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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

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# Minimizing Stunting Prevalence Rates to Create Healthy Provinces

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## ABSTRACT

The multiple roles of midwives in the health care system raises a question mark on how sharp this role is in preventing stunting to create a healthy province. This research has an impact on evaluating stunting prevalence reduction programs in healthy provincial programs so that governance improvements can be obtained. The objective of this study was to obtain certainty status specifically the role of midwives in reducing stunting prevalence in the program to create a healthy province. This study used a quantitative method with a descriptive design. The research population was midwives and midwifery students (n=59). The inclusion criteria were midwives and midwifery students who took part in healthy provincial seminars. The exclusion criteria were midwives and midwifery students who did not attend the seminar. The control variable was a minimizing stunting prevalence rates in the midwifery perspective. The instrument was a questionnaire that includes demographic data and technical data about the program and the role of midwives. Processing the data was analyzed descriptively. As the results, of the 59 study populations, 50.9% said the stunting program was urgent, 56.1% was in line with the capacity of the local government, and 50% said the role of midwives had not been maximized, especially in the field of health education (71.9%). The cause of the slow achievement of the program is the lack of cross-sectoral cooperation (61.4%), and the low socioeconomic level of the community (57.9%). As conclusion, this study recommended involving midwives and midwifery students in the formation of a stunting management team, and obtaining accurate data in the prevalence reduction program.

**Keywords:** stunting; prevalence; healthy provinces

## INTRODUCTION

In 2020 globally, 149.2 million children (22.0%) under five were stunted.<sup>(1)</sup> This figure is lower than 33.1% in 2000 which is still far from the target of the World Health Assembly (WHA) in 2025 which is 40%.<sup>(2)</sup> In Indonesia, the stunting prevalence rate in 2020 is estimated to decrease to 26.92%.<sup>(3)</sup> The decline in the stunting rate is predicted to be 0.75% compared to 27.67% in 2019.<sup>(4)</sup> This figure shows the government's policy in encouraging the acceleration of stunting reduction is quite good, because in the previous year, in 2018 the stunting prevalence rate was still at 30.8%.<sup>(5)</sup> Even though it is declining, a strategy is needed to achieve the target of reducing stunting prevalence that has been set in the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2020-2024 and Presidential Regulation No. 72 of 2021 which is 14% in 2024.<sup>(6)</sup> To achieve the objective, the consistency of decreasing the stunting prevalence rate must be 2.7% per year.<sup>(7)</sup> The prediction of stunting reduction is very important to track progress as stipulated in the National Strategy (Stranas) for the Acceleration of Stunting Reduction.<sup>(8)</sup> However, the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic has hampered the steps toward achieving the program's goals.<sup>(9)</sup>

At the provincial level, stunting is a common problem that must be handled by cross-sectoral departments with the Health Office as the leading sector.<sup>(10)</sup> Handling stunting is a national priority agenda so that all provinces are expected to carry out activities to reduce stunting prevalence, and coordinators are handed over to Bappeda, both provincial and district/city.<sup>(11)</sup> It is hoped that in the future the Stunting Control Coordination Team and district/city governments will effectively take action and at the same time reduce the stunting prevalence rate to create a healthy province.<sup>(12)</sup> The steps include integrating programs into budgeting, implementing integrated stunting reduction prevalence across village apparatus organizations (OPD) to the village level, mobilizing all

stakeholders to accelerate stunting reduction, and carrying out synchronization of stunting reduction activities carried out by the central, provincial, and district levels, as well as carry out routine monitoring and then submit reports.<sup>(13)</sup> This is where the role of health professionals, including the role of midwives, is expected to be integrated.

There have been many studies related to the role of midwives in dealing with stunting focused on prevention, therapy, massage, rehabilitation, and overall stunting management.<sup>(14-16)</sup> This study emphasizes on exploring the role of midwives in efforts to the reduction of stunting prevalence to create a healthy province. The objective was to get specific picture of the role of midwives in reducing stunting prevalence in the program to create a healthy province. The research finding is expected to have positive impact on the development of stunting handling at the provincial level by midwives, especially as professionals who can take an independent attitude in practice.

**METHODS**

This quantitative research method was supported by a descriptive design. The research population was midwives and midwifery students (n=59). The study was conducted in Manado, North Sulawesi Province in August 2022. Respondents were selected randomly from the participants during the national seminar entitled Efforts to Accelerate the Decline of Stunting Prevalence for the Creation of a Healthy Province where the participants were midwives and midwifery students. North Sulawesi is one of the provinces in Indonesia with the lowest stunting prevalence rate.<sup>(17)</sup> The inclusion criteria were midwives and midwifery students who took part in healthy provincial seminars. The exclusion criteria were midwives and midwifery students who did not attend the seminar.

The quantitative variable was the number of midwives and midwifery students attending the seminar. The instrument was a questionnaire that consisted demographic data and technical data about the program and the role of midwives. Data processing was packaged in three tables and two figures using univariate and analyzed descriptively.

**RESULTS**

Respondents who participated in this study were midwives (n=35 or 64.3%) and midwifery students (n=21 or 35.7%). The respondents who considered that there was an urgency in handling stunting were n=29 (50.9%), those who did not consider it urgent were n=12 (21.1%), and those who thought they did not know were n=16 (28.1%).

Table 1. Alignment between government policy and regional capacity

No	Harmony between govt. policy and regional capacity	Frequency	Percentage
1	Already in tune	32	56.1
2	Not yet	19	33.3
3	No idea	6	10.5

Table 1 shows that the majority of respondents assured there was an alignment between government policies and local capacity (56.1%). Only a few respondents did not know about the policy (10.5%). Figure 1 shows the role of midwives in stunting management which needs emphasis on educators (72%). Table 2 shows the major cause of delays in reducing the prevalence of stunting was a combination of cross-sectoral collaboration, lack of funds, lack of human resources, and community support (61.4%).

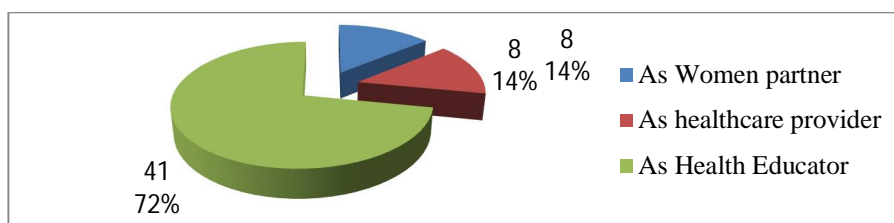


Figure 1. Midwives' roles need to be emphasized

Table 2. Factors that slow down the decline in the prevalence of stunting

No.	Factors	Frequency	Percentage
1	Lack of cross-sector collaboration	6	10.5
2	Lack of financial support	1	1.8
3	Human resources are not sufficient	3	5.3
4	Minimum public support	12	21.1
5	All of the above	35	61.4

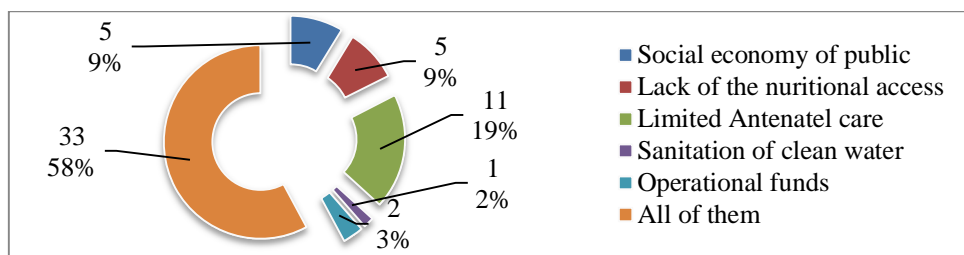


Figure 2. Midwives' challenges in the field practice

Figure 2 shows the dominant obstacle in the field of midwives in the stunting program was the combination of social and economic conditions of the community, lack of access to nutrition, clean water, and operational funds (57.9%). Figure 3 shows that the majority of respondents support the involvement of midwifery students in the stunting prevalence reduction program.

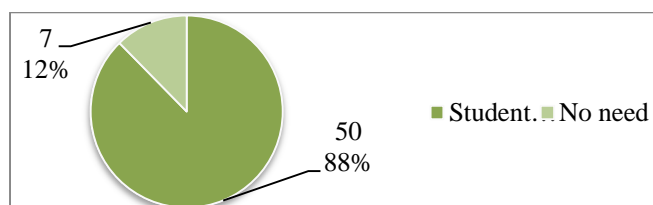


Figure 3. Students involvement in the stunting prevalence reduction program

Out of 59 respondents who participated in this research, the majority (n=29 or 50.9%) stated that the stunting program was very important and n=32 (56.1%) was in line with the capacity of the local government. However, half of them (n=28 or 50%) responded that the role of midwives was not maximized, especially in the field of health education which needed emphasis (n=41 or 71.9%). Meanwhile, the cause of the slow program achievement is the lack of cross-sectoral cooperation (61.4%), and the low socio-economic level of the community (57.9%). The majority of respondents suggested the involvement of midwifery students in stunting prevention to reduce the prevalence rate for the achievement of healthy provinces (n=50 or 89.3%).

This research was conducted in North Sulawesi involving only 57 respondents which are very small compared to the number of midwives across the archipelago of Indonesia (288,686 midwives)<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be used to represent Indonesian midwives. Even so, North Sulawesi is one of the provinces with the lowest prevalence rate in Indonesia.<sup>(18)</sup> Therefore, the results of this study can serve as an illustration of how to involve midwives in accelerating the stunting prevalence reduction program to achieve a healthy province. Many previous studies have revealed the causes, determinant factors, and role of midwives in stunting prevention.<sup>(19)</sup> However, rarely discuss the specific role of midwives related to stunting in achieving healthy provinces as explored in this study.

## DISCUSSION

This study identified three problems to be solved in which midwives' intervention are needed to be emphasized as their specific role in the stunting prevalence reduction program. The reduction in the prevalence of stunting is one of the key performance indicators for achieving healthy provinces.<sup>(20)</sup> The findings of this study include the importance of sharpening the role of midwives as health educators in the community (Figure 1), strengthening cross-sectoral collaboration (Table 2), and involving midwifery students in programs (Figure 3).

Among several health problems in this country, stunting has received great attention.<sup>(21)</sup> Currently, stunting is a major health problem that is being sought to seriously reduce the number.<sup>(22)</sup> Increasing the role of health professionals and collaboration are two things that are intensively carried out between ministries and institutions.<sup>(23)</sup> Article 46 of Law Number 4 of 2019 concerning Midwifery explains that the midwife's duties include maternal and child health services, women's reproduction, and family planning.<sup>(24)</sup> In this area, the role of the midwife becomes wider, because she is a facilitator figure for families to prevent and treat stunting from an early age. As an integral part of the health workforce, midwives do have a strategic role in accelerating the reduction of stunting to create a healthy, intelligent, and quality generation. In the Midwifery Practice Standards, the function of the midwife related to her role as an educator is described in detail, starting from the stages of reviewing education/extension needs, planning, and implementation, to the evaluation process and the stage of documenting the results of education/health education.<sup>(25)</sup> With the role and function of the midwife, it can be a means to realize better public health through health education. Through these roles and functions, midwives as

health workers can develop existing science and technology with health education in the community to overcome various stunting problems that occur in the community.

In the field of enhancing collaboration, midwives also have a collaborative role which includes the application of midwifery management in every midwifery care according to the collaboration function by involving clients and families, as well as providing midwifery care to toddlers with high risk and first aid in emergencies that require collaborative action with the client and family.<sup>(26)</sup> This proves that the service to infants and children with stunting is an area of collaboration that is the duty and responsibility of the midwife. In a wider scope, collaboration can mean the process of working together to generate ideas or ideas and solve problems together towards a common vision.<sup>(19)</sup> Thus, in handling stunting by collaborating with midwives, it means that it is necessary to create collaboration between midwives and other related parties to achieve a common goal to create a healthy province. Such cooperation can be needed from the central, provincial, and district to remote areas.

The government is responsible for reducing the prevalence of stunting, but the role of the community is also very much needed as an effort to work together to prevent stunting<sup>7</sup>. On the other hand, society is never separated from students as one of its layers. Midwifery students, for example, with their role as agents of change also need to contribute together with other health professionals in taking roles to help reduce the prevalence of stunting cases.<sup>(27)</sup> Through their knowledge, ideas, and skills, students are expected to be able to bring about change for the better in society.

From those exposures, stunting is a health problem that cannot only be treated. Yet, it must also be prioritized in the prevention efforts. With the active involvement of midwives and midwifery students in community service programs, providing appropriate education, and collaboration programs in the form of socialization, a reduction in the prevalence of stunting will be achieved. At a minimum, the rate of improvement and acceleration of the response will be suppressed.

## CONCLUSION

The three findings in this study are the importance of sharpening the role of midwives as health educators in the community, the importance of strengthening cross-sectoral collaboration, and the need to involve midwifery students in the stunting prevalence reduction program to create a healthy province. This research recommendation is a manifestation of the role of midwives in the community by involving their roles in the central, provincial and remote areas as well as involving midwifery students in the program. The obstacle lies in the low socio-economic level of the community, the operational costs are still minimal.

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