



## Stunting in a political context: A systematic review<sup>☆</sup>



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### KEYWORDS

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### Abstract

**Objective:** This paper aimed to examine the influence of political aspects on the presence of stunting problems in a country and region.

**Methods:** This research was conducted through a systematic literature review. Various references were collected from online databases including ProQuest, books, reports, journals in the last 5 years. 36 documents relating to public health and using English were reviewed in this study. The key word were stunting AND politics.

**Results:** This study showed that there is a strong link between the support or political commitment of the government and the incidence of stunting in children. Countries and regional leaders who pay attention to stunting treatment can reduce the prevalence of stunting. This commitment can be shown in the program and funding related to nutrition intake, supplementation, improvement of environmental sanitation and improvement of health for mothers and children.

**Conclusion:** This paper recommends to conduct further studies on the local level as a case study.

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### Introduction

Stunting has become a global agenda. Stunting in children is one of the most significant factors inhibiting human development and growth.<sup>1,2</sup> Globally, this problem has affected around 162 million children under the age of 5 years. Stunting is largely irreparable due to inadequate nutrition, repeated infectious attacks during the first 1000 days of a child's life.<sup>3</sup> The impact of stunting has a short and long-term effect both

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in individuals and in society. The impact includes a reduction cognitive and physical development, reduced productivity and poor health, and increased risk of degenerative diseases such as diabetes.<sup>4</sup> Economists even estimate that stunting can reduce the country's gross domestic product up to 3%.<sup>2</sup> It is estimated that if effective stunting is not carried out, 127 million children under 5 years old will be hampered by 2025.

Factors causing stunting are very complex. According to WHO<sup>5</sup> stunted growth and development can be influenced at the household, and community/nation level. At the household level, stunting can occur at the house level (inadequate sanitation and water supply, low wealth and socioeconomic status, food insecurity, low status of women), poor quality foods (poor micronutrient quality, anti-nutrient content), food and water supply (contaminated food and water, poor hygiene practices), infection (respiratory infections, Malaria). In addition, stunting can occur due to maternal factors (poor nutrition during pre-conception, pregnancy and lactation, short maternal stature, infection), inadequate care (poor care practice, non-responsive feeding), inadequate breastfeeding (delayed initiation, non-exclusive breastfeeding) and inadequate complementary feeding (infrequent feeding, feeding insufficient quantities). At community/nation level, stunting can occur due to agriculture and food systems, water, sanitation and environment, health and healthcare, society and culture and education. Some aspects of politics in relation to stunting are also important determinants such as food prices and trade policy, marketing regulations, political stability, poverty, income and wealth, financial services and employment and livelihoods.

Studies of stunting have been carried out in relation to nutritional intake, infection and sanitation, especially at the household level.<sup>6–10</sup> Furthermore, stunting also relates to the context of the community, state or politics,<sup>11</sup> but the aspects are rarely studied comprehensively. Therefore, this study aims to examine the influence of political aspects on the presence of stunting problems in a country and a region.

## Methods

This research was conducted through a systematic literature review. Various references were collected from online databases including ProQuest, books, reports, journals in the last 5 years. The literature review process includes the stages of identification, screening, eligibility and included.<sup>12</sup> We identified 386 documents and screened 36 documents relating to public health and using English (2 dissertations and 5 books). There were 10 relevant articles after screening and only 4 articles reviewed nutrition issues more specific, the rest of the article discussed the overall nutrition issues. Some additional sources also included in this study such as WHO document. The key words are stunting AND politics.

## Results

There are four studies examined in relation between stunting and politics as shown in [Table 1](#). Based on the study, it can be concluded that health problems related to a political issue,<sup>13,14</sup> including nutritional problems. Poor nutrition, over nutrition, or even stunting are the products of

policies and politics. Stunted growth in toddlers is caused by various factors: at the household, community and country level.<sup>5</sup> That is why stunting requires a specific and sensitive approach. Nutrition is not a matter of food insufficiency, but because of policy and political factors. The articles that discuss on stunting specifically are very limited, especially in relation to politics. [Table 1](#) examines the relationship between stunting and politics in various countries.

## Discussion

Nutritional problems, especially stunting, have become an issue in various countries, especially in developing countries. This can occur because the stunting problem is seen not only to have an impact on physical development, but also cognitive and psychomotor development so that in the long run it has an impact on the economic development of a country. Indonesia, for example the stunting prevention policy has been stipulated in the national strategy for accelerating stunting prevention 2018–2024 and in the National Middle Term Development Plan 2020–2024.<sup>18</sup> The government's policies and political alignments are increasingly clear because the nomenclature is there.

Indonesia, furthermore, for example where a specific study was carried out showed that in the last 1–2 years, the government was very concerned about stunting. This can be proven from several aspects in relation to commitment and vision of leadership, national campaigns and behavior change communication, convergence of central, regional and village programs, food and nutrition security, implementation of coordination and the role of the parties. In the national strategy of prevention of stunting acceleration is determined each objective, the strategy and the achievement of the implementation of the instrument. Other political contexts that are also studied are related to related financing, funding sources, financing problems, financing strategies and financing mechanisms for convergence/integration actions.

Bangladesh developed a program for Reducing Childhood Stunting through Micronutrient Supplements. This Direct Nutrition Package for Stunting is carried out in Bangladesh in the 6–59 month age group. The program aims to review and analyze the benefit and cost ratio of the program. Through the micronutrient supplement program, Bangladesh has experienced a reduction in stunting levels over time, compared to several countries in Southeast Asia, although this number remains high. A decrease of 47 percent of children occurs under five in 2006 to around 43 in 2007 and continued to decline from 40 in 2013 to 35 in 2014. This decline shows that the government is consistent and continues to try politically both program policies and budgets to address the stunting problem. In addition to nutrition-related interventions such as nutritional supplements, fortification, and worming drugs, there are also interventions in clean water supply areas, access to health facilities as well as access to healthy food consumption.

India also includes countries that consistently work in stunting prevention. An evaluation conducted jointly with UNICEF showed significant changes in children under five. The conclusion of the program is that India shows strong progress toward adopting a more integrated, deliberate and effective stunting approach, but some gaps in state planning

**Table 1** Summary of objectives and findings of the reviewed articles in relation to stunting and politics.

Authors (years)	Objectives	Findings
Hossain M, Choudhury N, Abdullah KAB, Mondal P, Jackson AA, Walson J, et al. <sup>12</sup>	Evaluate health and nutrition programs to identify contexts-special intervention packages that might help prioritize implementation programs to reduce stunting in low and middle income countries	The combination of interventions is associated with success when they incorporate health and nutrition outcomes and social safety nets. Effective programs for stunting reduction include commitments at the country level along with community involvement and program context.
Devi S <sup>15</sup>	Describes the difficult times for health and human rights in Egypt	This report found that health care was a luxury, even in the so-called government facilities, which theoretically had to be free, people had to pay. Strong commitment from the Ministry of Health regarding the reduction of stunting in children under five, the challenge ahead is neonatal care.
Barmania S <sup>16</sup>	Identify the health challenges of Madagascar	The political crisis results in cuts in the health budget Various infectious diseases occur such as malaria Difficulties with access to health services (far from health facilities) The world's fourth ranking is related to undernutrition including stunting due to food scarcity, water and sanitation Low international attention to the country's problems The country's political situation and health needs
Webb P, Stordalen GA, Singh S, Wijesinha-Bettoni R, Shetty P, Lartey A <sup>17</sup>	Describes hunger and malnutrition in the 21st century.	Stunting was reported in various countries and continents, for example in 1990–2002, namely stunted (6–59 million). Key policy actions are needed to overcome this specter and must focus on improving quality for all. Resolving nutritional problems requires a good understanding of the determinants and processes that affect diet and nutritional problems including stunting

Source: Adopted from various articles

remain. India has made great progress in achieving outputs that are otherwise related to stunting. The multi-sectoral approach needs to be strengthened further. India plays an important role in generating and disseminating knowledge and data related to stunting. Some aspects that need to be strengthened.<sup>19</sup>

Stunting prevention can vary by region and country, depending on the size of the problem, the cause of the problem and the readiness of resources and government support. This stunting problem also includes obstacles to the assessment of healthy districts/cities in Indonesia, especially on aspects of food security and community nutrition.<sup>20,21</sup>

## Conclusion

It is very clear that there is a strong influence between policy and political support with stunting. Central, regional

and municipal governments that care and have strong political will set stunting as a top priority in terms of programs, policies and financing and encourage all sectors to be fully involved.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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