

The Impact of Systemic Bias in Media Literacy on Stunting Mitigation Efforts in Nias Barat

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Abstract: Stunting remains a critical public health issue in Indonesia, particularly in rural areas like Nias Barat, where limited access to resources and information exacerbates the problem. This study examines the systemic biases in media literacy and their impact on stunting prevention efforts in this underserved region. Using a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach, the research integrates traditional communication channels such as local leaders and community meetings with media literacy initiatives to address cultural and infrastructural barriers. The mixed-methods methodology combines qualitative focus groups and interviews with quantitative surveys to assess changes in community awareness, health practices, and stunting prevalence. The findings highlight the need for culturally relevant and accessible health communication strategies, demonstrating that integrating media literacy with traditional channels enhances the reach and effectiveness of interventions. This study proposes an inclusive and sustainable framework for addressing stunting, offering valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners aiming to improve public health outcomes in marginalized regions

Keywords: Media literacy, stunting prevention, public health communication

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INTRODUCTION

Stunting remains a significant public health challenge in Indonesia, particularly in rural areas like Nias Barat, where limited access to resources exacerbates the issue. The prevalence of stunting in Nias Barat was recorded at 37% in 2022, far surpassing the national average of 24.4%¹. This alarming statistic highlights the urgent need for comprehensive interventions to combat stunting, a condition that has long-term detrimental effects on children's physical growth, cognitive development, and overall quality of life². Despite numerous national initiatives aimed at reducing stunting rates, regions like Nias Barat face persistent challenges that hinder the effectiveness of these programs³. These challenges include inadequate access to healthcare services, cultural barriers to adopting healthier practices, and a lack of awareness among the local population about the importance of early nutrition and health interventions.

Efforts to disseminate information about stunting prevention in Nias Barat have predominantly relied on conventional health communication methods such as local workshops and community health programs⁴. While these approaches have achieved moderate success, their reach remains limited, particularly in remote areas with poor infrastructure and minimal access to information technology⁵. Surveys conducted in 2023 indicate that 35% of the population in Nias Barat lacks reliable internet access, limiting their exposure to digital health campaigns that are increasingly becoming the cornerstone of public health communication⁶. Furthermore, much of the information disseminated is presented in technical language that is not accessible to the general population, especially those with limited educational backgrounds. As a result, health

¹ Barat, BPS Nias. "Nias Barat Dalam Angka." *BPS*, 2023, 32

² Noviansyah et al., "Strategy for Accelerating Stunting Prevention through Religious Approach to Generate Qualified Generation."

³ Mulyaningsih et al., "Beyond Personal Factors: Multilevel Determinants of Childhood Stunting in Indonesia."

⁴ Barat, BPS Nias. "Nias Barat Dalam Angka." *BPS*, 2023, 32

⁵ Hengky and Rusman, "Stunting Prediction Model in Parepare City."

⁶ B Barat, BPS Nias. "Nias Barat Dalam Angka." *BPS*, 2023, 32



messages often fail to resonate with the target audience, diminishing the impact of well-intentioned programs.

The gap in research on effective communication strategies for stunting prevention in rural areas like Nias Barat is evident. While media literacy is recognized as a critical component in empowering communities to make informed health decisions, most studies focus on urban contexts where digital access and literacy levels are higher. The applicability of media literacy-based interventions in rural settings, particularly in regions with limited technological infrastructure, remains underexplored ⁷. Additionally, there is limited research on how traditional communication methods, such as community engagement and the role of local leaders, can be integrated with media literacy strategies to create more inclusive and effective health campaigns. This gap in the literature represents a missed opportunity to develop interventions tailored to the unique needs and challenges of rural communities.

The urgency of addressing stunting in Nias Barat extends beyond health concerns. Stunting has far-reaching social and economic implications, perpetuating cycles of poverty and reducing the potential for human capital development in affected regions. Children who suffer from stunting are more likely to face lifelong challenges, including reduced educational attainment and limited economic opportunities. In a region already grappling with socio-economic disparities, the high prevalence of stunting compounds existing inequalities and threatens the prospects of future generations. Addressing this issue is not merely a public health priority but a socio-economic imperative that demands innovative and context-specific solutions.

This study aims to fill the research gap by critically examining the systemic biases inherent in current media literacy approaches and their

⁷ Yulianti, *Kejadian Stunting Dan Faktor Asupan Mikronutrien Pada Remaja Putri Pondok Pesantren Di Yogyakarta*; Harahap et al., "Stunting Risk Factors For Children Aged 6-36 Months in The Region of Sambirejo Health Center, Langkat, North Sumatera"; Divania, "Pengaruh Makanan Fortifikasi Terhadap Kasus Stunting Anak"; Wati et al., "Penerapan Pola Pemberian Makanan Dalam Pencegahan Kejadian Stunting Pada Balita"; Suwarta et al., "Understanding the Role of the Environmental Arena and Community Social Structure in Stunting Prevention Education."



implications for rural health interventions. Unlike existing studies that focus predominantly on urban areas with advanced digital infrastructure, this research investigates how media literacy strategies can be adapted to rural contexts like Nias Barat. By integrating traditional communication methods with media literacy, the study seeks to identify a more holistic framework that leverages both modern and local approaches to health communication. This dual strategy not only addresses the limitations of relying solely on digital platforms but also ensures that health messages reach and resonate with the intended audience.

The novelty of this research lies in its emphasis on inclusivity and cultural relevance. By combining media literacy with traditional forms of community engagement, such as utilizing the influence of local leaders and incorporating culturally appropriate messaging, this study proposes a model that prioritizes accessibility and sustainability. This approach challenges the one-size-fits-all paradigm often seen in health communication strategies, advocating instead for interventions that are tailored to the socio-cultural and economic realities of specific communities. The study also highlights the potential of participatory action research in empowering communities to take an active role in designing and implementing health interventions, thereby fostering a sense of ownership and accountability.

The urgency of this research is further underscored by the critical need to address equity gaps in health communication strategies. Rural regions like Nias Barat often remain marginalized in national health initiatives, with limited resources allocated to address their unique challenges. This study not only sheds light on these disparities but also provides actionable insights into how health communication can be made more inclusive and effective. By focusing on a marginalized community, this research underscores the importance of equity in public health interventions and offers a replicable framework for other underserved regions.

Methodologically, this study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities in implementing media



literacy-based interventions in Nias Barat. In-depth interviews with community members, health workers, and local leaders will be complemented by surveys assessing media access and literacy levels. This approach ensures that the findings are grounded in the lived experiences of the community while also providing measurable indicators of intervention effectiveness. The participatory nature of the research further enhances its relevance, as community members are actively involved in co-creating solutions that are contextually appropriate and sustainable.

This study seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on health communication by challenging conventional approaches and advocating for more inclusive and context-sensitive strategies. By addressing the systemic biases in media literacy and leveraging the strengths of traditional communication methods, this research aims to create a framework that can significantly enhance the effectiveness of stunting prevention programs in Nias Barat and similar regions. The findings have the potential to inform policy and practice, ensuring that health communication strategies are not only impactful but also equitable and sustainable in the long term

THEORETICAL BASIS

Stunting, as a public health issue, is rooted in multifaceted determinants, including malnutrition, socio-economic conditions, and inadequate healthcare⁸. The theoretical foundation for this study draws on frameworks that address health communication, media literacy, and community-based interventions. At its core, the use of media literacy in health campaigns is guided by the Health Belief Model (HBM), which posits that individuals' health behaviors are influenced by their perceptions of susceptibility, severity, benefits, and barriers. Media literacy enables individuals to critically assess health information, aligning with the HBM's focus on empowering informed decision-making⁹.

⁸ Hakeem, "Stunting Variations Among Countries."

⁹ Getahun et al., "Prevalence and Correlates of Stunting and Thinness among Adolescent Students in Lideta Subcity, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: A Cross-Sectional Study."



Media literacy theory emphasizes the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media content ¹⁰. In the context of health communication, media literacy equips individuals with skills to discern credible health information, identify misinformation, and engage with health messages effectively¹¹. This theory is particularly relevant in addressing stunting, as it supports individuals in navigating complex health narratives and adopting evidence-based practices. By fostering critical thinking, media literacy enhances the capacity of communities to act on health-related information, especially in regions like Nias Barat, where access to traditional healthcare infrastructure is limited.

Community-based approaches to health promotion also underpin this research. The Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) framework emphasizes collaboration with local communities in designing, implementing, and evaluating health interventions ¹². CBPR aligns with the principles of empowerment and sustainability, recognizing that community engagement is essential for addressing culturally specific barriers to health. This framework is particularly pertinent in rural settings, where community networks and local leaders play a critical role in shaping health behaviors and disseminating information ¹³. The integration of media literacy into community-based health interventions addresses gaps in existing stunting prevention programs. Traditional health campaigns often fail to consider the cultural and social contexts of target populations, leading to limited impact. By combining media literacy with community engagement, this study aims to create a more inclusive framework that leverages both digital and traditional communication channels. The Diffusion of Innovations Theory further supports this integration by explaining how new ideas and behaviors spread within a community,

¹⁰ WHO, "ON SETTING AND IMPLEMENTING A STUNTING REDUCTION AGENDA Action Points for Country Programme Implementers."

¹¹ Samosir, Radjiman, and Aninditya, "Food Consumption Diversity and Nutritional Status among Children Aged 6-23 Months in Indonesia: The Analysis of the Results of the 2018 Basic Health Research."

¹² Ledwith and Springett, "Participatory Practice: Community-Based Action for Transformative Change."

¹³ Duke, "Community-Based Participatory Research."



emphasizing the importance of opinion leaders and social networks in facilitating change.

Systemic biases in media access and representation are critical to understanding the limitations of current health communication strategies. The Critical Media Literacy perspective highlights how media systems often marginalize underserved populations, such as rural communities, by failing to provide accessible and culturally relevant content. This study applies a critical lens to evaluate how these biases impact the effectiveness of media-based health interventions in Nias Barat, advocating for a more equitable approach that incorporates local knowledge and traditional communication methods. Lastly, the Social Ecological Model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the interplay between individual, interpersonal, community, and societal factors in shaping health outcomes. By situating stunting within this multi-layered context, the model underscores the importance of addressing systemic and structural determinants alongside individual behaviors. This approach reinforces the need for interventions that integrate media literacy with community-based strategies, ensuring that solutions are both context-sensitive and sustainable. Together, these theoretical perspectives inform the study's innovative approach to stunting prevention in Nias Barat.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study utilizes a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach to examine and address the challenges of stunting prevention in Nias Barat through media literacy and community engagement¹⁴. CBPR emphasizes collaboration with community members as equal partners in the research process, ensuring that the study is rooted in the local context and responsive to the specific needs of the population¹⁵. In this framework, local leaders, healthcare workers, and residents are actively involved in identifying problems, designing

¹⁴ Ige, "School-Based Cybersecurity Education Programme for Schoolchildren in South Africa! A Timely Call from Bloemfontein."

¹⁵ Leavy, *Research Design: Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed Methods, Arts-Based, and Community-Based Participatory Research Approaches*.



interventions, and evaluating outcomes, fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment within the community.

The research begins with a needs assessment, conducted through community meetings and focus group discussions (FGDs) to understand existing perceptions, practices, and barriers related to stunting prevention ¹⁶. These discussions also explore the community's familiarity with media and their access to information channels. Insights gathered from these sessions inform the development of culturally relevant intervention strategies that integrate media literacy and traditional communication methods, such as utilizing the influence of local leaders and leveraging local gatherings for information dissemination.

A key component of the CBPR approach in this study is the co-creation of solutions with the community. This involves workshops where community members, including parents, teachers, and healthcare workers, collaboratively design health communication materials and strategies. These workshops are structured to incorporate both traditional and digital communication channels, ensuring inclusivity for those with limited access to digital media. The process also allows the research team to address systemic biases in existing health interventions by tailoring messages to the socio-cultural realities of Nias Barat.

Throughout the study, participatory evaluation methods are employed to measure the effectiveness of the interventions. Community members play an active role in gathering feedback, assessing the impact of health messages, and suggesting refinements. This iterative process ensures that the interventions remain adaptive and responsive to emerging challenges. By grounding the research in the CBPR framework, the study not only seeks to address the issue of stunting but also aims to strengthen the community's capacity for collective action and resilience in tackling other public health challenges. This approach underscores the importance of building sustainable and context-sensitive solutions through genuine collaboration with the affected population.

¹⁶ Mitchell and Lange, "Community-Based Participatory Video and Social Action."
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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Understanding Media Literacy in Rural Communities

Media literacy, defined as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media content, plays a pivotal role in addressing public health challenges such as stunting. Increasing digitization has made health information widely available but often inconsistent, requiring critical assessment skills to navigate effectively. Public health campaigns targeting underserved communities benefit significantly from media literacy, bridging the gap between available information and its practical application. Empowering individuals to discern credible sources ensures health decisions related to nutrition, healthcare, and preventive practices are based on accurate knowledge.



Figure 1. Understanding Media Literacy in Rural Communities

Rural communities like Nias Barat face compounded challenges due to infrastructural limitations and entrenched socio-economic barriers. Traditional communication methods dominate in these regions, as digital infrastructure remains inadequate. Low internet penetration and the prohibitive cost of digital access marginalize many households, reducing exposure to online health campaigns. Media literacy assumes heightened importance, addressing these disparities by enabling individuals to critically evaluate information through accessible formats and localized messaging.

Empowering individuals through media literacy transforms approaches to stunting prevention. Families gain tools to identify accurate health



information, understand its relevance, and apply it effectively. Nutrient-rich diets, early health interventions, and debunking myths surrounding nutrition become accessible practices. Enhanced community awareness fosters a shift toward prioritizing child health, creating a ripple effect that influences broader health behaviors. Collective empowerment through informed decision-making leads to long-term cultural change and improved public health outcomes.

Media literacy remains underdeveloped in regions like Nias Barat due to limited educational initiatives addressing critical media evaluation. Most programs focus on basic literacy skills, neglecting the complexities of media engagement. A lack of health communication materials tailored to local languages and cultural contexts widens the gap further, leaving communities vulnerable to misinformation. Addressing this deficiency demands targeted efforts to incorporate media literacy into accessible and culturally relevant frameworks.

Innovative approaches integrating media literacy into public health interventions offer sustainable solutions. Combining traditional communication channels with digital tools expands outreach and impact. Local leaders and community gatherings provide platforms for disseminating health messages while introducing foundational media literacy concepts. Simplified digital tools, such as SMS-based health alerts, complement these methods, bridging the digital divide incrementally. Strengthening media literacy builds community capacity for addressing public health challenges, fostering resilience and sustainability in stunting prevention efforts.

Challenges of Implementing Media Literacy in Nias Barat

Despite its potential, the implementation of media literacy in Nias Barat encounters numerous challenges that significantly limit its effectiveness. Internet penetration in the region remains among the lowest in Indonesia, with 35% of households lacking access to any digital platforms. This stark digital divide hampers the dissemination of health information, as many public health campaigns increasingly rely on digital media for outreach. Limited infrastructure, including unstable electricity supply and inadequate

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telecommunications networks, exacerbates these issues, making it difficult for rural communities to engage with online platforms or benefit from digital resources designed to enhance media literacy and public health awareness.

The use of technical language in existing health campaigns further alienates a significant portion of the community, particularly those with low literacy levels. Many health messages are crafted in a way that assumes a baseline level of education and familiarity with medical terminology, which is often absent in rural populations. As a result, crucial information about stunting prevention fails to resonate with the target audience, leading to misinterpretations or complete disengagement. This disconnect highlights a critical need for health communication materials that prioritize simplicity, clarity, and accessibility, ensuring that information can be understood and applied by diverse audiences regardless of their educational background.

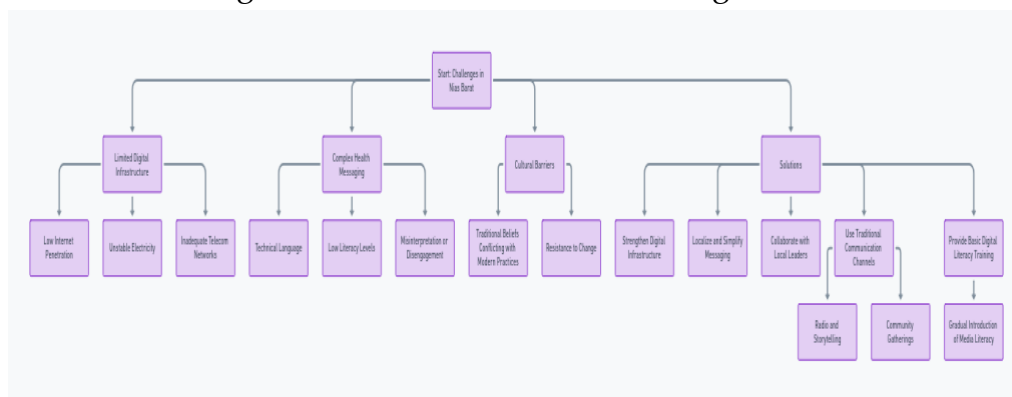


Figure 2. Challenges of Implementing Media Literacy in Nias Barat

Cultural dynamics also play a substantial role in limiting the adoption of media literacy and health practices in Nias Barat. Traditional beliefs about health, nutrition, and child-rearing often conflict with modern medical knowledge, creating resistance to change. For instance, some local practices prioritize specific foods or remedies that lack nutritional value while dismissing scientifically proven approaches to addressing malnutrition. These entrenched cultural norms require careful navigation, as outright dismissal of traditional beliefs risks alienating the community further. Instead, integrating culturally



sensitive strategies that respect local traditions while introducing evidence-based practices can help bridge this gap.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that combines digital education with culturally relevant communication strategies. Strengthening digital infrastructure is a critical starting point, ensuring that communities have the technological tools to access media and health information. Parallel to this, public health campaigns must be redesigned to include localized and simplified messaging that aligns with the cultural and linguistic contexts of Nias Barat. Collaborating with local leaders and influencers who hold sway in the community can enhance the credibility and acceptance of these messages, fostering trust and engagement among the population.

A comprehensive strategy must also incorporate traditional communication channels alongside digital methods to ensure inclusivity. Community gatherings, local storytelling traditions, and radio broadcasts provide alternative platforms for disseminating health information in areas with limited digital access. Simultaneously, basic digital literacy training can gradually familiarize residents with online tools, preparing them to engage with more advanced media literacy initiatives over time. By adopting this integrated approach, media literacy efforts in Nias Barat can overcome existing obstacles, creating a sustainable framework for addressing public health challenges such as stunting while empowering communities to access and utilize critical health information effectively.

Integrating Traditional Communication with Media Literacy

Traditional communication channels such as local leaders, community meetings, and word-of-mouth hold a central place in Nias Barat's information ecosystem, serving as trusted conduits for disseminating knowledge. These channels are deeply embedded in the cultural and social fabric of the community, making them invaluable for delivering health messages in ways that resonate with local norms and practices. The reliance on interpersonal communication, facilitated by respected figures like local leaders, ensures that information is not only shared but also accepted as credible and relevant. This trust-based approach

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is particularly crucial in regions where formal education levels are low, and skepticism toward external sources of information may prevail.

Integrating these traditional channels with media literacy initiatives can amplify the effectiveness of health campaigns, particularly in addressing complex issues like stunting prevention. Local leaders, who are often viewed as custodians of community knowledge, can act as intermediaries, translating technical health information into language and concepts that align with the community's cultural understanding. By positioning these leaders as champions of media literacy, campaigns can benefit from their authority and influence, ensuring broader acceptance and engagement. Their involvement can also help mitigate resistance to change by framing new health practices as extensions or enhancements of existing traditions rather than as replacements.

Community meetings provide a unique opportunity for interactive and participatory learning, offering a platform for media literacy education in a culturally appropriate setting. These gatherings, already established as venues for discussing communal issues, can be adapted to introduce concepts of critical media evaluation and stunting prevention. By incorporating visual aids, storytelling, and practical demonstrations, these sessions can make complex ideas more accessible and engaging. For example, activities like analyzing health advertisements or role-playing scenarios about identifying credible information can help participants develop practical media literacy skills while reinforcing the importance of stunting prevention.

Word-of-mouth, as a highly trusted and organic form of communication, further reinforces the dissemination of health information within the community. Messages shared by neighbors, friends, and family members carry a level of personal endorsement that can significantly enhance their impact. Media literacy initiatives can leverage this network by equipping key individuals with accurate information and skills to share with their peers. This grassroots approach not only extends the reach of health campaigns but also ensures that the information is continually reinforced through repeated and informal interactions. By combining these traditional channels with structured media literacy efforts, a more inclusive

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and culturally resonant strategy for public health communication can be developed, fostering sustainable behavioral change and improved health outcomes in Nias Barat

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight the critical role of media literacy in addressing systemic biases that hinder the effectiveness of stunting prevention efforts in rural regions like Nias Barat. Systemic barriers, including limited digital access, the use of technical language in health campaigns, and cultural resistance, significantly constrain the dissemination and adoption of health information. Media literacy emerges as a transformative tool to bridge these gaps by empowering communities with the skills to critically evaluate and utilize information, fostering informed decision-making in health practices. Integrating media literacy into public health interventions offers a pathway to more inclusive and effective solutions tailored to the unique socio-cultural contexts of underserved regions.

The study underscores the importance of incorporating traditional communication methods, such as community meetings, local leaders, and storytelling, alongside digital platforms to ensure greater inclusivity and cultural resonance. By leveraging these traditional channels, public health messages can be adapted to align with local values and practices, enhancing their acceptance and impact. Furthermore, the participatory action research approach adopted in this study has demonstrated the potential of community involvement in co-creating health communication strategies, ensuring that interventions are not only contextually relevant but also sustainable over time.

Addressing systemic biases in media literacy requires a holistic approach that combines capacity building, infrastructure development, and culturally sensitive messaging. The study's findings indicate that tailored interventions, which integrate traditional and digital communication, significantly improve community engagement and health outcomes. For example, equipping local leaders with media literacy skills allows them to serve as mediators, effectively translating health messages into accessible and relatable

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formats. This approach not only enhances the reach of stunting prevention campaigns but also builds long-term community resilience in addressing public health challenges.

Ultimately, this study contributes to the broader discourse on equitable health communication by presenting a replicable framework that addresses the unique challenges faced by rural and underserved communities. The integration of media literacy with traditional communication methods offers a scalable model for improving health outcomes, particularly in addressing complex issues such as stunting. Policymakers, practitioners, and researchers are encouraged to adopt and adapt this model to ensure that public health strategies are both impactful and equitable, fostering sustainable development in marginalized regions like Nias Barat.

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