

STUNTING AMONG CHILDREN UNDER-FIVE IN WEST PAPUA: MOTHER'S BELIEFS, PERCEPTION, AND HEALTH BEHAVIOR

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ABSTRACT

Background: Stunting is considered a major public health problem, particularly in the eastern part of Indonesia. The Sorong and Tambrauw districts have the high prevalence of stunting in West Papua Province. According to the health development index of 2018, the prevalence of stunting among children in these two districts was reported to be 32.3% and 41.5%, respectively. This study aimed to investigate mothers' beliefs, perceptions, and health behavior associated with a high prevalence of stunting in the study area.

Subjects and Method: This qualitative study was conducted in the Sorong and Tambrauw District, West Papua, in 2019. A total number of 40 mothers with children under five years of age were selected purposively. The data were collected by open-ended interviews and focus group discussions. The qualitative data and information were analyzed using descriptive thematic analysis.

Results: Feeding practices, including breastfeeding and complementary feeding, among children under five years of age were determined by the poor knowledge of mothers. Mothers perceived that they did not have enough breast milk production when they found children crying even after breastfeeding. This perception lead to inappropriate timing of complementary feeding which is known as a factor associated with stunting. The early marriage which has negative consequences for the growth of the children persisted in the study location. Mothers faced obstacles to accessing antenatal care and health institutions due to cultural and traditional beliefs in society. For example, mothers were not allowed to visit health facilities as pregnancy was not considered as a health issue and they preferred to deliver their baby at home.

Conclusion: Overcoming the problem of stunting requires a holistic approach including understanding cognitive aspects related to beliefs and perceptions as well as behavioral aspects of maternal health and childcare pattern.

Keywords: stunting, cultural beliefs, perception, health behavior, West Papua

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