

Community Nurses' Strategies for Overcoming Stunting Through a Family Approach

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Stunting is a high public health problem in Indonesia, especially in rural areas. This condition has a long-term impact on a child's physical growth, cognitive development, and quality of life. Community nurses are important in stunting prevention and management efforts, particularly through a more holistic and sustainable family-based approach. Research Objectives: To identify and analyze the strategies used by community nurses in tackling stunting through a family approach, as well as to understand the challenges faced in implementing these strategies at the community level.

Research Methodology: This study uses a descriptive qualitative design with a phenomenological study approach. A total of 10 community nurses in areas with high stunting prevalence were interviewed in depth. Purposive sampling techniques were used to select participants, and data were analyzed using thematic methods to identify the main strategies applied in the family approach.

Result: The results of the study showed that community nurses implemented several main strategies, namely: (1) health education to families about nutrition, sanitation, and child care, (2) regular home visits to monitor family growth and development, (3) collaboration with cadres and community leaders in the implementation of programs, and (4) empowerment of mothers through mentoring and counseling groups. Nurses also emphasize the importance of building trust with family to encourage behavior change. Obstacles include low family awareness, a local culture that conflicts with healthy practices, and limited resources.

Conclusion: Strategies carried out by community nurses through a family approach have proven to be effective in efforts to overcome stunting. Family empowerment and cross-sector collaboration are key to success. Ongoing support is needed to strengthen the capacity of community nurses to carry out these roles optimally.

Keywords: Child nutrition, Community nurses, Family approach, Prevention, Stunting.



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INTRODUCTION

Stunting is a persistent public health issue that affects millions of children worldwide, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (Fu *et al.*, 2023). Characterized by impaired growth and development due to chronic malnutrition, stunting has long-term consequences on cognitive function, educational performance, and future productivity (Otoo *et al.*, 2025). In Indonesia, the prevalence of stunting remains a critical concern despite various government-led interventions. Stunting remains a significant public health concern in many low- and middle-income countries, particularly in rural areas (Nyirenda, Mulenga, and Nyambe-Silavwe, 2025). It reflects chronic malnutrition and can lead to long-term impacts on physical growth, cognitive development, and productivity in adulthood. The family plays a crucial role in shaping children's nutrition and health practices, making it a central focus in addressing stunting. As the front line of primary health care, community nurses have a unique and strategic position to engage families, promote healthy behaviors, and implement preventive interventions. However, their strategies in this context, especially within a family-centered approach, are often underexplored (Wijayanti *et al.*, 2024). Understanding these strategies is essential for strengthening community-based health initiatives and achieving sustainable reductions in stunting. This study aims to explore the strategies employed by community nurses in overcoming stunting through a family approach (Pradhan, Pradhan, and Kandapan, 2023).

Child nutrition is a fundamental factor determining optimal growth and development and quality of life in the future. An imbalance in nutritional intake, especially in the golden period of the first 1,000 days of life, can lead to chronic growth disorders known as stunting (Zangerl *et al.*, 2024). Stunting not only impacts the physical aspects of children but also affects cognitive, emotional, and learning development (Till *et al.*, 2023). Stunting prevention efforts must be carried out comprehensively and sustainably, involving the family as the central unit in parenting and child nutrition. In primary health services, community nurses have a strategic role as the spearhead in bringing promotive and preventive services closer to the community (Mardani *et al.*, 2024). Community nurses can establish direct relationships with parents and caregivers through the family approach, provide education, and form healthy living behaviors based on family needs. Although this approach has the potential to have a significant impact, the concrete strategies carried out by community nurses in its implementation have not been studied in depth (Bongga Linggi *et al.*, 2024). Therefore, this study aims to explore and understand the strategy of community nurses in tackling stunting through a family approach as part of community-based prevention efforts (Yue *et al.*, 2023).

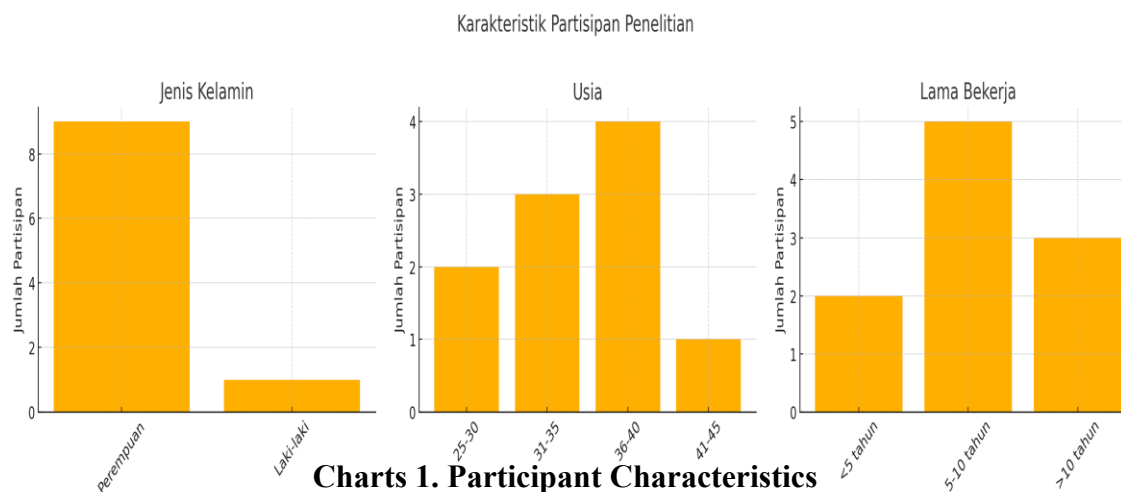
Community nurses are pivotal in promoting health at the grassroots level, especially in rural and underserved areas (Batani and Maharaj, 2024). Practice-based training and mentoring are effective strategies to improve nurses' competence in health centers, which can ultimately contribute to improving the quality of public health services (Zeldman *et al.*, 2025). Through direct interaction with families, they are uniquely positioned to identify risk factors early and implement preventive measures (Ibrahim and Fathi Zaghmir, 2024). A family-centered approach has increasingly gained attention as an effective strategy to address stunting, emphasizing the importance of empowering families to make informed health decisions and adopt sustainable practices (Ajeng Wijayanti *et al.*, 2025). Despite its potential, limited research explores how community nurses apply family-based strategies in real-world settings. Understanding their roles, methods, and the challenges they encounter is essential for optimizing stunting prevention efforts. This study aims to explore the strategies employed by community nurses in

addressing stunting through a family approach, to provide insights that can strengthen community-based interventions and inform policy development.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive design to gain an in-depth understanding of the strategies applied by community nurses in tackling stunting through a family approach. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore nurses' experiences, views, and practices directly in the context of community service. The data collection technique was conducted through a semi-structured, in-depth interview with 10 community nurses working in areas with a high prevalence of stunting. Participants were selected using purposive sampling techniques based on specific criteria, such as at least two years of work experience in community health services and active involvement in stunting prevention programs. The interview process is recorded with the participant's permission and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Data analysis is carried out with a thematic approach, which includes the coding process, identification of themes, and interpretation of the meaning of the strategies used. The validity of the data is maintained through source triangulation, re-examination by participants (member check), and discussion with fellow researchers. This research has obtained ethical approval from the research ethics committee of the relevant institution. All participants were given informed consent before the interview process was carried out to ensure ethics, confidentiality, and freedom of participation.

RESULT



Of the 10 participants, 9 were women, and only one was male. This reflects that the community nursing profession is still dominated by women, which aligns with the general trend in the nursing profession in Indonesia. This dominance of women can also affect the communication approach used in interactions with families, especially mothers as the primary caregivers of children. Most of the participants were in the age range of 31–40 years, indicating that they were in the productive and mature age phase in their careers. This age range is considered ideal for carrying out their duties as community nurses because they tend to have sufficient experience and adaptability to social dynamics in society. Most community nurses in this study had 5 to 10 years of work experience. This considerable work experience provides them with a deep understanding of community

conditions and challenges in the field and effective approaches in dealing with public health issues such as stunting. In addition, the combination of practical experience and proximity to the community allows nurses to implement more contextual and targeted strategies.

Nutrition Education and Family Parenting

"We often provide direct education to mothers about the importance of providing nutritious food. Sometimes they don't know that local foods like moringa leaves are very good for children." (P1)

Home Visits and Growth Monitoring

"Through home visits, we can see firsthand the environmental conditions, the way mothers feed their children, and sometimes we even help them weigh their children at home if they do not come to the integrated health service post." (P3)

Collaboration with Cadres and Community Leaders

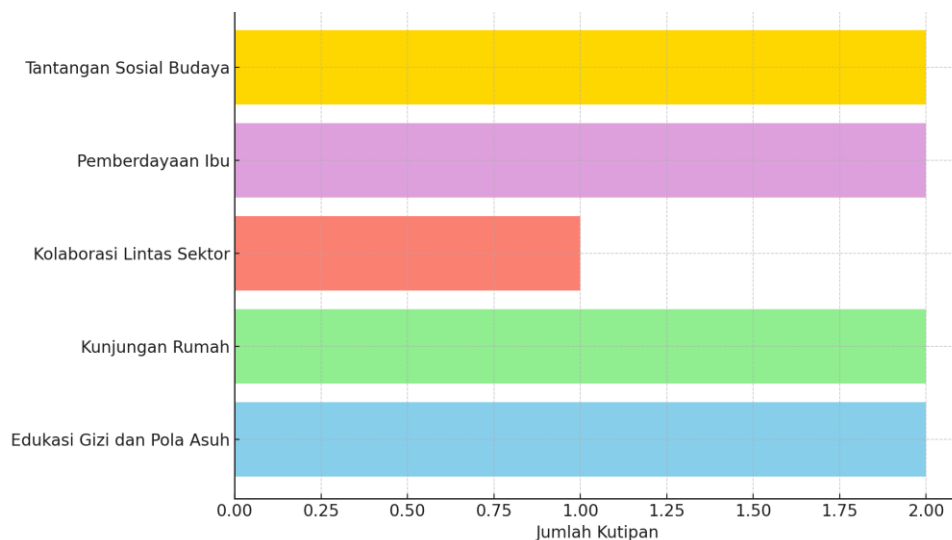
"We can't work alone. Usually, we collaborate with integrated health service post cadres and village leaders so that the community is more trusting and willing to participate in the program." (P6)

Mother's Empowerment Through Discussion Groups

"We created a group of mothers under five, so they can share experiences. There, we also provide counseling and practice cooking healthy food." (P8)

Social and Cultural Challenges

"Sometimes it is difficult because there are still false beliefs, for example, children are not allowed to eat eggs before a certain age. So we have to be patient to explain slowly." (P4)



Charts 2. Distribution of Quotes by Key Theme

The graph shows the number of interview quotes categorized based on the five main themes of qualitative data analysis. Each theme reflects the strategic aspects community nurses use in tackling stunting through a family approach. Nutrition and Parenting Education (2 citations). This theme emerged strongly in the interview, showing that education to families, especially mothers, is the main strategy used by community nurses. The education provided is not only in the form of theory, but also emphasizes the use of nutritious local food sources. Home Visits (2 quotes) Home visits are an important

method in the family approach. Nurses monitor the child's physical condition and observe parenting practices and the family environment firsthand. This allows for more targeted interventions. Maternal empowerment (2 citations) Empowerment through discussion groups and skills training (e.g., cooking healthy meals) is an effective form of social intervention. This strategy increases mothers' involvement as the main decision-makers in the care and fulfillment of child nutrition. Socio-Cultural Challenges (2 citations) The quotations on this theme show that there are still local cultural barriers and beliefs that are challenges for community nurses. Therefore, a persuasive approach and empathetic communication are needed. Cross-Sector Collaboration (1 quote) Although only one quote explicitly mentions collaboration, this theme is still important. The role of integrated health service post cadres and community leaders has been proven to help expand interventions' reach and build community trust.

Based on the citation distribution graph, it can be concluded that the main strategies that stand out most in community nurses' efforts to overcome stunting through a family approach include nutrition and parenting education, home visits, maternal empowerment, and management of socio-cultural challenges. The four themes have an equal number of citations, showing that nurses not only focus on the medical aspect but also take a balanced educational, social, and cultural approach. Meanwhile, although cross-sector collaboration has fewer citations, this theme still shows the importance of cooperation with cadres and community leaders in strengthening the effectiveness of interventions at the community level. Overall, this graph illustrates that community nurses are applying a comprehensive and contextual approach, adapting their strategies to the socio-cultural conditions of the family and the local community.

DISCUSSION

This study identifies five main themes that describe community nurses' strategies for tackling stunting through a family approach. The results of the interviews showed that education, home visits, maternal empowerment, cross-sector collaboration, and socio-cultural challenges were essential components in implementing interventions in the field.

Nutrition and Parenting Education. Education for families, especially mothers, is the most dominant strategy. Community nurses actively provide counseling on the importance of fulfilling balanced nutrition, healthy diets, and the use of local foodstuffs (Kekre and Mahajan, 2023). This education is delivered in formal forums such as integrated health service post and through direct interaction during home visits (Astuti, Suindyah Dwiningwarni and Atmojo, 2025). This aligns with the promotive-preventive principle in community nursing services, where increasing family knowledge is the first step in stunting prevention (Suprpto, Mulat, and Lalla, 2021). Nutrition education and parenting are the dominant strategies carried out by community nurses. Education is given directly to families, especially mothers under five, about the importance of balanced nutritional intake and proper parenting practices (Rakha *et al.*, 2025). Nurses also take advantage of the potential of local foods, such as moringa leaves, which are easy to obtain but are not widely known for their nutritional benefits (Nyarko, ten Ham-Baloyi and van Rooyen, 2024). These findings align with previous research that stated that family-based education improves mothers' understanding of child nutrition (Karim *et al.*, 2024). One of the main strategies widely implemented is nutrition education and parenting. Community nurses actively counsel mothers and families about the importance of providing nutritious food and utilizing local resources. This is supported by a participant's

quote that the education is carried out with a hands-on approach and uses examples of foodstuffs that are easy to find (Piper *et al.*, 2024).

Home Visit. Home visit activities allow nurses to assess the child's environmental conditions, parenting habits, and growth status directly. This strategy provides a more personalized and contextual approach and strengthens the relationship between the nurse and the family (Nurwahyuni *et al.*, 2023). In addition, home visits are also an alternative for families who do not actively attend integrated health service post so that services can still be reached equally. Home visits are one of the effective approaches to bringing services closer to the community. Through these visits, nurses can monitor children's growth directly and identify environmental health problems and home feeding practices (Amouzou *et al.*, 2025). This approach allows nurses to provide more personalized and contextual interventions according to family conditions. Another strategy that is also widely used is home visits, which allow caregivers to monitor the child's growth directly, assess environmental conditions, and provide guidance according to the specific needs of the family. This visit also helps reach families not actively coming to health facilities or integrated health service post (Aris Tyarini, Kurni Menga, and Setiawati, 2025).

Mother Empowerment. Community nurses are also empowered through the formation of discussion groups, skills training, and emotional support. This strategy increases the mother's confidence and knowledge in making decisions related to childcare and nutritional fulfillment (Escher *et al.*, 2024a). This approach strengthens the role of the family as a key actor in stunting prevention. Maternal empowerment is carried out through the formation of discussion groups and practical training, such as cooking nutritious food. This strategy increases mothers' knowledge and strengthens social networks and emotional support among fellow mothers. Community nurses also apply a maternal empowerment approach, one of which is through the formation of discussion groups and practical training, such as cooking healthy meals. This strategy increases knowledge and builds mothers' confidence in parenting (Escher *et al.*, 2024b).

Cross-Sector Collaboration. Although fewer quotes on this theme, nurses conveyed the importance of cooperation with integrated health service post cadres, community leaders, and the village government (Lancaster, Bourque and Hyrkas, 2025). This collaboration expands the program's reach, increases community participation, and strengthens the sustainability of health interventions. Cross-sector collaboration is not mentioned much; the involvement of integrated health service post cadres and community leaders is considered important to strengthen program implementation. Public trust in local figures is an effective bridge in conveying health messages. Although not very dominant in citations, cross-sector collaboration remains an important strategy. Nurses work with integrated health service post cadres, community leaders, and village governments to increase the community's acceptance and effectiveness of stunting programs (Wholeben *et al.*, 2025).

Socio-Cultural Challenges. Nurses face challenges in implementing the family approach, such as low nutritional awareness, myths around children's food, and habits that do not support optimal child growth (Kamyabi Azar, Naeim, and Arjmand, 2025). Therefore, a persuasive, empathetic, and local culture-based approach is needed to build trust and encourage behavior change. Socio-cultural barriers are quite significant obstacles. Some traditional beliefs, such as prohibiting certain foods for children, are still barriers to good nutrition practices (Mumtaz *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, a persuasive, communicative, and empathetic approach is needed from community nurses. However, in the field, nurses face various social and cultural challenges, including traditional beliefs

that are not in line with modern health principles. This requires a persuasive approach, empathetic communication, and patience in explaining information to families (Bassoumah and Mohammed, 2020).

Practical and Theoretical Implications

This research significantly contributes to community nursing practice, especially in stunting prevention and control. Strategies such as nutrition education, home visits, and maternal empowerment have proven effective and can be used as implementable guidelines in areas with similar characteristics. The family approach strengthens community involvement and increases participation in maintaining children's nutritional status. The success of the intervention is also influenced by cross-sectoral collaboration and a sensitive approach to local cultural values. Theoretically, these findings enrich the perspectives of Family-Centered Care and Community Health Nursing by placing the family at the center of health behavior change. The community nursing approach is positioned as a form of promotive and curative service and a transformational strategy that sustains local capacity. These findings can serve as a basis for developing a community nursing curriculum and future research directions in the context of family-based interventions.

CONCLUSION

This study shows a strong and significant relationship between nurses' therapeutic communication and inpatient satisfaction. The higher the quality of therapeutic communication the nurse provides, especially in empathy and active listening, the higher the patient satisfaction with the services received. Therapeutic communication is a means of conveying information and plays an essential role in building a trusting relationship between nurses and patients. Therefore, improving therapeutic communication skills should be prioritized in developing nurses' competencies through formal training and regular clinical supervision. This study suggests that hospital management pays more attention to implementing therapeutic communication in the clinical environment to improve the quality of nursing services and patient satisfaction.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There are no potential conflicts of interest relevant to this article.

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