Risk Factor of Child Diarrhea in Indonesia: 
A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

Background: Diarrhea is the leading cause of death among children worldwide, including in Indonesia. However, there is no scientific research on the most common risk factors for diarrhea among children in Indonesia. A systematic literature review was conducted to highlight the most predisposing risk factors of diarrhea based on the epidemiological triangle, in order to improve preventive measures by society to reduce the incidence of childhood diarrhea. Methods: A systematic review of observational studies without limitation of year of publication was performed in 2023 based on PRISMA protocol. Results: A total of 2607 studies were identified from the Pubmed database, only 9 studies were extracted and assessed using the STROBE method. The risk factors were divided into 3 categories: environmental, host and other, to follow the rule of the epidemiologic triangle of disease. The highest odds ratios were found for the factor “child defecation in open places” (OR=10.47) from the environmental category and for the factor “child eating by hand” (OR=5.6) from the host category. Lower maternal education from the host category was also influential (OR=1.52). Conclusion: Improper public disposal of child feces, child behavior of eating with hand and low maternal education are the most significant contributing risk factors of child diarrhea in Indonesia.

Keywords: Childhood diarrhea, Indonesia, risk factors, systematic review.

INTRODUCTION

Diarrhea is one of the most common health problems among children, especially in developing countries. At least 1.7 billion cases of diarrhea occur annually worldwide. In 2016, 525,000 children under 5 years of age died from diarrhea, making diarrhea the second leading cause of death. Diarrhea kills more children than AIDS, malaria, measles, or all three diseases combined. In Indonesia, diarrhea is the leading cause of child mortality, accounting for 31.4% of child deaths.

According to the World Health Organization’s disability adjusted life year (DALYs) measure, the overall burden of diarrhea exceeds that of any type of digestive neoplasm. DALYs estimate the impact of a disease on the total number of years of life lost due to death combined with years spent in disability. The DALY value for diarrhea is 2.69, much higher than colorectal neoplasms (0.43), liver neoplasms (0.38), or even esophageal neoplasms with a value of only 0.06. This reflects the enormous impact of diarrhea on a person’s life, yet diarrhea is sidelined by the community. This leads to a lack of understanding of preventive measures.

A national systematic literature review of risk factors associated with diarrhea in children under 5 years of age in Indonesia based on the epidemiological triangle has never been conducted. This systematic literature review provides data for a new strategy to reduce the incidence of diarrhea and even eliminate diarrhea in children under 5 years of age.

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Methods
This systematic literature review was based on the PRISMA method and a collection of observational studies that addressed risk factors associated with childhood diarrhea in Indonesia. Observational studies were selected as the source of this study because they are the most appropriate to differentiate the association between each risk factor and the occurrence of childhood diarrhea at the national level. A total of 2607 studies were identified from the Pubmed database. A total of 2572 studies that did not meet the inclusion criteria and 26 studies that met the exclusion criteria were excluded. Final 9 studies with a total of 198,959 participants were used for this systematic review. The selection procedure is described in Figure 1. The available data from each publication were processed using STROBE (Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology).4 STROBE is used to indicate the quality of each study. This systematic literature review was a qualitative study.

Results
According to the STROBE assessment, the reporting quality of the studies was insufficient. The STROBE scores are shown in Table 1. The median score of the STROBE assessment was 16.23 (12.7-18.8), indicating moderate quality. The best study based on STROBE assessment was the study designed by Agustina (2013), with a score of 18.8 out of 22 (maximum score). The main weaknesses were bias and generalizability. The details of the STROBE assessment are shown in Figure 2. The studies were conducted in different areas of Indonesia, 2 in Sumatra, 3 in Java, 1 in Bali, 1 in Kalimantan, 1 in Sulawesi, and 1 in Papua (Figure 3). The studies were divided into major variables, which consisted of host variables and environmental variables. We found that host variables contributed to 44% of the risk factors for diarrhea, while environmental variables contributed to 39% of the risk factors for diarrhea.

The most discussed risk factors for childhood diarrhea in the available studies and the most problematic in Indonesia are sanitation and family background. In terms of sanitation, the most significant risk factor was open defecation (OR: 10.47). For family background, the most significant risk factor was low maternal education (OR: 1.52). Other risk

![Figure 1. Study selection process based on the PRISMA statement.](image1)

![Figure 2. Quality assessment by the STROBE checklist.](image2)

![Figure 3. Distribution of study location.](image3)
factors with high odds ratios were the absence of a septic system (OR: 6.98) and children’s habit of eating with their hands (OR: 5.6). Protective factors for childhood diarrhea in Indonesia included feeding frequency (OR: 0.94), maternal decision-making power (OR: 0.84), maternal age > 33 years (OR: 0.65), resistance to household violence (OR: 0.74), better toilet conditions (OR: 0.82), availability of sanitary drains (OR: 0.78), and availability of water pipes in the house (OR: 0.748).

Discussion
The three most significant factors contributing to the incidence of diarrhea among children in Indonesia were fecal disposal in public places, children using their hands to eat, and low maternal education.

1. Fecal Disposal in Public Places
According to Aulia H (1994), children who dispose feces in public places are at least 10 times more likely to get diarrhea than children who dispose feces in toilets. Children are more likely to get diarrhea if their mothers or caregivers also dispose feces in open areas. This can be explained by the fact that pathogens (such as Shigella, Salmonella, Vibrio, and Campylobacter) in feces can contaminate the environment and food. In addition, Agustina (2013) also found that the presence of a sewer that was associated with the incidence of diarrhea in children; only 1 out of 29 houses with a sewer had children suffering from diarrhea.

2. Children Using Hands to Eat
Aulia (1994) also found that children who could feed themselves were 5.6 times more likely to have diarrhea than those who could not. This is because children prefer to use their hands rather than cutlery. Agustina (2013) also found a 4.55 times higher risk of diarrhea among children with poor food hygiene habits. The study also found that among children with poor food hygiene habits, 60% did not use soap to wash their hands. This habit increases the risk of diarrhea in children, as supported by a study by Watson (2014), who found that children who washed their hands without soap after defecation had a 4.77 times higher risk than those who used soap.

3. Low Maternal Education
Semma (2009) states that mothers with no formal education and only 1-6 years of formal education have up to 1.43 and 1.26 times higher risk of children with diarrhea, respectively, compared to mothers with more education. Komarulzaman (2016) also showed that good maternal education acts as a protective factor.

Hopefully, communities, especially mothers, will be more aware of these factors to prevent childhood diarrhea, which is still one of the highest causes of child mortality in Indonesia. Educating mothers can serve as a long-term solution not only to prevent childhood diarrhea, but also to improve the overall health and growth of children. The results of this study are expected to provide the basis for the development of a specific program to prevent childhood diarrhea in Indonesia.

Conclusion
This systematic literature review was based on PRISMA guidance. A total of 9 studies from the Pubmed database with 198,595 participants were used; data were extracted and assessed for quality with the STROBE method.

Results showed that inappropriate disposal of children’s feces in public places, children’s habit
of eating with their hands, and low maternal’s education were the top 3 factors associated with the occurrence of childhood diarrhea in Indonesia. These results are expected to be used to improve the knowledge and ability of the community to prevent childhood diarrhea.

**Conflict of Interest**
None declared

**REFERENCES**


**ANALISIS**

**Table:** Characteristics and findings of included studies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author, Year</th>
<th>Study Design</th>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Analysis Method</th>
<th>STROBE Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cronin AA, et al. 2016</td>
<td>Cross-sectional</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>4,909</td>
<td>&lt;24 Months</td>
<td>Female gender (OR = 1.93) Birth size smaller than average (OR = 2.31) Birth size average to very large (OR = 1.38) Woman's education secondary or lower (OR = 1.52) Sanitation unimproved (OR = 2.19) Unimproved water source (OR = 1.59) Soap availability (OR = 1.45)</td>
<td>Logistic regression</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Komarulzaman A, et al. 2017</td>
<td>Cross-sectional</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>33,399</td>
<td>&lt;5 years</td>
<td>Piped water in dwelling (OR = 0.748) Point of use water treatment (OR = 1.11) Improved toilet (OR = 0.826) Gender girl (OR = 0.795) Child’s age (OR = 1.264) Mother’s education (OR = 0.979) Household wealth (OR = 0.844) Living in urban areas (OR = 0.87) Improved sanitation coverage (OR = 0.83) Health facilities coverage (OR = 0.816) Vaccination coverage (OR = 0.865) Economic development (OR = 0.865) Mother’s decision power (OR = 0.93)</td>
<td>Bivariate and multivariate logistic regression</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Funding Acknowledgement**
This study received no specific grants from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peneliti</th>
<th>Jenis Penelitian</th>
<th>Tempat Penelitian</th>
<th>Populasi/Isi</th>
<th>Umur</th>
<th>Jumlah</th>
<th>Isi</th>
<th>Operasi Terapi</th>
<th>Keterangan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agustina R, et al. 2015</td>
<td>Cross-sectional</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>18,865</td>
<td>&lt;5 years</td>
<td>Mother's access to health care (OR = 1.27) Delivered at institution and assisted by healthcare professionals (OR = 0.88) Parity &lt;2.6 (OR = 1.13) Gave No. feeding in the first 3 days of child life (OR = 0.85) Child eat &gt;3 times a day (OR = 0.97) Child's stool disposed properly (OR = 0.88) Mother decide alone or with husband on visits to family/friends (OR = 0.84) Couple decide on daily purchase (OR = 0.77) Mother decide on own health care (0.75) Never justified domestic violence (OR – 0.74)</td>
<td>Bivariate and multivariate logistic regression</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salim H, et al. 2014</td>
<td>Prospective cohort</td>
<td>Denpasar</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>&lt;5 tahun</td>
<td>Sex male (OR 1.2)</td>
<td>Chi square</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sina LC, et al. 2012</td>
<td>Cohort</td>
<td>Koja, Tanjung Priok, Pejanten Timur</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>1 – 4 years</td>
<td>In Northern urban slum area Bottled water (RR = 0.45) Water kiosk (RR = 0.49) Combination (RR = 0.61) In Southern periurban area Bottled water (RR = 0.89) Water kiosk (RR = 0.98) Combination (RR = 1.03)</td>
<td>Chi square, T-test, poisson regression</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agustina R, et al. 2013</td>
<td>Cross-sectional</td>
<td>Jatinegara</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>12 – 59 months</td>
<td>Age ≤2 years (OR = 2.93) Age ≥3 years (OR = 2.69) Received complete immunization (OR = 0.35) Family size ≥6 person (OR = 2.27) Under-five children living under same roof &gt;1 (OR = 2.78) Existence and less dirty sewage (OR = 0.16) Overall poor food-hygienic practice in age ≤2 (OR = 4.55)</td>
<td>Chi square, bivariate and multivariate logistic regression</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semba RD, et al. 2009</td>
<td>Cross-sectional</td>
<td>Jakarta, Surabaya, Semarang, Makassar, Palembang</td>
<td>139,231</td>
<td>0 – 59 months</td>
<td>Purchase inexpensive water (OR = 1.43) Maternal age 25 – 28 (OR = 0.81) Maternal age 29 – 32 (OR = 0.7) Maternal age 33+ (OR = 0.65) Maternal education 0 years (OR = 1.46) Maternal education 1 – 6 years (OR = 1.23) 5 or more individuals eating from same kitchen (OR = 1.04)</td>
<td>Chi square, fisher's exact test, bivariate and multivariate logistic regression</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aulia H, et al. 1994</td>
<td>Case Control</td>
<td>District Rambutan, South Sumatra</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>0 – 3 years</td>
<td>Child feces disposal in open places (OR 10.47) Not having drain (OR = 6.98) Child eating with hand (OR = 5.6) Not having television (OR = 3.22) Child bathing in river (2.88) Mother's place of defecation in open place (2.56)</td>
<td>Chi square</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watson L, et al. 2014</td>
<td>Case Control</td>
<td>Makassar</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>&lt;5 years</td>
<td>Unimproved source of drinking water (OR = 3.83) Washing hands without soap after defecation (OR = 4.72)</td>
<td>Chi square, T-test, fisher's exact test, bivariate and multivariate logistic regression</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td></td>
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