

Original Article

Prevalence and Determinants Stunting Among Children Under Two Years in Indonesian District

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to analyze the prevalence and determinants of stunting in children under two years of age in Tojo Una-Una District, Indonesia as focus location of stunting. The method is Cross-sectional study design, the sample of 300 children aged 0-23 months, stratified random sampling technique. Data collection in June-July 2022. Stunting data was obtained by measuring body length using the length measuring board. The WHO-Anthro 2005 software was used to determine the Z-Score height per age. Univariate, bivariate, and multivariate analyzes used SPSS version 22.00. The Results of this research show that 33.7% of children under the age of two are stunted. Stunting in children under the age of two is associated with child age, birth weight, and food insecurity. In addition to a history of low birth weight (AOR=2.7, 95% CI: 1.2-5.7) and experiencing food insecurity (AOR=1.9, 95% CI: 1.1-3.5), children aged 12-23 months (AOR=3.5, 95% CI: 1.7-7.2) have a higher tendency to experience stunting than those who are not. The Conclusion is the prevalence of stunting which is more than 20 percent is a priority health problem that must be resolved by 2024. Interventions to reduce stunting by reducing the incidence of low birth weight, reducing food insecurity, managing birth spacing > 3 years, number of children less than 3, and breastfeeding.

Keywords : *Stunting, Low Birth Weight, Food Insecurity, Malnutrition, Child Health.*

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INTRODUCTION

Stunting is defined as an anthropometric measure of a child's height for age (HAZ) with a Z-score <-2 Standard Deviation from World Health Organization (WHO) standard ¹. Stunting is a diagnostic category in assessing a child's nutritional status that was introduced in 1973 by J. C. Waterlow. Stunting usually appears early in life, is a long-term linear growth obstacle, and is difficult to recover for

further growth ². According to UNICEF/WHO and the World Bank ¹ there are approximately 149 million stunted children worldwide, accounting for 22% of all children. The proportion of stunted children is concentrated in low-income (34.6%) and lower-middle-income (29.1%) countries. In 2020, more than half of all stunted children under the age of five lived in Asia, with Southeast Asia having the highest stunting prevalence (27.4%) ¹.

Malnutrition, including stunting, is prevalent in Indonesia³. According to Ministry of Health data, the prevalence of stunting in children aged five and under remains high, at 30.8%⁴. Meanwhile, the Indonesian government hopes to reduce stunting to 14% by 2024⁵. According to the World Bank (2020), Indonesia has done less well than upper middle-income countries and other countries in the region in terms of reducing stunting rates⁶. Stunting prevalence varies by region in Indonesia, with provinces in eastern Indonesia having a higher prevalence of stunting than other regions^{4,7}. Central Sulawesi is one of the top ten provinces in Indonesia with the highest prevalence (28.2%), with Tojo Una-una district ranking fifth out of 14 districts⁸. In 2023, Tojo Una-una Regency will be the focus location (locus) for integrated stunting reduction interventions⁹.

Stunting has serious consequences for children's physical and cognitive development, resulting in long-term health and well-being issues. Stunted children are more vulnerable to infectious diseases, and their cognitive development may be hampered, resulting in poor educational performance and lower productivity in adulthood^{10,11}. Understanding the factors that contribute to stunting is essential for developing effective interventions to prevent and reduce stunting in children.

The most recent research from Rwanda, Gambia, Ethiopia, India, Uganda¹²⁻¹⁶, and Indonesia^{17,18} indicates that the causes of child stunting vary and are multifactorial. Stunting determinants include low birth weight¹⁸⁻²³, food insecurity^{19,23-27}, birth spacing^{7,28-30}, child age³¹⁻³⁴ number of children³⁵⁻³⁸, and the inability to breastfeed exclusively³⁹⁻⁴². Stunting increased significantly in children living in households with three or more children under five years of age, households with 5-7 household members, children whose mothers attended less than four antenatal care services during pregnancy, males, 12-23 months old, and low birth weight⁴³. Non-exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months, low household socioeconomic status, premature birth, short birth, low maternal height, low education, poor latrines, untreated drinking water, poor access to health care, and living in rural areas are all determinants of stunting in Indonesia^{44,45}. A study in Central Sulawesi discovered that low birth weight, poor hand-washing practices, and a lack of a latrine were

risk factors for stunting⁴⁶⁻⁴⁸.

Despite the high prevalence of stunting in Tojo Una-Una district, limited research has been conducted on the determinants of stunting among children under two years of age. Therefore, this study aims to determine the prevalence of stunting and identify its determinants among children under two years of age in Tojo Una-Una district.

METHOD

This is a cross-sectional analytic study. Tojo Una-una District is the site of the research. As a stunting locus, there are 23 village areas spread across 9 sub-districts. There are three sub-districts on the mainland and six on the islands. Approximately thirteen to fourteen children under the age of two represent each village. The stratified random sampling technique was used to select the candidates. Nutrition workers who had received 5-day training collected measurement data.

The locus of stunting in a sample of 300 children aged 0-23 months. Data collected from the mothers of the study sample. The Data Technical Person in Charge checked the data for completeness and correctness.

The dependent variable is children's nutritional status, which is classified into two categories: normal and stunting. This category is based on the results of calculating the z-score for HAZ (< -2 SD categorized as stunting) using the WHO-Anthro 2005 software. The independent variables are divided into mother and child factors.

Mother factors: the mother's age, mother's education, type of delivery, drinking water source, family latrine ownership, ownership index, breastfeeding, breastmilk, food insecurity, number of children, delivery distance, residence, utilization of health facilities, smoking family.

Child factors: child's gender, child's age in months, early breastfeeding initiation, birth length, low birth weight, supplementary feeding, receive growth stimulation, illness history, history of Acute Respiratory Illness (ARI), history of diarrhea, history of pulmonary tuberculosis, history of measles, history of intestinal worms, child condition during the study.

Stunting data was obtained by measuring body length using the Length Measuring Board (LMB) and measuring age by

reading the birth certificate or the Maternal Child Handbook (MCH) of the respondent's child. Other data were obtained by filling out the cobocollect questionnaire.

Data were analyzed in 3 stages. The first is univariate analysis to describe the frequency distribution of each variable. Second, bivariate analysis between the dependent variable and the independent variable to calculate the adjusted odds ratio (AOR), namely the relative risk between the stunting group and the normal group with a significant chi-square test $p < 0.05$. The third multivariate analyzes used the backward logistic regression method. All analyzes were performed using SPSS 22.00 software (IBM Corp, Armonk, NY, USA) with a 95% confidence interval (CI) and a significance p -value ≤ 0.05 .

Study ethical eligibility was obtained from the Ethics Commission of the Poltekkes, Ministry of Health, Palu Number 0010/KEPK-KPK/IV/2022.

RESULTS

According to our findings (table 1), the prevalence of stunting in toddlers in the Tojo Una-una District stunting locus area is 33.7%. where it was discovered that the characteristics of the mothers of stunted children were mostly aged 20 years or more (34.5%), had an education period of less than 9 years (35.0%), gave birth to their children normally (33.8%), did not breastfeed their children (40.1%), having more than 3 children (41.8%), and having a distance of 3 years or less (42.6%)

their children had a higher incidence of stunting. Mothers who use improved drinking water sources (34.5%), own family latrines (34.2%), have a middle down ownership index (37.0%), have food insecurity (44.4%), live on islands (35.4%), and do not smoke (40%) have a higher incidence of stunting in their children.

In our findings also found that food diversity in children under two years of age in the stunting locus is still less diverse, with children under two years of age consuming animal protein sources only 32.0% and vegetable protein sources only 9.3%. Drinking milk other than breast milk was 23.0%, consuming vegetables as sources of vitamin A only 8.3%, dark green vegetables only 19.3%. Intake of fruit sources of vitamin A only 3.0%, but children under two years of age who had consumed snacks such as crackers or cheese balls were as much as 9.7%.

The most stunted children were aged 12-23 months (42.3%), initiated early breastfeeding (35.0%), born less than 48 cm (37.3%), born with low birth weight (47.2%), given supplementary feeding (39.7%), receiving growth stimulation (37.8%), having a history of illness (33.9%), both history of ARI, diarrhea, lung tuberculosis, and intestinal worms, and children who were in mild pain (41.9%). According to the bivariate analysis from statistical chi-square test showed a relation between stunting in children under two years with breastfeeding ($p=0.020$), food insecurity ($p=0.42$), and child's age ($p=0.001$) (table 1).

Table 1. Respondent characteristics and cross tabulation with stunting prevalence

Variable	Nutritional Status				p-value
	Stunting		Normal		
	n (101)	%	n (199)	%	
Mother's characteristics					
Mother's age (year)					
<20	12	28.6	30	71.4	0.451
≥ 20	89	34.5	169	65.5	
Mother's education					
<9 years	72	35.0	134	65.0	0.486
≥ 9 years	29	30.9	65	69.1	
Type of delivery					
Normal	93	33.8	182	66.2	0.854
Sectio Secarea	8	32.0	17	68.0	
Breast milk					
Not exclusive	68	33.0	138	67.0	0.863
Exclusive	31	33.0	63	67.0	
Breastfeeding					
No	59	40.1	88	59.9	0.020*
Yes	42	27.5	111	72.5	

Number of children					
>3 children	23	41.8	32	58.2	0.157
≤3 children	78	31.8	167	68.2	
Delivery Distance					
≤3 years	29	42.6	39	57.4	0.075
>3 years	72	31.0	160	69.0	
Utilization of health facilities					
No	12	33.3	24	66.7	0.964
Yes	89	33.7	175	66.3	
Drinking water Source					
Not Improved	5	22.7	17	77.3	0.259
Improved	96	34.5	182	65.5	
Family Latrine Ownership					
No	32	32.7	66	67.3	0.796
Yes	69	34.2	133	65.8	
Ownership index					
Middle down	57	37.0	97	63.0	0.208
Middle to above	44	30.1	102	69.9	
Food insecurity					
Yes	28	44.4	35	55.6	0.042*
No	73	30.8	164	69.2	
Residence					
Island	80	35.4	146	64.6	0.267
Non-island	21	28.4	53	71.6	
Smoking family					
No	8	40.0	12	60.0	0.535
Yes	93	33.2	187	66.8	
Child's characteristics					
Child age (month)					
0-6	18	27.3	48	72.7	0.001**
7-11	12	18.2	54	81.8	
12-23	71	42.3	97	57.7	
Early Breastfeeding Initiation					
No	43	30.7	97	69.3	0.599
Yes	56	35.0	104	65.0	
Birth Length					
<48 cm	28	37.3	47	62.7	0.438
≥48 cm	73	32.4	152	67.6	
Low birth weight					
Yes	17	47.2	19	52.8	0.067
No	84	31.8	180	68.2	
Supplementary feeding					
No	53	29.6	126	70.4	0.070
Yes	48	39.7	73	60.3	
Receive growth stimulation					
No	39	28.7	97	71.3	0.096
Yes	62	37.8	102	62.2	
Illness history					
No	14	32.6	29	67.4	0.868
Yes	87	33.9	170	66.1	
History of ARI					
No	60	30.9	134	69.1	0.174
Yes	41	38.7	65	61.3	
History of diarrhea					
No	92	33.5	183	66.5	0.797
Yes	9	36.0	16	64.0	
History of pulmonary tuberculosis					
No	100	33.6	198	66.4	0.642
Yes	1	50.0	1	50.0	

History of measles					
No	87	33.7	171	66.3	0.961
Yes	14	33.3	28	66.7	
History of intestinal worms					
No	97	33.4	193	66.6	0.666
Yes	4	40.0	6	60.0	
Child condition during the study					
Mild pain	18	41.9	25	58.1	0.219
Healthy	83	32.3	174	67.7	
Total	101	33.7	199	66.3	

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.001

Table 2 presents the results of the multivariate analysis where showed that children aged 12-23 months are 3.5 times more likely to experience stunting (95% CI 1.7-7.2) than children aged 0-6 months. Children under two years of age who were born with low birth weight were 2.7 times more likely to experience

stunting (95% CI 1.2-5.7) compared to them who were born with normal weight. Children under two years of age who experience food insecurity are likely to experience stunting 1.9 times (95% CI 1.1-3.5) compared to them who do not experience food insecurity.

Table 2. Multivariate Analysis of Determinants of Stunting in Children Under Two Years Age in Indonesian District.

Variables	p-value	AOR	95%CI	
			Lower	Upper
Child age				
0-6	reff	1.0		
7-11	0.105	1.7	0.9	3.4
12-23	0.001**	3.5	1.7	7.2
Low birth weight				
No	reff	1.0		
Yes	0.011*	2.7	1.2	5.7
Food insecurity				
No	reff	1.0		
Yes	0.034*	1.9	1.1	3.5
Number of children				
>3 children	reff	1.0		
≤3 children	0.136	1.6	0.9	3.0
Birth spacing				
≤3 years	reff	1.0		
>3 years	0.066	1.7	1.0	3.1
Breastfeeding				
No	reff	1.0		
Yes	0.168	1.4	0.9	2.4

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.001

DISCUSSION

The stunting rate in children under two years of age is one of the most important health indicators globally ³⁷. The prevalence of stunting under two years of age in the stunting locus area of Tojo Una-una District in 2022 in this study is 33.7%. In other studies, the results

of a survey on the nutritional status of Indonesian children under five conducted by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia showed that there was an increase in the prevalence trend of child stunting in Tojo Una-Una District from 29.4% ⁴⁹ in 2021 to 31.3% ⁵⁰ in 2022 or an increase of 1.9% in a year. The results of this study indicate that the incidence

of stunting is significantly increasing in children born with a body weight <2500 gram, have a low level of food security, and are aged 12-23 months.

This study shows that the strongest predictor of stunting is in Tojo Una-Una districts is child's age. This study found that children under the age of 12-23 months had a significantly increased likelihood of experiencing stunting compared to children aged <12 months. Other study shows that the difference in body length between normal birth weight babies and low birth weight babies is increasingly visible starting from the age of 12 months until reaching the age of 2 years^{51,52}. Inadequate growth with increasing age can be associated with the transition of feeding from exclusive breastfeeding to complementary foods⁵³. Problems with child growth will occur if continued breastfeeding is not accompanied by adequate complementary breastfeeding based on age. An increase in the need for nutrients if accompanied by an insufficient intake of nutrients can cause a slowdown in growth^{54,55}. In addition, exposure to various diseases and conditions as a consequence of increasing age, such as exposure to poor food hygiene and environmental sanitation, can have an impact on slowing growth⁵³. As a result, adequate nutrition and a healthy environment are important during this critical period to promote healthy growth and development of the children.

This study shows that one of the strong predictors of stunting in Tojo Una-una is low birth weight of the baby which is in line with the findings of previous studies^{45,56-58}. Studies in Indonesia, Rwanda, Malawi, India, Africa¹⁸⁻²³, Pakistan and Tanzania have also consistently demonstrated that low birth weight is a major risk factor for stunting^{22,59-61}. A study in Tojo Una-una shows that low birth weight is 2.7 times more likely to experience stunting (95% CI 1.2-5.7) with children under two years of age who are born with normal weight, relevant to a study by Aryastami, et al (2017) which shows that babies born with low birth weight are 1.74 times more likely to experience stunting (95% CI 1.38-2.19) compared to babies born with normal weight⁴⁵. Stunting usually begins in pregnancy, so the possibility of low birth weight babies experiencing underweight tends to persist in early childhood. The growth of low birth weight babies is reported to tend to be lower than normal birth weight babies^{51,52}. The

growth that is not optimal during the perinatal period is a contribution from maternal malnutrition. However, in the postnatal period, these growth disturbances can be corrected by optimal feeding practices^{53,56}. Therefore, in the postnatal period, if food intake (nutrients) is insufficient, compounded by unhealthy environmental conditions, toddlers will be susceptible to infectious diseases, which will reduce the body's ability to absorb nutrients and ultimately interfere with growth⁵³. Birth weight is a strong predictor of stunting⁴⁸, as a result fulfillment of maternal nutritional intake before and during pregnancy is optimized so that children do not experience low birth weight, in this way it is hoped that the incidence of stunting will also decrease.

Lack of nutritional intake in children and mothers can be triggered by a low level of food security in the family. This study also shows that another strong predictor of stunting is family food security. Other studies have reported that the relationship between socioeconomic level and the incidence of stunting is generally mediated by food security^{62,63}. In addition, a low level of food security will have an impact on low food diversity in toddler food intake^{62,64}. The characteristics of complementary foods for children under two years of age are reflected in the diversity of foods that are still lacking in variety. Concerning stunting, the intake of animal protein sources for under-fives such as beef, chicken, fish, and eggs is still very low or less than 50%. Findings in Northern Ethiopia protein intake is very low⁶⁵. Likewise, in areas in Indonesia where the prevalence of stunting is high, intake of animal protein is only 19.3%⁶⁶. It also includes that food diversity also greatly influences the incidence of stunting in children^{67,68}. Low dietary diversity is related to stunting. A study by Hlaing LM (2016) recommended local food-based complementary foods which were developed to increase problematic nutritional intake in children aged 12-23 months. Nutrients Ca, Zn, niacin, folate, and Fe are nutrients that do not achieve 100% of the recommended nutrient intake even when the diet is optimized. Chicken liver and anchovies are locally available nutrient-dense foods that will fill these nutritional gaps, however, alternative interventions, such as fortification, are still needed to ensure an adequate supply of all the required nutrients⁶⁹. In line with Harper A (2022), this study

suggests that interventions that can improve household food security and nutritional status during the periconception and antenatal periods can reduce the prevalence of low birth weight and stunting in children⁵⁹. Therefore, ensuring family food security is essential in preventing stunting and promoting healthy growth and development in children.

The results of this study indicate the importance of interventions to address these factors. Interventions focus on a multi-sectoral approach to address stunting effectively⁷⁰. Strengthen the family planning program because larger families also have a higher risk of having stunted children⁷¹. The role of midwives and the implementation of sustainable midwifery care can help this program be implemented^{72,73}. Specific intervention behavior in preventing stunting even in post-disaster conditions is breastfeeding for up to 2 years³⁹. These interventions are expected to improve the socioeconomic status, sanitation, and hygiene. In addition, it is necessary to carry out agricultural development interventions to improve nutrition which will increase family food security, especially for households with many members and households with more than two children under five.

CONCLUSION

The determinants of stunting of children under two years are children aged 12-23 months, low birth weight, food insecurity, birth spacing between children less than 3 years, number of children over 3, and not breastfeeding. It is suggested to program implementers that stunting prevention campaigns be carried out as early as possible for pregnant women, and pre-conception mothers, to arrange the spacing of children more than 3 years and the number of children not to exceed 3 children, through the family planning program. The role of midwives and the implementation of sustainable midwifery care can help this program to be implemented. To effectively address stunting, interventions should take a multi-sectoral approach. These interventions are intended to improve socioeconomic conditions, sanitation, and hygiene.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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