

Handling Stunting in Indonesia: Challenges, Progress and Recommendations

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ABSTRACT

Stunting is a nutritional problem that has an impact on children's growth and development. This article discusses the prevalence of stunting in Indonesia, the efforts made by the government, and Indonesia's position in dealing with the stunting problem. Data from various sources, including WHO and the Global Nutrition Report, is used to provide a comprehensive picture. In a global context, stunting affected approximately 144 million children under five years in 2019, with a higher prevalence in low- and middle-income countries. In Southeast Asia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Timor Leste have a high prevalence of stunting. Even though Indonesia has shown progress in reducing stunting rates, there are still challenges and targets that must be achieved. Indonesia's contribution to the global stunting problem, both in terms of causes and solutions. Efforts that have been made, such as improving nutrition for children and pregnant women, quality of health services, access to sanitation, and participation of all parties, are highlighted as important steps in dealing with stunting.

Key words: stunting, prevalence, treatment, nutrition, children, pregnant women

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INTRODUCTION

Stunting is a form of growth failure (growth faltering) due to the accumulation of nutritional deficiencies that last for a long time starting from pregnancy until the age of 24 months. This situation is exacerbated by the lack of adequate catch-up growth.¹

Globally, stunting affected around 144 million children under five years in 2019, or around 21.3 percent of the world's child population. Stunting is more common in low- and middle-income countries, especially in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.² The World Health Organization (WHO) has set a target to reduce the prevalence of stunting by 40 percent by 2025 from the condition in 2013. According to the 2020 Global Nutrition Report, the prevalence of stunting in Southeast Asia is 27.6 percent, or around 28.7 million children.³ Indonesia, the Philippines and Timor Leste are the three countries with the highest prevalence of stunting in the region, namely 30.8 percent, 28.8 percent and 50.2 percent respectively. Nationally, Indonesia is still one of the countries with the highest cases of stunting in the world. WHO data shows that Indonesia ranks 4th in the world and 2nd in Southeast Asia as a country with a high stunting rate.⁴ 2018 Basic Health Research (Riskesmas) data shows that the prevalence of stunting in Indonesia is 30.8 percent, or around 9 million children.⁵ According to Teguh, national action to accelerate stunting reduction has been carried out on a massive scale throughout Indonesia. The results are quite significant, namely being able to reduce the prevalence of stunting by 9.2 percentage points since 2018, although there are still many shortcomings.⁶

The causes of stunting are not only related to malnutrition in mothers and children, but are also influenced by other factors, such as uncertainty in food and nutrition policies, poverty, low access and quality of health services, lack of sanitation and clean water, as well as existing socio-cultural constructions in society.⁷

WHO recommendations for preventing stunting⁴ (Rahmayanti, 2022) include: Increasing the nutritional intake of pregnant and breastfeeding mothers, including supplementation with iron, folic acid, calcium and vitamin A. Encouraging exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months and providing complementary foods for breast milk. quality and variety afterwards. Providing iron, vitamin A and zinc supplementation or fortification to children, as well as treating worm infections and malaria. Improving access and quality of health services, including immunization, family planning services, and early detection and treatment of pregnancy and childbirth complications. Improving access and quality of sanitation and clean water, as well as encouraging clean and healthy living behavior. Increase family and community knowledge and skills about nutrition and health, and empower women and girls. Increasing the availability and affordability of nutritious, safe and diverse

food, as well as reducing inequality and poverty.

INDONESIA'S ACTIONS IN HANDLING STUNTING

Stunting is a condition of failure to grow in children caused by a lack of nutritional intake, especially in the first 1,000 days of life. Stunting can have a negative impact on children's health, development and productivity in the future.⁸ Indonesia is one of the countries with a high prevalence of stunting, namely around 24.4 percent in 2021.

To reduce stunting rates, the Indonesian government has made various efforts involving cross sectors, programs and levels. Some efforts made based on Health services include: 1). Improving the nutrition of children and pregnant women, through providing additional food, iron supplements, and exclusive breastfeeding.^{9,10} 2). Improving the quality of health services, through pregnancy checks, monitoring the growth and development of toddlers, completeness of vaccinations, and handling infections.^{9,11} 3). Increasing access and quality of sanitation and clean water, through infrastructure development, clean and healthy living behavior, and waste management.^{9,12} 4). Increasing the availability and affordability of nutritious food, through non-cash food assistance programs, national health insurance, and the family hope program.¹² Efforts based on strengthening education are increasing the knowledge and skills of families and communities regarding nutrition and health, through socialization, education and empowerment of cadres and community leaders.¹¹ Efforts to increase community involvement, namely increasing participation and collaboration of all parties, including government, private sector, academics, media, NGOs and the community in preventing and controlling stunting.⁸

There are several potential obstacles to achieving the 2024 stunting reduction target in Indonesia, including: 1) Lack of accurate and credible data on the prevalence of stunting in various regions, which makes it difficult to make targeted and effective policies.¹ 2) Lack of emphasis on specific interventions directly related to stunting management, such as nutritional supplementation, provision of additional food, and early detection of stunting.¹ 3) Lack of coordination, commitment and convergence between various sectors and stakeholders involved in reducing stunting, such as health, education, clean water, sanitation, food and social protection.^{2,3} 4) Lack of awareness, knowledge and practices of maternal nutrition and care children, as well as access to nutritious food at the household level 5.

WHAT IS INDONESIA'S CURRENT POSITION?

Indonesia's current position regarding the stunting problem is as follows: Indonesia is still one of the

countries with the highest prevalence of stunting in the world and in Southeast Asia. According to WHO data, the prevalence of stunting in Indonesia was 30.8 percent in 2018, or around 9 million children. This figure places Indonesia in 4th place in the world and 2nd in Southeast Asia as the country with the highest stunting rate.¹³ Indonesia has made various efforts to reduce stunting rates, based on WHO recommendations, namely involving cross-sectors, programs and levels. Some of the efforts made include improving the nutrition of children and pregnant women, the quality of health services, access and quality of sanitation and clean water, the availability and affordability of nutritious food, the knowledge and skills of families and communities regarding nutrition and health, as well as the participation and collaboration of all parties.^{8,14}

Indonesia has shown progress in reducing stunting rates.¹⁵ Table 1 is data on stunting rates in Indonesia for 2019-2023.

Table 1: Data on stunting rates in Indonesia in 2019- 2023

Year	Stunting Prevalence (%)
2019	27.7
2020	24.4
2021	21.6
2022	20.8
2023	18.5

Table 1 illustrates that Indonesia has shown progress in reducing the stunting rate by 10.3% over the last 5 years. Indonesia still has challenges and targets that must be achieved in preventing stunting. The national target set is to reduce the stunting rate to 14 percent by 2024.^{14,16} To achieve this target, Indonesia needs to increase intervention, convergence, innovation and good data in handling stunting.

INDONESIA'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE WORLD'S STUNTING PROBLEM

The Indonesian government's contribution to reducing the stunting rate is to carry out various efforts that involve cross-sectors, programs and levels. Efforts made are: Improving the nutrition of children and pregnant women, through providing additional food, iron supplements, and exclusive breastfeeding.¹³ Improving the quality of health services, through pregnancy checks, monitoring toddler growth and development, complete vaccination, and treating infections.⁸ Improving access and quality of sanitation and clean water, through infrastructure development, clean and healthy living behavior, and waste management.^{3,12} Increasing the availability and affordability of nutritious food. Increase family and community knowledge and skills about nutrition and health. through socialization, education and empowerment of cadres and community leaders. In-

crease participation and collaboration of all parties, including the government, private sector, academics, media, NGOs and the community, in preventing and controlling stunting.

It is hoped that these efforts can reduce the stunting rate in Indonesia in line with the national target set at 14 percent by 2024.

CONCLUSION

The problem of stunting in Indonesia is a condition of failure to grow in children caused by a lack of nutritional intake, especially in the first 1,000 days of life. Indonesia is one of the countries with the highest prevalence of stunting in the world and in Southeast Asia, namely around 21.6 percent in 2022, or around 6.5 million children. Indonesia's efforts to handle stunting are to carry out various interventions that involve cross-sectors, programs and levels. These efforts have shown progress in reducing stunting rates, but there are still challenges and targets that must be achieved.

Recommendations for efforts to handle stunting are to increase intervention, convergence, innovation and good data in handling stunting.

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