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# Efforts to Enhance Dental Health Behavior and Status of Stunted Toddlers Through the Utilization of the 'Towards Healthy Teeth Card' in Integrated Health Posts Across Taebenu Subdistrict, Kupang Regency

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**Abstract---**Dental and oral diseases, such as caries, pose risks to toddlers. The Indonesian government's Ministry of Health Regulation No. 89 of 2015 emphasizes community empowerment in dental health by involving local health cadres. The 'Towards Healthy Teeth Card' facilitates early detection and promotes community independence in dental health. Experimental studies on its effectiveness are needed, with parental involvement being vital to support toddler dental health. This study aims to determine the effect of the 'Towards Healthy Teeth Card' on improving stunted toddlers' dental health behavior and status. The research involved developing materials and concepts for the 'Towards Healthy Teeth Card' for toddlers and employed a pre-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design at Integrated Health Posts across Taebenu Subdistrict, Kupang Regency. The respondents were mothers and stunted toddlers, with total sampling used as the sampling method. The study assessed changes in behavior and dental health status using the def-t score. The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test analysis showed a significant effect of the 'Towards Healthy Teeth Card' on maternal behavior in maintaining dental health and the dental caries status of stunted toddlers, with a p-value of 0.000 ( $< 0.05$ ). The study concludes that the 'Towards Healthy Teeth Card' significantly improves maternal behavior and dental caries status. Further implementation of the 'Towards Healthy Teeth Card' is recommended, particularly in villages with the highest prevalence of stunted toddlers, to improve their health status.

**Keywords---**dental and oral health, stunting, toddlers, towards healthy teeth card.

#### Introduction

According to the 2018 Basic Health Research data, dental damage among Indonesia's population has increased to 57.6%, with East Nusa Tenggara Province reporting a 43.9% proportion of dental problems, including tooth decay (Kementerian Kesehatan RI., 2018). A study on Early Childhood Caries (ECC) in Southeast Asia revealed that

children aged 5–6 years have a 79% risk of developing caries (Duangthip et al., 2017), while in Indonesia, the prevalence of caries among toddlers ranges from 50–70% (Widayati, 2014). Dental and oral diseases can lead to serious functional limitations, such as impaired speech and chewing, discomfort, including bad breath and decayed teeth, and psychological impacts like low self-esteem (Buset et al., 2016; Silva et al., 2015).

Dental problems can trigger stunting. The 2021 Study on the Nutritional Status of Toddlers in Indonesia (SSGI) indicated that East Nusa Tenggara Province had the highest national stunting rate at 37.8%. However, dental health education at integrated health posts (Posyandu) has primarily been limited to direct teaching for health cadres about proper toothbrushing techniques and oral health examinations (Dewi et al., 2019).

The Ministry of Health Regulation No. 89 of 2015 on dental and oral health efforts introduced the 'Towards Healthy Teeth Card' as a tool to empower communities and foster independence in dental health. The 'Towards Healthy Teeth Card' employs a color-coded assessment system, enabling mothers or Posyandu cadres to evaluate early caries risk in the primary teeth of toddlers. This card has been used to assess caries risks in pregnant women and toddlers (Karamoy & Fione, 2020; Oktadewi et al., 2023). However, training has mainly targeted Posyandu cadres, with limited usage of the 'Towards Healthy Teeth Card' at Posyandu and no focus on stunted children. Stunted children are particularly vulnerable to dental and oral diseases, which can worsen their development (Lutfi et al., 2021). This highlights a research gap concerning experimental studies on the 'Towards Healthy Teeth Card' in Posyandu.

This study involves parents in utilizing the 'Towards Healthy Teeth Card' to support changes in behavior and dental health status among stunted children. The urgency of this proposal lies in reducing stunting rates in Taebenu Subdistrict and addressing the minimal implementation of the 'Towards Healthy Teeth Card' in the area, which has 80 stunted toddlers. The research team plays a role in field implementation, education, and monitoring. The partner research team contributes by providing input on program implementation based on their experience with the 'Towards Healthy Teeth Card' and analyzing its effectiveness in changing the behavior of mothers with stunted toddlers and improving the DMF-T scores of these children (Petti & Scully, 2009; Masood et al., 2017).

## Method

The type of this research is pre-experimental research with a one-group pre-test and post-test design, where a pre-test is conducted before the intervention and a post-test is conducted after the intervention to determine the effect of the 'Towards Healthy Teeth Card' on improving parental behavior and the dental health status of stunted toddlers. The population in this study consisted of 67 mothers of stunted toddlers and 67 stunted toddlers across Taebenu Subdistrict, Kupang Regency, while the research sample included the total population of 67 mothers of stunted toddlers and 67 stunted toddlers across Taebenu Subdistrict, Kupang Regency, who agreed to participate in the study (Arikunto, 2017). The research variables were: Independent Variable, The behavior of mothers in maintaining the dental health of stunted toddlers; Dependent Variable, The dental caries status of stunted toddlers.

The instruments used in this study included a questionnaire and a dental caries examination form. The tools used in the research included a mouth mirror, tweezers, probes, and excavators, while the materials used included personal protective equipment, alcohol, cotton, and Dettol. The stages of data collection were as follows: Interviewing; Recording participant identities; Administering the questionnaire; Conducting dental and oral examinations; Recording and analyzing the data.

The data analysis was processed using computer software to determine the effectiveness of maternal behavior in maintaining dental cleanliness and dental caries status from pre-test to post-test using the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test.

## Result and Discussion

### *Behavior of Mothers in Maintaining Dental and Oral Health of Stunted Toddlers*

Table 1  
Distribution of Respondents' Behavior Before and After Using the 'Towards Healthy Teeth Card' in Integrated Health Posts (Posyandu) across Taebenu Subdistrict, Kupang Regency

Village Name	Behavior Before				Behavior After		
	Good	Moderate	Poor	Total	Good	Moderate	Total
Oeltua Village	27	4	6	37	37	0	37
	73.0%	10.8%	16.2%	100.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Baumata Village	9	0	0	9	8	1	9
	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	88.9%	11.1%	100.0%
Oeletsala Village	4	2	0	6	6	0	6
	66.7%	33.3%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Kuaklalo Village	1	2	0	3	3	0	3
	33.3%	66.7%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Baumata Timur Village	9	3	0	12	12	0	12
	75.0%	25.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	50	11	6	67	66	1	67
	74.6%	16.4%	9.0%	100.0%	98.5%	1.5%	100.0%

Table 1 shows that before using the 'Towards Healthy Teeth Card', there were still 17 respondents (25.4%) with moderate and poor behavior and 50 respondents (74.6%) with good behavior. However, after using the 'Towards Healthy Teeth Card', the behavior of mothers in maintaining the dental health of stunted toddlers improved significantly, reaching 66 respondents (98%).

### *Dental Caries Status (def-t) in Stunted Toddlers*

Table 2  
Distribution of Dental Caries Status of Respondents (Stunted Toddlers) Before and After the Use of Towards Healthy Teeth Card at Posyandu in Taebenu Sub-district, Kupang Regency

Village Name	Caries_Before					Total
	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High	
Oeltua Village	33	2	2	0	0	37
	89.2%	5.4%	5.4%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Baumata Village	7	0	1	1	0	9
	77.8%	0.0%	11.1%	11.1%	0.0%	100.0%
Oeletsala Village	3	0	0	1	2	6
	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	16.7%	33.3%	100.0%
Kuaklalo Village	2	0	0	0	1	3
	66.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	100.0%
Baumata Timur Village	8	2	2	0	0	12
	66.7%	16.7%	16.7%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	53	4	5	2	3	67
	79.1%	6.0%	7.5%	3.0%	4.5%	100.0%
Village Name	Caries_After					Total
	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High	
Oeltua Village	33	2	2	0	0	37
	89.2%	5.4%	5.4%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Baumata Village	7	0	1	1	0	9
	77.8%	0.0%	11.1%	11.1%	0.0%	100.0%
Oeletsala Village	3	0	0	1	2	6
	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	16.7%	33.3%	100.0%

Kuaklalo Village	2 66.7%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 33.3%	3 100.0%
Baumata Timur Village	8 66.7%	2 16.7%	2 16.7%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	12 100.0%
<b>Total</b>	53 79.1%	4 6.0%	5 7.5%	2 3.0%	3 4.5%	67 100.0%

From Table 2, it is observed that the average presentation of dental caries status in stunted toddlers across all villages remains very low (79.1%), with the highest percentage found in Desa Oeltua at 89.2%. There were no changes in the dental caries status of stunted toddlers before and after the use of the Towards Healthy Teeth Card.  
*Analysis of the Effect of Towards Healthy Teeth Card*

Table 3  
Summary of the Effect of Towards Healthy Teeth Card on Mothers' Behavior and Dental Caries Status in Stunted Toddlers at Posyandu in Taebenu Sub-district, Kupang Regency

	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) / p
Behavior After - Behavior Before	-3.579 <sup>b</sup>	.000
Dental Caries Status After - Dental Caries Status Before	.000 <sup>c</sup>	1.000

From Table 3, it is observed that the mother's behavior before and after the use of Towards Healthy Teeth Card had a p-value of  $0.000 < 0.05$ , indicating a significant influence of Towards Healthy Teeth Card on the behavior of mothers in maintaining the dental health of stunted toddlers at Posyandu in Taebenu Sub-district, Kupang Regency. Meanwhile, the dental caries status before and after the use of Towards Healthy Teeth Card had a p-value of  $1.000 > 0.05$ , indicating no significant influence of Towards Healthy Teeth Card on the dental caries status of stunted toddlers.

#### *Behavior*

Based on the table above, it is observed that before the use of the Towards Healthy Teeth Card, the majority of respondents (74.6%) exhibited good behavior in maintaining the dental and oral health of stunted toddlers. Most respondents already demonstrated positive behavior, reflecting a basic understanding of the importance of dental and oral health for stunted toddlers. Additionally, this positive behavior may be attributed to interactions with health cadres and support from healthcare professionals who assist mothers in adopting positive behaviors to maintain their children's dental health. According to Sudibya et al., awareness of the importance of maintaining dental health for toddlers can stem from previous experiences or information received from healthcare workers through prior counseling (Sudibya et al., 2020).

Based on the table above, 25.4% of respondents exhibited fair or poor behavior. This finding indicates a variation in the level of awareness and dental care practices among respondents before the intervention with the Towards Healthy Teeth Card. It highlights barriers or factors that influence respondents' behavior, such as their level of education and knowledge (Yanti et al., 2021). According to Moynihan and Petersen, the level of education and understanding of mothers affects their ability to comprehend and implement information from the Towards Healthy Teeth Card. Additionally, socioeconomic factors can influence respondents' behavior. According to Dewhirst, economic factors impact a mother's ability to purchase essential dental health supplies, such as fluoride toothpaste and toothbrushes, which are crucial for preventing dental caries in children (Moynihan & Petersen, 2004; Dewhirst et al., 2010).

The respondents' limited behavior in maintaining their stunted toddlers' dental health is also due to their lack of familiarity with positive practices for dental care. One effort to improve mothers' behavior in maintaining dental health for stunted toddlers is through the use of the Towards Healthy Teeth Card. Towards Healthy Teeth Card serves as a media tool to facilitate the assessment of respondents' behavior in maintaining dental health for stunted toddlers. This card focuses on parents, especially mothers, as children spend most of their time with their mothers. According to Sariningsih, mothers play a vital role in guiding, providing understanding, reminding, and offering facilities for their children, as well as fostering open dialogue and discussion while teaching children about maintaining dental and oral hygiene, since mothers spend more time with their children (Sariningsih, 2012).

After the use of Towards Healthy Teeth Card, it is evident from Table that respondents' behavior in maintaining the dental health of stunted toddlers significantly improved, with 66 respondents (98%) showing better behavior. Based on the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test analysis, there is a significant influence of Towards Healthy Teeth Card on mothers' behavior in maintaining the dental health of stunted toddlers and on the dental caries status of stunted toddlers. The p-value for mothers' behavior before and after using Towards Healthy Teeth Card is  $0.000 < 0.05$ , indicating a significant improvement. This suggests that respondents were able to use Towards Healthy Teeth Card to assess early caries risk factors in their children's primary teeth effectively, as the card is brought home, enhancing respondents' knowledge and enabling its practical use at home. According to Rahmawati, knowledge is the result of "knowing" which occurs after individuals perceive a particular object through their senses. This sensory input is processed through human senses. Knowledge, or cognition, plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's actions. Behaviors based on knowledge are more sustainable than those not rooted in understanding (Rahmawati, 2019).

#### *Dental Caries Status*

Based on the table above, the average presentation of dental caries status (def-t) in stunted toddlers across all villages is categorized as very low (79.1%), with the highest prevalence observed in Oeltua village at 89.2%. There was no significant change in the dental caries status of stunted toddlers before and after the use of Towards Healthy Teeth Card. This lack of change can be attributed to several factors, including dietary patterns. A healthy diet plays a crucial role in preventing caries (Mainland et al., 2016; George et al., 2018). In rural areas, residents often rely on staple foods and locally sourced ingredients that are typically low in sugar, which is a major factor contributing to caries development. Lower sugar intake in rural areas can help mitigate the risk of dental caries (Saleh et al., 2021; Leroy & Frongillo, 2019).

Moynihan & Petersen (2004), state that low sugar consumption is strongly associated with lower caries rates within certain communities. Additionally, rural populations often have limited access to sugary foods and beverages sold in stores or restaurants, particularly products with high sugar content such as candies and sodas. This reduces excessive sugar intake in children, thereby helping maintain their dental health and preventing damage from excessive sugar consumption. According to Singh, in some rural areas, communities still use natural remedies to maintain oral hygiene, such as specific plants with antibacterial properties. Although not as effective as fluoride toothpaste, these natural substances can help reduce plaque and maintain dental health, thereby reducing the prevalence of caries. Rural communities are more likely to utilize natural resources that contribute to lower caries prevalence. Dietary patterns in rural areas often include higher intakes of fibrous foods that require prolonged chewing. These fibrous foods stimulate increased saliva production, which helps cleanse the mouth and neutralize acids produced by bacteria. Enhanced saliva production positively protects enamel from acidic substances that contribute to caries (Singh et al., 2013).

#### *Influence of Using Towards Healthy Teeth Card on Mothers' Behavior in Maintaining the Dental Health of Stunted Toddlers and Dental Caries Status*

Based on the table above, it is evident that the p-value of 0.000 is less than the significance level of 0.05 (p-value < 0.05). This indicates a significant influence of using the Towards Healthy Teeth Card on mothers' behavior in maintaining the dental health and oral hygiene of stunted toddlers (Cardon et al., 2011; Butte et al., 2010). This influence encompasses changes in mothers' knowledge, attitudes, and practices in caring for their children's dental health. Through the Towards Healthy Teeth Card, mothers gain new insights into the importance of maintaining dental and oral health, particularly in preventing dental caries and oral infections. The visual content in the card enhances mothers' understanding of the relationship between oral health and the nutritional status of their children. Research by Pertiwi et al. shows that visual-based educational media, like guide cards, can increase mothers' comprehension by up to 85% compared to verbal counseling alone. Once mothers of stunted toddlers acquire this new understanding of dental health, they are more likely to adopt positive attitudes and actions toward maintaining their children's dental health, such as ensuring twice-daily brushing, avoiding excessive sugary foods, and teaching children proper brushing techniques (Pertiwi et al., 2020). Additionally, the Ministry of Health notes that health education based on practical media can improve dental care practices by 60% among mothers of toddlers (Kementerian Kesehatan RI., 2021).

However, based on the table above, a p-value of 1.000 is observed, which is greater than the significance level of 0.05 ( $p > 0.05$ ). This suggests that the use of the Towards Healthy Teeth Card does not have a significant impact on the dental caries status of stunted toddlers. The brief duration of use did not yield a significant change in the caries status of stunted toddlers. Sudibya et al. indicate that oral health education programs require a minimum of six

months for significant behavioral changes to occur. The success of the Towards Healthy Teeth Card intervention heavily depends on the intensity and duration of the program. If the use period is too short or if mothers do not consistently apply the guidance from the card, the impact on dental caries status is limited (Sudibya et al., 2020). Research by Pertiwi et al. further supports that sustained education is necessary to significantly influence dental care practices (Pertiwi et al., 2020).

## Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the behavior of mothers before and after using the Towards Healthy Teeth Card has a p-value of  $0.000 < 0.05$ , indicating a significant influence of the Towards Healthy Teeth Card on mothers' behavior in maintaining the dental and oral health of stunted toddlers. On the other hand, the dental caries status in villages throughout Kecamatan Taebenu is classified as very low, with an average of 79.1%, and there was no significant change in the caries status before and after the use of the Towards Healthy Teeth Card.

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