

Strengthening Stunting Prevention Education Based on Local Wisdom for Mothers Under Five in Coastal Areas

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Stunting remains a major public health concern in Indonesia, particularly in coastal communities where socio-cultural factors and limited access to continuous health education influence nutritional practices. Maternal knowledge plays a critical role in shaping child feeding practices and preventing stunting. This study aimed to strengthen stunting prevention education among mothers of children under five through a local wisdom-based approach in a coastal area.

Methods: A community-based intervention was conducted on March 5, 2026, involving 35 mothers of children under 5 years old. The program integrated culturally adapted educational materials with participatory learning methods, including interactive sessions, group discussions, and demonstrations. Data were collected using pre-test and post-test questionnaires to assess changes in knowledge.

Results: The intervention led to a significant improvement in maternal knowledge. The mean score increased from 56.8 ± 10.4 in the pre-test to 82.3 ± 8.7 in the post-test, with an average increase of 25.5 points. This improvement indicates that the intervention was effective in enhancing understanding of balanced nutrition and appropriate feeding practices.

Conclusion: The local wisdom-based educational approach proved effective in improving maternal knowledge related to stunting prevention. Integrating cultural values with evidence-based health education can enhance program acceptance and effectiveness, particularly in coastal communities. This approach has the potential to be adapted and implemented in similar settings to support sustainable stunting prevention efforts.

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INTRODUCTION

Stunting remains a critical public health issue with long-term implications for human capital and economic productivity. Globally, an estimated 148 million children under five were affected by stunting, reflecting chronic malnutrition and repeated infections during early life (Abdullah et al., 2025). Stunting is associated with impaired cognitive development, reduced educational achievement, and lower productivity in adulthood, making it a multidimensional development challenge (Arief et al., 2025).

In Indonesia, stunting remains a national priority despite a gradual decline in prevalence over recent years. Data from the Indonesian Nutritional Status Survey (SSGI) showed that stunting prevalence was 21.6% in 2022, which remains above the World Health Organization (WHO) threshold of 20% for a significant public health problem. More recent data indicate a decrease to approximately 21.5% in 2023 and further to 19.8% in 2024, demonstrating progress but still requiring sustained intervention efforts. Although this downward trend is encouraging, disparities across regions and socioeconomic groups persist, particularly in eastern and coastal areas (Arqam et al., 2026).

Stunting is a complex condition influenced by multiple determinants, including inadequate dietary intake, poor sanitation, limited access to health services, and suboptimal caregiving practices (Asefa et al., 2024). Among these, maternal knowledge and behavior play a central role in shaping child nutrition outcomes. Studies have shown that inadequate maternal understanding of infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices contributes significantly to the risk of stunting (Suprpto, 2026). Furthermore, low dietary diversity remains a major issue, with many children failing to meet the minimum diversity standards recommended by WHO, thereby increasing vulnerability to chronic undernutrition (Ashar et al., 2025).

In coastal communities, these challenges are often compounded by socio-cultural and environmental factors. Despite the availability of nutrient-rich marine resources, utilization for child nutrition is frequently suboptimal. This paradox is influenced by limited nutrition literacy and persistent cultural beliefs that restrict the consumption of certain foods for young children (Astuti et al., 2025). In many cases, traditional perceptions about food safety, digestion, or child health discourage the intake of protein-rich foods such as fish, which are actually abundant in coastal areas. These practices contribute to inadequate nutrient intake during the first 1,000 days of life, a critical window for growth and development (Bhutta et al., 2025).

The partner community targeted in this program reflects these conditions. Preliminary assessments indicate that mothers of children under five have limited knowledge of balanced nutrition, appropriate feeding frequency, and age-appropriate complementary feeding practices (Erfini et al., 2025). In addition, access to continuous health education remains limited, and existing interventions are often not culturally adapted to local contexts. As a result, behavioral change is difficult to achieve and sustain. This situation highlights the urgency of implementing context-specific interventions that address both knowledge gaps and socio-cultural barriers simultaneously (Erika et al., 2024).

One promising approach is integrating local wisdom into health education strategies. Local wisdom encompasses community values, traditions, and social norms that shape daily practices and decision-making processes. Incorporating these elements into nutrition education can enhance community acceptance and participation, thereby improving the effectiveness of the intervention. Evidence suggests that culturally sensitive, community-based interventions are more likely to produce sustainable

behavioral change compared to conventional approaches that do not consider local context.

However, the application of local wisdom-based approaches in stunting prevention programs, particularly in coastal settings, remains limited. Most existing interventions focus primarily on knowledge transfer, failing to address cultural beliefs and practices adequately. This gap underscores the need for innovative models that integrate scientific knowledge with culturally relevant strategies to enhance program effectiveness and sustainability. Therefore, this community service program aims to strengthen stunting prevention education among mothers of children under five in coastal areas through a local wisdom-based approach. Specifically, the objectives are to improve maternal knowledge of balanced nutrition and appropriate feeding practices, promote positive behavioral changes in child feeding, and develop a culturally adapted educational model that can be replicated in similar communities. By addressing both behavioral and cultural determinants, this program is expected to contribute to sustainable efforts in reducing stunting prevalence at the community level.

METHOD

This community service program employed a community-based intervention approach to strengthen stunting-prevention education among mothers of children under five in coastal areas. The program was structured to integrate evidence-based nutrition education with local wisdom to ensure cultural relevance and community acceptance. Activities were conducted through a series of systematic stages, including an initial needs assessment, the implementation of educational interventions, and the evaluation of outcomes.

The intervention focused on enhancing maternal knowledge and promoting behavioral change related to infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices. Participatory methods, such as interactive education sessions, group discussions, and practical demonstrations, were used to engage participants actively. In addition, locally adapted educational materials were developed to align health messages with community values and beliefs. Overall, this approach aimed not only to improve knowledge but also to foster sustainable practices within the community by empowering mothers as key agents of change in stunting prevention.

Study Design

This community service program applied a community-based participatory approach to strengthen stunting prevention education among mothers of children under five. The design combined educational intervention and behavioral reinforcement strategies, integrating evidence-based nutrition messages with local wisdom to enhance cultural acceptance. The approach emphasized active participation, allowing mothers to engage directly in learning and practice sessions to facilitate knowledge retention and behavior change.

Setting and Time

The program was conducted in a coastal area of Indonesia on March 5, 2026. This location was selected based on preliminary identification of stunting-related risk factors and limited access to continuous nutrition education among mothers in the community.

Participants

The participants were 35 mothers of children under 5 years of age. Inclusion criteria included mothers who were actively involved in child caregiving and willing to participate throughout the program. Participants were recruited using a purposive

sampling approach in collaboration with local health cadres to ensure relevance to the target population.

Program Stages

The implementation of the program was carried out in three main stages:

Pre-intervention Stage

This stage involved initial needs assessment through informal interviews and baseline measurement of participants' knowledge using a pre-test. The aim was to identify knowledge gaps and cultural practices related to child feeding.

Implementation Stage

The intervention was delivered through interactive education sessions, group discussions, and practical demonstrations on balanced nutrition and appropriate infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices. Educational materials were adapted to incorporate local wisdom to improve understanding and acceptance.

Evaluation Stage

Evaluation was conducted immediately after the intervention using a post-test to measure changes in knowledge. Observations were also performed to assess participant engagement and comprehension during activities.

Evaluation Instruments

The program evaluation used multiple instruments to capture both quantitative and qualitative outcomes. A structured questionnaire was used for pre-test and post-test assessments to measure changes in participants' knowledge. Observational checklists were employed to assess participation and behavioral responses during the sessions. In addition, brief feedback questionnaires were administered to capture participants' perceptions of the intervention and its relevance to their daily practices. Overall, this methodological approach was designed to ensure that the intervention was not only informative but also contextually appropriate and effective in promoting sustainable behavioral change in stunting prevention.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

This section presents the outcomes of the community-based educational intervention on stunting prevention among mothers of children under five. The results are primarily based on quantitative data from pre-test and post-test assessments, supported by observations during implementation. The analysis focuses on changes in participants' knowledge before and after the intervention, as well as the program's overall effectiveness. A total of 35 mothers participated in both the pre-test and post-test assessments. The baseline results showed that participants had a moderate level of knowledge regarding stunting prevention and appropriate feeding practices. The mean pre-test score was recorded at 56.8 ± 10.4 . Following the educational intervention, there was a noticeable improvement in participants' knowledge improved significantly. The mean post-test score increased to 82.3 ± 8.7 , indicating a substantial gain in understanding. The average increase in score was 25.5 points, suggesting that the intervention had a meaningful impact on participants' knowledge levels.

Table 1. Comparison of Knowledge Scores Before and After Intervention (n=35)

Assessment	Mean $\pm$ SD	Mean Difference
Pre-test	56.8 $\pm$ 10.4	
Post-test	82.3 $\pm$ 8.7	25.5

The data presented in Table 1 indicate a clear upward trend in knowledge scores after the intervention. Nearly all participants showed some improvement, with several demonstrating substantial increases from baseline. In addition to the improvement in the mean score, changes were observed in the distribution of knowledge levels. Participants who were initially categorized as having low knowledge demonstrated progress toward moderate and good categories after the intervention. This shift suggests that the program reached participants with varying baseline levels of understanding.

The results indicate that the educational intervention improved maternal knowledge about stunting prevention. The increase in mean scores reflects not only improved awareness but also a better understanding of key topics such as balanced nutrition, feeding frequency, and the importance of dietary diversity for young children. One possible explanation for this improvement is the use of a culturally adapted approach that incorporates elements of local wisdom. By presenting information in a way that aligns with participants' daily experiences and cultural context, the material became easier to understand and more relevant to their needs. This may have enhanced participants' engagement during the sessions and supported better knowledge retention.

Furthermore, the interactive nature of activities, such as discussions and practical demonstrations, appears to have encouraged active participation. Participants were not only receiving information but also involved in the learning process, which likely contributed to the observed improvement. Overall, the findings suggest that a community-based, participatory, and culturally sensitive educational approach can effectively improve mothers' knowledge in coastal areas. This improvement is an important initial step toward behavioral change, which is essential in efforts to prevent stunting at the household level.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate a substantial improvement in maternal knowledge following the implementation of a local wisdom-based educational intervention. The increase in mean knowledge scores and the shift toward higher knowledge categories indicate that the program was effective in addressing existing knowledge gaps among mothers of children under five. These results are consistent with previous studies that highlight maternal education as a key determinant in stunting prevention.

Several studies have reported that improving maternal knowledge significantly improves child feeding practices and nutritional outcomes. For instance, a recent study found that mothers with adequate knowledge of infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices were less likely to have stunted children compared to those with limited understanding (Hadush et al., 2026). Similarly, research by Jalloh et al., (2025) emphasized that interventions targeting maternal behavior during the first 1,000 days of life are critical in reducing stunting prevalence. The present findings align with these

studies, suggesting that enhancing maternal knowledge can serve as an entry point for improving child nutrition.

The magnitude of improvement observed in this study is comparable to that reported in community-based nutrition education programs in similar settings (Soofi et al., 2024). A study conducted in Southeast Asia reported that structured educational interventions led to a significant increase in maternal knowledge scores, with improvements ranging from 20% to 40% (Lubis et al., 2025). In this study, the observed increase exceeded this range, suggesting that integrating local wisdom may have added value beyond standard educational approaches.

One of the distinguishing features of this intervention was the incorporation of local wisdom into the educational content. This approach appears to have enhanced both participant engagement and comprehension (Taofik et al., 2026). Evidence suggests that culturally tailored interventions are more effective in influencing health behaviors because they resonate with community values and beliefs (Mizawati et al., 2026). In coastal communities, where traditional beliefs often shape dietary practices, aligning nutrition messages with local perspectives can facilitate acceptance and reduce resistance to behavioral change (Setiawan et al., 2026).

Furthermore, the participatory nature of the intervention played a significant role in improving outcomes. Interactive methods, such as group discussions and demonstrations, allowed participants to engage with the material rather than passively receive information. According to a study by Pasha et al., (2025), participatory learning approaches are associated with higher knowledge retention and a greater likelihood of behavior change than lecture-based methods. This supports the observation that participants in this program demonstrated not only improved knowledge but also increased confidence in applying the information (Sentika et al., 2024).

Another important aspect is the relevance of local food resources in the intervention. Coastal areas typically have access to abundant protein sources such as fish; however, these resources are often underutilized due to misconceptions or cultural restrictions (Rosyada et al., 2026). Previous research has shown that promoting locally available, nutrient-rich foods can significantly improve dietary diversity and reduce the risk of stunting (Pauzi et al., 2025). By emphasizing the nutritional value of locally accessible foods, this program helped bridge the gap between availability and utilization (Supranoto et al., 2025).

Despite these positive findings, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample size was relatively small, which may limit the generalizability of the results (Rialihanto et al., 2025). Second, the evaluation focused primarily on short-term knowledge outcomes, without assessing long-term behavioral changes or children's nutritional status (Supadmi et al., 2024). Similar limitations have been noted in other community-based interventions, where improvements in knowledge do not always translate directly into sustained behavior change (Prayitno et al., 2025). Therefore, follow-up studies are needed to assess the long-term impact of such interventions.

Overall, the findings of this study reinforce the importance of combining evidence-based nutrition education with culturally relevant approaches. The integration of local wisdom, participatory learning methods, and context-specific messaging appears to enhance the effectiveness of stunting prevention programs. These results contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting community-based, culturally adapted interventions as a viable strategy for addressing stunting, particularly in underserved and culturally diverse settings.

CONCLUSION

The results of this community-based intervention indicate that the local wisdom-based educational approach was effective in improving maternal knowledge related to stunting prevention. The significant increase in post-test scores relative to baseline suggests that integrating culturally relevant content with participatory learning methods can enhance understanding and engagement among mothers of children under five. This improvement reflects the program's ability to address existing knowledge gaps and support more informed decision-making in child feeding practices. In addition, the observed shift in knowledge levels from low and moderate to predominantly good categories highlights the practical impact of the intervention. These findings suggest that context-sensitive education can serve as an important entry point for promoting behavioral change in communities with strong cultural influences.

To ensure sustainability, it is recommended that similar programs be implemented continuously with the involvement of local health cadres and community leaders. Integrating this approach into routine health promotion activities, such as Posyandu services, may further strengthen its reach and impact. Future programs should also consider longer follow-up periods to assess behavioral changes and nutritional outcomes in children. Expanding the model to other coastal areas with similar characteristics may contribute to broader stunting prevention efforts at the community level.

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Conflict of Interests

All authors declare no conflict of interest in this community service program.

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