

The Critical Role of Community-Based Advocacy Communication Model in Combating Stunting in Indonesia: A Study from Jeneponto

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Abstract

Stunting remains a significant public health issue in Indonesia, particularly acute in South Sulawesi where it affects 27.2% of toddlers, and reaching an alarming rate of 39.8% in Kabupaten Jeneponto, highlighting severe gaps in nutrition and healthcare access. To combat this, the Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH) employs conditional cash transfers and local food-based supplements. This qualitative descriptive study, rooted in a post-positivist paradigm, was conducted over three months in Jeneponto, selected for its critical stunting rates and active PKH engagement. Primary data were sourced from interviews with PKH social workers and beneficiaries, supplemented by secondary data from agency reports and scholarly literature, with analysis focusing on data identification, processing, and validation. The results indicate PKH's advocacy efforts are aimed at incorporating community issues into the policy framework and ensuring accountability among policymakers, structured around stages of analysis, strategy, mobilization, action, evaluation, and sustainability. However, challenges such as poor interagency coordination and budget constraints hinder effective intervention. The findings underscore the role of advocacy in shaping public health strategies and enhancing community engagement, suggesting that robust advocacy could lead to scalable stunting reduction models if systemic barriers are overcome and intersectoral collaboration is strengthened. Ultimately, advocacy within PKH is vital for addressing stunting in Jeneponto, demanding improved coordination and sustained community efforts to significantly enhance health outcomes and reduce stunting rates.

Keywords: *Advocacy Communication Model, Stunting Reduction, Health Intervention Strategies.*

INTRODUCTION

Community welfare is a key aspect of national development due to its significant impacts across various sectors (Akwalu & Muchai, 2020; Marín-González, 2022; Rao & Enelamah, 2024). Firstly, prosperous communities are generally more productive, supported by good health, adequate education, and economic security, enabling them to work with high effectiveness and innovation (Zhao et al., 2022; Kasinathan et al., 2022; Borges & de Oliveira, 2022; Goloshchapova et al., 2023; Virjan et al., 2023; Leal, 2023). Secondly, high levels of welfare can reduce social tensions and conflict, often marked by lower crime rates and greater social harmony. Thirdly, equitable welfare facilitates equal access to resources and opportunities, promoting sustainable development through more efficient resource use and intergenerational equity. Fourthly, prosperous communities have better opportunities for quality education and training, crucial in facing market dynamics and technological advancements. Finally, investing in community welfare also enhances public health by expanding access to quality healthcare services, adequate nutrition, clean water, and proper sanitation.

High rates of stunting in a population often indicate inadequacies in community welfare. Stunting, a condition where child growth is hindered due to chronic malnutrition, lack of access to nutritious food, and poor health conditions, highlights broader social and economic issues (Abu-Fatima et al., 2021; Quamme & Iversen, 2022; Kathembe et al., 2023; Schneider, 2023).

Stunting is a serious public health issue in Indonesia (Achmad, 2022; Suryana & Azis, 2023), particularly in South Sulawesi, where the prevalence among toddlers reached 27.2% in 2022. Specifically, Jeneponto Regency recorded a very high prevalence of stunting at 39.8%. These figures not only reveal critical malnutrition

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conditions but also indicate deep-seated issues related to access to nutritious food, healthcare services, and adequate sanitation.

The Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH) is a government initiative aimed at reducing poverty and improving the health and welfare of poor families through conditional cash transfers. In Jeneponto Regency, PKH includes additional food based on local produce, reflecting an approach tailored to specific local needs. This addition aims to directly address nutritional deficiencies that contribute to stunting.

Within the context of PKH, there is an intensive advocacy communication component targeting policymakers. This advocacy aims to influence policies and practices at national and local levels, ensuring sustained support and program expansion. Advocacy activities play a critical role in raising awareness, fostering concern, and building commitment to addressing stunting issues.

This research aims to evaluate the effectiveness of PKH implementation in Jeneponto Regency in reducing stunting prevalence. Additionally, it will examine how advocacy communication within PKH influences public policies and practices at local and national levels.

The findings from this research are expected to provide valuable insights into the success and areas needing improvement in PKH implementation. It also aims to provide recommendations for more effective policies and practices to address stunting in Indonesia.

METHOD

This research adopts a post-positivist paradigm, following the approach outlined by Creswell & Creswell (2018), and utilizes a qualitative descriptive method. The study was conducted in Jeneponto Regency, South Sulawesi Province, over a period of three months. This location was chosen based on intensive activities by central and regional governments in implementing the Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH) to prevent stunting, as well as high stunting cases reported in the SSGI 2022 report. Data collection included primary data obtained directly from interviews with informants and secondary data sourced from relevant agencies, literature, scholarly works, journals, official documents, and online sources.

The research informants include several PKH Social Facilitators in Jeneponto, including the PKH Coordinator of Jeneponto Regency; PKH Social Facilitators from Bangkala and Bontoramba Subdistricts. Additionally, beneficiaries of the PKH program were involved, along with health sector representatives such as officials from the Health Office/Integrated Health Posts (Posyandu).

Data analysis in this study follows the methodologies of Miles & Huberman (2014), Creswell (2015), and Moleong (2014), which encompass the identification of research objectives, data processing and interpretation, as well as data abstraction and reduction, followed by verification of data authenticity collected.

RESULT

Advocacy Communication Model

Advocacy is defined as a strategic action aimed at producing public policies beneficial to the community or avoiding potentially detrimental policies, as explained by Reyes (1997) cited by Cangara (2020). In line with this, according to the Strategic Policy Advocacy Manual by IDEA (July 2003), advocacy is understood as coordinated and strategic actions undertaken by PKH Social Facilitators or community groups/beneficiaries of PKH. These actions include placing issues on the policy agenda, influencing decision-makers to seek solutions, and garnering support for the enforcement and implementation of public policies designed to address these issues.

Advocacy discussed here is an effort to influence public policies through various forms of persuasive communication. Public policy can be defined as a series of statements, policies, or actions defined by authorized authorities aimed at guiding or controlling the actions of institutions, communities, and individuals. The communication planning model for advocacy involves six crucial stages: (a) Analysis, to understand the context and needs; (b) Strategy, to formulate effective approaches; (c) Mobilization, to gather resources and support; (d) Action, to implement planned activities; (e) Evaluation, to measure the effectiveness and impact of the advocacy efforts; and (f) Sustainability, to ensure continuity of advocacy efforts and achieve long-term changes.

Analysis

Analysis is the first step in conducting effective advocacy, similar to the initial step in any action. Advocacy efforts designed to impact public policy begin with the availability of accurate information and a deep understanding of existing issues, the involved communities, policies and their existence, organizations, and pathways that can serve as access points to influence influential community figures and decision-makers in Jeneponto Regency. The stronger the foundational knowledge of these elements, the more compelling the advocacy carried out by PKH Social Facilitators in Jeneponto Regency.

In addressing stunting, inter-agency coordination often proves a major obstacle due to the lack of effective and integrated communication forums among various stakeholders. This results in disparate stunting data across agencies, complicating the formulation of appropriate policies and intervention strategies. Shortcomings in follow-up after formal meetings also indicate issues in commitment and collaboration between agencies. Additionally, budgetary constraints hinder educational activities, impacting the effectiveness of teaching and outreach efforts on stunting. Despite efforts to unify and synchronize data, sectoral egos frequently obstruct closer cooperation, which should ideally enhance program efficiency and effectiveness. There is a need for more systematic and sustainable efforts to establish a framework that enables all parties to effectively combat stunting, by improving the quality of information exchange and cross-sectoral collaboration.

Strategy

Every advocacy effort by PKH Social Facilitators requires a strategy. The strategic stages are built upon the analysis phase, which directs, plans, and focuses efforts on specific objectives, placing them on a clear path towards achieving the goals and targets set in preventing stunting in Jeneponto Regency.

In the effort to prevent stunting, the strengthening of Human Resources (HR) becomes crucial, especially at the field level where direct interaction with the community takes place. The success of socialization and education depends on how well field officers are equipped with effective tools and modules. Enhancing family capabilities through Family Capability Enhancement Meetings (P2K2) is a strategic step, but often hindered by insufficient materials and adequate support tools, due to budget limitations. Therefore, better coordination and budget support from various relevant institutions, including ministries, are needed to ensure that field officers have adequate resources to carry out their tasks effectively. Additionally, regular meetings among various institutions can serve as platforms to formulate joint strategies and address existing issues, thereby generating more coordinated and integrated efforts in combating stunting. Transparency in sharing data and information also needs to be enhanced to ensure that all parties have a shared understanding of the issues and progress made.

Mobilization

Formation of coalitions to strengthen advocacy. Events, activities, messages, and supporting materials should be designed according to objectives, target groups, partnerships, and available resources. All of these should have maximum positive impact on policy makers and full participation from all members while minimizing opposition groups.

In efforts to prevent stunting, structured and continuous communication is key to achieving significant behavior change in the community. Systematic monthly meetings through the Family Capability Enhancement Program (P2K2) have proven effective in delivering crucial health information, including healthy nutrition practices for pregnant women and their families. The use of visual aids and specially designed modules for specific sessions helps clarify important messages and ensures that they are well received by participants. However, challenges include insufficient visual aids and budget constraints that hinder the optimization of the learning process. This underscores the importance of greater support from relevant institutions and adequate budget allocation to strengthen these efforts. Active involvement of health officers in health centers and the use of local languages in delivering materials also enhance acceptance and the impact of interventions, increasing the likelihood of positive long-term outcomes in stunting prevention.

Action

Maintaining action groups and all partners is fundamental in advocacy implementation. Repetition of messages and the use of credible aids made repeatedly greatly help to maintain attention to existing issues.

In addressing the complex issue of stunting in Jeneponto Regency, the effectiveness of interventions is hindered by a lack of coordination and communication among involved government agencies, such as the Health Office, Social Office, and BKKBN. More integrated cooperation under clear supervision is highly necessary to ensure the efficiency and success of intervention programs. For example, discrepancies in stunting data among different agencies lead to duplicated efforts and inconsistency in case management. Moreover, the use of technology in data collection often proves ineffective, such as applications that misinterpret data, resulting in errors in stunting assessment. Additionally, there is a need to increase awareness and training for Posyandu cadres, who play a crucial role in program implementation at the community level. Finally, the integration of nutrition strategies, such as family vegetable gardening, should be supported with adequate resources, including the provision of seedlings, to promote healthy food consumption among the community. Improving this coordination will enable more targeted and systematic interventions, ultimately reducing stunting rates in the region.

Evaluation

Advocacy efforts need to be carefully evaluated, similar to other campaign activities, as advocacy often yields partial results. Advocacy teams need to monitor regularly and objectively what has been achieved and what still needs to be done. The evaluation process can be more crucial and challenging than the impact evaluation itself.

In the context of preventing stunting in Jeneponto, the approach taken involves utilizing integrated educational modules within Family Capacity Building Meetings (P2K2), with a specific focus on nutrition and dietetics. Effective communication in group meetings is recognized as key to changing community understanding and behavior, particularly in addressing long-rooted myths and unhealthy eating practices. This approach entails continuous education and rigorous supervision, including checking attendance and monitoring educational activities to ensure that the information provided is well-absorbed. The greatest challenges faced include resistance to behavioral change and financial constraints affecting access to nutritious food. Local initiatives, such as using eggs and milk as more affordable nutritious food alternatives, are crucial adaptive efforts to address these constraints. However, further support from the government and donor agencies is needed to ensure the sustainability and expansion of such programs, thereby reaching more families and having a broader impact on reducing stunting rates in the region.

Sustainability

Just like communication, advocacy is an ongoing process, not just a policy or regulation. Planning for sustainability involves clarifying long-term goals, maintaining coalition integrity, and adapting argumentation data alongside evolving changes.

Comprehensive analysis of the stunting issue highlights the urgent need for a holistic approach to addressing nutrition and growth issues among children. Recognizing that stunting is not merely about height but also about the quality of nutrition received during critical growth periods underscores the need for interventions informed by accurate data and knowledge. The tendency to determine stunting status solely based on physical parameters without considering nutrition and overall health aspects indicates shortcomings in current health education systems. This is exacerbated by discrepancies between collected data and on-the-ground realities, often due to inadequate data collection applications or methods.

The importance of the first thousand days of life as a critical window for interventions emphasizes the crucial role of optimal nutrition intake and proactive health management in preventing stunting. The fact that existing policies and practices often lack synchronization, both at the policy level and in implementation in the field, highlights existing gaps in stunting reduction efforts. Additionally, environmental and social factors, such as family economic status and access to nutritious food, also play critical roles in determining children's health and growth.

Collaborative efforts across various sectors, including health, social services, and food security, are needed to address stunting. Ministries and related agencies must work together to develop and implement more effective strategies that not only focus on medical and nutritional aspects but also on improving social and economic conditions that affect children's health. A comprehensive and integrated approach, considering specific needs based on regional and local conditions, will be essential in reducing the prevalence of stunting and improving the quality of life for children in the future.

DISCUSSION

In examining the findings, it's essential to contextualize them within the scope of prior research on advocacy in public health interventions. For instance, if this study establishes that PKH advocacy efforts have markedly decreased stunting rates in Jeneponto, these results should be compared with similar initiatives in other regions or countries. The alignment or divergence of these findings with existing studies offers critical insights. Discrepancies might be attributed to unique cultural, economic, or political factors in Jeneponto that either enhance or hinder the effectiveness of advocacy strategies. Such comparative analysis helps elucidate the specific conditions under which advocacy efforts flourish or falter.

The implications of these findings are far-reaching, necessitating a thorough exploration of their impact on various stakeholders. If the research verifies that targeted advocacy communications have successfully influenced policy changes and bolstered community engagement, this underscores the potential for expanding stunting reduction initiatives. Moreover, the study enriches our understanding of how advocacy drives public health outcomes, contributing valuable perspectives to the broader dialogue on health communication strategies and policymaking in developing contexts. These insights are instrumental for policymakers, healthcare providers, and communities in strategizing more effective health interventions.

Looking ahead, the discussion should steer towards identifying future research avenues. This includes probing the long-term effects of advocacy on stunting rates or assessing the role of digital tools in amplifying the impact of advocacy. A comparative analysis across different Indonesian regions could reveal factors that either promote or impede the success of public health advocacy. Further research might also examine how adaptive changes to the PKH program's communication tactics could better accommodate the diverse local nuances, thereby optimizing the program's efficacy. Such studies will not only fill existing knowledge gaps but also enhance the strategic implementation of health advocacy initiatives.

CONCLUSION

The communication model of Social Assistants in the Family Hope Program (PKH) in preventing stunting in Jeneponto Regency emphasizes the importance of cross-sectoral cooperation and effective communication strategies. Challenges such as lack of coordination between agencies and limited access to accurate data often hinder efforts to prevent stunting. To address these issues, the advocacy approach used by social assistants includes deep analysis of policies and local situations, strategies focused on mobilizing resources and communities, and actions aimed at educating and changing community behaviors. Continuous evaluation and sustainability in advocacy are needed to ensure the effectiveness of interventions. Collaborative efforts between government, non-governmental organizations, and the community itself are crucial to build synergy that enhances awareness and reduces the prevalence of stunting in the region.

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