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Article

## RISK FACTORS FOR STUNTING INCIDENTS IN TODDLERS

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### A B S T R A C T

**Background:** Stunting can hinder physical growth, increase a child's susceptibility to diseases, and create barriers to cognitive development, potentially reducing intelligence and productivity in the future. The prevalence of stunting in Riau Province in 2022 was 17%. This figure does not meet the target set by the Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJM), which is 14% by 2024. In Purnama Sub-District, Dumai Barat District, the prevalence of stunting remains high, with 47 toddlers (30%) out of a total of 159 under-fives affected.

**Objective:** This study aims to identify the risk factors associated with stunting in toddlers aged 24-59 months, including maternal and child characteristics, knowledge, maternal nutritional status during pregnancy, exclusive breastfeeding history, and basic immunization history.

**Methods:** This research is a quantitative study with an analytical observational design using a case-control approach.

**Results:** Statistical tests showed significant associations between maternal education (p-value 0.29), maternal chronic energy deficiency (KEK) during pregnancy (p-value 0.032), history of iron tablet consumption (p-value 0.002), exclusive breastfeeding (p-value 0.031), and basic immunization (p-value 0.019) with stunting in toddlers. No significant association was found between occupation (p-value 0.059) and maternal knowledge (p-value 0.073) with stunting in toddlers.

**Conclusion:** The calculation of the Odds Ratio (OR) indicates that pregnant women with a history of chronic energy deficiency are three times more likely to have stunted toddlers compared to those without a history of chronic energy deficiency. Women who do not exclusively breastfeed are three times more likely to have stunted toddlers compared to those who exclusively breastfeed. Toddlers who do not receive complete immunization are 11 times more likely to experience stunting than those who receive complete immunization. In this study, immunization was found to have the greatest impact on the occurrence of stunting in under-fives in Purnama Sub-District, Dumai Barat District, after controlling for variables such as exclusive breastfeeding, maternal history of iron tablet consumption, maternal occupation, maternal knowledge, and maternal nutritional status during pregnancy

## INTRODUCTION

Stunting is a condition of impaired growth in toddlers under five years old due to chronic malnutrition, particularly during the first 1,000 Days of Life (HDL), characterized by height or length below the standard. A child is considered stunted if their height or length is below minus two standard deviations (-2SD) compared to the standard for their age group. Stunting can impede physical growth, increase susceptibility to diseases, and create barriers to cognitive development, potentially reducing a child's intelligence and future productivity. Stunting also increases the risk of developing degenerative diseases in adulthood. Stunted toddlers have a lower Intelligence Quotient (IQ) compared to the average IQ of normal toddlers(1)

Stunting has widely been used as an indicator to measure community nutritional status. If the prevalence of stunting in an area is high, it is indicative of broader development issues such as access to clean water, education, health, and poverty(2).

According to the 2022 joint data from UNICEF, WHO, and the World Bank, there were 148.1 million (22.3%) stunted toddlers, 45 million (6.8%) wasted toddlers, and 37 million (5.6%) overweight toddlers. Among these, stunting is the most prevalent form of malnutrition. The majority of stunted toddlers are in Africa (52%) and Asia (43%), with Indonesia being one of the countries with a very high prevalence of stunting at 31%, alongside 10.2% wasting and 10.6% overweight(3).

Stunting leads to a "lost generation," posing a burden and threat to the nation's future and causing an annual economic loss of up to three hundred trillion rupiahs. Stunting has short-term effects, such as increased morbidity and mortality risks; medium-term effects, including lower intellectual and cognitive abilities; and long-term risks, such as reduced quality of human resources and increased risk of degenerative diseases in adulthood(4). Meta-analysis results show that stunting affects various aspects of child development, including fine and gross motor skills, language and communication, and socio-emotional development, highlighting the need for focused attention on stunting prevention(5).

According to the Indonesian Nutritional Status Survey (SSGI), the prevalence of stunting in toddlers reached 21.6% in 2022, down by 2.8 percentage points from 24.4% in 2021(6). In 2023, based on the Indonesian Health Survey (SKI), the prevalence of stunting in Indonesia was 21.5%, a slight decrease of 0.1% from 21.6% in 2022(7). In Riau Province, the prevalence of stunting in toddlers aged 0-59 months has shown a decline, from 22.3% in 2021 to 17% in 2022. However, this figure does not meet the RPJM target of 14% by 2024(8). In Dumai City, the prevalence of stunting decreased from 23% in 2021 to 12.8% in 2022. While this figure meets the national target, Purnama Sub-District, Dumai Barat, still has a high prevalence of stunting, with 47 toddlers (30%) out of a total of 159 under-fives affected.

The causes of stunting are very complex. According to UNICEF, the direct causes of nutritional issues, including stunting, are inadequate nutrition and infectious diseases. Indirect causes include insufficient food supply, inadequate child-rearing practices, and poor basic healthcare services. Key contributing factors include low levels of education, knowledge, and skills(4). Many factors influence the occurrence of stunting, such as maternal knowledge, education, energy and protein adequacy, and family income, which are all risk factors for stunting in children aged 24 to 59 months(9).

To reduce stunting in toddlers, the government implements holistic interventions, including specific and sensitive interventions. Specific interventions target toddlers during the first 1,000 Days of Life (HDL) and pregnant women, focusing on short-term outcomes generally conducted in the health sector, targeting adolescents, prospective brides, pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, and toddlers aged 0-59 months. Sensitive interventions are carried out through various development activities outside the health sector and involve cross-sectoral collaboration with the general public(10).

Maternal nutritional status before and during pregnancy significantly affects fetal development. Pregnant women experiencing Chronic Energy Deficiency (CED) are more likely to give birth to babies with low birth weight (LBW)(11). Babies born with LBW are at higher risk of stunting(12)(13). Other factors contributing to stunting in under-fives include maternal knowledge and education, child-rearing practices, exclusive breastfeeding, child health services, and family economic status.(14),(15)

The aim of this study is to identify the risk factors associated with stunting in under-fives in Purnama Sub-District, Dumai Barat.

## METHOD

This research is a quantitative study with an analytical observational design using a case-control approach. The study compares risk factors between cases and controls, including characteristics (education, occupation, and maternal knowledge), health services (maternal nutritional status during pregnancy, history of iron tablet consumption, exclusive breastfeeding, and

completeness of child immunizations), using a retrospective approach to determine how risk factors influence stunting in under-fives.

The study population includes all toddlers aged 24 to 59 months, with 47 stunting cases and 47 control subjects distributed in Purnama Sub-District, Dumai Barat, Dumai City. The results are analyzed univariately to describe the characteristics of each variable, followed by bivariate analysis to determine the odds ratios and identify factors associated with stunting in under-fives. Multivariate analysis is used to identify the most dominant risk factors for stunting in toddlers.

## RESULT DAN DISCUSSION

### Characteristics of Subjects and Respondents

**Table: Frequency Distribution of Toddlers's Gender, Parental Education, and Occupation**

	Stunting		Not stunted	
	n	%	n	%
<b>Gender of Toddlers</b>				
Male	23	49%	20	43%
Female	24	51%	27	57%
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Mothers Education Level</b>				
Elementary	9	19%	5	11%
Junior School	9	19%	9	19%
Senior High School	27	57%	21	45%
College	2	4%	12	26%
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Mother's Occupation</b>				
Working	1	2%	7	15%
Not Working	46	98%	40	85%
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>100%</b>

The majority of the study subjects were female, constituting 54% of the toddlers, while males made up 46%. One factor influencing child growth is gender. Growth patterns differ between boys and girls; typically, girls experience faster physical growth, although boys usually surpass girls in height eventually. The relationship between gender and stunting has been debated in previous studies(13). Some research indicates a link between gender and stunting, while others find no significant difference in stunting risk between boys and girls(16). This study found a higher percentage of stunting among girls compared to boys.

The proportion of mothers with low education in the case group was 38%, which is higher than the 34% in the control group. Higher educational attainment often correlates with greater knowledge, understanding, and the ability to think logically and rationally. Educated individuals are more likely to view problems from multiple perspectives and seek effective solutions compared to those with lower education levels.

## A. Risk Factors for Stunting in Toddlers

Bivariate and multivariate analyses were conducted to determine the odds ratios and identify risk factors associated with stunting in toddlers. The following factors were identified as risk factors for stunting, as summarized in the table below:

### 1. Chi-Square Test

**Table: Association of Maternal Education, Maternal Occupation, Maternal Knowledge, Chronic Energy Deficiency (KEK) Status during Pregnancy, History of Iron Tablet Consumption, Exclusive Breastfeeding, and Basic Immunization with Stunting in Toddlers**

	Stunting		Not stunted		Total		<i>P Value</i>	
	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>		
<b>1 Maternal Education</b>								
Elementary	9	19%	5	11%	14	15%	0,029	
Junior School	9	19%	9	19%	18	19%		
Senior High School	27	57%	21	45%	48	51%		
College	2	4%	12	26%	14	15%		
<b>2 History of Taking Blood Supplement Tablets</b>								
Not Drinking	2	4%	0	0%	2	2%	0,002	
Drinking but not finished	37	79%	24	51%	61	65%		
Drink up to 90 tablets	8	17%	23	49%	31	33%		
	Stunting		Not stunted		Total		<b>OR</b>	<i>P Value</i>
	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>(95%CI)</b>	
<b>3 Maternal Occupation</b>								
Working	1	2%	7	15%	8	9%	0,124	0,029
Not Working	46	98%	40	85%	86	92%	(0,015-1,053)	
<b>4 Maternal Knowledge</b>								
Lack of knowledge	19	40%	10	21%	29	31%	2,511	0,073
Good knowledge	28	60%	37	79%	65	69%	(1,011-6,235)	
<b>5 Nutrisional Status Of Pregnant Women</b>								
Chronic Energy Deficiency	13	28%	14	9%	17	18%	4,11	0,032
Not Chronic Energy Deficiency	34	72%	33	92%	77	82%	(1,229-13,750)	
<b>6 Exklusif Breastfeeding Status</b>								
Not Exclusive Breastfeeding	22	47%	11	23%	33	35%	2,88	0,031
Exclusive Breastfeeding	25	53%	36	77%	61	65%	(1,188-6,982)	
<b>7 Basic Immunization Status</b>								
Incomplete	9	19%	1	2%	10	11%	10,895	0,019
Complete	38	81%	46	98%	84	89%	(1,321-89,879)	

### Maternal Occupation

The results indicate that there is no significant relationship between maternal occupation (p-value 0.059) and stunting in toddlers. Similarly, maternal knowledge (p-value 0.073) does not show a significant relationship with stunting<sup>17</sup>. This finding is consistent with Djogo et al., who reported no relationship between maternal occupation and stunting<sup>(17)</sup>. However, it contrasts with Asti Sabrina Utami's research, which found that non-working mothers had a higher prevalence of stunting (87%) compared to working mothers (13%)<sup>(18)</sup>. Rahmawati's study also found a significant relationship between maternal occupation and stunting<sup>(19)</sup>, as did Fadila et al., who reported a correlation between maternal occupation and stunting<sup>(20)</sup>. According to the author, working mothers often juggle multiple responsibilities, including managing their job, household duties, and childcare, which may limit their time for child-rearing.

### Maternal Education

The study shows that 96% of mothers with stunted toddlers had low to medium education levels, compared to 75% in the non-stunted group. Statistical analysis reveals a significant relationship between maternal education and stunting in toddlers in Kelurahan Purnama, Dumai City, with a p-value of 0.29. This finding aligns with Husnaniyah's research, which reported a relationship between maternal education levels and stunting<sup>(21)</sup>. In contrast, Salsabila's study found no association between maternal education and stunting<sup>(22)</sup>.

According to Law No. 20 of 2003, Article 3, the purpose of national education is to develop abilities and shape character and civilization to educate the nation's life, aiming to produce individuals who are faithful, pious, ethical, healthy, knowledgeable, skilled, creative, independent, and responsible citizens<sup>(23)</sup>. Higher education often correlates with better knowledge, understanding, and the ability to approach problems logically and rationally, which can influence stunting prevention strategies.

### History of Iron Tablet Consumption

Mothers of stunted toddlers had a history of not consuming iron tablets completely (79%), compared to 51% in the non-stunted group. The study shows a significant relationship between iron tablet consumption during pregnancy and stunting, with a p-value of 0.002. This result aligns with Munirah's research, which found a link between adherence to iron tablet consumption and stunting<sup>(24)</sup>. However, Fentiana's study identified iron tablet consumption as the most significant factor related to stunting<sup>(25)</sup>.

The WHO states that approximately 20% of stunting occurs during pregnancy due to inadequate fetal nutrition, affecting fetal growth and increasing the risk of low birth weight (LBW). Pregnant women are advised to consume 90 iron tablets to prevent anemia and support fetal development, as LBW is a risk factor for stunting in toddlers<sup>(26)</sup>.

### Chronic Energy Deficiency (KEK) Status

Maternal nutritional status before and during pregnancy affects fetal growth. Good maternal nutrition is likely to result in a healthy, full-term baby with normal birth weight<sup>(11)</sup>. Conversely, poor maternal nutrition can affect fetal growth, leading to LBW. The study found that 28% of mothers with a history of KEK had stunted toddlers, compared to 9% in the non-KEK group. Statistical analysis shows a significant relationship between KEK status during pregnancy and stunting, with a p-value of 0.032. The odds ratio calculation indicates that mothers with a history of KEK are three times more likely to have stunted toddlers compared to those without KEK. This finding is consistent with Diana's research<sup>(27)</sup> and Desni Sagita's study, which both found a relationship between maternal nutritional status during pregnancy and stunting<sup>(28)</sup>.

### Exclusive Breastfeeding

Breast milk is the ideal food for infants, providing all the necessary nutrients and antibodies. Exclusive breastfeeding, defined as feeding only breast milk (with the exception of vitamins and minerals) for the first six months, supports optimal growth and development and reduces the likelihood of illness<sup>(29)</sup>. The study shows that 47% of toddlers who were not exclusively breastfed experienced stunting, compared to 35% in the non-stunted group. Statistical analysis indicates a significant relationship between exclusive breastfeeding and stunting, with a p-value of 0.031. The odds ratio calculation shows that toddlers who were not exclusively breastfed are three times more likely to be stunted compared to those who were exclusively breastfed. This finding is consistent with Pratama's research<sup>(30)</sup> and Lois's study, which found a link between exclusive breastfeeding and stunting<sup>(31)</sup>. However, Safitri's study found no relationship between exclusive breastfeeding and stunting<sup>(32)</sup>, suggesting that other factors, such as adequate complementary feeding and continued breastfeeding up to two years<sup>(33)</sup>, also play a role in preventing stunting.

### Basic Immunization Status

Immunization improves immunity by introducing vaccines to protect against diseases. The study found that 19% of toddlers who did not receive complete immunization experienced stunting, compared to 2% in the fully immunized group. Statistical analysis shows a significant relationship between immunization status and stunting, with a p-value of 0.019. The odds ratio calculation indicates that toddlers who did not receive complete immunization are eleven times more likely to be stunted compared to those who received complete immunization. This finding is consistent with Fajariah's research and Wanda's study, which both reported a relationship between immunization status and stunting<sup>(34)(35)</sup>. However, Vasera's study found no relationship between immunization and stunting<sup>(36)</sup>. Immunization helps build immunity, reducing the risk of illness that can affect nutritional status and growth.

### Multiple Regression Analysis

Multivariate analysis was conducted to determine which variables have the greatest impact on stunting in toddlers. Variables included in the multivariate analysis were those with a p-value < 0.025 from the bivariate analysis.

**Table of bivariate analysis results for the risk factors of stunting in toddlers**

Variabel Independen	P Value
Mother's Education	0,020
Mother's Occupation	0,027
Mother's Knowledge	0,043
Nutritional Status of Mother during Pregnancy	0,014
History of Taking Blood Additive Tablets	0,001
Exclusive Breastfeeding	0,017
Immunization History of Toddlers	0,004

Variables that met the criteria were then subjected to multivariate analysis using logistic regression. In the multivariate analysis process, variables with a p-value > 0.05 were removed one by one, starting with the variable having the highest p-value. After each variable was removed from the model, the analysis was continued by examining the change in odds ratios (OR). If there was a change in OR greater than 10%, the removed variable was reintroduced into the model. If no OR change greater than 10% was observed, the variable was kept out of the model.

The final model of the multivariate logistic regression analysis shows the factors most significantly influencing the incidence of stunting.

	S.E.	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I.for EXP(B)	
				Lower	Upper
Riwayat Minum TTD	0,58	0,008	4,665	1,498	14,53
ASI Eksklusif	0,614	0,012	4,717	1,416	15,712
Riwayat immunisasi	1,194	0,046	10,853	1,046	112,581
Staus Gizi Berdasarkan LILA Saat Hamil	0,794	0,214	2,681	0,565	12,721
Pengetahuan Ibu Tentang Gizi Balita	0,557	0,205	2,026	0,68	6,037
Pekerjaan Ibu	1,193	0,071	0,116	0,011	1,206

Based on the multivariate analysis, the variables associated with the incidence of stunting are the history of iron tablet consumption, exclusive breastfeeding, and immunization history. Meanwhile, the variables of maternal employment, maternal knowledge, and maternal chronic energy deficiency (KEK) during pregnancy act as confounding variables. To determine which variable has the greatest impact on stunting in toddlers, we look at the value of Exp(B); the larger the Exp(B) value, the greater its effect on the dependent variable. The analysis shows that the Odds Ratio (OR) for the immunization history variable is 10.853, meaning that toddlers who do not receive complete immunization are 11 times more likely to experience stunting compared to those who receive complete immunization.

## CONCLUSION

Pregnant women with a history of chronic energy deficiency (KEK) have a 3 times higher risk of having stunted toddlers compared to those without a history of KEK during pregnancy. Mothers who do not exclusively breastfeed have a 3 times higher risk of having stunted toddlers compared to those who exclusively breastfeed. Toddlers who do not receive complete immunization are 11 times more likely to experience stunting compared to those who receive complete immunization. The variable with the greatest impact on stunting in toddlers in the Purnama sub-district of Dumai Barat is immunization, after controlling for exclusive breastfeeding, history of iron tablet consumption, maternal employment, maternal knowledge, and maternal KEK status during pregnancy.

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