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THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY AS AN INTERVENTION AGENT IN STUNTING PREVENTION PROGRAM: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Stunting is a chronic nutritional issue that hinders child development and reduces the quality of human resources. This study aims to explore the role of families, particularly parents, as key agents in preventing stunting through education and empowerment. A systematic literature review was conducted using empirical and theoretical studies published between 2020–2025. Sources were obtained from scientific journals focusing on family education, parental empowerment, interpersonal communication, and family-based intervention models. Thematic analysis was employed to identify key patterns, challenges, and outcomes of family-centered interventions. Findings indicate that continuous education and parental empowerment enhance family participation in child health programs such as Posyandu and supplementary feeding. While maternal knowledge is essential, consistent practice and environmental support are critical success factors. Interventions based on Family Centered Nursing and interpersonal communication have proven effective in increasing family engagement. Furthermore, early detection education and improved maternal health literacy significantly reduce stunting. Collaborative, multisectoral approaches strengthen families as the central agents in stunting prevention.

Keywords: *family, intervention agents, stunting prevention, nutrition education, parent empowerment*

Introduction

Stunting remains a serious public health problem in Indonesia, especially in areas with high levels of poverty and social inequality (Hidayati et al., 2022; Kustanto et al., 2025; Nursyifa, 2025). Although efforts to eradicate stunting continue to be made, its prevalence is still high, thus having a negative impact on

children's cognitive and physical development (Susanto et al., 2024). This occurs not only due to lack of access to nutritious food, but also because of the suboptimal role of the family in supporting children's growth and development from an early age. The family, as the smallest unit in society, has an important responsibility in ensuring children's



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nutritional intake, parenting patterns, and environmental cleanliness (Bunyamin & Syahrier, 2024), but this role is often neglected or has not been optimally utilized. Based on data from the 2022 Indonesian Nutritional Status Survey (SSGI), the prevalence of stunting in Indonesia reached 21.6% (Rudatiningtyas et al., 2024), and one of the main determinants is low nutritional literacy and parenting practices in the family. This finding is reinforced by the UNICEF report (2021) which states that family-based interventions have proven to be more effective in reducing stunting rates when compared to medical approaches alone (Basrowi et al., 2025; Rua & Nahak, 2024). Therefore, strengthening the role of the family as an intervention agent is not only important but also strategic in national efforts to reduce stunting rates sustainably.

The role of the family has been widely identified as a key factor in the success of stunting prevention interventions (Astuti et al., 2025; Fajar et al., 2024; Harahap et al., 2024; Yusriadi et al., 2024). This is because the family is the first and foremost environment that determines nutritional intake, clean living behavior, and child care patterns during the first 1,000 days of life (Abanto et al., 2022; Indrio et al., 2022). Several studies have shown that active involvement of parents, especially mothers, in nutrition education, sanitation, and regular monitoring of child growth can significantly reduce the risk of stunting. For example, research by (Ringdal, 2024) emphasized that interventions involving increasing parental capacity in

nutrition-sensitive parenting contributed greatly to improving children's nutritional status. Another study by (Suhardin et al., 2024) also stated that family-based nutrition intervention programs in several developing countries showed positive results in significantly reducing the prevalence of stunting. Therefore, an approach that places the family at the center of intervention is not only theoretically relevant, but has also been empirically proven to be effective in breaking the intergenerational stunting cycle.

Although there have been many studies discussing the causes of stunting, most of them still focus on medical, economic, and access to health services aspects, while studies that deeply review the strategic role of families as the main agents of intervention are still limited. This study offers novelty by presenting a literature synthesis that emphasizes families not only as objects receiving education, but also as active subjects in initiating behavioral changes that prevent stunting.

Stunting remains a major public health concern in Indonesia, particularly in regions with persistent poverty and socioeconomic disparities. Despite national efforts to reduce its prevalence, the 2022 Indonesian Nutritional Status Survey (SSGI) recorded a stunting rate of 21.6%, which continues to pose significant threats to children's cognitive and physical development. While nutritional intake and access to healthcare are commonly addressed, the pivotal role of the family in supporting early childhood growth is often overlooked or underutilized. As the



primary social unit, the family holds direct influence over child nutrition, hygiene practices, parenting, and early stimulation, all of which are critical during the first 1,000 days of life.

Emerging evidence highlights that family-based interventions—those involving parents as active participants in health promotion—are more sustainable and culturally adaptive compared to medical-centric approaches. However, current literature still lacks comprehensive synthesis focusing specifically on how families function as *agents of change* in stunting prevention. Most studies tend to emphasize medical interventions or economic determinants, leaving a gap in understanding the mechanisms, barriers, and enablers of effective family engagement.

This study addresses that gap by systematically reviewing literature from 2020–2025 to explore the role of the family as an intervention agent in stunting prevention. The aim is to identify the most effective forms of family involvement, analyze the factors influencing family participation, and generate evidence-based recommendations to strengthen family-centered strategies. The novelty of this research lies in repositioning the family not merely as a target of intervention but as a proactive partner capable of initiating behavioral change and sustaining child health improvements. Through this review, the study seeks to contribute to the development of more holistic, contextual, and sustainable stunting prevention programs.

Through a literature review approach, this study identifies dimensions

of the family's role including nutrition education, parenting patterns, environmental sanitation, and communication with health workers as integral factors in the effectiveness of stunting intervention programs. This study aims to review and analyze relevant scientific findings regarding the role of families as agents of intervention in stunting prevention programs. Specifically, this study aims to identify the most effective forms of family involvement, supporting and inhibiting factors for family participation, and to develop evidence-based recommendations to strengthen family-based stunting intervention policies and programs. Thus, the results of this study are expected to be a reference in designing a more contextual, holistic, and sustainable intervention approach.

The role of the family as an intervention agent is believed to have a significant influence on the success of the stunting prevention program in children. This assumption is based on the central role of the family in meeting children's basic needs, starting from nutritional fulfillment, environmental cleanliness, to parenting that supports optimal growth and development (Maryuni, 2024). Theoretically, the concept of "family-centered intervention" places the family not only as a beneficiary, but as the main actor in changing children's health behavior. Based on these findings, the hypothesis proposed in this study is: The higher the family involvement in the stunting prevention intervention program, the lower the prevalence of stunting in early childhood. By testing and examining



this hypothesis through a literature review, the study is expected to strengthen the theoretical and practical foundations in designing family-based stunting prevention strategies.

Methods

The research method used in this study is a literature review. The articles reviewed were obtained from electronic-based data sources such as PubMed, Google Scholar, and ProQuest, with publication year limits between 2020 and 2025. A literature search was conducted to identify relevant studies on family involvement in stunting prevention programs. The search strategy followed the PICOS framework, which includes Population (P), Intervention (I), Comparison (C), Outcome (O), and Study (S). In this study, the population (P) included families with children aged 0–59 months, the intervention (I) focused on the role of families in stunting prevention intervention programs, the comparison (C) involved families with low involvement or no intervention, outcomes (O) included a decrease in stunting prevalence or an increase in children's nutritional status, and study designs (S) included observational studies such as cross-sectional, cohort, and case-control.

Identification of relevant studies was carried out using the Boolean Operator technique to organize keywords effectively. Keywords used in the search process include: “family intervention” AND “stunting prevention” AND “child nutrition” AND “growth faltering” OR “parental involvement” OR “nutrition education”. Study selection is based on inclusion and exclusion criteria set

according to the PICOS framework. Inclusion criteria include: (1) articles published in the last 5 years (2020–2025), (2) written in English or Indonesian, (3) available in full-text format, (4) published in reputable journals, and (5) freely accessible or open-access. Meanwhile, studies that include literature reviews, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, or do not specifically discuss the role of the family in preventing stunting are excluded from this study.

The data collection and screening process was carried out using the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) method to ensure the quality and relevance of the selected studies. From the initial search using these keywords, 530 articles were identified. After being screened using inclusion and exclusion criteria, 85 articles were excluded because they did not match the year of publication, were not available in full-text format, or did not focus on the theme of family and stunting. Of the remaining 445 articles, screening was carried out based on abstracts and suitability to the theme, resulting in 40 articles that were reviewed thoroughly. After the full-text selection stage, only 10 articles met the final criteria for analysis in this literature review. The article selection process can be seen in Figure 1 below.

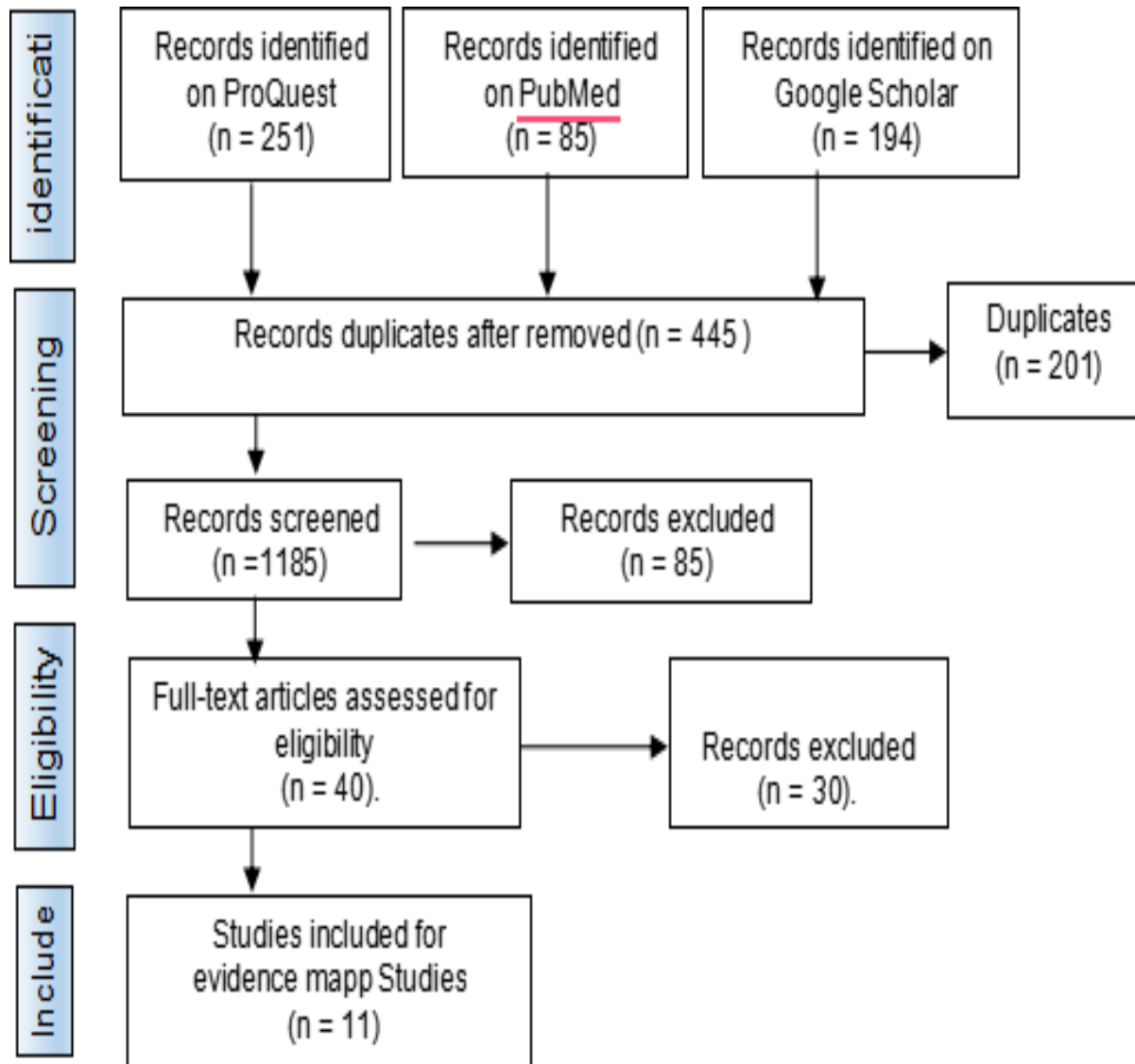


Figure 1. Diagram PRISMA



Results

Stunting is a chronic condition due to growth failure in children, characterized by a height shorter than the standard for their age (Wulandari et al., 2024). In an effort to overcome stunting, various interventions have been developed, one of which is by involving the family as the main agent of change. The family, especially mothers, has a strategic role in determining nutritional intake, parenting patterns, and access to health services for children. Family functions that can be optimized in preventing stunting include economic, health, reproductive, and socialization functions (Wariin et al., 2024). Recent literature shows that a

family-based approach in stunting prevention programs is considered effective in increasing family knowledge, attitudes, and involvement in this issue. Various studies also emphasize the importance of interpersonal communication, maternal education, community programs, and multi-sector collaboration in efforts to prevent stunting. To further understand the forms and results of family interventions in preventing stunting, the following is a literature review table that summarizes five research articles related to the role of the family as an intervention agent in stunting prevention program.

Tabel 1. Tabel literature review

Article Title	Author (Year)	Research Objective	Method	Population and Sample	Conclusion Research Results
<i>Family Experiences in Caring for Children with Stunting in Timor, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia: A Family-Centered Nursing Approach</i>	(Suhardin et al., 2024)	Exploring family experiences in caring for stunted children in Timor, NTT.	Qualitative phenomenological	9 families with purposive sampling	Family recognize stunting but many consider it a genetic factor. After education from health workers, families began to be active in Posyandu and supplementary food programs. Further education



and father involvement are needed, as well as a multisectoral approach.

<i>Empowerment of Parents with Stunting Children</i>	(Indana h et al., 2022)	Reviewing parent empowerment interventions in improving the nutritional status of stunted children.	Systematic Review (PRISMA)	8 articles from international databases	Parent empowerment has been shown to be positively correlated with children's nutritional status. Through education, mentoring, and strengthening decision-making, parents can be more effective in caring for stunted children.
<i>The Role of Parents in Providing Nutritious Food to Prevent Stunting in Early Childhood</i>	(Yanti & Nofianti, 2025)	Analyzing the role of parents in providing nutritious food for stunting prevention.	Literature review	Relevant scientific articles (number not mentioned)	Parents, especially mothers, are very important as educators and facilitators of nutrition. A balanced diet and participation in health



						programs such as integrated health posts (posyandu) have a significant impact on reducing stunting rates.
<i>Stunting Incidence Based on Socio Demographic Determinants, Family Food Security, and Maternal Digital Parenting</i>	(Alwi et al., 2024)	Analyzing the relationship between social determinants, family food security, and digital parenting with the incidence of stunting.	Quantitative, cross-sectional	341 mothers of toddlers (total sampling)	No significant relationship was found between knowledge, attitudes, maternal actions, family support, food security, and digital parenting with the incidence of stunting.	
<i>Family Empowerment Model in Stunting Prevention Based on Family Centered Nursing</i>	(Januari et al., 2020)	Determining a family empowerment model based on Family Centered Nursing for stunting prevention	Explanatory and descriptive survey (cross-sectional)	. 280 families (cluster sampling)	External factors through family empowerment have the most influence on stunting prevention. The importance of increasing	



						the role of fathers and family nursing-based intervention models is emphasized.
<i>Prevention of Stunting Problems in the Family Through the Approach Personal Communication</i>	(Hidayat et al., 2023)	Analyzing the effectiveness of interpersonal communication in improving family knowledge and attitudes to prevent stunting	Quasi experiment (one group design)	120 families in Sungai Tuan Ilir Village, Astambul	Health Center working area	Interpersonal communication intervention using flipcharts is effective in improving family knowledge and attitudes towards preventing stunting (P < 0.001)
<i>Providing Education for a Mother in Stunting Prevention: A Collaborative Study through Action Research</i>	(Dolifah et al., 2021)	Improving mothers' understanding of stunting prevention through the I-CARE education model in the Kampung KB program	Action research	100 mothers of toddlers in Kampung KB, Sumedang, West Java	The I-CARE model is effective in increasing mothers' insight and understanding of stunting prevention through reflective and	



						solution-oriented steps
<i>Early Stunting Detection Education as an Effort to Increase Mother's Knowledge about Stunting Prevention</i>	(Sari, 2021)	Analyzing the effect of early detection education on mothers' knowledge about stunting prevention	Pre-experimental (one group pre-post test)	40 mothers of toddlers aged 0-24 months (cases and controls)	Early detection education on stunting significantly increased mothers' knowledge, especially in the group of mothers with stunted children (P < 0.05)	
<i>Preventing Stunting in Rural Indonesia: A Community-Based Perspective</i>	(Yusriadi et al., 2024)	Exploring the driving and inhibiting factors of family involvement in community-based stunting prevention programs	Observations, FGDs, and in-depth interviews	10 observation s, 45 FGDs, 23 interviews (household s, village officials, health workers)	The program has succeeded in improving family health, but challenges in the form of inappropriate social behavior and low understanding of nutrition remain obstacles	
<i>The Role of the Population, Family Planning and Family Development Program (KKBP) in Reducing Stunting Prevalence</i>	(Mauluddin, 2020)	Explaining the importance of a multi-sector approach, including the KKBPK program, in reducing the	Literature study and secondary data analysis	WHO data, Riskesdas, and national programs	Stunting prevention is effective when involving multi-sector interventions, especially a family-based approach in regulating birth spacing and family development.	



Based on the literature review table above, it shows that the role of the family, especially parents, has been shown to have a significant influence in preventing stunting. Suhardin's (2024) research shows that families in Timor, East Nusa Tenggara, although they have recognized the symptoms of stunting, tend to consider it a hereditary factor. However, after receiving education from health workers, there was an increase in family participation in Posyandu activities and supplementary food programs. This emphasizes the importance of continuous educational interventions as well as the involvement of fathers and a cross-sectoral approach. In line with that, Indanah (2022) in her systematic review concluded that empowering parents through education and strengthening decision-making has a positive impact on children's nutritional status. This indicates that strengthening the capacity of parents as agents of change is an essential strategy in overcoming stunting as a whole.

Furthermore, a literature review by Yanti (2025) and quantitative research by Alwi (2024) provide complementary views. Yanti highlighted that parents, especially mothers, have a vital role as child nutrition educators, with a balanced food provision approach and participation in community health services. On the other hand, Alwi found that there was no significant relationship between maternal knowledge and stunting incidence, indicating that knowledge alone is not enough without environmental support and

sustainable practices. These two studies emphasize that stunting prevention efforts require synergy between education, implementation of healthy behaviors, and strengthening social support in the family environment.

Several studies also underline the urgency of a family-focused intervention model. Januarti (2020) developed a family empowerment model based on Family Centered Nursing which has proven effective in encouraging family involvement in stunting prevention programs. This model emphasizes the role of fathers and the need for integration between nursing aspects and social empowerment practices. Meanwhile, the interpersonal communication approach has also proven significant as shown by Hidayat (2020) through a flipchart-based intervention. Direct communication in the household can increase the family's understanding and positive attitude towards stunting prevention, with statistically significant results ($P < 0.001$).

Educational interventions for mothers are also a focus in several studies. Dolifah (2021) through an action research approach with the I-CARE model succeeded in increasing mothers' understanding of stunting through a process of reflection and experience-based solutions. Likewise, research by Sari (2021) showed that early detection education for stunting was able to significantly increase mothers' knowledge, especially in groups whose children were already indicated as stunting ($P < 0.05$).



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This finding shows that strengthening maternal health literacy through targeted programs plays a major role in reducing stunting rates at an early age.

Finally, the importance of synergy between families and communities in handling stunting was emphasized in Yusriadi's study (2024). Through an observational approach and group discussions, it was found that community-based programs succeeded in increasing family health awareness, although social challenges and low nutritional understanding remained obstacles. Mauluddin's study (2020) also highlighted the effectiveness of a multi-sector approach through the KKBPK program in reducing the prevalence of stunting. Birth spacing, strengthening family resilience, and building healthy families are crucial factors. These two studies emphasize that families are not only targets, but also the center of all sustainable and holistic strategic stunting prevention interventions.

Discussion

The findings of this literature review reinforce the importance of the family—particularly parents—as central agents in preventing stunting among children. One of the most consistent themes across the reviewed studies is the critical role of education in increasing parental knowledge about nutrition, hygiene, and child care. Educational interventions targeting mothers have shown promising results in raising awareness and improving understanding of stunting and its consequences. For instance, Suhardin et al. (2024)

demonstrated that health education encouraged families to participate more actively in Posyandu and supplementary feeding programs. Similarly, Sari (2021) found that structured education on early stunting detection significantly increased maternal knowledge. However, Alwi et al. (2024) observed no significant correlation between maternal knowledge alone and stunting reduction, implying that knowledge is a necessary but insufficient condition. This highlights the need to complement educational efforts with consistent behavioral reinforcement and environmental support to translate knowledge into sustained healthy practices.

Beyond education, the empowerment of families—especially through structured, family-centered models—emerges as a key success factor in stunting prevention. The Family Centered Nursing (FCN) model introduced by Januarti et al. (2020) exemplifies how engaging both mothers and fathers as caregivers strengthens household capacity in child nutrition and health practices. Similarly, Indanah et al. (2022) emphasized that when parents are empowered to make decisions and take active roles in their children's care—through mentoring, education, and support networks—the impact on children's nutritional status is significantly improved. These empowerment strategies demonstrate that effective stunting prevention cannot rely solely on top-down health messaging but must foster a sense of agency and ownership within families. This shift in approach—from viewing families as passive recipients to active



partners—is essential for creating sustainable behavioral change.

Nevertheless, family-based interventions face several barriers that must be acknowledged. Cultural perceptions, such as the belief that stunting is hereditary, remain widespread in many communities, leading to fatalistic attitudes and resistance to change. Suhardin et al. (2024) noted that in certain areas, families only began to take action after targeted education by health workers. Additionally, limited literacy, gender dynamics that exclude fathers, and sporadic engagement by health professionals further reduce the effectiveness of interventions. To address these challenges, context-sensitive approaches like the I-CARE model (Dolifah et al., 2021), which emphasizes reflective, dialogic education tailored to mothers' experiences, have proven effective. These models suggest that intervention must go beyond information delivery and instead promote experiential learning and problem-solving that align with local social norms and daily realities. Another crucial factor that influences the success of stunting prevention is the method of communication used to deliver health messages. Hidayat et al. (2023) found that interpersonal communication using flipcharts was effective in improving family knowledge and attitudes toward stunting prevention, with statistically significant results. This reinforces the idea that face-to-face, two-way communication builds trust and understanding more effectively than mass or written media alone. Personalized education, supported by visual aids and grounded in empathetic interaction, ensures that families not only

receive information but also internalize and apply it in daily parenting behavior. Thus, communication style and delivery are as important as the message itself in building a receptive and responsive household environment.

Furthermore, the success of family-based interventions is significantly enhanced when integrated within broader community and government systems. Multisectoral collaboration has been widely recognized as an effective strategy to sustain and scale up stunting prevention. Programs like KKBPK (Mauluddin, 2020), which combine family planning, maternal health, and early childhood development, demonstrate that interventions are more impactful when supported by policy, infrastructure, and cross-sector resources. Yusriadi et al. (2024) provided evidence that community-based efforts—especially those that actively involve families in program design and implementation—lead to improved awareness and resilience. However, these efforts must also contend with persistent social challenges, such as cultural norms, economic constraints, and varying levels of health literacy, which require adaptive and inclusive policymaking.

In line with the aim of this study, the findings support the hypothesis that increased family involvement in stunting prevention interventions is associated with a reduction in stunting prevalence. This review contributes to the growing body of knowledge by synthesizing evidence that positions the family not just as a passive target of public health programs, but as a proactive and capable actor in promoting child health. The novelty of this study lies



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in its integrative approach—drawing from empirical, theoretical, and community-based perspectives—to present a comprehensive picture of what works, what challenges persist, and where future interventions should focus. Strengthening the capacity of families through education, empowerment, and collaborative support systems is not only theoretically sound but also practically necessary for achieving long-term reductions in stunting.

Conclusion

This literature review concludes that the family plays a vital and multidimensional role as an intervention agent in stunting prevention. Parents, particularly mothers, are central to meeting children's nutritional needs, promoting hygiene, and ensuring participation in child health programs. However, the success of family-based interventions is not solely determined by knowledge acquisition, but also by behavioral change, consistent practice, and environmental and social support. Empowerment models such as Family Centered Nursing and reflective communication strategies like the I-CARE model have proven effective in increasing parental involvement and improving child health outcomes. Furthermore, cross-sector collaboration—through programs that integrate family planning, community health services, and education—enhances the sustainability of stunting prevention efforts.

In line with the study's aim, the review supports the hypothesis that higher levels of family involvement are associated with lower rates of stunting in early childhood. Thus, intervention

strategies must reposition families not only as beneficiaries but as active partners in health promotion. Strengthening parental capacity, fostering two-way communication, and building supportive systems are critical to achieving holistic and sustainable reductions in stunting. Future programs and policies should prioritize family empowerment and cross-sectoral synergy to break the intergenerational cycle of stunting effectively.

Although this review highlights promising strategies for family-based stunting prevention, several gaps remain that warrant further investigation. Future research should explore the long-term effects of family empowerment programs using longitudinal and mixed-method approaches. Studies examining the role of fathers and extended family members—often underrepresented in existing literature—are needed to understand family dynamics more comprehensively. In addition, culturally sensitive intervention models for indigenous and rural communities must be developed and tested to ensure contextual relevance. The integration of digital tools, such as mobile health apps and digital parenting platforms, also presents a potential avenue to enhance outreach and engagement. Finally, implementation research focusing on the scalability and cost-effectiveness of family-centered interventions will be essential to inform national and local policy decisions.

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