



INNOVATIVE: Journal Of Social Science Research

Volume 4 Nomor 4 Tahun 2024 Page 10021-10031

E-ISSN 2807-4238 and P-ISSN 2807-4246

Website: <https://j-innovative.org/index.php/Innovative>

Free Nutritious Meal Policy As A Solution To Overcoming The Stunting Problem In Indonesia

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Abstract

Program makan siang gratis yang saat ini tengah ramai diperbincangkan oleh presiden dan wakil presiden terpilih Prabowo dan Gibran mengatakan bahwa program makan siang gratis ini adalah untuk menekan angka stunting di Indonesia. Program ini akan menyalurkan makanan bergizi beserta susu yang diyakini dapat memenuhi gizi penerima manfaatnya. Dalam pemenuhan gizi tersebut, implikasi yang diharapkan adalah dapat menekan angka stunting di Indonesia dan menciptakan anak Indonesia yang sehat dan cerdas, sehingga kualitas Sumber Daya Manusia (SDM) pun ikut meningkat. Masalah stunting di Indonesia merupakan masalah yang sudah menjadi perhatian nasional. Target penurunan stunting pada tahun 2024 sebesar 14%, sedangkan pada tahun 2022 masih sebesar 24%. Berbagai upaya penanganan stunting telah dilakukan Pemerintah Indonesia, baik di tingkat pemerintah pusat maupun daerah, namun belum mampu menurunkan angka stunting secara signifikan. Dengan adanya program makan siang gratis ini diharapkan dapat menekan angka stunting di Indonesia. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan deskriptif. Peneliti menggunakan data penelitian berupa data sekunder yang diperoleh dari sejumlah sumber yang kredibel seperti artikel ilmiah, buku dan sejumlah sumber lain yang kredibel dan umum digunakan dalam penelitian. Data tersebut dianalisis menggunakan alat analisis dengan tahapan pengumpulan data, pemilihan data, reduksi data dan penarikan simpulan. Kata Kunci : Stunting, Indonesia, Makan Siang Gratis

Abstract

The free lunch program which is currently being widely discussed by the elected president and vice president Prabowo and Gibran said that this free lunch program is to reduce the stunting rate in Indonesia. This program will distribute nutritious food along with milk which is believed to fulfill the nutrition of its beneficiaries. In fulfilling this nutrition, the expected implication is to reduce the stunting rate in Indonesia and create healthy and intelligent Indonesian children, so that the quality of Human Resources (HR) will also increase. The problem of stunting in Indonesia is a problem that has become a national concern. The stunting reduction target in 2024 is 14%, while in 2022 it is still 24%. Various efforts to deal with stunting have been carried out by the Indonesian Government, both at the central and regional government levels, but have not been able to reduce stunting significantly. With this free lunch program, it is hoped that it can reduce the stunting rate in Indonesia. This research is qualitative research with a descriptive approach. Researchers use research data in the form of secondary data obtained from a number of credible sources such as scientific articles, books and a number of other sources that are credible and commonly used in research. These data were analyzed using analytical tools with stages of data collection, data selection, data reduction and drawing conclusions.

Keywords : *Stunting, Indonesia, Free Lunch*

INTRODUCTION

The problem of stunting in Indonesia is currently still quite high. The issue of lunch for students in tackling stunting has become increasingly interesting since the announcement of Prabowo Subianto as president-elect in the 2024 election. The main program that is highly favored by the elected President is Prabowo Subianto and Vice President-elect Gibran Rakabuming in the health sector, it is a lunch program for Kindergarten to Senior High School students, Islamic boarding school students, and pregnant women as an effort to tackle stunting (Rosyida, 2024).

Stunting is a big problem that still threatens Indonesian children. The stunting rate in Indonesia is still high. In 2023, the prevalence of stunting will still be 21.6%. In 2024, the latest data on stunting has not yet been released. Even though it is targeted to reach 14% in 2024 (Tarmizi, 2023). From the results of the Indonesian Nutritional Status (SSGI) survey, it is still far above the threshold determined by WHO, namely 20% (Faradila, 2024). According to the Minister of Health, the stunting rate in Indonesia has only fallen by 0.1% from 21.6% in 2022 to 21.5% (Atmoko, 2024).

The incidence of short toddlers or what is called stunting is a condition where toddlers have less height compared to their age (Falmuariat, *et al.*, 2022). According to Hatijar (2023), this condition is measured by body length or height which is less than minus two standard deviations from the median child growth standard from WHO. Stunted toddlers are

classified as a chronic nutritional problem which is caused by many factors including economic conditions, nutrition of pregnant women, pain in babies, lack of nutritional intake in toddlers. Globally, around 1 in 4 children under five experience stunting (Ni'mah, *et al.*, 2015).

Failure to reach one's growth potential is caused by chronic malnutrition and repeated illnesses during childhood. This can permanently limit a child's physical and cognitive capacity and cause long-lasting damage (Pebrian, *et al.*, 2023). Stunting is a health problem that has a long-term impact on a child's future. Intervention is needed for stunted babies up to the age of 2 years to catch up in the next period of child development. Sensitive nutrition interventions are actions to reduce indirect nutritional problems, such as environmental factors (Nurjazuli, *et al.*, 2023).

According to the Data and Information Center of the Indonesian Ministry of Health (2018), the incidence of stunted (short) toddlers is the main nutritional problem facing Indonesia. Based on Nutritional Status Monitoring (PSG) data for the last three years, shortness has the highest prevalence compared to other nutritional problems such as malnutrition, thinness and obesity. The prevalence of short toddlers has increased from 2016, namely 27.5% to 29.6% in 2017.

Based on WHO and UNICEF data, Indonesia is ranked fifth among countries in Asia for the number of children with stunting (Alam, 2023). Stunting occurs due to the impact of chronic malnutrition during the first 1,000 days of a child's life. The damage that occurs results in the child's development being irreversible, the child will never learn or gain as much as he or she could (Suarnianti, 2020). Stunting occurs when the fetus is still in the womb and only appears when the child is two years old. It can cause sufferers to get sick easily, have less than optimal body posture as adults, increase mortality rates, reduce cognitive abilities, resulting in long-term economic losses for Indonesia (Setiyawati, *et al.*, 2024).

According to Santoso (2024) There are many potential causes of stunted growth in Indonesia, including proximate factors such as maternal nutritional status, breastfeeding practices, complementary feeding practices, and exposure infections as well as other related determining factors such as education, food systems, health care, and water and sanitation infrastructure and services.

The process of failure to thrive that occurs at toddler age will continue into the next age. It is very likely that when they reach the age of 19, their optimal height will not be achieved. They will become short adults with limitations to optimal productivity (Ranti, *et al.*, 2020). The consequences of child stunting are short-term and long-term, including

increased morbidity and mortality, poor child development and learning capacity, increased risk of infection and non-communicable diseases in adulthood, and reduced productivity and economic capacity (Soliman, *et al.*, 2021).

METHODS

Researchers believe that the Free Nutritious Meal Policy is a solution to overcoming the problem of stunting in Indonesia. Because stunting is a physical growth disorder which is characterized by a decrease in growth rate and is the impact of nutritional imbalance (Saimu, *et al.*, 2023). This research is qualitative research with a descriptive approach, namely describing the role of the free nutritious lunch policy as a solution to preventing stunting (Hanyfah, *et al.*, 2022). The data used in this research is secondary data that researchers obtained from books, credible websites, scientific articles, books, and other things that are usually used as data references from researchers (Fairus, 2020). The data sources were analyzed using the stages of data collection, data selection, data reduction, and drawing conclusions (Rosid, 2024).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Stunting is a condition where a child's growth tends to be slow which is measured based on indicators measuring height according to age, this is a condition of malnutrition or chronic infection which is calculated with a z-score < -2 standard deviations (Handayani, 2023). According to WHO, stunting is short or very short based on height according to age which is less than -2 standard deviation (SD) on the WHO growth curve which occurs due to irreversible conditions resulting from inadequate nutritional intake and/or recurrent or chronic infections that occur in 1000 HPK (Susanti, 2022)

According to Widyawati (2018), stunting is a condition of malnutrition caused by low nutritional content in the body over a long period of time, namely the first 1,000 (one thousand) days of life, namely from the fetus to a two year old baby, this is caused by the food content. consumed does not meet nutritional needs.

Based on the results of the Indonesian Nutrition Status Survey (SSGI), the prevalence of stunting in Indonesia fell from 24.4 percent in 2021 to 21.6 percent in 2022. There is still a need to reduce 3.8 percent per year to reach the target of 14 percent in 2024 (Setiyawati, *et al.*, 2024). One of the factors causing stunting in Indonesia is a lack of micronutrients such as vitamin A, iron, folate and zinc (Dedy, 2022). According to Ernawati, et al. (2021) Stunting and micronutrient deficiencies can affect physical and cognitive development in children and increase the risk of infection. Stunting itself can be triggered by health problems in

Indonesia, such as nutritional problems, infectious diseases and non-communicable diseases (Handayani, 2023).

Stunting in children is not a rare thing, according to Ramadani (2021) who stated that research shows that one in four children in Indonesia suffer from stunting. So, never take this disease lightly. Because stunting can interfere with a child's physical growth, stunting conditions are difficult to detect early on. Children who experience stunting can be indicated later at the age of 2 years (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, 2018). Malnutrition that causes stunting can start when the child is still in the womb and continue after the child is born. Children who experience stunting are quite difficult to recognize because their bodies are physically in healthy condition (Narendra, 2020).

According to Marsito (2023), the short-term impacts felt by children suffering from stunting include their bodies being shorter than children their age. Apart from that, children will experience metabolic disorders and a decrease in children's intelligence. Stunting that is left unchecked will have detrimental long-term impacts on children. Such as weakening immunity or body resistance so that children get sick easily, are at risk of suffering from dangerous diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and hypertension when children grow up, children are at risk of experiencing metabolic diseases such as obesity, the physical condition of children who are shorter will affect the child's career in the future (Pane, 2024).

Children affected by stunting will have difficulty achieving high career levels and have a low level of success as adults, and children will have difficulty concentrating and thus experience learning difficulties (Oktaviani, *et al.*, 2022). Several studies state that children who experience stunting have lower cognitive abilities (Daracantika, *et al.*, 2021). The danger of stunting in children will also have an impact on the child's physical condition, such as making the child sick more easily, reduced cognitive abilities, less optimal body posture as an adult, unbalanced body functions, and when older they are at risk of developing chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and obesity (Tysara, 2023).

Currently, Indonesia's economic conditions are not going well. In the midst of increasing poverty and unemployment rates, it cannot be denied that an increase in the prevalence of stunting in Indonesia is possible. Family economic factors are closely related to the occurrence of stunting in children. This is because a person's economic condition affects the nutritional intake and nutrition they get (Nurfauziah, *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, it is necessary to increase education to the public regarding the dangers of stunting and how to prevent it. So that in the future, when they become parents, it is hoped that the community can play a role in preventing stunting from an early age. So, the prevalence of stunting in

Indonesia is no longer at an alarming number. Parental parenting also plays an important role in preventing stunting (Ramadani, 2021).

The risk of stunting can be reduced by adequate nutritional intake. Children need about 40 different types of nutrients for optimal growth. The best prevention of stunting should be done during early pregnancy (Samsuddin, *et al.*, 2023). Parents are advised to start implementing a balanced diet and healthy lifestyle as early as possible. From the beginning of pregnancy, preventing stunting can be done by increasing the mother's intake of iron and folic acid. Apart from fulfilling your child's nutrition with balanced nutritious food, also give your little one a healthy drink in the form of milk to increase weight (Amrullah, 2024).

According to Riadi (2019), stunting can be prevented through several efforts, namely:

1. Exclusive breastfeeding until the age of 6 months and after the age of 6 months, complementary foods (MPASI) are given that are strong in quantity and quality.
2. Monitoring the growth and development of toddlers at posyandu regularly according to age is a strategic effort to detect growth disorders.
3. Increase the use of clean water and sanitation facilities, as well as maintaining environmental cleanliness. Low sanitation and environmental cleanliness will trigger digestive tract disorders which will divert energy for growth to the body's resistance to infection. The longer you suffer from infection, the risk of stunting will increase.
4. Improve children's sleep quality. It turns out that improving the quality of children's sleep can prevent stunting in children. At night, the body will produce growth hormone which is of course important for increasing a child's height. The most optimal production of growth hormone occurs around 11 pm and the child is sleeping soundly

One health condition that is often overlooked by parents is stunting. This is a condition that disrupts a child's physical growth and intellectual development. In Indonesia, access to balanced nutritious food is not evenly distributed (Handayani, 2023). In fact, the main factor in stunting is a child's lack of nutritional intake in the First 1000 Days of Life (HPK). Brain and body growth develops rapidly at 1000 HPK starting from the fetus until the child is two years old. Fulfillment of nutrition at this stage is very important so that children's growth and development can be optimal (Endah, 2023).

According to Tan, there are 5 doors that cause a child to become stunted. This can be influenced from when you are still in the womb until you are a child. Starting from pregnant women who experience anemia, babies not getting exclusive breast milk, to MPASI periods that do not comply with procedures in terms of quantity and quality to providing non-nutritious food intake. Even though the free food and milk program has good intentions, it

can only be considered as an addition because nutritious food alone is not complete. This must be supplemented with pregnancy checks, immunizations, promotion and counseling on breastfeeding and nutrition, as well as providing supplements (Harahap, 2024).

Since the past, a program similar to free lunch has also been implemented and has become a program initiative in several private schools with different patterns for each educator. These various things are considered not to be running effectively. Providing free lunches and milk at schools and Islamic boarding schools, as well as nutritional assistance for children under five and pregnant women. This program targets more than 80 million beneficiaries with 100 percent coverage by 2029 (Harahap, 2024).

In providing free lunches for students, which are budgeted at IDR 15,000 per child, the government will have to be careful about the menu served according to the concept of balanced nutrition so that the goal of reducing stunting rates is achieved. The food menu must contain staple foods, vegetables, side dishes and fruit with carbohydrate, protein and vitamin content that are healthy for the body. A budget of IDR 15,000 is enough to meet the target of the contents of my plate concept, especially if it is processed well and must use local food ingredients, not imported ones, so that the quality is good and prices can be reduced (Harahap, 2024).

There are several examples of lunch menus that are considered nutritionally adequate at a cost that is not too expensive, starting from menu type 1, which consists of staple foods such as lontong, pecel vegetables, bacem tempeh side dishes and bananas. Meanwhile, the type 2 menu consists of boiled cassava, buntil, roa fish sauce and papaya. Furthermore, there is also type 3 menu which consists of red rice, chili sauce, grilled chicken and melon (Pahlephi, 2023). The goal of dealing with stunting will not be realized if it is not on target and only relies on free lunch and milk programs for children and pregnant women. There must be massive collaboration with many parties and do not eliminate other factors. Every parent continues to pay attention to their child's diet, from breakfast to dinner, by providing them with healthy and nutritious food. This program is not ineffective, but it is incomplete and must be carried out continuously by the role of the family at home, not just by the government (Salsabilla, 2023).

It also needs to be emphasized that the problem of stunting is not just a problem of the ability to access nutritious food. But it is also a problem of health services, sanitation, knowledge, awareness, lifestyle, socio-economics. Providing lunch for students aged over 5 years to high school seems to be out of sync if it is aimed at preventing stunting. So, if the student lunch program is indeed aimed at tackling stunting, then the lunch program needs to be reconsidered for implementation. Increasing budget allocations for nutrition and

health programs must be right on target. Sustainability, monitoring and evaluation must be carried out strictly and continuously. Don't let new programs that are not suitable actually break the focus of good programs that are currently running (Rosyida, 2024).

CONCLUSION

Based on the explanation above, several points can be concluded regarding the Free Nutritious Meal Policy as a Solution to Overcoming the Stunting Problem in Indonesia as follows:

1. Stunting is a big problem that still threatens Indonesian children. The stunting rate in Indonesia is still high. In 2023, the prevalence of stunting will still be 21.6%. In 2024, the latest data on stunting has not yet been released. Even though it is targeted to reach 14% in 2024.
2. The impact and danger of stunting is not only a matter of height, but the most dangerous thing is the child's low ability to learn, mental retardation, and the emergence of chronic diseases which can easily enter the child's body, which will reduce the functioning of the brain so that his cognitive ability, his way of thinking becomes more slow and difficult to progress.
3. The government has a very big role in reducing stunting in Indonesia, with a free lunch program that is right on target with balanced nutrition and the government must also be careful about the menu served according to the concept of balanced nutrition so that the goal of reducing stunting rates is achieved in Indonesia.

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