

# Nutrition Education Counseling for Breastfeeding Mothers and Healthy Toddlers is provided at the Bayangkari PC Health Center in South Tapanuli

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## Article Information:

Received January 15, 2026

Revised May 18, 2026

Accepted May 26, 2026

## Keywords:

Balanced Nutrition;  
Breastfeeding Mothers; Healthy  
Toddlers

## Abstract

**Background:** Proper nutrition during breastfeeding and early childhood is crucial for maintaining the mother's health, producing high-quality breast milk, and supporting the child's growth and development. In many areas, especially in Indonesia, many mothers and parents lack knowledge of how to prepare balanced meals. This lack of knowledge leads to nutritional problems, such as stunting, which is incredibly common.

**Objectives:** This community service activity aimed to help breastfeeding mothers and parents of toddlers learn more about balanced nutrition through an educational program integrated with posyandu activities at the Bayangkari PC Posyandu in South Tapanuli Regency. The program covered topics such as the basics of balanced nutrition, nutritional needs during breastfeeding, the importance of exclusive breastfeeding, proper methods for introducing solid foods, and the use of locally available, nutritious foods.

**Methods:** Activities were conducted using a participatory approach in which participants actively engaged through one-on-one conversations, group chats, planning healthy meals together, and pre- and post-session tests to assess learning.

**Results:** The evaluation found that participants gained substantial knowledge from participating in educational activities. They learned more about selecting healthy, balanced foods, the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding, and the right ways to feed young children. They also became more confident in using good nutrition practices at home.

**Conclusion:** Nutrition education delivered through integrated health service centers is effective in promoting healthy eating and preventing poor nutrition. It helps increase awareness about healthy eating among mothers and their families. This approach can also help make long-lasting improvements in children's eating habits and overall health.

## A. Introduction

Nutrition is a big problem for public health around the world, and it's a primary concern for health programs, especially for mothers who breastfeed and young kids (Ayu et al., 2025). Having adequate, nutritious food during the first 1,000 days of life, from pregnancy through age 2, supports proper growth, cognitive development, and long-term health (Wulandari et al., 2025). If a child doesn't get enough nutrients during this time, they are more likely to get sick, die before they are older, and face health problems later in life,

like being too short for their age, being too thin, or even becoming overweight as a child or adult (Victoria et al., 2016).

The World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF have established guidelines on exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of a baby's life. These rules are intended to provide infants with the best possible nutrition and help prevent malnutrition. Breast milk provides infants with all the energy and essential nutrients they need. It also helps protect them from illness and common health problems that affect young children (Rollins et al., 2016). After six months, appropriate supplemental feeding techniques are crucial for maintaining a child's ideal growth and development. However, due to socioeconomic limitations, a lack of access to practical nutrition education, and a lack of nutritional awareness, many mums still struggle to execute optimal feeding habits.

Nutritional issues among children under five continue to be a major public health concern in Indonesia. The frequency of stunting among Indonesian children is still comparatively high and above the WHO guideline threshold, according to statistics from the country's health survey (Kusuma et al., 2023). Through community health monitoring initiatives, child development and nutritional issues are still being documented in North Sumatra Province, which includes South Tapanuli Regency (Asrianti et al., 2025). These circumstances suggest that raising maternal nutrition awareness is still a top community goal (Raal & Mohamed, 2020).

Both the health of the mother and the nutritional sufficiency of the newborn are significantly impacted by the nutritional state of the mother during nursing (Ayu et al., 2025). Mothers who consume insufficient nutrients run the risk of producing less breast milk, which could have a detrimental impact on the development and immunity of their offspring (Wulandari et al., 2025). Consuming sufficient amounts of carbs, proteins, fats, vitamins, and minerals in accordance with age and physiological requirements is known as balanced nutrition (Utami et al., 2025). A balanced diet is crucial for toddlers' growth, brain development, and ability to learn (Kusteja et al., 2025; Maerescu et al., 2025).

According to preliminary observations made at the Bayangkari PC Posyandu in South Tapanuli Regency, a number of nursing mothers and parents of young children still lacked knowledge about complementary feeding techniques, exclusive breastfeeding, balanced dietary patterns, and the use of reasonably priced, nutrient-dense local foods. Additionally, some participants thought that cooking healthy meals was costly and challenging. Furthermore, the target population had not regularly engaged in instructional initiatives that especially addressed practical family nutrition management (Maslow-Haynes et al., 2020).

Posyandu provides preventative and promotional services, such as nutrition education, that significantly contribute to the improvement of maternal and child health (Tyarini & Mulat, 2025; Yanti & Hastuty, 2023). Through direct engagement and participatory learning techniques, community-based nutrition education programmes incorporated into posyandu events can assist increase maternal knowledge, attitudes, and feeding practices.

There is still a disconnect between nutrition knowledge and its actual application at the family level, despite numerous government nutrition initiatives. Therefore, in order to enhance mothers' comprehension and promote long-term healthy feeding practices, nutrition education must be strengthened through community service projects. Through participatory nutrition education included into posyandu activities at Bayangkari PC Posyandu, South Tapanuli Regency, this community service project aimed to increase the knowledge and awareness of nursing mothers and parents of toddlers on balanced nutrition.

## **B. Methods**

The implementation and assessment of a nutrition education programme at the Bayangkari PC Posyandu in South Tapanuli Regency are described in this document, which was written as a community service report. A one-group pretest–posttest method was used to gauge participants' knowledge both before and after the intervention in order to measure the efficacy of the educational activities.

Parents of toddlers between the ages of 0 and 59 months who actively participated in posyandu activities in the target region and nursing mums made up the participants. Participants had to meet the following requirements in order to be included: (1) be nursing mothers or parents/caregivers of toddlers between the ages of 0 and 59 months; (2) be actively registered in Bayangkari PC Posyandu activities; (3) be willing to participate in all educational sessions; and (4) be able to complete the pretest and posttest questionnaires. The evaluation process did not include participants who did not complete both surveys or who did not attend the entire educational session.

This exercise involved 45 individuals in all. The instructional programme emphasised the use of nutrient-dense local foods, exclusive breastfeeding, complementary feeding techniques, balanced nutrition, and the nutritional requirements during breastfeeding.

Knowledge assessment was conducted using a 20-item multiple-choice questionnaire developed based on balanced nutrition guidelines issued by the Indonesian Ministry of Health. The questionnaire assessed participants' understanding of breastfeeding nutrition, balanced diets, complementary feeding, and toddler nutritional needs.

Content validity was reviewed by two maternal and child health experts and one nutrition educator. Reliability testing was conducted among 20 respondents outside the study sample, resulting in a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.82, indicating good internal consistency.

Participants completed a pretest questionnaire before the educational intervention. After completion of all educational sessions, participants completed the same questionnaire as a posttest assessment.

Interactive lectures, group discussions, nutrition counselling, and meal preparation demonstrations using locally sourced food supplies were all used in the instructional sessions. Participant orientation, pretest administration, instructional sessions, hands-on demonstrations, and posttest evaluation were all part of the implementation phases.

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics were used to present participant characteristics and knowledge scores. Normality testing was performed using the Shapiro–Wilk test. Because the pretest and posttest scores were normally distributed ( $p > 0.05$ ), paired t-tests were used to compare mean knowledge scores before and after the intervention. The statistical significance threshold used in this study was  $p < 0.05$ .

The phases and duration of the educational activities carried out during the community service programme are shown in Table 1.

The educational sessions were conducted as follows:

**Table 1.** Phases and Length of Community Service Projects

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Duration</b>
Pretest and participant orientation	30 minutes
Educational lecture session	60 minutes
Group discussion and counseling	45 minutes
Meal preparation demonstration	45 minutes
Posttest and evaluation	30 minutes

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The statistical significance threshold used in this study was  $p < 0.05$ .



**Figure 1.** Providing balanced nutrition education programs for nursing mothers and parents of toddlers at the Bayangkari PC Health Center in South Tapanuli Regency.

### C. Results and Discussion

#### 1. Results

The results from the community service activities show that breastfeeding mothers and parents of toddlers have gained more knowledge after receiving balanced nutrition education based on posyandu. When tested before and after the training, almost everyone showed improvement. They learned more about the basics of balanced nutrition, what mothers need during breastfeeding, why exclusive breastfeeding is essential for the first six months, and how to safely introduce solid foods. This shows that a community-based, hands-on teaching method effectively helps people understand and apply key nutrition information in their daily lives.

In addition to gaining knowledge, the activity demonstrated that participants had a more positive attitude toward incorporating healthy eating habits into their household routines. Showing how to make nutritious meals using local ingredients helped participants see that good nutrition doesn't have to cost a lot. Participants also felt more confident in planning meals for nursing mothers and young children, following guidelines such as eating a variety of foods, ensuring adequate nutrient intake, and keeping food safe.

Table 2 presents the characteristics of participants involved in the nutrition education activity.

**Table 2.** Participant Characteristics

Characteristics	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age 20–29 years	18	40.0
Age 30–39 years	21	46.7
Age ≥40 years	6	13.3
High school education	25	55.6
College education	12	26.7
Elementary/junior high school	8	17.7
Breastfeeding mothers	29	64.4
Parents of toddlers	16	35.6

Most participants were aged 30–39 years and had completed high school education.

**Table 3.** Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Knowledge Scores

Variable	Mean ± SD	Minimum	Maximum	p-value
Pretest score	58.4 ± 10.6	40	76	
Posttest score	84.7 ± 8.9	65	98	0.001

The average knowledge score increased by 26.3 points after the intervention. Statistical analysis using the paired t-test showed a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores ( $p = 0.001$ ).

**Table 4.** Improvement in Participant Knowledge by Topic

Topic	Pretest Correct (%)	Posttest Correct (%)
Balanced nutrition principles	57.8	91.1
Exclusive breastfeeding	62.2	93.3
Complementary feeding	51.1	86.7
Local nutritious food utilization	48.9	88.9
Toddler meal planning	46.7	84.4

The greatest improvement was observed in participants' understanding of local nutritious food utilization and toddler meal planning. During discussions and counseling sessions, participants actively asked questions regarding affordable healthy foods, feeding difficulties among toddlers, and strategies to maintain adequate nutrition during breastfeeding. Many participants reported that before the activity they believed nutritious foods were expensive and difficult to prepare (Kawarazuk et al., 2023; Campo et al., 2020; Wyst et al., 2019).

After participating in demonstrations and counseling sessions, participants expressed greater confidence in preparing balanced meals using locally available ingredients such as fish, eggs, vegetables, tempeh, tofu, and fruits.

## 2. Discussion

### 2.1 Implications

Both the posttest results and the participants' active engagement in counselling and discussion sessions demonstrated the increase in their knowledge. Following the educational intervention, several participants were able to describe suitable supplemental feeding techniques, identify balanced food combinations, and explain the significance of exclusive breastfeeding. This suggests that the instructional materials were clear and pertinent to the participants' everyday need.

This study shows that community-based nutrition education effectively improves nutrition knowledge among mothers and their families, especially during the first 1,000 days of a child's life (Maryanti et al., 2025). When breastfeeding mothers have good nutrition knowledge, they can make better choices for their health, produce more and better breast milk, and feed their babies properly. This, in turn, helps children grow and develop healthily (Basrowi et al., 2025).

Because the teaching sessions used straightforward examples and readily available, reasonably priced culinary supplies, participants also shown interest during practical demonstrations. Participants had a greater understanding of how to adopt balanced eating in their homes thanks to this practical approach.

Helping people understand the importance of exclusively breastfeeding has significant benefits, as breast milk is the best food for babies (Verma et al., 2024). It helps reduce the risk of illness, supports brain development, and protects against long-term health problems, including heart disease and diabetes (Shenoy et al., 2023). Research from around the world shows that babies who are breastfed exclusively are more likely to be innovative and successful in their adult lives (Sharm et al., 2025). This means teaching new mothers about breastfeeding is not just about feeding babies; it's also about investing in their future health and success (Muthoharoh et al., 2025).

When introducing solid foods to babies, guidance on when, how soft, how often, and which foods to offer aligns with WHO guidelines. These guidelines emphasize the importance of providing children aged 6 to 23 months with a balanced, high-quality diet to prevent nutrient deficiencies and slow growth (Febriyanti et al., 2025). Research from multiple countries shows that teaching parents about nutrition, along with showing them how to prepare meals, helps them feed their children better, mainly by providing a wide range of foods and sufficient animal-based protein (Supun et al., 2025).

This activity's use of local foods aligns with the global guide for sustainable food systems and healthy eating (Errico et al., 2025). The FAO and WHO say that using local food items makes nutrition programs more cost-effective and sustainable. It also helps families have enough to eat and respect their eating traditions. This is important because social, economic, and cultural factors significantly affect the success of changes in eating habits (Id et al., 2023).

In addition to gaining knowledge, the study found that participants' confidence in balanced nutrition was essential. Research worldwide shows that confidence plays a significant role in helping people change their eating habits in a lasting way (Lindawati et al., 2026). Mothers who feel confident and capable of preparing healthy meals are more likely to adhere to good feeding practices and regularly track their children's growth (Yuliawati et al., 2025).

While gaining more knowledge and changing attitudes are essential steps, changing actual behaviors and improving children's nutrition require sustained effort and support across multiple areas (Chen et al., 2022). Studies around the world show that simply teaching people about nutrition isn't enough to make lasting improvements in health, unless there are also improvements in access to food, sufficient income, clean water, and basic medical care. Nutrition education activities at health centers should be viewed as part of a broader plan to address malnutrition (Wang, 2021).

## 2.2 Research contribution

This activity demonstrates that Posyandu is a key platform for implementing nutrition-focused programs at the community level. Integrating organized nutrition education into posyandu efforts can improve primary health care services by strengthening both prevention and promotion of health. It also helps achieve global goals to reduce stunting and improve maternal and child nutrition. This method can be applied in other areas with similar economic and social conditions.

The results of this project show that increasing community awareness of maternal and child nutrition can be achieved by incorporating nutrition education into regular posyandu services. Furthermore, the participatory educational approach may promote sustainable healthy feeding practices at the household level and boost participant engagement.

## 2.3 Limitations

The main benefit of this activity is to provide objective evidence of how effective balanced nutrition education can be when delivered through integrated health service posts (posyandu) using a hands-on approach and a focus on local foods. These results add valuable information to the global knowledge base on community nutrition programs, particularly in low-income areas of developing countries. Also, this activity supports a framework linking nutrition to other health efforts, with teaching mothers a key component of improving children's health.

## 2.4 Suggestions

This study has some limitations. It used a pre-experimental design without a control group, had a small sample size, and the evaluation period was too short to assess how well it changed children's behavior or improved their nutrition over time. Also, critical external factors, such as household food security and the family's economic situation, were not thoroughly studied, even though they can significantly affect the success of a nutrition program.

## D. Conclusion

The balanced nutrition education program, delivered through the integrated health service post (posyandu), conducted at the Bayangkari PC Posyandu in South Tapanuli Regency, has shown positive results in improving the knowledge, attitudes, and confidence of breastfeeding mothers and parents of toddlers regarding balanced nutrition. The educational approach that engaged participants helped them better understand the nutritional needs of breastfeeding mothers, the importance of exclusive breastfeeding,

proper methods for introducing solid foods, and the benefits of using nutritious local foods. These results show that posyandu is an effective way to deliver nutrition education that is relevant, accessible, and sustainable over the long term. While the program's evaluation to date has focused primarily on short-term outcomes, such as increased knowledge, the results suggest strong potential to encourage healthy eating habits at home. Overall, nutrition education through community-based health services is essential for preventing nutritional issues and improving maternal and child health sustainably.

#### E. Acknowledgment

The author expresses gratitude to everyone who helped make this community service project possible. A special thank you goes to the administrators and leaders of the Bayangkari PC Posyandu in South Tapanuli Regency for their support, teamwork, and help throughout the process. The author also thanks the breastfeeding mothers and parents of young children who participated in the nutrition education sessions with great interest and enthusiasm. The author also thanks the workplace for the academic and moral support received. Gratitude is also extended to the colleagues who contributed their ideas and helped improve the material and write this article. All the content in this article is the responsibility of the author alone.

#### F. Author Contribution Statement

SA was responsible for developing the idea, planning activities, creating educational nutrition materials, and organizing the community service. AP helped gather data, provide advice, and support the people involved in the activities. MN conducted data analysis, explained the results, and wrote the results and discussion sections. Both SA and MN worked on writing the paper, reviewing it carefully, and making the final edits. All the authors read the final version of the paper and agreed to it.

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