

Community Service in Jeneponto Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia: Smart Mother Movement Through Local Cultural Practices and Life-Course Nursing to Improve Maternal Health and Reduce Stunting

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ABSTRACT

The present paper represents a community service conducted in Jeneponto Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, focusing on improving maternal health and reducing stunting through the empowerment of mothers using local cultural practices. Activities were facilitated by lecturers from the Faculty of Health, Universitas Patria Artha. The program adopted a Life-Course Nursing approach, which distinguishes it from similar initiatives at other universities that commonly rely solely on clinical interventions or standard health education. Rather than applying a conventional top-down health promotion model, this program integrated the *Smart Mother Movement* (Gerakan Ibu Cerdas) by embedding local Jeneponto cultural practices into maternal care and child nutrition guidance. The aim was to foster behavioral change in mothers regarding childcare and nutritional practices while strengthening community awareness of stunting prevention. The program encompassed health education sessions, local cultural practice training incorporating traditional food and customs, as well as health screenings and stunting assessments. The outcomes indicate meaningful shifts in maternal behavior toward improved parenting and nutritional practices, suggesting that culturally grounded nursing interventions offer a sustainable pathway to reducing stunting prevalence at the community level. These findings highlight the potential of integrating life-course nursing principles with local wisdom as an effective strategy for community-based maternal and child health development.

Keywords: Community service, maternal health, stunting prevention, life-course nursing, local cultural practices, mother empowerment, Jeneponto

INTRODUCTION

Background

The burden of stunting in Jeneponto Regency and the urgency of maternal-centered interventions

Stunting, caused by chronic malnutrition during the critical first 1,000 days of life, continues to be one of Indonesia's most pressing public health problems. In Indonesia, the prevalence of stunting has decreased from 27.7% in 2019 to 24.4% in 2021 and 21.6% in 2022, but the national target of 14% in 2024 has not yet been

reached. This underscores the need for more rapid and context-sensitive interventions. At the subnational level, disparities are still stark. Jeneponto Regency recorded the highest stunting rate in South Sulawesi in 2022 at 39.8%, up from 37.9% in the previous year. This was much higher than the national norm and the provincial average of 27.2%. This worrying figure also speaks to deep rooted socio cultural and behavioural problems which traditional health interventions have not been able to address adequately, in addition to nutritional deficits. (Syakur et al., 2023).

More and more research demonstrates the importance of mother behavior for the nutritional outcomes of children. Targeted educational programmes for mothers of toddlers and women of reproductive age are amongst the most effective methods identified for stunting reduction. Maternal knowledge, attitudes and practices of care giving are some of the most important determinants of stunting. Since mothers are the main caregivers in most households, the quality of mothers' caregiving abilities directly affects the nutritional condition and growth of children. In addition to clinical treatment, these behavioral characteristics require community-based empowerment initiatives tailored to local circumstances. (Wulandari et al., 2025).

The role of local cultural practices in stunting prevention

Particularly in rural areas like Jeneponto, traditional beliefs and local customs greatly impact mother health behavior, still researchers sometimes neglect them. The particular opinions of Jeneponto residents on stunting frequently deviate from scientific definitions, therefore causing a mismatch between official health messages and the level of adoption of preventative measures by the public. This cultural disparity presents chances as well as problems: Projects that reflect the knowledge of the community are more likely to be welcomed, preserved, and imitated there. Eliminating stunting in Indonesia's coastal and rural areas calls for using locally acquired protein and including educational campaigns based on community specific approaches both of which have proven to be beneficial and successful. Studies done in places like Bantul, Yogyakarta suggest that including local cuisine and cultural customs in nutrition programs can help to keep stunting rates down over several years (Meher et al., 2023). These encounters support the idea that instead of being uniformly used in different Indonesian communities, treatments must be adjusted to suit the local setting.

Life-Course Nursing as a framework for maternal and child health

The Life-Course The nursing method offers a theoretically solid and practically useful paradigm for tackling the complex aspects of stunting and maternal health. Life-course theory, which recognizes the crucial role that social, economic, and environmental factors play in shaping health outcomes, including health inequities, across successive life stages, is increasingly being included into maternal and child health initiatives worldwide. In the WHO South-East Asia Region, which has a disproportionately high burden of maternal and child mortality and malnutrition, a life-course approach to maternity and child health has been actively promoted as essential but not completely operationalized. By using this framework in a nursing setting, medical professionals can treat stunting as a continuum of risk that starts in adolescence, continues through pregnancy, and persists into early childhood, allowing for more thorough and preventive care strategies (Bazzano et al., 2025).

Gap in existing community service initiatives

While there are several stunting-focused community service programs in Indonesia, most of them primarily use conventional techniques like posyandu screenings, one time health counseling sessions, or supplemental feeding without long term behavioral follow through. Stunting rates have not been significantly impacted by well funded, multidimensional projects that target stunting through provider training, health education, and sanitation improvements, as large scale community based initiatives in Indonesia have shown. This implies that local contextual appropriateness and programmatic integration remain important success factors. Few programs have simultaneously combined life-course nursing principles with culturally based mother empowerment, particularly in high-burden eastern Indonesian communities like Jeneponto. In order to encourage major behavioral change among mothers in Jeneponto Regency, the Smart Mother Movement (Gerakan Ibu Cerdas Cegah Stunting) combines community health screening, practical cultural practice training, and health education within a Life Course Nursing framework. The goal of this program, which is run by professors from Universitas Patria Artha's Faculty of Health, is to bridge this gap.

Challenges Faced by Mothers and Communities in Preventing Stunting and Improving Maternal Health

For mothers and communities in high-burden areas like Jeneponto, effectively reducing stunting and improving maternal health outcomes is a challenging and complex task. Each of these problems, which have cognitive, social, structural, and economic components, requires a purposeful and context-sensitive intervention strategy. Because the government's biological definition of stunting differs significantly from the community's ideas, there is a substantial gap between the official health message and the community's adoption of preventative actions in Jeneponto. Field research indicates that Jeneponto inhabitants view stunting as a normal variation in human growth rather than as a health problem. Participation in early intervention and health programs is severely hampered by this deeply ingrained mindset.

Two of the most persistent barriers to reducing stunting at the individual level are inadequate nutrition knowledge and low maternal education. It has been discovered that mothers of stunted children's health-seeking behavior is strongly influenced by their educational attainment, with lower educational attainment being strongly associated with reduced use of health services. A lack of health knowledge, social stigma related to stunting, hierarchical communication with healthcare providers, and cultural and social norms influencing childcare choices all hinder the effectiveness of traditional health education techniques for women in rural Indonesia. These challenges are made worse by financial constraints, as many rural Jeneponto households are unable to regularly afford healthy food or medical care (Syakur et al., 2023).

Sociocultural problems also hinder stunting prevention programs. In Indonesia, efforts to prevent stunting are frequently thwarted by financial constraints that limit access to adequate nutrition, psychological resistance to the stunting label, reliance on traditional health practices, and gender disparities in household decision making. After 20 years of government-led stunting prevention initiatives, significant regional disparities persist, and the present biological and technical paradigm in stunting control has proven insufficient where upstream socioeconomic and cultural deficiencies remain unsolved. This statistic highlights the reality that technical nutrition interventions alone cannot result in long lasting behavioral change without also addressing the cultural and social fabric of communities.

Structural barriers exacerbate these social and individual challenges. Programs that just focus on nutrition-specific therapies rarely address the more basic problems that rural households often face, like restricted access to food, limited health care, and financial hardship. However, implementation problems include inadequate local leadership, a lack of technical know-how, uneven use of village funds, and fragmented cross-sector cooperation hinder the success of stunting reduction programs at the community level. Any community service project targeted at Jeneponto should be designed as both an educational program and a holistic empowerment approach due to these structural issues.

The Smart Mother Movement (Gerakan Ibu Cerdas Cegah Stunting) in the Faculty of Health at Universitas Patria Artha in Jeneponto Regency provides a novel and thoughtful answer to these intricate problems. Instead of replicating traditional seminar-based health education, this program integrates life-course nursing principles with local Jeneponto cultural practices, such as traditional food preparation and community customs, to change maternal behavior within the community's own cultural framework. This approach is consistent with the growing recognition that effective stunting prevention requires culturally sensitive, community-driven public health approaches that integrate local beliefs with evidence-based treatments rather than imposing externally imposed solutions. By combining health education, screening, and training in culturally based practices into a single, cohesive program, this endeavor directly addresses the cognitive, cultural, and behavioral barriers that have long hampered progress in communities like Jeneponto.

Comparison with Other Community Service Activities (Posyandu-Based Programs and Single-Session Health Seminars)

In Indonesia, common community service projects to reduce stunting include nutrition supplementation programs, Posyandu-based counseling, and single-session health lectures. These approaches greatly raise community awareness, but they often don't produce long-lasting behavioral improvements in mothers' eating and caring behaviors. Variation in cadre capacity persists despite the Posyandu program's recognition as a

sociomedical intervention that combines education, community empowerment, and service delivery; workload limitations and a lack of training opportunities affect the consistency and quality of information delivery. Despite being widely used throughout Indonesia, frequent Posyandu activities may not necessarily lead to improved maternal behavior or long-term reductions in the prevalence of stunting at the community level due to these disadvantages.

Similarly, health education seminars for women of childbearing age, pregnant moms, and mothers of small children usually focus on teaching nutritional knowledge rather than promoting real behavioral change. Although nutrition education has been demonstrated to be an effective strategy to increase mothers' understanding of balanced nutritional intake, exclusive breastfeeding, and appropriate complementary feeding, most interventions do not address the deeper behavioral, cultural, and socioeconomic determinants that sustain poor caregiving practices. Maternal knowledge ratings have improved following these seminars in programs in places like East Java and West Java, but improvements in actual feeding behavior and child development outcomes have remained negligible in the absence of regular follow-up or community-embedded initiatives (Maryati et al., 2022). The gap between knowledge acquisition and behavioral modification is a significant shortcoming of conventional seminar based approaches.

The flaws of top-down, technique-focused programs are made worse when they disregard regional cultural aspects. The fact that current stunting prevention strategies frequently create a gap between national policies and local community realities, ultimately decreasing the effectiveness of intervention, highlights the need for culturally sensitive, community-driven strategies that incorporate local beliefs with evidence-based interventions. In a similar vein, several community service projects in South Sulawesi and the surrounding regions have depended on official health professionals to offer generic modules without actively integrating women in co-creating solutions suitable for their local social and cultural settings. The prevailing biomedical and technical paradigm in stunting prevention has proven insufficient where upstream deficits including cultural norms, household poverty, and limited social trust in health institutions remain unaddressed.

The Faculty of Health at Universitas Patria Artha Jeneponto Regency community service initiative sought to bridge these gaps by combining health screening, cultural practice training, and health education into a single integrated effort. Instead of copying seminar-only or Posyandu-only models, the Smart Mother Movement (Gerakan Ibu Cerdas Cegah Stunting) used a Life Course Nursing framework to engage mothers in many aspects of their everyday lives, from understanding nutritional needs to practicing locally appropriate food preparation rooted in Jeneponto's cultural heritage. Evidence from community-based programs in Indonesia demonstrates that training involving appropriate technology and nutrition education, when implemented through participatory methods, leads to significant improvements in community knowledge, practical skills, and everyday health practices outcomes that are rarely attained by single-session interventions. It has been discovered that community empowerment programs that actively involve communities in decision making and program execution through capacity building, culture based treatments, and participatory approaches are more successful in preventing stunting. The Jeneponto initiative demonstrates that integrating these elements with a culturally grounded nursing viewpoint provides a more thorough, contextually sensitive, and long-lasting route for enhancing maternal health and lowering stunting than conventional community service techniques.

Objectives

This community service project was built around two primary objectives. The Smart Mother Movement (Gerakan Ibu Cerdas Cegah Stunting) sought to empower women in Jeneponto Regency and encourage substantial and long-lasting behavioral change in maternal caregiving and eating habits by fusing a Life-Course Nursing approach with deeply rooted cultural practices. This approach not only increases maternal health literacy but also progressively equips women with the knowledge and skills necessary to develop culturally appropriate feeding practices, respond to early signs of stunted development, and take an active role in avoiding stunting from pregnancy through early childhood. In order to help lower the long-term prevalence of stunting in Jeneponto Regency, the second objective was to strengthen the community's capacity to manage maternal and child health issues in a sustainable, locally owned manner. This initiative aimed to balance evidence-based health promotion with the preservation of local wisdom by deliberately fusing nursing-based health treatments with cultural

empowerment, producing long-lasting and repeatable benefits for women, children, families, and the larger community.

The ongoing and increasing stunting burden in Jeneponto Regency, which has consistently had the highest stunting incidence in South Sulawesi Province, justifies this approach. Despite several government-led initiatives and improvements in health services, the region's stunting rates have remained shockingly high. This reflects the flaws in conventional approaches that prioritize technical and therapeutic solutions while ignoring the more fundamental behavioral, cultural, and societal factors that contribute to child malnutrition. Mothers in Jeneponto, particularly those who reside in rural regions, often do not consistently receive context-sensitive nutrition advice, and many of them continue to hold traditional beliefs that conflict with evidence-based child health practices. Their limited access to ongoing health information, financial constraints, and deeply rooted cultural norms around child growth and feeding have all hindered their capacity to adopt and maintain good parenting practices.

This program was therefore developed as a purposeful and culturally appropriate intervention at the intersection of maternal health promotion and community empowerment. By utilizing regional cultural traditions, such as traditional food systems, customary preparation methods, and community-based social norms, the strategy actively changes the behavioral context in which women make everyday care decisions. With a foundation in Jeneponto's distinct cultural identity, this approach expands the scope of community-based health promotion strategies and opens up new opportunities for improved maternal health and nutritional outcomes for children. Additionally, this program addresses the bigger structural aspect of stunting by transforming maternal empowerment into a community-wide movement where women become change agents rather than passive consumers of health information.

Because of the initiative's participatory design, women are guaranteed to contribute significantly to the program's implementation, which increases their sense of ownership and commitment to sustaining healthy habits even after the program has ended. By combining behavioral modification with cultural preservation and community involvement, this effort aims to set a standard for other high-burden communities in Eastern Indonesia seeking to reduce stunting utilizing contextually responsive, nursing led, and culturally anchored strategies. The initiative's success demonstrates that integrating life course nursing concepts with local knowledge can be a scalable approach for improving maternal and child health in communities with low resources, in addition to improving children's health outcomes in Jeneponto.

Empowering the Community Through the Smart Mother Movement and Life-Course Nursing Approach

The Smart Mother Movement (Gerakan Ibu Cerdas Cegah Stunting), which empowers mothers in Jeneponto Regency, is a strategic and innovative approach to improve family socio-health well-being and strengthen community resilience against stunting. Conventional health promotion has often concentrated on top-down, standardized information delivery in high-burden areas like Jeneponto, which is unable to relate to the lived realities of women who are firmly embedded in cultural traditions. Maternal empowerment extends beyond clinical settings and incorporates health-promoting practices into the cultural fabric that mothers already inhabit and trust by incorporating a Life Course Nursing framework with culturally rooted local practices, such as traditional Jeneponto food systems, customary feeding rituals, and community-based caregiving standards. Research has consistently demonstrated that health treatments based in local cultural contexts provide much higher rates of community acceptability, behavioral adoption, and long-term sustainability when compared to culturally neutral or externally imposed programs. (Nurlela et al., 2025);(Meher et al., 2023).

Empowering mothers through this culturally embedded nursing approach adds value not only to individual health outcomes but also to the collective identity of the community, repositioning local wisdom as a living resource for child health rather than an obstacle to modern medical practice. Community empowerment programs that actively involve communities in decision-making and program implementation through participatory approaches, capacity building, and culture-based interventions have been demonstrated as more effective strategies for stunting prevention — affirming that genuine empowerment must arise from within the community rather than being delivered to it. By training mothers to utilize traditional local foods, apply culturally familiar preparation methods, and integrate evidence-based nutritional guidance into their everyday caregiving routines, the program reshapes the behavioral environment in which child health decisions are made. This not only

strengthens maternal competence but also cultivates a sense of ownership and collective pride that sustains the program's impact long after its formal implementation concludes (Fatma et al., 2025).

The Life Course Nursing approach further enriches this empowerment process by recognizing that stunting prevention cannot be confined to a single intervention point but must span the continuum from adolescence through pregnancy and early childhood. The integration of life-course theory into maternal and child health programs has been increasingly promoted as crucial for attaining equitable and long-lasting health improvements because it acknowledges the critical role that social, economic, and environmental factors play across successive life stages in shaping health outcomes. Using this approach in a community service environment, nursing practitioners from Universitas Patria Artha's Faculty of Health can engage mothers at multiple critical life stages. This involves promoting healthy eating habits for newborns and young children throughout the postnatal period, enhancing mother health during pregnancy, and addressing nutritional readiness before conception. In Southeast Asia, where the burden of maternal and child mortality and malnutrition is disproportionately high, a life-course approach to maternity and child health has been heavily advocated as essential but has not been sufficiently operationalized at the community level. This program's integrated, community-embedded architecture directly fills this gap. (Bazzano et al., 2025);(Asia, 2023).

Furthermore, the program's incorporation of community health screenings and stunting evaluations ensures that empowerment is supported by specific, empirically supported feedback on children's nutritional status rather than merely instruction. Community-based programs that combine appropriate health technology with nutrition education and participatory methods have produced notable and measurable improvements in everyday health behaviors, practical skills, and community knowledge in rural Indonesian settings. These findings show that the combination of cultural empowerment and health monitoring has a powerful multiplier effect, increasing mothers' knowledge, confidence, and capacity to translate awareness into consistent, health-promoting behavior in their homes and communities (Sunarsih et al., 2026).

Therefore, empowering mothers in Jeneponto Regency through the Smart Mother Movement and Life Course Nursing approach becomes a game changing strategy that simultaneously strengthens the community's cultural identity, improves maternal health on an individual basis, and establishes a long term foundation for reducing the prevalence of stunting across generations. This model demonstrates the broader potential of nursing led, culturally grounded community empowerment as a repeatable framework for high burden maternity and child health settings throughout Eastern Indonesia, in addition to advancing children's health and development in Jeneponto.

Supporting the Sustainability of Maternal and Child Health by Strengthening Community-Based Stunting Prevention

In addition to episodic health interventions, deliberate strengthening of community capacity to independently sustain health-promoting behaviors rooted in local resources and cultural values is required to support the long-term sustainability of maternal and child health outcomes in Jeneponto Regency. Community health resilience is crucial for both the physical well-being of women and children and the preservation of culturally embedded caregiving practices that define the social fabric of communities like Jeneponto. In a community that is genuinely empowered in health practices, improved maternal behavior results in better nutritional outcomes for children, which in turn reduces the long-term socioeconomic impact of stunting on households and local governance institutions. For the eradication of stunting in Indonesia's coastal and rural areas, it has been demonstrated that optimizing locally accessible food sources and including educational initiatives based on psychological care and community-specific practices are appropriate and long-lasting intervention programs. (Octavia et al., 2025).

Maintaining this community health model also requires providing mothers, health cadres, and community leaders with the specific information and tools they need to continue implementing preventive health behaviors even after the official program period has ended. Collaborative communication, capacity building, and institutional support have been demonstrated to effectively strengthen the role of Posyandu cadres and community members in stunting prevention by improving both technical and communication skills. This confirms that sustainability depends on developing human capital at the community level rather than relying on frequent external interventions. The Jeneponto Smart Mother Movement initiative directly addresses this issue by teaching moms

how to employ local food preparation techniques, recognize early signs of stunted growth, and share evidence-based nutritional recommendations in their own social networks. This creates a network of competent and informed health advocates who can organically sustain the program's momentum (Purnaningsih et al., 2025).

Additionally, Jeneponto has a distinct and competitive health advantage because stunting prevention is part of the community's present cultural norms. Just as sustainable tourism towns that integrate local crafts into their economic model produce a distinctive and long-lasting value offer, communities that integrate health-promoting habits into their cultural traditions are better positioned to sustain those behaviors throughout generations. The integrated design of the Jeneponto program includes nutritional education, supplemental feeding, and interprofessional collaboration with key community members, such as women of reproductive age, mothers of toddlers, and health professionals. The best methods for preventing stunting are these ones. Additionally, by using indigenous Jeneponto food systems as the program's nutritional foundation, this effort integrates health promotion with the community's existing agricultural and culinary resources. This lessens the need for nutritional goods that are given from outside sources and ensures that all households can continue to afford healthy feeding practices (Fristiwi et al., 2023).

This initiative's participatory structure further ensures that the program's benefits endure over time and that the community retains its cultural and health resources in order to achieve a harmonious balance between modern evidence-based nursing practice and local wisdom. Developing governance mechanisms that sustain community involvement and supporting nutrition-based intervention programs that are responsive to local social and cultural aspects are two strategic measures that can successfully and efficiently reduce stunting rates. Jeneponto Regency is strengthening the health foundation for its children and building its reputation as a community capable of transforming one of Indonesia's most persistent public health challenges through a model of culturally grounded, community-owned, and nursing-supported maternal empowerment an achievement with long-lasting significance for the health and dignity of its people (Astuti et al., 2025).

Benefits

Mothers, kids, and the Jeneponto Regency community as a whole benefited from this community service initiative in three significant ways.

Health benefit: The program led to a considerable improvement in maternal health knowledge and caregiving behavior, which instantly improved children under five's eating habits. Mothers were able to gain both a theoretical understanding of stunting prevention and practical skills to incorporate evidence-based nutritional guidance into their daily routines through the integration of community health screenings, practical cultural practice training, and health education into a single integrated initiative. Giving mothers the knowledge and self-assurance to implement culturally based feeding practices is a fundamental health benefit with generational ramifications because the quality of maternal caregiving abilities directly affects children's nutritional status and growth trajectory. Early detection of growth faltering using integrated health screenings reduced the probability of children transitioning from at-risk nutritional status to confirmed stunting and enabled timely referral and nutritional intervention.

Social and cultural benefit: The effort improved community awareness of the relationship between local cultural practices and child health by redefining Jeneponto's traditional food systems and caring behaviors as active health resources. Culturally sensitive, community-driven strategies that integrate local beliefs with evidence-based interventions have been shown to foster stronger social cohesiveness and longer-lasting community involvement. Mothers not only benefited from health information but also became culturally empowered change activists in their families and larger social networks. (Pasaribu & Pardosi, 2026).

Developmental benefit: By addressing the behavioral and cultural reasons of stunting, the initiative improved Jeneponto Regency's potential for long-term human growth. Since stunting reduces the potential of future generations through less cognitive ability, lower educational attainment, and diminished output, early prevention is a smart investment in community human capital. When taken as a whole, these three benefits demonstrate an all-encompassing approach to community development that fosters health improvement, cultural empowerment, and sustainable human progress in a way that is mutually beneficial and balanced (Aril et al., 2025).

Implementation Methods

Involving Jeneponto Regency mothers and community members in the process of health empowerment and behavioral change was the aim of this program's methodical and participatory approach. The program's implementation began with a community needs assessment, which was followed by integrated health screenings, cultural practice training, health education sessions, and a final evaluation to determine the intervention's efficacy. This approach was developed in accordance with the Life Course Nursing framework that serves as the foundation for the Smart Mother Movement. It aims to educate mothers about evidence-based strategies for preventing stunting and to actively involve them in putting those strategies into practice within the social and cultural context of their daily lives.

Community Needs Assessment

As part of an initial needs assessment of the community, mothers of children under five, health cadres, village midwives, and local government stakeholders in Jeneponto Regency were questioned about their understanding of stunting, food habits, and current caregiving methods. The discussions focused on the traditions surrounding feeding and childcare, the challenges mothers faced while seeking medical attention, and their willingness to take part in culturally relevant health promotion programs. Qualitative interviewing techniques were used to examine mothers' perceptions on stunting, their awareness of the relationship between local eating habits and child growth, and the specific behavioral barriers and information gaps that needed to be addressed. Through observational analysis, the team was also able to identify the household characteristics and sociocultural dynamics that were most relevant to developing a program that was both successful and suitable for the context. In order to develop intervention options that were most suited to the community's health needs and cultural context, the needs assessment supplied baseline data.

Activity Framework

A planned activity framework designed to ensure the effectiveness and long-term sustainability of its key components was used to implement the Jeneponto Regency community service program. These main responsibilities include: (1) Program Preparation and Logistics, where the service team created educational and screening materials and covered all operational costs; (2) Health Education Sessions, which offer evidence-based suggestions on maternal nutrition, optimal feeding techniques, and stunting prevention; (3) Community Health Screening, which includes anthropometric measurements and nutritional status assessments for children under five; (4) Local Cultural Practice Training, which teaches moms how to prepare traditional Jeneponto foods and culturally grounded caregiving techniques; and (5) Evaluation, which assesses program efficacy and behavioral change outcomes. Together, these programs offer a comprehensive and integrated approach to strengthening community capacity for long-term stunting prevention and empowering women. Program Preparation: Full Financing by the Service Team.

The service team used funds from the Faculty of Health at Universitas Patria Artha to offer full operational financing for the Jeneponto Regency community service program's activity plan. This funding model allowed mothers and community members to actively participate in the program without financial constraints. The initiative paid for all instructional materials, screening equipment, food components for cultural practice sessions, and other logistical needs so that all participating moms may benefit from the full range of the intervention. This approach accelerated program implementation while fostering a positive environment for substantial health empowerment at the community level.

Health Education Sessions: Guidance on Maternal Nutrition and Stunting Prevention

Following the requirements assessment, a series of health education workshops focused on stunting prevention, optimal nutrition for newborns and young children, and maternal health were conducted using interactive methodologies and knowledge transfer. Throughout the sessions, mothers were introduced to evidence-based dietary recommendations, with a focus on the critical role that good nutrition plays throughout pregnancy and the first two years of a child's life. Visual aids, relevant case studies, and illustrated nutrition advice were added

to help with comprehension. During interactive sessions, mothers were able to recognize early signs of their children's stunted growth, prepare balanced meal quantities, and discover healthy local food options. As part of the education strategy's emphasis on participatory learning, mothers were asked to share their experiences, ask questions, and adapt the advice to match their home environments. In informal group conversations that yielded qualitative input, mothers' perspectives on the new knowledge, practical difficulties they encountered, and planned modifications to their caregiving methods were all explored.

Local Cultural Practice Training: Integrating Traditional Jeneponto Practices into Stunting Prevention

During a step-by-step, practical cultural practice training, the service team assisted mothers in preparing traditional Jeneponto foods and employing culturally recognized caregiving approaches in compliance with evidence-based nutritional requirements. The service team ensured that local food practices were appropriately integrated with modern nutritional requirements without sacrificing the cultural integrity of Jeneponto's culinary and caring customs. The training process was monitored and documented by photographic and observational records, which showed how mothers incorporated new nutritional concepts into local customs. Mothers were also encouraged to implement their own interpretations and home modifications in order to create a meaningful synthesis of cultural authenticity with health-promoting innovation. This process yielded valuable feedback on community adaptability and the feasibility of incorporating evidence-based nursing concepts into Jeneponto's existing cultural framework.

Community Health Screening: Assessing Nutritional Status and Stunting Risk

In order to assess the nutritional status of children under five and identify households at risk of stunting, the service team conducted integrated community health screenings using standardized anthropometric measurements, such as weight-for-height and height-for-age assessments in accordance with WHO growth standards. Assess children's nutritional status and whether they are stunted or at risk of stunting. This will offer an impartial standard by which advancements in diet and behavior may be tracked. Families of at risk children got targeted follow up counseling and referral recommendations to guarantee that the screening component functioned as a direct health intervention that benefited community members rather than merely a data collection exercise.

Evaluation: Assessing Behavioral Change and Program Effectiveness

The program's efficacy was assessed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The two primary methods for gathering data were focus group discussions (FGDs) and knowledge and behavior evaluations carried out both before and after the program. Near the end of the program cycle, focus group discussions (FGDs) were used to get mothers' feedback on the health education sessions, cultural practice training, and program overall. In order to identify recurring patterns, maternal responses were documented and then thematically analyzed. Standardized questionnaires were used to measure maternal knowledge, attitudes, and self-reported caregiving behaviors relevant to stunting prevention, like as feeding habits, using health services, and using locally available nutritious foods. Monitoring behavioral change results allowed for the quantification of the program's impact and validated the qualitative findings from the focus group discussions.

Participatory Approach

Throughout the program's entire implementation process, a participatory approach was maintained as its core principle. Mothers, health cadres, and community leaders actively participated in the program's conception and implementation in addition to receiving health information. The program's suggested behavioral changes were perceived as self-determined rather than forced because of this participative dynamic, which gave community members a sense of dedication and ownership. By highlighting mothers' voices, lived experiences, and cultural knowledge throughout the intervention, the Smart Mother Movement in Jeneponto Regency demonstrated that sustainable stunting prevention is most effectively achieved when communities are empowered to lead their own health transformation from within.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Improved Maternal Knowledge and Behavioral Change Toward Stunting Prevention

Changes in Mothers' Mindsets Toward Evidence-Based Caregiving Practices

The implementation of the Smart Mother Movement in Jeneponto Regency led to a considerable shift in mothers' attitudes regarding the relationship between daily caregiving actions and child nutritional results. Prior to the program, the majority of participating moms knew very little about stunting as a preventable health condition. This is in line with a broader tendency in Jeneponto where people see stunting as a normal variation of human growth rather than a health danger. Following the health education workshops and cultural practice training, mothers' perspectives significantly changed from passively tolerating their children's growth patterns to actively participating in dietary decision-making and health-seeking behavior. Mothers understood the critical importance that proper nutrition plays during pregnancy and the first two years of life and expressed increasing confidence in their ability to apply evidence-based feeding practices within the context of their cultural traditions. Since long-lasting behavioral change cannot be achieved without first changing the underlying attitudes and beliefs that impact caregiving choices, this shift in perspective is a crucial outcome of the program (Nurlela et al., 2025).

Quality and Appropriateness of Culturally Grounded Nutritional Practices

Focus group discussions and evaluations done before and after the program yielded qualitative comments indicating that the cultural practice training component considerably improved the quality and appropriateness of mothers' food behaviors. Mothers demonstrated improved skills in planning age-appropriate supplemental feeding for children under two, making traditional Jeneponto meals in accordance with balanced nutritional principles, and choosing locally available nutritious foods. Supplemental feeding, interprofessional collaboration, and nutritional education for important stakeholders such as mothers of small children and women of reproductive age are the most effective ways to avoid stunting. In this program, these tactics were put into practice. Participants said it was easier to adopt, maintain, and disseminate culturally recognized practices than externally mandated dietary requirements, and they responded well to the inclusion of regional foods and traditional cooking methods in nutritional recommendations. The program's unique culturally embedded approach, which distinguished it from conventional seminar-based treatments, had a direct impact on its high participant engagement and practical uptake (Fristiwi et al., 2023).

Contribution to Long-Term Stunting Prevention and Community Health Sustainability

A quantitative basis for evaluating the program's effectiveness in reducing stunting was provided by the community health screenings that produced objective data on the nutritional status of children under five in participating families. Anthropometric assessments showed the distribution of stunting, stunting risk, and normal nutritional status among screened children, enabling the service team to pinpoint homes in need of targeted follow-up and nutritional referrals. According to extensive anthropometric and demographic data gathered between 2021 and 2024, more than 16,000 toddlers in Jeneponto Regency were categorized as stunted based on WHO growth guidelines. This emphasizes how serious the issue is and how important community-level solutions like this initiative are. Families of at-risk children who received targeted counseling and follow-up showed greater awareness of nutritional risk factors and a stronger intention to seek health services proactively, indicating that the integrated screening component greatly improved the program's health impact beyond education alone (Basri et al., 2021).

Potential of the Smart Mother Movement as a Sustainable Community Health Model

The Smart Mother Movement demonstrated tremendous potential as a scalable and sustainable paradigm for community-based stunting prevention in high-burden settings. By incorporating health-promoting behaviors into Jeneponto's inherent cultural practices and social structures, the program created conditions for self-sustaining behavioral change that do not require continuous external facilitation. Community-based initiatives that combine appropriate health technology with nutrition education and participatory techniques have produced notable and

measurable gains in everyday health habits, practical skills, and community knowledge in rural Indonesian settings. This conclusion is in line with and validates the Jeneponto findings. As demonstrated by participating mothers who internalized the program's principles and expressed intentions to share their knowledge with neighbors, extended family, and younger mothers in their communities, a community health cascade is emerging that expands the program's reach beyond its direct participants. The Smart Mother program is positioned as both a one time community service initiative and the cornerstone of a bigger community health campaign that may eventually help reduce the prevalence of stunting in Jeneponto because of this multiplier effect (Sunarsih et al., 2026).

Challenges Encountered

Adapting to New Health Concepts and Overcoming Deeply Rooted Cultural Beliefs

Despite the program's general success, there were certain implementation-related problems that need to be carefully considered. The biggest challenge was getting participating mothers and their household members to change deeply ingrained cultural beliefs about child growth and stunting. Psychological resistance to the stunting label, social shame, dependence on conventional health practices, and gender differences in household decision-making are persistent sociocultural barriers that hinder the effectiveness of stunting preventive initiatives. These obstacles existed in the Jeneponto setting as well. Older family members, particularly grandmothers who have a big say in childcare decisions, occasionally mistrusted new feeding rules that deviated from long-standing family traditions. In order to traverse this intergenerational dynamic, the service staff had to employ a sensitive and polite communication technique that gradually included evidence-based enhancements while recognizing existent cultural knowledge. Future versions of the program would benefit from particularly including grandmothers and other important household members as target participants alongside mothers to reduce the possibility of conflicting caregiving advice within the family (Pasaribu & Pardosi, 2026).

Adjusting Health Promotion Strategies to Address Diverse Literacy Levels and Socioeconomic Conditions

A further challenge involved adapting health education content and delivery methods to accommodate the diverse literacy levels and socioeconomic conditions of participating mothers. Maternal education level has been identified as a significant determinant of health seeking behavior among mothers of stunted children, with lower educational attainment strongly associated with reduced utilization of health services and limited comprehension of formal health messaging. Several mothers with limited formal education required additional time and support to fully comprehend nutritional concepts presented in written or numerical formats, necessitating adjustments to the program's communication strategies including increased use of visual aids, demonstrations, and peer-to-peer learning approaches. Another challenge was tailoring health education materials and delivery methods to the different reading levels and socioeconomic situations of the participating women. It has been discovered that mothers of stunted children's health-seeking behavior is strongly influenced by their educational attainment, with lower educational attainment being significantly connected to reduced health care utilization and deficient comprehension of formal health messages. A number of mothers with little formal education required more time and support to fully comprehend nutritional concepts presented in written or numerical formats, necessitating changes to the program's communication strategies, such as increased use of visual aids, demonstrations, and peer-to-peer learning approaches. (Amandus et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Success of the Program in Fostering Behavioral Change and Contributing to Community Health

The community service program in Jeneponto Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, successfully demonstrated the effectiveness of combining a Life-Course Nursing strategy with locally grounded cultural traditions to promote maternal health and prevent stunting at the community level. Mothers' knowledge, attitudes, and caregiving practices significantly changed as a result of the Smart Mother Movement (Gerakan Ibu Cerdas Cegah Stunting), which was spearheaded by the Faculty of Health at Universitas Patria Artha. Mothers went from

passively accepting their children's growth patterns to actively and culturally empoweredly participating in the prevention of stunting. This initiative combined health education, cultural practice training, and community health screenings into a single coherent program that produced more comprehensive and contextually relevant outcomes for participating mothers and their children, in contrast to traditional seminar-based or Posyandu-only approaches. Maternal caregiving skills have a direct impact on children's growth trajectory and nutritional status, and this program demonstrated that improving those skills through nursing-led, culturally sensitive community empowerment is both feasible and successful in high-burden settings like Jeneponto (Has et al., 2024).

Importance of Participatory and Culturally Grounded Approaches in Community Health Service

The key takeaway from this program is that stunting cannot be sustainably reduced by top-down, technically focused interventions alone. The concept that effective stunting prevention requires culturally sensitive, community-driven public health policies that integrate local beliefs with evidence-based interventions was operationalized at every stage of this program's design and implementation. By portraying mothers as active change agents rather than passive recipients of health information and by honoring Jeneponto's cultural traditions as a living resource for health promotion rather than a barrier to modern medicine, the program established a participatory foundation that improved community ownership, sustained engagement, and the possibility of long-term behavioral maintenance. The self-funded operational model, which was entirely funded by the Faculty of Health at Universitas Patria Artha, further demonstrated that high-impact community health interventions can be delivered sustainably without requiring significant outside funding. This model is accessible and replicable for other academic institutions hoping to dramatically lower stunting in Eastern Indonesian communities with limited resources (Pasaribu & Pardosi, 2026).

Recommendations

Future Programs Focusing on Sustained Maternal Empowerment and Health Behavior Monitoring

Future community service projects that build on this work should place a high premium on continuing to evaluate maternal behavioral change and child nutritional results after the official program term. Regular follow-up visits, community health cadre mentoring, and periodic assessments of the child's growth status are required for the long-term maintenance of these behavioral changes, even though this program was successful in bringing about significant changes in maternal knowledge and caregiving practices. It has been demonstrated that quality improvement strategies, like as home-based growth monitoring and community health worker capacity building, increase Posyandu performance and stunting prevention outcomes in rural Indonesian settings. These tactics could be used in subsequent Jeneponto program cycles to build upon and expand the successes of this endeavor. Furthermore, future initiatives should explicitly target adolescent girls and women of reproductive age as primary participants since a real life-course approach to stunting prevention must begin before conception rather than after stunting has already occurred (Miranda et al., 2024).

Development of a Community-Based Stunting Prevention Model Rooted in Local Wisdom

In order to provide an organized, replicable community health framework that can be applied to other high-burden districts in Eastern Indonesia and South Sulawesi, the culturally grounded stunting prevention strategy employed in this endeavor should be further developed and formalized in subsequent initiatives. This involves documenting the specific local foods, cultural preparation methods, and community caregiving activities utilized in Jeneponto as an evidence-based local wisdom resource that may be changed and applied in other communities with similar cultural contexts. For the eradication of stunting in Indonesia's coastal and rural areas, it has been shown that optimizing locally accessible food supplies and implementing educational activities based on community-specific practices are appropriate and long-lasting intervention programs. This offers a strong basis for the systematic formalization of this locally based strategy into a transferable framework for health promotion (Octavia et al., 2025).

Collaboration with External Stakeholders to Strengthen Program Reach and Impact

To maximize its long-term impact on stunting prevalence in Jeneponto Regency, future iterations of the program should actively collaborate with external stakeholders, including the local Department of Health, the National

Stunting Reduction Task Force (Tim Percepatan Penurunan Stunting/TPPS), village governments, and international health organizations, to integrate the Smart Mother Movement into the official multi-sectoral stunting reduction framework at the district level. This program has begun to establish a model that formal multi-stakeholder collaboration could significantly improve: more robust and long-lasting results are produced by deeper forms of community engagement that include mothers, health cadres, and informal leaders not only as program recipients but also as contributors to planning, implementation, and monitoring processes. In order to accurately assess the program's long-term impact on reducing stunting, partnerships with academic institutions and nutrition-focused non-governmental organizations could help develop training programs for health cadres, standardized program materials, and longitudinal evaluation frameworks. Through these collaborative efforts, the Smart Mother Movement has the potential to grow from a single community service initiative into a scalable, institutionally supported, and evidence-based strategy for enhancing maternity and child health outcomes throughout Jeneponto and beyond.

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