

# The Contribution of Cultural System in Toodler Parenting by Mother (In the Context of Nutritional Status)

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## Abstract

Pecuk village is an area with a nutrition vulnerable environment, which is a region with a relatively low income, vulnerable food availability, and low level of education, most of the people only finish at elementary level, but have a relatively good nutritional status. Questions explored in this study are whether there is cultural system contribution and what elements of cultural systems supporting toddlers parenting by their mother which are related to nutritional status in Pecuk village.

This study is designed to have a qualitative approach with a focus on cultural system which is related to the mother's parenting of toddlers that influence the nutritional status. The strategy used is the field research, a case study in Pecuk village. Data are collected in the form of qualitative data and quantitative data, so that the instruments in this study are the author herself along with one member of the research team, questionnaires, food recall, and supporting instruments such as observations, interviews and focus group discussions.

The results shows that: 1) in the village of Pecuk, nutritional status of children becomes good because of the support of existing cultural system, 2) elements of cultural systems supporting toddlers parenting by their mother related to nutritional status are norms, values, and habits focusing on high value of children.

**Keywords:** social systems, nutritional status, parenting, toddler, mother.

## 1. Introduction

In the cycle of human life, there are times that are very vulnerable to nutritional status. Toddlers are the age group of rapid body growth, so they are nutrition vulnerable and easy to suffer from malnutrition. Improvment of children nutritional status is part of community nutritional status improvement.

Nutritional status improvement plays a fundamental role in human resource development. Lately the impact of nutritional status has been a concern in the prevention of disease, learning ability improvement, and productivity improvement (UNICEF, 1998; ACC / SCN / IFPRI, 2000). Research conducted by Ivanovic et al. (2008), reveals the impact of nutritional status in childhood and school years through further study monitored for twelve years on school-age children in Chile. Children with problems of nutritional status at infancy have a higher tendency to drop out of school or delay school to a higher level. It is associated with brain development, intelligence, and academic achievement. In other study, malnourished children are also more vulnerable to disease, have a higher mortality, and delayed growth compared to well-nourished children (Pelletier, 1994; World Bank, 1996 and 1997; Murray and Lopez, 1997).

Results of research related to nutrition, conducted by Horowitz (2000), Garces (2006), and Mitra (2007), shows that there are differences between racial, ethnic, traditional, and socio-economic conditions to the parenting or health treatment and care. Accordingly, the results of research Chung et al. (1997), shows that the dimensions and causes of food insecurity and malnutrition are often a very complex problem and a specific location. The problem can vary in each country or even at each location or group of different populations, in the same country. The study by Cantu (2008), which was carried on the traditional American-Mexico woman who lived in a low-income neighborhood, displays that the women teach the family about their concern for the family and family relationships which then gives the same pattern in its environment, including the pattern of health care and parenting. The research of Dunkley et al. (2001), reveals that there is food regulation or strict diet caused by the influence of multi socioculture which is existed in a particular sub-culture environment. Cultural system in this study is referred to as a complex of ideas, concepts, values, norms, rules, beliefs, habits, traditions, and myths (Koentjaraningrat, 1990).

Indonesia is made up of various races and cultures, having a diverse socioculture conditions. Socioculture which is a man to man relationship, is often influenced by myths, norms, values, beliefs, habits related to cultural patterns and the effect of a variety of accesses. They may include access to food, access to information and services as well as access to owned capital. These conditions raise a form of parenting that inflence nutritional status. Parenting or care is the behavior and practice of caregivers (mothers, blood brothers, father and child care service providers) to provide food, health care, stimulation, and encouragement which are important for healthy

child development (Engle and Lhotska, 1999). So diverse socioculture conditions will affect the different parenting and need attention related to the prevalence of malnutrition occurs.

In the developing countries of Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, the less nutrition status is one of the causes of child mortality. Prevalence of undernutrition and malnutrition is higher in urban areas / villages (Olack et al., 2011). Data obtained from Indonesia as lower-middle income country have a prevalence of undernutrition and malnutrition by 13% and 4.9% (Health Department of Indonesia, 2010). The number decreases compared to 2007 in the category of malnutrition (5.4%), but in the category of undernutrition remains the same.

More detail, based on the data of 2010 Basic Health Research conducted in Indonesia, Central Java is one of the provinces that still have Very Thin Nutritional Status Prevalence in Body Weight / Height (weight / height) above the national average. The Very Thin Nutritional Status Prevalence in Central Java province is 6.4%, while the average of Very Thin Nutritional Status Prevalence in Indonesia is 6.0%. As well as the Thin Nutritional Status Prevalence (7.8%) is still higher than the national average (7.3%). According to the results of this research as well, the tendency of very thin nutrition is higher in the group of respondents who live in villages than in urban areas (Ministry of Health, 2010).

On the other hand, research conducted by Handayani (2008) shows that in Pecuk village which is nutrition vulnerable environment, i.e. regions with relatively low income, vulnerable food availability, and low level of education, which is mostly only up to elementary level, has a relatively good nutritional status. So that the problem of this research is to what extent the contribution of the cultural system will form parenting that can support the nutritional status of children. Questions explored in this study are whether there is cultural system contribution and what elements of cultural systems supporting toddlers parenting by their mother which are related to nutritional status in Pecuk village.

## 2. Method

This study takes a holistic understanding of the cultural system in forming toddlers parenting by their mother in favor of nutritional status, therefore this study used a qualitative approach. The strategy used was the case study field researches, the study area was Pecuk Village, Mijen Subdistrict, Demak Regency, Central Java.

The focus in this study was cultural systems related to mother's parenting on toddlers that affects nutritional status. Data collected in the form of qualitative data and quantitative data, so that the instrument in this study was the author herself along with one member of the research team, questionnaires, food recall, and supporting instruments such as observation, interviews and focus group discussions.

Initial informants, consisting of village head, heads of public health center, midwife, toddlers, and Integrated Health Centre (Posyandu) cadre, were determined based on the following criteria: 1) The Head of Pecuk Village, Head of Mijen Public Health Center (Puskesmas) II, Pecuk Village Midwife, and IHC cadre are those who are still active or considered to know the state of the Pecuk Village, 2) As for the informants of toddler family have conditions: (1) Families who have toddlers aged 1 to 5 years, (2) Residing in the village Pecuk from the birth of toddler until the research took place, (3) The informants of toddler family can be Father, Mother, Grandmother, Grandfather, or maid / nanny.

Informant representing IHC cadre was Ms. Hasunah, who was determined along with the village midwife, considering: 1) She is an active cadre, 2) she is the secretary of the IHC, thus simplifying both data retrieval of documents and necessary field data, 3) she has time and is willing to help the research, 4) she resides on the main road so it is easy for communication access.

Toddler family informants were determined based on the recommendation of the Village Midwife and IHC cadre who knew the state of toddlers in their working area. The data related to age, nutritional status, and toddler environment, were referred from the data of IHC report book. The results were then verified in the field so that all toddler family informant requirements were met, and as the early stage then determined 5 toddler families. Toddler family informants consist of mother, grandmother and nanny.

Of the early stage informants consisting of 9 people, next informants were then determined by snowball sampling techniques which were considered to provide more complete data, so that the number of informants grew larger until no significant additional new information obtained. Final number of informants was 15 people, with the addition of the 4 families and 2 IHC cadres.

Data were analyzed using analytical models of Miles and Huberman (Basrowi, 2008), which includes the same three activities comprising data reduction, presentation (display) of data, and conclusion (verification).

## 3. Result

Cultural system is part of the culture which is in Bahasa more commonly called adat istiadat (customs). Culture form as a complex of ideas, concepts, values, norms, rules and so on. Many people ideas live together in a community, they give soul to the community. The ideas are not separated from each other, but always related,

into a system, which is called the cultural system. The function of the system is to set up and establish human actions and behavior (Koentjaraningrat 1990).

Based on the data obtained, not all elements of the cultural system in Pecuk village affected parenting that ultimately determined the nutritional status of children. Elements of cultural systems that influence nutritional status of children were:

### 2.2 Norm Contribution

Based on the data obtained in Pecuk Village, norms related to parenting which then affected the nutritional status of toddlers were norms that reflected mutual giving habits in families and communities, such as caring and watching the children around them, especially the young children (toddlers). As if they were also responsible for the development of the children around them. When the toddler's mother was at work, either working to seek additional income outside, or working on homework, such as washing clothes and cooking, usually toddlers who were capable of walking would play along with their peers in their own house or the neighbor's house. At this time, the neighbors around the toddlers would oversee the activities. For example, they would prohibit the toddlers to climb a bamboo fence or play in the gutter, and even invited them to play together inside the house so that it would be easier to watch. At the moment of toddlers weighing, distribution of vitamin A, immunization activities, or other events related to toddlers, the toddler mothers would remind each other. Even if the mother was unable to come, perhaps due to work, illness, or no grandparents and nanny to take the toddlers, the neighbors were willing to take them to the IHC. On observations it was often found a mother feeding her and the neighbor's children together at lunchtime or afternoon meal.

### 3.2 Value Contribution

Based on the data obtained, the values that existed in the village of Pecuk were shifted or can be said that the old values were replaced by the new values. As example:

- A change in the value of children. Initially, in most rural communities in Indonesia adheres to the motto "a lot of kids, a lot of fortune", so that it also affected the value of toddlers in the community, whether in relation to the positive or negative values. For example, having many children would be economically more profitable, because each child bring their own fortune. But today people say that a lot of kids will cause economic burden for the family. Changes in the values that exist in Pecuk village was influenced by the information, guidance, and explanations through the rationalization that they obtained from: (1) television, (2) the movement of people, whether temporary or permanent from outside the region, especially from the town / bigger village (migration), (3) people working out of the village and (4) the ease of transportation, (5) as well as the role of the local health authority. The existence of a high value in Pecuk village affected toddlers parenting which then affected their nutritional status. Based on interviews and observations, it can be concluded that the positive values of toddlers in Pecuk village can be grouped as follows:

- Emotionally, they were able to give happiness, cheer, and be a place to devote affection, as obtained from interviews with informants who said that, toddlers could be friends when the husband worked so that mothers would not feel alone. Toddlers, especially in the age of one year, were funny, may response a joke and became entertainment in difficult time, so if fathers worked out of the village, they would always want to hear the toddlers voice over the phone to reduce fatigue. Toddlers, especially those who were still a baby, were not able to walk, yet independent. They could be a place to devote affection, carried, sung favorite songs, hugged and kissed.

- From parents' personal development point of view, having a toddlers was a picture of the whole family which could be accepted in the community as well as to raise the parents' degree. Other toddlers mother stated that, a family was not complete without children. Besides, relatives, neighbors, or the neighborhood would always ask about children to those who have married. So if after marriage, someone had not had or did not have any children, they would feel ashamed or inferior.

- Economically, having a child could provide assistance in old age, such as giving attention and care. It is based on data obtained from toddlers' mother informants, who said that the children could help and care their parents when the parents were old and not able to work anymore. Children could give a lift (place to stay) when the parents were ill. Parents could stay and eat on their children.

- Toddlers could also create a harmonious family, where having them could strengthen marriages. Toddlers' mothers said that having children could bound relationship between husband and wife. The children could forbid the desire for action that could harm the family, such as having an affair or getting divorced.

Besides the positive values, there are also negative values of Toddlers in Pecuk village. They can be grouped as follows: (1) Emotionally, it can be concluded that toddlers were often annoying, making messes, and create a headache. (2) Economically, parents should provide much money for toddlers' snacks, daily meals, medicatin, and milk. (3) Toddlers may restrict the liberty of parents and be troublesome. Especially for working mothers, then nanny should be hired. Similarly, when toddlers were sick, mothers should arrange with their workplace to

be able to bring their babies for care or treatment. 4) Toddlers may also create tension in the relationship of husband and wife, especially with regard to the money that must be provided for the children.

Based on the data obtained from informants about the value of a toddler in the Pecuk village, it can be concluded that the toddlers' value in the family was high, so they were pampered with a variety of facilities. Families had a high concern for their babies, especially those related to providing toddlers' nutrition, namely the provision of food and medical care / treatment in toddlers.

- A change of yard usage. The yard was mostly used to raise chickens or ducks, which were up to 5 to 10 animals, they were not caged. This situation resulted in unhealthy environment. Sometimes manure was found not only outside but also inside the house. On the other hand, the livestock was a protein sources that was very useful for toddlers. Chickens or ducks that were kept are mostly for family needs, either for the eggs or meat. When the family run out of money, the chicken or the duck would be sold to buy rice or sometimes for toddlers medical expenses. Breeding was considered to have a higher value than growing vegetables in the yard. It caused the nutrition garden program from health institutions did not run well or less popular in the community.

- A change in the view of the work selection. The comparison of garden and rice field in Pecuk village was 1: 5, It showed that the rice field was very large, but the villagers were less interested in working on the land and handed it over to people from other villages. While they chose to work as laborers in Jepara or Kudus. They considered working as laborer is more favorable, could earn a better income and gained new experience or knowledge than just farming which has been done by their parents. The change in the work selection was the change in cultural values, although it was not free of economic concepts.

The number of villagers who worked outside the region including the toddlers' mothers, causes the toddlers care to be handed over to the family (grandmother or other relatives in the village), or hire a nanny. The others chose to entrust the toddlers to neighbors. On the other hand working as laborers in Jepara or Kudus provided income that can be received every week, which then could be immediately used for toddlers care, for example for pocket money, formula milk, baby food or other purposes as paying the nanny. Toddlers' mothers usually worked as cigarettes laborers, while men usually worked as a driver or workshop worker. Actually, after being calculated, the mothers' income who worked as cigarettes laborers was out for snacks, meals, and nanny's wage. However, the mothers were satisfied for fulfilling the responsibility to meet the needs of their toddlers.

Toddlers' mothers were also getting information and knowledge from the work place. This is understandable because Jepara and Kudus are more developed than Pecuk village. The information was related to the provision of vitamins for toddlers to increase appetite, which then could be easily purchased in stores that exist in Jepara and Kudus. The other information is related to various kinds of packaged supplementary food for toddlers, which is very easy to get in small shops around the factory. There were even toddlers whose father worked as a company driver, he always brought the need for them home, which could not be obtained in the village, such as baby food or appetite enhancer vitamins for toddlers.

- Changes in agricultural patterns. A very big shift of values happened in the last 4 years because of the movement of people (people from other villages), as well as Pecuk villagers working in another village. People who moved to Pecuk village were usually those who got married with people from other region and then resided in Pecuk village. bringing expertise or skills of the origin region, such as expertise in planting other than rice. So it can be said that migration was one of the factors that resulted in variation of agricultural crops like melon, big curly chili, and scallions, besides rice, which were considered to have high value. In their opinion, such high values may be earned through maximum land management. After planting the rice, they would plant scallions, so that the land would always produce. Besides scallions, melon, and chili were easy to be marketed. Population movement also led people to start entrepreneurship like open *Lamongan* (fish food stalls) and selling *nasi uduk* which is the typical food from East Java and Betawi, so farming is becoming obsolete. Selling *Lamongan* was considered to generate a more promising income on a daily basis than farming (economic oriented). In addition, people thought that selling *Lamongan* and growing scallions had higher prestige (degrees) than being rice farmers. Changes in communities farming pattern would affect family income and finally parenting, either in relation to food intake or health care for toddlers.

### 3.3. Habits Contribution

Habits by mothers in Pecuk village related to parenting were:

- Mother always breastfeed their toddlers, until the milk is no longer come out, whenever and wherever they asked, so it was often seen mother breastfeeding while selling snacks in front of the school or while washing clothes, or even while walking from one place to other places in the village. While for mothers who worked outside the village, the breastfeeding was done at the time of the toddlers woke up or when the mothers would go to work and after getting home from work at noon. Breast milk was the main food for toddlers up to the age of six months. After that the breast milk was the main protein intake of milk, because the mother was not able to provide formula milk formula every day, due to the expensive price. Breastfeeding the child at any time

shows mothers' high concern for their toddlers, so that all facilities are granted, but exclusive breastfeeding in Pecuk village was still low at 44%. Some caused mothers cannot breastfeed exclusively are because of working, illness, either the mothers or toddlers, and mother ignorance or solid foods before the time.

- Meals were 3 times a day, but for toddlers, meals were given whenever they want, including the desire for snack was always fulfilled. This situation is contrary to the conditions of the villagers which are in deprivation, most villagers had a low economic level and work as farmers and farm laborers. This condition could occur, because of the high value of the toddler and the high concern or attention to the toddlers, so that all the efforts were made to meet the needs of their toddlers. The observation found toddlers who were eating outside meal time, namely at 10.00 and at 15.00, and the mother said that, in a day, sometimes they had two meals plus snacks or five times plus snacks and it was done for a healthy toddlers. Meeting the needs of snacks for toddlers seemed very dominant.

- Meals were prioritized, as claimed by Ms. Hasunah, which was one of toddlers mothers, IHC cadre, and vegetable hawkers, who had died because of illness at the time of this research, i.e.:

Even if the house is ugly, we're poor people but meals should still be delicious, in fact, we can spend up to Rp 15,000 for daily needs, sometimes also with "*ijol beras njalo iwak*" (exchanging rice with fish).

Since Ms. Hasunah worked as vegetables hawker, she was very familiar with the habits of mothers in Pecuk village as her consumers in meeting the food needs of the family. Although they did not have money, they often remained attempted to buy fish and vegetables by exchanging of rice with fish or debt. This was consistent with their view of a good meal. According to them, good meal was meal with fish, beef, or chicken, which were expensive foods for villagers. Fish were commonly purchased for their affordable price compared to beef or chicken.

- Villagers who mostly worked as farm laborers always had rice in the form of grain, which then milled little by little as needed, either to eat or to be exchanged with other foodstuffs, which was usually exchanged for fish. The fact that could be seen especially from Ms. Hasunah as vegetables hawker who often received rice for her stuffs. Mostly it was exchanged for fish. Toddlers in Pecuk village were enjoying fried fish, fish are often eaten without rice and mothers do not have any objections, as long as the toddlers like and mothers are able to provide. Mothers do not feel embarrassed to express because it was a habit there. Habit of storing rice like this can be regarded as a form of food security in a family which then influences parenting and nutritional status of children.

### 3. Workforce Sizing Plan (WOZIP)

Based on the description, it can be concluded that the elements of norms, values and habits that exist in the Pecuk village are factors that influence toddlers parenting by their mother, either those associated with the intake of food or health care given to toddlers, which in turn determines the toddler nutrition status. Research findings related to the culture system in the Pecuk village will also be found in developing countries, such as the results of research conducted by Muller (1999) and Singhth (1986), in Rwanda, Africa, on the composition of farmer production influences the eating behavior (culture) or parenting. The level of agricultural products derived from agricultural families in developing countries can affect their nutritional status directly or indirectly. It can also be seen from the results of research conducted by Salehi (2004), which concluded that the culture of every country, both developing countries and developed countries, affects how mothers feed / nourish or perform nutrition parenting for the baby, such as the tradition of breastfeeding, infant feeding, and child care.

In another research, Gay (2004), found that in the Afro-American self-care or parenting, in general, is also based on the culture and traditions, such as medication by parents to their children that is traditional and uses natural materials. Health care will affect the health status or infection degree of the child, which finally have an impact on the nutritional status of children. Obisesan (2006), also found that the Europeans and Mexico-Americans, who often come to the religion festival (Catholic), where they are taught to eat fish, often consume fish each week. In addition, the research conducted by Oninla (2006), on children in Nigeria found that the nutritional status of children in the urban area is better than in rural area. This occurs because of the differences of food which is consume by people in rural and urban area, and also traditional beliefs and practices that are rooted in rural than urban communities. All of them will affect the nutritional status of the people.

Norms that exist in the village Pecuk are strengthened by the results of research conducted by Franzini et al. (2009), about the influence of the social and physical environment around the residence for the children nutritional status of in UK. The existence of healthy norms in the network of the parents knowing each other and willing to keep the children in the neighborhood that influence obesity or nutritional status of children in UK. These norms affect the existing system of social intimacy and have been shown to affect health at the neighborhood level. Increased social contact and transactions between people can help the application of a healthier behavior. On the other hand, according to Foter (2006), the under nutrition is caused by horrible eating

habits, which is not only limited to the third world, but are found also in America. It can be said that such norms may occur not only in rural areas but also in developed countries, with different models influenced by many factors, such as the elements of the existing cultural systems.

Value of the children or in this study is the value of toddlers will affect parenting behaviors, which include the provision of food and health care / treatment on toddlers. Value of the children is also the basis for the role of the other cultural systems elements in running parenting in community, or it can be said that the value children directs the family (parents) considerations and behaviors to parenting toddlers. These elements are: 1) habits, breastfeeding until the milk did not come out again, prioritizing food for toddlers, storing grain for feeding toddlers, 2) norms, a mutual giving in the community, caring for each other, and watching toddlers in their environment, toddler seems to be a shared responsibility.

Toddlers high value in Pecuk village serves as a guide that gives direction and orientation to family life even communities in Pecuk village. Toddlers high value then causes parents try to establish healthy toddlers, one of the indicators is toddlers with good nutritional status. It is consistent with the social children value theory, which states that the high children value child will be reinforced by the positive response to their toddlers coming from the environment. The positive response occurs when the toddlers are in a state of maximum good health.

Fulfillment of toddlers eating from snacks is preferred in terms of fund provision and often replaces lunch or dinner portion for the toddlers. Snacks are dominant contributor to meet the needs of protein and calories of toddlers in Pecuk village.

Buying snacks behavior is one of food intake choices, which then becomes a pattern of toddlers eating habits in the Pecuk village. The behavior is associated with food ideology that is based on a specific point of view of the food selection in the family of Pecuk village (usually the mother). The food ideology is toddlers should achieve maximum health. In order to achieve the objective, then the parents facilitate all toddlers' needs, including desires for snacks. The parents' expectation is that by fulfilling toddlers' eating will, then the food intake of toddlers are met, which then can make healthy toddlers with a good nutritional status.

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