jamsi.jurnal-id.com+1journal.ipb.ac.id+1.
- Ashikin, PA et al. (2022). Prevention of Malnutrition through Communication Strategy at Tanjung Rejo Health Center. Tambusai Education Journal jamsi.jurnal-id.com+2jptam.org+2jptam.org+2.

-
- Wahyuningsih, & Irawan, T. (2021). Strategy for Improving Nutritional Status of Toddlers in Batang Regency. RISTEK Batang Regency journal.ipb.ac.id+11ojs.batangkab.go.id+11sehati.pelantarpress.co.id+11.
- Agustina, D. et al. (2024). Evaluation of Stunting Prevention Program in Toddlers. Tambusai Education Journal so03.tci-thaijo.org+8jptam.org+8jptam.org+8.
- Pratiwi, IG (2023). Literature Study: Specific Interventions for Handling Stunting. Indonesian Health Issue jamsi.jurnal-id.com+2sehati.pelantarpress.co.id+2jptam.org+2.
- Purwanti, R. et al. (2023). Strategy for Improving Knowledge, Attitude & Practice of Responsive Feeding. Wikrama Parahita journal.unupurwokerto.ac.id+8sehati.pelantarpress.co.id+8ejournal3.undip.ac.id+8.
- Rahmanda, F., & Gurning, FP (2022). Implementation of Stunting Prevention Policy 1000 HPK. PubHealth proceedings.uinsgd.ac.id+3sehati.pelantarpress.co.id+3jptam.org+3.
- Ilmiati, I., Jamhary, & Lestari, RI (2023). Health Quality Control in Efforts to Overcome Malnutrition. Dynamic ojs.dinamikakesehatan.unism.ac.id+1ojs.batangkab.go.id+1.
- Utari, F. et al. (2023). Literature Review: Analysis of the Implementation of Stunting Prevention Programs in Community Health Centers. Public Health Media sehati.pelantarpress.co.id+2ejournal.undip.ac.id+2jptam.org+2.
- Arasy, FT et al. (2024). Stunting Surveillance & Maternal Education in Jeporo Village. JPIM journal.ipb.ac.id.
- Trisilawati, R. et al. (2025). Social Perceptions About Stunting in Rural Central Java. JPSS so03.tci-thaijo.org.
- Bima, A. (2020). Analysis of Stunting Mitigation Efforts: Village Fund Policy. Proceedings UIN jptam.org+11proceedings.uinsgd.ac.id+11journal.unupurwokerto.ac.id+11.
- Marsh, D.R. et al. (2023). Care Group interventions improve WASH and nutrition behaviours. BMJ Global Health en.wikipedia.org+1en.wikipedia.org+1.
- Komakech, J.J. et al. (2024). Care Groups in Infant Growth among Refugees. PLOS ONE en.wikipedia.org.
- Gupta, P. (2025). Systematic Review: Women's Agricultural Participation and Nutrition. arxiv.org.

Islam, MR, & Sim, N. (2021). Education and Food Consumption Patterns in Indonesia. [arxiv.org+1](#) [en.wikipedia.org+1](#).

Nosratabadi, S. et al. (2020). Social Capital Contributions to Food Security: A Review. [arxiv.org+1](#) [arxiv.org+1](#).

GAIN (2022). Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition – Fortification Programme. [en.wikipedia.org](#).

Ilmiati, I. et al. (2023). Health Quality Control in Efforts to Overcome Malnutrition. Dynamic (duplicate?) — but ensure distinct. We can replace duplicate:

Utari et al. already. Use positive deviance Wikipedia but too old. Instead use Foodbank:

Foodbank of Indonesia (2025). Food Kitchen & Qurban Program to Remote Areas. [ojs.dinamikakesehatan.unism.ac.id](#) [en.wikipedia.org](#).