



OPTIMIZATION OF STUNTING PREVENTION EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF PARENTING AND NUTRITIONAL BALANCE OF CHILDREN

**Khansa Dinah Trisnawati¹, Muthia Lestari^{2*}, Widi Syawali³, Firda Alfira Muklis⁴,
Asep Kurnia Jayadinata⁵, Idat Muqadas⁶, Gia Nikawanti⁷**

^{1,2,3,4,5,6,7}Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia

email : khansadinah@upi.edu¹
muthialestari17@upi.edu²
widisyawali1012@upi.edu³
firdaalfiramuklis@upi.edu⁴
asep1jayadinata@upi.edu⁵
idatmuqodas@upi.edu⁶
gyanikawanti@upi.edu⁷

* Corresponding Author

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Abstrak

Kegiatan Pengabdian Masyarakat ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan pemahaman dan kesadaran orang tua di Desa Margamukti mengenai pentingnya pola asuh yang tepat dan kesehatan gizi seimbang pada anak usia dini. Metode pengabdian yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif dengan pengumpulan data observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Hasil pengabdian menunjukkan peningkatan pengetahuan dan kesadaran masyarakat tentang pentingnya pola asuh yang tepat dan gizi seimbang untuk mencegah stunting. Diskusi interaktif yang dilakukan membuka ruang bagi peserta untuk berbagi pengalaman dan menemukan solusi atas berbagai tantangan yang dihadapi dalam menjaga kesehatan dan gizi anak. Secara keseluruhan, kegiatan ini berhasil mencapai tujuannya dalam memberikan edukasi dan kesadaran kepada masyarakat, yang diharapkan menjadi langkah awal dalam menurunkan angka stunting di Desa Margamukti. Kegiatan pengabdian masyarakat ini menekankan pentingnya keterlibatan berbagai pihak, termasuk ibu hamil, ibu menyusui, kader posyandu, dan tokoh masyarakat, dalam mendukung pencegahan stunting. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif yang berfokus pada penyuluhan dan pemberian informasi yang mendalam, program ini mampu membantu penurunan risiko stunting di wilayah target. Dampaknya tidak hanya terhadap kesehatan anak, tetapi juga pada peningkatan kualitas sumber daya manusia di masa depan.

Kata Kunci: Anak Usia Dini; Kesehatan Gizi; Pola Asuh; Pencegahan Stunting; Keterlibatan Komunitas.

Abstract

This Community Service Activity aims to increase the understanding and awareness of parents in Margamukti Village regarding the importance of proper parenting patterns and balanced nutritional health in early childhood. The research method used is a qualitative approach with observation data collection, interviews, and documentation. The study's results showed increased public knowledge and awareness of the importance of proper parenting patterns and balanced nutrition to prevent stunting. The interactive discussion opened space for participants to share experiences and find solutions to various challenges faced in maintaining children's health and nutrition. Overall, this activity succeeded in achieving its goal of providing education and awareness to the community, which is expected to be the first step in reducing stunting rates in Margamukti Village. This community service activity emphasizes the importance of the involvement of various

parties, including pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, posyandu cadres, and the community, in supporting stunting prevention. With a qualitative approach focusing on counseling and in-depth information delivery, this program can help reduce the risk of stunting in the target area. The impact is not only on children's health but also on improving the quality of human resources in the future.

Keywords: Early Childhood; Nutritional Health; Parenting; Stunting Prevention; Community Engagement.

INTRODUCTION

This Community Service Program to empower parents in Margamukti Village by increasing their understanding of the importance of proper parenting and the fulfillment of balanced nutrition for early childhood. Poor parenting, such as ignorance of nutritious feeding or lack of family involvement, also contributes to this problem. Service revealed that good parenting and education about balanced nutrition can play an important role in preventing stunting and improving the quality of life of children (Ministry of Health, R. I., 2018).

Nutrition problems in early childhood are still a challenge in Indonesia, with various conditions such as obesity, stunting, anemia, underweight, and malnutrition. Stunting is a long-term nutritional problem caused by a lack of nutritional intake over a long period, often due to a diet that does not meet dietary needs. This condition can start from the time the child is in the womb and is only seen when the child reaches the age of two years (Yuindra et al., 2022). According to (the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, 2016) Stunting is a condition in which children experience malnutrition, and long-term infections, and are usually characterized by height that is not appropriate for the age of children under five. Meanwhile, according to WHO in (Sari & Resiyanthi, 2020), Stunting is seen as a difficult growth problem. It is mainly influenced by nutritional deficiencies and infections that occur repeatedly in the first 1000 days of a child's life.

Stunting is a health problem that can affect children's physical and mental development. Factors that cause stunting include suboptimal nutrition practices, lack of maternal knowledge about health and nutrition before, during, and after pregnancy (Fauzi et al., 2024). On the other hand, (Batiro et al., 2017) explained that stunting is influenced by several risk factors, such as disease infections (e.g. diarrhea and ISPA), delays in breastfeeding, not immunization, lack of consumption of food derived from animal products, and the use of unsafe water sources. Meanwhile, according to (Sinaga et al., 2019) stunting occurs due to low nutritional intake received by children from the food consumed, where a lack of protein and energy greatly affects the occurrence of stunting in children. Therefore, the many factors that cause stunting are the top priority of world health problems that must be solved immediately.

However, the gap in stunting prevention efforts is still the main obstacle (Fitriani, 2022). Existing educational programs are often not well-integrated and do

not reach people in remote areas (Atamou, 2023). In addition, parental understanding, especially in parenting and the provision of balanced nutrition, is still low due to the lack of access to appropriate and comprehensive information (Ndagijimana, 2024). This is exacerbated by the limitations of health resources, such as nutritionists and posyandu cadres, as well as cultural factors that are still deeply rooted, such as traditional beliefs in feeding children.

Therefore, optimizing stunting prevention education programs is very important to overcome this problem. By combining scientific, technological, and community empowerment approaches, this program is expected to be able to improve the quality of parenting and child nutrition (Harahap, 2024). This step not only aims to reduce stunting rates, but also to create a healthier, more productive, and quality generation in the future. Based on a survey by the World Health Organization (WHO), the prevalence of stunting in the world reaches 151 million (22%), while Indonesia is in third place in Southeast Asia with a prevalence rate of 36.4% (Hidayah & Marwan, 2020).

Even so, in 2022, the prevalence of stunting has been successfully reduced to 21.6%, with a target of 14% by 2024. To achieve this target, various efforts continue to be made. As stated by (Munira, 2023), stunting prevention is considered more effective than treatment. Children who experience stunting tend to have difficulties in achieving maximum growth and development potential (Nursyamsiyah et al., 2021). So it has the potential to be a serious threat to the quality of a country's human resources. This is important for the progress of a country, which requires high-quality human resources. Based on data (Arsayuladi et al., 2022), currently, the number of children under five in Indonesia reaches around 22.4 million, with around 5.2 million pregnant women every year and 4.9 million babies born every year. Of the total number, about three out of ten children under five in Indonesia are stunted.

The problem of stunting requires serious attention because of its widespread and long-term impact on children's lives. If not handled properly, stunting can inhibit physical and cognitive growth and adversely affect learning ability due to cognitive development disorders (Nirmalasari, 2020). In the long term, this has the potential to affect adult life, including limitations in education, career choices, and income potential (Ministry of Health, R. I., 2018). In addition, stunting can also increase the risk of obesity in adulthood, which contributes to vulnerability to various non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and cancer (Astuti, 2024).

To face this challenge, the government has set a target to reduce the prevalence of stunting in Indonesia to reach 14% by 2024. Based on the latest data from the Ministry of Health presented in the National Working Meeting, the stunting rate has decreased significantly, from 24.4% in 2021 to 21.6% in 2022. In order to



achieve this target, the government has set strategic steps by reducing the prevalence of stunting by 3.8% every year for two consecutive years (Rokom, 2023).

In the last three years, various community service programs have been carried out to overcome the problem of stunting in Indonesia. However, many of them still focus on short-term interventions such as supplemental feeding and sporadic health campaigns (Banhae et al., 2023). Based on a study of several community service activities, it was found that most programs have not been integrated holistically between parenting education, balanced nutrition fulfillment, and family empowerment as core elements in stunting prevention (Lestari, 2024). In addition, program coverage is often limited to urban areas or areas with high accessibility, while communities in remote areas still face challenges in obtaining quality education and health services (Suparji, 2024).

Another gap lies in the lack of active community involvement in designing and implementing these programs. The education provided tends to be one-way without considering the specific social, cultural, and economic conditions of the target community (Supadmi, 2024). This causes a low level of program sustainability after service activities end. In addition, although several programs have included training for health cadres and posyandu, their implementation is often hampered by a lack of follow-up mentoring and systematic evaluation.

With this gap, optimizing stunting prevention education programs through a more structured, evidence-based, and community empowerment approach is very important. The program, which focuses on improving the quality of parenting and children's nutritional balance, and is supported by cross-sector collaboration, is expected to answer the real needs of the community and ensure the sustainability of the program's impact in the long term. The purpose of community service activities in Maragamukti Village, Pangalengan District, Bandung Regency, is to improve the knowledge, attitude, and skills of parents whose children are indicated to be stunted.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The community service was held on November 14 to 16, 2024 in Margamukti Village, Pangalengan District, Bandung Regency, West Java, by UPI Early Childhood Education Teacher Education (PGPAUD) Purwakarta Campus students. 50 mothers with babies and toddlers attended this service. This service uses a qualitative approach that aims to deepen the experience of the subject of service as a whole. This study focuses on the behavior, thoughts, motivations, and actions of subjects that are analyzed descriptively in a specific natural context, concerning the scientific method. (Moleong, 2016).

Data collection techniques in this service include interviews, direct observations, socialization activities, counseling, and documents and books relevant

to the topic of service. Table 1 explains the interview indicators on the usefulness of service activities to participants.

Table 1. Interview Instruments for Assisted Participants

No	Aspects	Indicator
1	Experience of Attending Stunting Prevention Education Seminars	Frequency of attendance at stunting prevention education seminars Impressions and views on the seminar material Obstacles experienced while attending the seminar
2	Understanding Parenting for Stunting Prevention	Understanding of childcare that supports stunting prevention Knowledge of balanced nutritional needs for early childhood Changes in parenting after getting information from seminars
3	Effectiveness of Stunting Prevention Education Seminar	Level of understanding before and after the seminar Relevance of seminar material to the needs of the community Suggestions to improve the quality of seminars

Service activities start from (1) problem identification; (2) Program Analysis and Planning; (3) Preparation of Materials and Methods; (4) Socialization of the Program to Local Leaders and Communities; (5) Core Activities consisting of Counseling on Stunting, Parenting and Balanced Nutrition Training, Direct Observation of Parenting at Home; (6) Data collection consists of Interviews, Observations, Documentation; (7) Program Impact Evaluation consists of Participant Understanding. The following is the flowchart of service activities depicted in Figure 1.

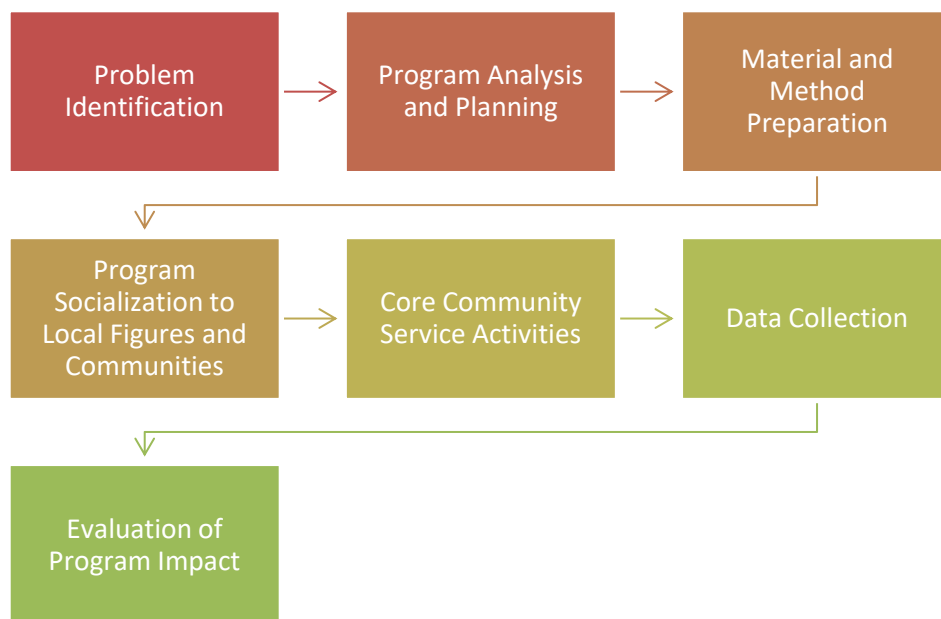


Figure 1. Flowchart of Community Service activities

After all activities are carried out, the entire service team conducts an evaluation based on the results of the activity and interviews with the participants to see how useful this activity is for them participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of service activities according to the flow of activities from the service team are explained as follows:

Problem Identification

The results of the problem identification in Margamukti Village, Pangalengan District, Bandung Regency, show that the prevalence of stunting in this area is still high. Based on preliminary data obtained through interviews with posyandu cadres and field observations, it was found that the community's understanding of parenting and nutritional needs of early childhood is still low. In addition, limited access to information and lack of community involvement in health programs are the main challenges in stunting prevention.

Program Analysis and Planning

The service team conducted an in-depth analysis of the needs of the community by involving community leaders, posyandu cadres, and representatives of mothers who have babies and toddlers. Based on this analysis, an integrated education program was designed that included counseling on stunting, parenting training, and balanced nutrition guidance. The program is designed to address specific problems facing communities, using a participatory approach to increase effectiveness and sustainability.

Preparation of Materials and Methods

The team developed evidence-based educational materials, such as modules on parenting that supports children's growth and development and guidelines for providing nutritious food according to WHO standards. The material is equipped with interesting visualizations to make it easier for participants to understand. The methods used include interactive discussions, parenting simulations, and demonstrations of serving nutritious food.

Program Socialization to Local Leaders and Communities

Prior to the implementation of the core activities, this program was socialized to community leaders and village officials to ensure full support. The socialization involved posyandu cadres and target women to motivate active participation in activities. Information about the activity schedule, objectives, and benefits of the program are conveyed clearly.

Core Activities

The core activities consist of three main stages: (1) counseling on stunting, (2) training on parenting and balanced nutrition, (3) direct observation of parenting at home. The counseling was attended by 50 mothers with babies and toddlers. This activity was carried out by interactive lecture and discussion methods involving

expert speakers in the fields of early childhood education, mental health, and nutrition. The first speaker, Dr. Idat Muqodas, M.Pd., Kons, delivered material on "Child Welfare through Parenting, Vitamin A, and Vitamin B". He emphasized that in addition to physical nutrition needs, children also need strong moral and religious education. The active role of parents, especially in providing example, love, and discipline, is the main key to preventing stunting and facing the challenges of the times. Furthermore, Dr. Asep Kurnia Jayadinata, M.Pd., explained the importance of balanced nutrition in supporting children's physical development, brain development, and cognitive abilities. He also highlighted the need to build healthy eating habits early on, especially during the first 1,000 days of life, to reduce the risk of stunting.

In addition to counseling, this activity involved Posyandu cadres who played an important role in registering toddlers, weighing weight, providing vitamin A, and conducting nutrition counseling. Further training on parenting and balanced nutrition. This training focuses on the application of parenting styles that support children's growth and development as well as guidelines for serving balanced nutritious food. Direct simulations are carried out, such as making nutritious menus with local ingredients. Participants were trained to practice positive parenting styles, such as communication that supports children's emotional development. After the workshop was completed, the service team conducted interviews with several participants whose results are explained in table 2.

The results of the interview with Mrs. Nurhayati, who is a seminar participant, revealed that the main causes of stunting include a lack of exclusive breastfeeding, suboptimal parenting, poor sanitation, and low birth weight. This seminar provided new insights, such as the importance of the father's involvement in supporting mothers from pregnancy, as well as strategies to improve family diets by replacing fast food with balanced nutritious foods. In addition, we also conducted interviews with two other speakers who participated in seminars on good parenting and stunting prevention in early childhood. The results of interviews with two speakers, namely Arida Rahayu (29 years old) and Widiанти (23 years old), gave an overview of their experiences after attending a seminar on parenting in stunting prevention. The two speakers revealed that this seminar was very useful in adding knowledge, especially about parenting styles that have often been wrong. The first resource person realized that mistakes in educating children, such as blaming objects when children fall, are parenting styles that need to be improved. Meanwhile, the second speaker admitted that he was often angry with his son, but through this seminar, he learned the importance of controlling emotions.

Both agreed that the delivery of material in the seminar was very clear and relevant to today's challenges, where children are more difficult to direct than previous generations. This seminar also provides an understanding that parenting is very influential in preventing stunting. The first speaker emphasized that as a



modern parent, he is more concerned about the nutritional content of the food given to his children than the parenting style of the previous generation, which only focuses on ensuring that children are full. The second speaker added that good parenting must be applied by all parents, especially for children who are cared for by grandparents because of their parent's work. Workshop activities are documented in figure 2.

Table 2. Results of Interviews with Participants of the Workshop Stunting Prevention Education

No	Respondent Code	Core Statement	Theme
1	R1	"It is very clear, there are many things we don't know like us, our parents in the past are very happy that we are already in the modern era. Our child is not a child yesterday in the 90s, not still my age who accepts it because children are now difficult to say. I also have an elementary school child who is sometimes very difficult to say even though if you look at the children now, it is not in that era and it is a different era".	Experience of Attending Stunting Prevention Education Seminars
2	R2	"It is very important, because judging from my neighbors whose parents work and are raised by their grandmothers, the parenting style is different while I apply it to my child, I want to be fine, therefore the parenting style is very important for parents to apply to their children".	Understanding Parenting for Stunting Prevention
3	R3	"Very useful and adds new knowledge about parenting and balanced nutrition".	Effectiveness of Stunting Prevention Education Seminar

After attending the workshop, the two speakers felt that there was a change in their perspective on child parenting. The first speaker admitted that he took many lessons from the workshop, such as the importance of building responsibility for children. The second speaker, who was initially often angry with his children, began to be more patient and tried to process healthy food to make his children more liked. They also agreed that this workshop is very important to increase awareness about good parenting, as well as provide new knowledge that is easy to apply in daily life.

Both hope that a similar workshop can be held again, with additional topics such as how to effectively process vegetables so that children like them, considering that many children in the Pangalengan area find it difficult to eat vegetables even though this community is a vegetable producer. In addition, the first speaker emphasized the importance of expanding this education to reach more people, especially because of the high rate of early marriage in Pangalengan. Further education is expected to increase public understanding of the importance of parenting in preventing stunting and creating a healthier generation in the future.



Figure 2. Stunting Prevention Seminar Activities

The core activity continued with direct observation of parenting at home. The service team made random visits to 15 homes to observe the implementation of parenting and feeding after the training. Most mothers showed improvement in compiling their children's food menus, although some still needed further assistance.

Data Collection

Data was collected through interviews, observations, and documentation during the activity. The results of the interview showed that 80% of the participants felt that they understood the importance of parenting and nutrition in preventing stunting. Documentation in the form of photos of activities and field notes strengthens the observation results.

Program Impact Evaluation

The results of the evaluation show that the stunting prevention education program implemented in Margamukti Village has a significant positive impact on improving community understanding, especially mothers who have babies and toddlers. Based on the results of interviews and questionnaires collected during the activity, as many as 80% of participants felt that they understood the importance of parenting that supports children's growth and development and the fulfillment of balanced nutrition in efforts to prevent stunting. Before the program was



implemented, participants' understanding of stunting and its relationship with parenting and nutrition was relatively low, especially related to the importance of exclusive breastfeeding, a variety of nutritious food menus, and positive interactions with children to support cognitive and emotional development. After the program, the majority of participants were able to identify the causes and impacts of stunting, as well as understand the practical steps they can take to prevent it.

This service program has several advantages that are the key to its success. First, interactive and practical educational methods, such as simulations of making nutritious menus with local ingredients, are very effective in increasing participant engagement. This approach allows participants to directly practice the material presented so that their understanding is deeper. Second, this program also highlights community empowerment through the training of posyandu cadres to continue the program independently. This ensures the sustainability of the program's impact at the community level. In addition, educational materials designed with simple language and equipped with interesting visualizations make it easier for participants to understand complex concepts. Support from community leaders and village officials also strengthens the acceptance of the program among the community.

However, this program is inseparable from several weaknesses that need to be improved for the next implementation. One of the main weaknesses is the limited time for implementing the program, so that follow-up assistance has not been maximized. Some participants revealed that they needed additional guidance to apply parenting and nutritional guidance consistently in their daily lives. In addition, the scope of the program is limited to a number of participants who have not been able to reach all mothers with babies and toddlers in the village. This is due to the limited human resources and logistics available. The limitations of quantitative data-based evaluation documentation are also a weakness, as most evaluations still rely on interviews and observations, which can be subjective.

In the future, this program needs improvements by expanding the scope of participants, extending the duration of mentoring, and improving a more structured data-based evaluation system. By overcoming these weaknesses, this program has the potential to have a greater impact in reducing stunting rates in Margamukti Village and other areas.

This service program has successfully shown that stunting prevention education that focuses on improving the understanding of parenting and fulfilling children's nutrition can have a significant positive impact on changing people's behavior. This result is in line with research conducted by the Indonesian Ministry of Health (2021), which states that one of the main causes of stunting in Indonesia is the lack of maternal knowledge about nutrition and proper parenting during the golden period of child growth. In addition, this program is also relevant to other service findings carried out by (Hara, 2024), where community-based interventions,

such as posyandu cadre training and counseling to mothers, have succeeded in increasing compliance in providing exclusive breastfeeding and nutritious complementary foods. Both programs emphasize the importance of a community-focused approach to creating sustainable behaviour change.

From a theoretical point of view, the success of this program can be explained through Behavior Change Theory, specifically the Health Belief Model (HBM) model. This model states that a person will change his behavior if he understands the risks of a particular action and believes that the interventions offered can reduce those risks (Greene, 2022). In the context of this program, mothers begin to understand the risks of stunting to the future of their children, such as disruption of physical, cognitive, and emotional development, so that they are encouraged to implement better parenting and meet the nutritional needs of children (Ponum, 2020). Practical approaches, such as simulations of making nutritious food menus, give participants confidence that they are able to apply the knowledge gained in their daily lives (Suratri, 2023).

In addition, Community Empowerment Theory also supports the success of this program. This theory emphasizes that people have the potential to solve their own problems if they are provided with adequate knowledge, skills, and support (Kloee, 2024). Through the training of posyandu cadres and the active involvement of community leaders, this program empowers the community to become agents of change in stunting prevention. This approach is in line with the service carried out by (Utami et al., 2024), Where the empowered posyandu cadres succeeded in increasing the coverage of health education to remote areas.

However, the program also reveals the challenges that need to be overcome to achieve sustainability. A study by UNICEF (2022) shows that one of the main obstacles in stunting prevention is the lack of long-term monitoring and evaluation of changes in people's behavior. In this service, the limited implementation time causes further assistance to not be fully optimal. This indicates the need for a structured follow-up program to ensure that new behaviors taught truly become sustainable habits.

By linking the results of this program with other relevant theories and services, it can be concluded that a holistic, participatory, and sustainable community-based approach is the main key in stunting prevention. Through strengthening community capacity and cross-sector integration, programs like this have great potential to overcome stunting problems in various regions of Indonesia.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Stunting prevention education that focuses on improving the understanding of parenting and balanced nutrition has a significant positive impact on changes in community behavior in Margamukti Village, Pangalengan District. As many as 80% of participants experienced an increased understanding of the importance of



parenting and nutrition to prevent stunting, with most mothers starting to implement practical measures in their daily lives. The success of this program is supported by an interactive approach, local community involvement, and empowerment of posyandu cadres, which provides a foundation for long-term impact sustainability.

The suggestion that can be given is that this stunting prevention education program is implemented sustainably by involving more parties, including local governments, educational institutions, and the private sector, to support the provision of adequate resources such as educational materials and nutritious supplementary foods. In addition, it is necessary to expand the scope of the program to other areas that have a high prevalence of stunting so that the benefits can be felt more widely. Structured monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are also critical to ensuring the long-term success of the program, as well as to identify areas that need improvement. Increasing public education through social media and community campaigns needs to be optimized to increase public awareness of the importance of proper parenting and the fulfillment of balanced nutrition for early childhood.

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