



Research Article

Strengthening Halal Lifestyle Behavior Literacy in Stunting Prone Communities

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Abstract

The community including the government, practitioners, and academics have not paid attention to the urgency of halal lifestyle in solving health problems such as malnutrition and stunting. This article aims to explain the strengthening of community literacy about halal lifestyle behavior to prevent stunting. Activities began August - October 2023 in Bandar Sono Village, Nibung Hangu District, Batu Bara Regency. Data were collected through focus group discussions (FGDs), and then education and mentoring were carried out. Data from FGDs were analyzed using ATLAS.Ti23. The data obtained was continued by conducting education and mentoring. The results of data processing are then displayed in tables and figures. The findings show that halal lifestyle behavior has not been understood by the community. Ethical and social moral principles include 5 aspects of halal life style behavior that can be applied by humans in living their daily lives so as to provide a strong impetus to maintain nutritional balance, avoid harmful behavior, and provide better care for children. This means that hifz ad din (protecting religion), as part of halal life style behaviors, is not a direct method of preventing stunting, however, it creates a strong foundation for healthy behaviors and careful care of children, which in turn can contribute to stunting prevention. A person's knowledge will become broad if he learns a lot and gets information through school or information provided through counseling, lectures, reading. The local government needs to continuously provide assistance to families prone to stunting by involving religious leaders so that the community has a strong foundation for implementing halal lifestyle behavior.

Keywords: halal lifestyle; literacy; behavior; stunting, stunting prevention

Introduction

Halal lifestyle is a trend that has penetrated society both globally and locally, including Indonesian society (Adinugraha et al, 2021). Halal lifestyle is developing rapidly in accordance with

the demands and needs of the people of the Islamic world. The current halal lifestyle trend in Indonesia includes halal food, Islamic finance, halal travel, halal clothing, halal media and holidays, halal medicine, halal cosmetics, and halal medicine.

Various sectors related to the halal lifestyle are more dominantly connected in efforts to improve the economy, welfare, and life satisfaction of individuals, communities, and countries. This reality can be seen from various scientific studies conducted by scientists and academics, such as

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halal lifestyle research to increase halal lifestyle in the cosmetic or beauty industry (Shahid et al., 2023), halal lifestyle in the food and beverage industry (Billah et al., 2020), and halal lifestyle in the world of health (Windasari et al., 2023). However, the public including the government, practitioners, and academics still pay less attention to the urgency of a halal lifestyle in solving health problems such as malnutrition and stunting problems that are still experienced by many Indonesian children, especially in poor rural communities.

The Indonesian government has launched a program to solve stunting, which is summarized in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), namely goal 2, "End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture". The target for 2025 is to reduce the prevalence of stunting and wasting in children under five and end all forms of malnutrition by 2030 (Indriyastuti et al., 2022). All types of efforts to solve the problem of stunting are important to continue to avoid adverse long-term impacts such as inhibition of child growth and development, brain and intelligence development, vulnerability to exposure to chronic diseases, and the risk of low productivity in adulthood (Alam et al., 2020).

Apart from the government, universities in the context of the Three Dharma of Higher Education have an important role to play in efforts to prevent and resolve stunting experienced by Indonesian children. Some of the programs implemented by universities include "Family Assistance in Prevention of Stunting with Islamic and Health Perspective" (Wahyuningsih et al., 2019) which was implemented in Klaten, Central Java, "Counseling to Prevent Stunting in Children in a Socio-Cultural Perspective in Pondambea Village, Kendari City" (Asmaharita et al., 2023), a community service program in the form of counseling for mothers in the stunting locus area which was implemented in Klaten, Central Java (Ernawati et al., 2022), a community service program in the form of counseling for mothers in the stunting locus area conducted by the Community Service Research Institute,

Universitas Merdeka Malang and a program conducted by the Ministry of Health in Polytechnic Surabaya "Development of Stunting Prevention Behavior Model Based on Health Promotion Model and Social Capital in The Magetan District" (Suharto et al., 2020).

One of the factors contributing to high stunting in North Sumatra is the low access to good and nutritious nutrition. Economic limitations and accessibility to nutritious food are major obstacles in efforts to overcome stunting. In addition, the lack of public understanding of the importance of balanced nutrition is also a problem that needs to be overcome. Previous researchers explained that the utilization of local food is an alternative to improve nutrition and iron in children, adolescents and pregnant women (Harahap et al., 2023). The local government and various health institutions have worked hard to reduce stunting rates in North Sumatra Province. Public health programs such as nutrition counseling, assistance to pregnant women, and promotion of exclusive breastfeeding have been implemented as part of stunting prevention efforts. However, these efforts still require improvement in terms of coverage and effectiveness. Capacity building aims to improve health literacy related to stunting and increase the ability of stakeholders to implement stunting intervention programs (Sitaresmi et al., 2023).

Based on this, it is important to conduct research with a different context from the point of view of the religious field believed by most people in Batu Bara Regency. The link between Islamic teachings and stunting prevention is an important aspect in the context of efforts to improve community health and welfare such as values and norms that are closely related to aspects of nutrition, health care, and social welfare. One aspect related to stunting prevention in Islamic teachings is the value related to nutrition and fulfillment of food needs. Islam encourages its adherents to maintain a balanced diet and pays special attention to providing nutritious food to children, especially during the growth period.

The stunting service satisfaction model is an effective strategy to support the stunting



elimination program in the province and nationally by strengthening communication between regional apparatus organizations to work together to implement stunting reduction programs (Sazali et al., 2023). Stunting prevention and reduction programs conducted by previous researchers focused on counseling methods and emphasized health aspects. However, this paper uses a religious-based educational approach as a basis for strengthening literacy and halal lifestyle behavior.

Strengthening halal lifestyle literacy among stunting-prone populations is a strategic step that has not yet been fully implemented as a form of community empowerment. Amid the growing challenges of malnutrition and increasing rates of stunting, the application of halal principles can play a significant role in raising community awareness about the importance of quality nutritional intake. Halal literacy encompasses not only an understanding of permissible food and beverages but also includes healthy living practices aligned with sharia principles, which are expected to contribute to the improvement of nutritional status and public health.

This study adopts a qualitative design to explore the dynamics and challenges faced by communities in implementing halal lifestyle behaviors, particularly among families with stunting children. Data collection is conducted through focus group discussions involving community members, local leaders, and nutrition experts. This approach is anticipated to provide in-depth insights into the perceptions, practices, and barriers faced in internalizing halal literacy. The findings from this research will serve as a foundation for designing adaptive and relevant empowerment programs aimed at improving community nutritional health and reducing the prevalence of stunting.

Previous research has indicated that the role of government and inter-sector collaboration is crucial in providing comprehensive services for families with stunting children. The formulation of synergistic policies among the health, education, and social sectors is necessary so that

the interventions implemented are not merely temporary but can have a long-term impact. By enhancing halal lifestyle literacy, it is hoped that the community will not only understand the importance of food safety but will also be able to adopt sustainable healthy lifestyles, thereby effectively supporting efforts to prevent stunting. This endeavor represents a strategic step toward improving the overall quality of life in communities.

Method

Activities were carried out from July to October 2023 in 3 stages. The first stage was to collect data and the second stage was to educate and assist. Community involvement is very important in development planning. With active participation from the community, we can identify their needs and expectations, so that the planned development program can be more appropriate and beneficial for them (Sakir et al., 2023). Research partners were village officials, mosque youth groups, and District and Village Family Health Activist teams in Batubara District. The research has received permission from the research ethics committee number RK.0102/KEPK/STIK/IX/2023.

The first stage of risk identification was to collect secondary data on families at risk of stunting. Data was obtained from the Regional Development Planning Research and Development Agency (BAPPEDA) of Batu Bara Regency, the Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN) of North Sumatra Province which has been collaborating since 2022. Through this collaboration, universities get support from the relevant government. Audiences with village officials, family facilitators, mosque youth, and religious leaders aimed to obtain primary data, plan discussions with the community through Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and develop education and assistance plans. There were 20 people involved in the group discussion activities.

The second stage is to educate and assist at-risk families. The information obtained from the group discussion activities (stage 1) was then analyzed



and then compiled into educational themes. The themes that were expanded in the group discussions included: the link between knowledge and understanding of stunting and religion, worship practices that support stunting prevention, and the tendency to practice consistently.

The results of community service activities through focus group discussions obtained information in descriptive form. This data was analyzed using ATLAS software so that it becomes new information that can be used to develop education and counseling plans based on the themes discussed. The use of ATLAS software in this research is a smart move, as the tool is able to facilitate qualitative data analysis more efficiently so that relevant theme patterns are found (Warsono at al., 2022). The presentation of data in the form of tables and schemes makes the information more accessible and understandable to the reader and helps in highlighting the main findings that emerged during the activity. The tables and schemes used in this study were able to provide a clear visual picture of the qualitative data collected. This eases the interpretation process and allows researchers to see relationships and patterns that may not be directly visible through text analysis.

The analysis stage was carried out through a process of coding, categorization, and searching for thematic patterns in the data, which allowed the researcher to develop findings and gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study. The information was analyzed using ATLAS.Ti23 software, then the results and displayed in tables and figures. Some previous researchers used similar analysis in qualitative methods to avoid subjectivity of research data (Harahap et al., 2023).

Result

The 20 research informants were divided into 4 target groups: families at risk of stunting, village officials, integrated service post cadres, and brides-to-be. Informants had different characteristics including age, education, and occupation, which are shown in [table 1].

Based on the characteristics of the informants, the minimum age is 22 years old, namely the bride-to-be and the maximum age is 52 years old. The minimum education is junior high school education for 7 informants, high school education for 9 informants, and university education for 4 informants. The average income of informants is around Rp. 1,500,000 million and a maximum of Rp. 4,000,000 million. The majority of the informants' occupations were housewives (not working) with 15 informants, 2 informants worked as teachers and 2 informants worked at the village office, and 1 informant was unemployed (bride-to-be).

[Table 2] It is known that the closeness between themes in focus group discussion activities that have a strong closeness of 0.45 is halal life style behavior and Hifz al Nafs. The closeness of the second theme in the medium category of 0.38 is the behavior of halal life style and stunting prevention, the closeness of the theme of strengthening halal life style literacy and understanding the causes of stunting in the third medium category of 0.36 and the theme of maintaining offspring has a closeness with prevention of 0.33 in the fourth medium category.

Based on the results of the discussion, counseling was conducted in the community to strengthen the literacy of halal lifestyle behavior about stunting knowledge, causes and prevention of stunting. This aims to achieve research objective 2 efforts to improve halal lifestyle behavioral literacy.



Table 1. Participants characteristics

Participants	Age (year)	Education	Work	Marital status	Number of children	Income (million)
1	38	Bachelor	Housewife/cadre	Married	3	1,5
2	51	Junior high school	Housewife	Married	4	1,5
3	52	Senior high school	Housewife	Married	9	2
4	44	Junior high school	Housewife	Married	4	3
5	44	Senior high school	Village head	Married	4	3
6	36	Senior high school	Housewife/cadre	Married	2	2,5
7	33	Junior high school	Housewife	Married	3	3
8	29	Junior high school	Housewife/family at risk	Married	2	1,5
9	22	Senior high school	Bride-to-be	Unmarried	0	0
10	34	Senior high school	Housewife/cadre	Married	2	1,5
11	49	Senior high school	Housewife	Married	5	1,5
12	23	Senior high school	Bride-to-be	Unmarried	0	0
13	34	Senior high school	Housewife/family at risk	Married	4	1,5
14	29	Junior high school	Housewife	Married	2	2
15	25	Bachelor	Teacher	Married	1	2
16	33	Junior high school	Housewife	Married	2	2,1
17	36	Senior high school	Housewife/cadre	Married	3	2,5
18	28	Bachelor	Village secretary	Married	-	4
19	44	Junior high school	Housewife	Married	3	3
20	33	Bachelor	Teacher	Married	3	1,5

Source: primary data, September 2023

Table 2. Co-occurrence value between discussion themes

Theme	Maintaining religion (hifz ad din)		Preserving the soul (hifz an nafs)		Preserving offspring (hifz an nasl)		Prevention		Behavior	
	count	coeff	count	coeff	count	coeff	count	coeff	count	coeff
Maintaining religion (hifz ad din)	0	0,00	6	0,22	2	0,10	5	0,19	9	0,35 **
Preserving the soul (hifz an nafs)	6	0,22	0	0,00	5	0,20	8	0,27	13	0,45*
Preserving offspring (hifz an nasl)	2	0,10	5	0,20	0	0,00	7	0,33**	5	0,19
Prevention	5	0,19	8	0,27	7	0,33**	0	0,00	11	0,38**
Behavior	9	0,35**	13	0,45*	5	0,19	11	0,38**	0	0,00

Description of closeness between themes: (*) strong; (**) moderate



(a)



(b)



(d)



(d)

Activity implementation. (a) Education. (b) community members attending the education session
(c) Providing additional food. (d) together with the Family Support team (TPK), community and at-risk families

Counseling provides enlightenment or illumination to individuals and provides diverse knowledge. Therefore, the community is given education that can support their understanding of stunting which is expected to support halal life style behavior to prevent and reduce stunting.

Information obtained through lectures, counseling results in better, increased knowledge and this will be practiced in daily behavior both in feeding, and caring for children (Rahma et al., 2023).

This activity was attended by village officials, village heads, village secretaries, family



assistance teams (TPK), PKK cadres. This activity is routinely carried out once a month for 6 months. The form of food provided follows the principles of balanced nutrition of carbohydrates, protein and vitamins consisting of rice, side dishes, vegetables, fruit and additional milk from the community service team. Coinciding with the routine of providing additional food, counseling is carried out on the application of halal life style behavior so that the community not only gets additional food supplements but also knowledge related to religious practices to maintain and care for children so that they are healthy and their growth does not experience obstacles. Providing material through lectures can increase maternal knowledge (Purba et al., 2022).

Discussion

Informant characteristics

This study involved a number of informants with varying age characteristics. The ages of the informants ranged from 22 to 52 years old, with a minimum of 22 years old as the inclusion requirement for informants who were brides-to-be. The maximum age of 52 reflects the diversity of the age group in this study. This allows for more comprehensive data collection on informants' perspectives and experiences related to the issue under study.

The age, education, income, and employment characteristics of the informants in this study create diversity in the sample, which can provide richer and deeper insights into the issue under study. It also allows the researcher to understand the different perspectives that may arise in the context of marriage and related preparations.

The educational characteristics of the informants also reflect the diversity in this research sample. A total of 7 informants have a junior high school education, 9 informants have a high school educational background, and the remaining 4 informants are university graduates. This diversity in education levels may affect informants' understanding and views on the topic at hand, as well as provide different perspectives in the research context. Previous researchers

mentioned that maternal education has a relationship with the risk of stunting in children. Low maternal education has a 2 times greater risk of stunting children. Education is important for quality health (Ahdad et al., 2025).

Data related to informants' income was also recorded in this study. The average income of informants ranged from IDR 1,500,000 million to a maximum of IDR 4,000,000 million. This information can provide an insight into the informants' economic background, which may influence how they deal with the issues under study, such as marriage preparation and the associated financial responsibilities. The wealth status of parents is significant to the risk of high children being stunted (Mulyaningsih et al., 2021). Previous researchers explained that low family income 39.3% of children were stunted. Low family income is 3 times the risk of children being stunted (Nurmayasanti et al., 2019). This is related to the family's ability to meet daily food needs for children's nutritional needs.

Employment is also an important aspect of informant characteristics. Most informants, 15 out of 22, work as housewives or are not formally employed. Two other informants were teachers, while two others worked at the village office. One informant was a bride-to-be who was unemployed. This information is important because occupation can affect informants' understanding of marriage and the preparation required, as well as the economic impact that may arise in the context of marriage. Socioeconomic status is related to one's occupation. Those with higher education have the opportunity to get a job that matches their education and income. The same opinion was conveyed by previous researchers that the type of work is related to the level of education (Utami et al., 2020).

Education and health facilities

Health facilities are an important element in the provision of health services to the community. The data documented in the table above reflects the condition of health facilities in Nibung Hangus District over a period of time. In 2019 there were



three polyclinic units in the sub-district, but in 2021, the number decreased to two units. This indicates a change in the availability of health service facilities in the area over the past two years.

In addition to polyclinics, the existence of community health centers is also an important factor in the community health service system. The table notes that the community health center available in Nibung Hangus District does not have inpatient facilities. This means that people who require inpatient care must seek health facilities outside the district area. This condition can have an impact on the accessibility and availability of necessary health services, especially in cases that require more intensive care. Previous researchers explained that prosperity and welfare as well as the quality of public health are influenced by health facilities (Mentari, 2022). If an area has complete health facilities, the community will find it easier to access these facilities and get immediate help.

Changes in the availability of health facilities as seen in the table should be considered in planning the health system in the region. The reduction in the number of polyclinics from three units to two units between 2019 and 2021 could be due to various factors, including policy changes or economic factors. This requires careful monitoring and evaluation to ensure that the health needs of the community are still well met.

Health services at first-level health facilities also have adolescent health programs so that the target is the adolescent group which also contributes to the health of children in the future. Healthy adolescents are expected to produce a healthy and stunting-free generation. Health service programs at the adolescent level include reproductive nutrition counseling to prevent stunting, mental health, and freedom from tobacco and addictive substances. Relevant to the explanation of other researchers who mentioned that adolescent health programs at community health centers are a practical way to involve adolescents in actively disseminating information

and implementing healthy behaviors (Ritonga et al., 2022).

It is proven that a good healthcare system that meets the needs of the community generates great benefits to the community and actually contributes to the economy in a positive way (Mwai et al., 2023). Inadequate availability of health facilities, especially those without inpatient facilities, can also be a challenge for local communities. They have to seek treatment elsewhere, which may require additional cost and time. Therefore, it is important for local governments and the various parties involved to work together to ensure that access and availability of adequate health services can be maintained or improved according to the needs of the communities in the Nibung Hangus District area.

Strengthening halal lifestyle literacy

The interviews provided an in-depth understanding of the concept of stunting, which can be scientifically explained as failure to thrive in children due to chronic malnutrition. They all agreed that stunting is a consequence of persistent malnutrition in children, which significantly stunts their growth. Counseling has a positive influence on community knowledge about stunting, because community knowledge will increase (Utami et al., 2022). A person's knowledge is influenced by the education obtained by a person formally and non-formally (Iyong, 2020). This means that a person's knowledge will become broad if he learns a lot and gets information through school or information provided through counseling, lectures, reading and so on.

The second theme in the discussion was stunting prevention, informants provided statements and views on stunting prevention strategies. The results of these interviews were then analyzed to obtain the meanings and concepts that emerged from these statements. From the analysis, four main meanings emerged as conclusions from the informants' statements,

which reflect good and correct scientific views in the context of stunting prevention.

The first meaning that emerged was the importance of healthy food consumption during pregnancy, which must meet the principles of halal, clean and *toyyibah*. Informants emphasized that balanced and quality nutrition during pregnancy is very important for optimal fetal development, and this is in accordance with the scientific view that adequate and quality nutrition is an important factor in preventing stunting. The second meaning identified was the importance of providing breastmilk to infants. This is consistent with the scientifically proven view that breastmilk is the best source of nutrients for infants that support optimal growth and development.

The third meaning is to maintain the mother's activities during pregnancy, including routine worship such as prayer, fasting, and zakat. This emphasizes the importance of the mother's physical and mental well-being during pregnancy, which can impact the growth of the fetus. This approach reflects the understanding that stress and emotional imbalance can negatively impact the growth of the child. The fourth meaning is avoiding harmful foods. Informants highlighted the dangers of consuming unhealthy and potentially harmful foods during pregnancy. This view is in line with scientific knowledge about the negative impact of harmful substances on fetal development.

The context of the discussion on strengthening literacy provides a clearer picture of the informants' scientific understanding and contribution to understanding the stunting issue: *Hifz ad din* (preserving religion): This aspect refers to the maintenance of religion and ethics in daily life. Communities that apply it consistently tend to have a more balanced diet, paying attention to halal and pious aspects in their food selection. *Hifz Nafs* relates to the maintenance of an individual's physical and mental health. Individuals who practice *Hifz Nafs* will be more likely to maintain a healthy diet, including the consumption of foods that are rich in essential nutrients for children's growth and development.

This aspect of *hifz nasl* includes the maintenance of healthy offspring. Communities that practice *hifz nasl* are generally more aware of the importance of nutrition and maternal and child health care. This contributes to the prevention of stunting through greater attention to pregnancy and infancy. *Hifz al Aql* refers to the maintenance of reason and knowledge. This involves a better understanding of the benefits of nutrition and proper diet, which can help people make better decisions about their diet, including the selection of foods that can prevent stunting. *Hifz al-mal*: This aspect leads to the preservation of wealth and resources. Communities that implement *Hifz al Mal* are likely to have better access to nutritious food, healthcare and education needed to prevent stunting. It also involves prudent economic management to meet the nutritional needs of children.

Conclusion

More comprehensive research findings contribute to local governments and related institutions to design effective strategies to address the problem of stunting. Serious attention to the problem of stunting is expected to prevent the level of stunting in North Sumatra Province, especially Batu bara District, from increasing in the future and the younger generation can grow up with better health quality.

These overall findings provide an overview of how themes related to halal lifestyle behavior and stunting prevention are interrelated in the context of FGDs. The closeness found between these themes can help researchers and practitioners to better understand the complexity of the interactions between halal behavior, health, and stunting prevention, and direct relevant policy measures.

The halal lifestyle literacy strengthening program that has been implemented has the potential to provide great benefits to people who have stunted children and couples in the Batu Baram community through increasing halal lifestyle literacy, it is hoped that the community can better understand the importance of halal



food, healthy eating patterns, and practices that support optimal child development.

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Conflict of interests

There are no conflicts of interest between the authors.

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Author Contribution

Agustina, D: literatur search, manuscript preparation; Batubara, C: concepts, manuscript editing, definition of intellectual content; Utami, TN: design, data analysis, manuscript review.

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