Technology and Society Perspectives (TACIT) Vol. 4, No. 3, November 2026-February 2027, pages 982–891

Fathers' Negotiation of Caregiving Roles for Children at Risk of Stunting in Nonbes, Indonesia

Vezthy Faryans Honni Koroh[1*], Susanne Dida[2], Elnovani Lusiana[3]

[1,2,3]*Universitas Padjadjaran, Jawa Barat, Indonesia*

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received: 02 October 2026
Revised: 10 November 2026
Accepted: 25 November 2026

DOI:
10.61100/tacit.v4i3.422

Keywords:
Caregiving, Paternal Involvement, Family Communication, Stunting Risk, Social Phenomenology

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

ABSTRACT

This study examines how fathers in Nonbes, Indonesia, understand and negotiate their caregiving roles for children under five considered at risk of stunting. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, the study drew on in-depth interviews with seven purposively selected fathers, participant observation, and document review. The analysis identified three understandings of fatherhood: providing financially, sharing daily care with a spouse, and assuming primary caregiving responsibilities while a spouse worked abroad. Fathers described preparing meals, budgeting for food, coordinating visits to community health posts, and discussing feeding practices with grandparents. Work schedules and uncertain income shaped their participation in daily feeding routines and health monitoring. Drawing on Schutz's social phenomenology, the findings link fathers' involvement to earlier concerns about children's growth, experiences of supporting their spouses, and hopes for their children's health and emotional security. The study shows how everyday communication helps families coordinate caregiving responsibilities across work schedules, households, and generations.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana ayah di Kelurahan Nonbes, Indonesia, memaknai dan menegosiasikan peran pengasuhan balita yang dianggap berisiko mengalami stunting. Penelitian menggunakan desain fenomenologi kualitatif dengan wawancara mendalam terhadap tujuh ayah yang dipilih secara purposif, observasi partisipatif, dan telaah dokumen. Analisis menemukan tiga pemaknaan peran ayah, yaitu sebagai pencari nafkah, mitra dalam pengasuhan sehari-hari, dan pengasuh utama di rumah ketika istri bekerja di luar negeri. Para ayah menceritakan pengalaman menyiapkan makanan, mengatur anggaran pangan, mengoordinasikan kunjungan ke posyandu, dan membicarakan pemberian makanan dengan kakek atau nenek. Jam kerja dan pendapatan yang tidak menentu turut membentuk keterlibatan mereka dalam pemberian makan dan pemantauan pertumbuhan anak. Melalui fenomenologi sosial Schutz, keterlibatan tersebut dipahami dari kekhawatiran tentang pertumbuhan anak, pengalaman mendampingi istri, serta harapan agar anak tumbuh sehat dan merasa aman. Temuan ini menunjukkan bagaimana komunikasi sehari-hari membantu keluarga mengatur tanggung jawab pengasuhan di tengah perbedaan jadwal kerja dan keterlibatan pengasuh lintas generasi.

1. INTRODUCTION

Stunting in children under five is identified by low length or height for age and reflects the cumulative effects of conditions that constrain growth. In Indonesia, research has linked stunting to factors that include birth outcomes, feeding practices, and household socioeconomic conditions (Beal et al., 2018). The 2024 Indonesian Nutritional Status Survey estimated that 19.8% of children under five nationally and 37.0% in East Nusa Tenggara experienced stunting (Badan Kebijakan Pembangunan Kesehatan [BKPK], 2025). These figures provide the public health context for a question at the household level: how do families organize everyday care when a child is at risk of stunting?

Child feeding involves decisions about what food a household can afford, who prepares it, and who feeds the child when parents are working. Fathers, grandmothers, and other relatives can influence these decisions, although nutrition programs often direct their messages primarily to mothers (Martin et al., 2021).

** Corresponding author, email address: vezthy24001@mail.unpad.ac.id*

Research in western Kenya has examined how involving fathers and grandmothers can support infant feeding practices (Mukuria et al., 2016). A recent systematic review and meta-analysis also documented variation in how fathers participate in infant and young child feeding (Adisu et al., 2026). These studies make it important to examine what paternal involvement means in a specific household.

In Indonesia, gender expectations can influence who receives health information and who participates in decisions about children's care. In East Flores, Palan Peten et al. (2023) found that expectations of men as breadwinners shaped their limited involvement in activities under a local stunting program. In a different setting, Putri et al. (2024) examined how local social arrangements affected access to and use of health information among Outer Baduy communities. These studies provide a basis for asking how gendered expectations are expressed in Nonbes, Amarasi District, Kupang Regency, and how fathers respond when a child's care calls for a different division of responsibilities.

Work arrangements can also change who provides care and how family members coordinate it. Lam & Yeoh (2018), in their study of families in Indonesia and the Philippines, showed how mothers' labor migration prompted fathers and other relatives to take on caregiving responsibilities and reconsider gendered expectations. In Nonbes, the present study examines how fathers describe their responsibilities under different household arrangements, including when a spouse works abroad. The communication question concerns how care is coordinated in practice. A father may discuss who will prepare meals, ask a grandparent to adjust what a child eats, or seek advice at a community health post (*Posyandu*).

Prior research has identified determinants of stunting, examined ways to involve family members in feeding, and documented how migration can reorganize caregiving (Beal et al., 2018; Lam & Yeoh, 2018; Martin et al., 2021). Read together, these studies leave a more specific question about family communication. How do fathers explain what they see as their responsibility, respond to other caregivers' expectations, and negotiate changes in daily routines when a child is considered at risk of stunting? By focusing on these exchanges, the present study examines how fathers' roles are defined and negotiated in everyday decisions about food, care, and health monitoring.

Alfred Schutz's social phenomenology guides the interpretation of how fathers understand their experiences in the everyday world (*Lebenswelt*). The distinction between *because-motives* and *in-order-to motives* directs attention to the experiences that inform a father's actions and the purposes he hopes to achieve through them (Schutz, 1932/1967). A father may, for example, remember a previous conversation about his child's growth and take on a caregiving task with a particular goal in mind. Drawing on George Herbert Mead's work on the social formation of the self, the study also considers how interaction with family members and health workers shapes fathers' understandings of their responsibilities (Mead, 1934).

This qualitative study examines the experiences of seven fathers caring for children under five who were identified as being at risk of stunting in Nonbes. It asks three questions. How do fathers understand their caregiving roles in relation to local gender expectations? How do they describe communicating and negotiating those roles with their spouses, other family members, and health workers? What experiences and goals do they identify as motives for their involvement? The study contributes to interpersonal communication research by examining how fathers describe the conversations and decisions through which caregiving responsibilities are shared, reassigned, or maintained.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

2.1. Schutz's Social Phenomenology

Schutz's social phenomenology begins with the everyday world (*Lebenswelt*), where people interpret familiar situations and act in relation to others. This world is intersubjective because people make sense of it through dealings with others whose experiences and expectations may differ from their own. They draw on a *stock of knowledge at hand*, built from prior experience and what they have learned from others (Schutz, 1932/1967). In this study, the concept helps examine how fathers in Nonbes interpret concerns about a child's growth in light of what they have learned from family routines, earlier caregiving experiences, and conversations about child health.

Schutz (1932/1967) distinguishes between *because-motives* and *in-order-to motives*. A *because-motive* refers to the background experiences that help make sense of why someone took a particular course of action. An *in-order-to motive* refers to what the person hoped to accomplish through that action. A father's recollection of an earlier concern about his child's growth, for example, may help explain why he began preparing meals. His aim of making sure the child eats regularly expresses the purpose he associates with that decision.

The distinction keeps the analysis attentive to both the history of an action and the outcome the father intended.

These concepts guide the analysis of how fathers describe their involvement in feeding, household work, and growth monitoring. Work schedules, income, and arrangements with other caregivers form part of the everyday circumstances in which fathers make decisions. Across studies of child nutrition, fathers, grandmothers, and other relatives have been shown to influence feeding practices in different ways (Martin et al., 2021). The phenomenological question is how a father understood those circumstances when deciding what to do. An expectation that a spouse or grandparent would feed the child, for example, may help explain when the father stepped in and what he hoped his involvement would achieve.

2.2. Symbolic Interactionism

Mead (1934) described the self as developing through social interaction, including the capacity to take the perspective of others. Blumer (1969) developed this line of thought into symbolic interactionism, which holds that people act toward things according to the meanings those things have for them. Meanings arise through social interaction and can change as people interpret new situations. Applied to fatherhood, this perspective directs attention to what participants mean when they refer to themselves as providers, partners, or caregivers. Preparing a meal, for instance, may be described as helping a spouse or as carrying out one's own responsibility as a father.

The concept of *role-taking* helps examine how fathers describe considering the perspectives of spouses, relatives, or health workers. In conversations about feeding or childcare, a father may explain his decision, respond to another caregiver's concern, or propose a different division of tasks. These exchanges offer evidence of how participants communicate about what they regard as appropriate fathering. Research on labor migration in Indonesia and the Philippines illustrates how changing work arrangements can prompt families to reconsider who earns income and who provides daily care (Lam & Yeoh, 2018). In Nonbes, the analysis examines how fathers describe such responsibilities under their own household circumstances.

Together, the two perspectives connect the meaning of caregiving to the circumstances and conversations in which fathers describe taking it on. Schutz's social phenomenology helps interpret what fathers experienced, how they understood those experiences, and what they intended to achieve. Symbolic interactionism helps interpret how expectations about fatherhood are expressed, affirmed, or reconsidered in exchanges with others. For example, a father's concern about what his child eats may explain why he wants to change a feeding routine. His account of discussing that change with a grandparent can then show how he communicates his expectations and responds to another caregiver's position.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1. Research Design

This study used a qualitative phenomenological design within a constructivist paradigm. It examined how fathers in Nonbes understood their experiences of caring for children under five considered at risk of stunting, how they described negotiating caregiving responsibilities, and what motivated their involvement. The analytical procedure drew on Moustakas (1994). Schutz's social phenomenology guided the interpretation of the experiences and goals that fathers associated with their actions. Symbolic interactionism informed the analysis of how fathers described defining and negotiating their roles in interactions with spouses, other family members, and health workers.

3.2. Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in Nonbes, Amarasi District, Kupang Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. Seven fathers were selected purposively based on criteria relevant to the research question. Eligible participants were 20–40 years old, lived in Nonbes, were willing to participate, and had a child under five considered at risk of stunting. The participating fathers were 32–40 years old and worked in civil service, farming, livestock raising, carpentry, driving, or automotive repair. Table 1 presents their ages, occupations, and total number of children. Participant codes are used to attribute individual accounts in the findings.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

No.	Participant code	Age (years)	Occupation	Number of children
1	RP	33	Civil servant	2
2	AN	33	Civil servant	3
3	JF	32	Farmer and livestock keeper	1
4	EA	36	Self-employed carpenter	2
5	RT	40	Driver and farmer	1
6	YT	37	Farmer and livestock keeper	1
7	SM	34	Mechanic	3

Note. The final column shows each participant's total number of children.

3.3. Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document review. The interviews invited fathers to describe their daily caregiving responsibilities, explain how they discussed feeding and childcare with their spouses and other caregivers, and reflect on what motivated their involvement. Fathers' accounts also addressed the practical circumstances surrounding their decisions, including work commitments, household finances, and help from relatives. Participant observation provided context for interpreting accounts of everyday caregiving and family interaction. Document review supplied background on the local setting in which the fathers' experiences were examined.

3.4. Data Analysis

The analysis drew on *epoché*, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation as described by Moustakas (1994). During *epoché*, the researcher sought to set aside prior assumptions about fatherhood and gender roles when engaging with participants' accounts. Phenomenological reduction involved identifying significant statements, grouping related statements into themes, and developing descriptions of fathers' experiences. Imaginative variation directed attention to how circumstances such as work schedules, income, and relationships with other caregivers shaped those experiences. Schutz's concepts of *because-motives* and *in-order-to motives* guided the interpretation of what had prompted fathers' actions and what they hoped to achieve. Symbolic interactionism helped interpret how fathers described communicating and negotiating their responsibilities.

3.5. Trustworthiness

The study used triangulation and member checking to assess the credibility of the analysis. Triangulation involved considering interview accounts alongside observational and documentary material. The researcher also sought expert input to examine the interpretation of the data. Through member checking, participants had the opportunity to comment on how their experiences had been represented and to clarify points that needed further explanation. This feedback helped the researcher assess whether the interpretations reflected participants' intended meanings and where further clarification was needed (Birt et al., 2016).

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis identified four themes in the accounts of seven fathers caring for children under five considered at risk of stunting in Nonbes, Amarasi District, Kupang Regency. The themes concern how the fathers understood their roles, what they did in daily care, what motivated their involvement, and how they responded to competing demands. Their accounts ranged from an emphasis on providing financially to sharing daily care with a spouse or assuming primary caregiving responsibilities at home while a spouse worked abroad. Table 2 summarizes these differences and identifies the practices and interactions discussed in the following sections.

Table 2. Themes and Subthemes in Fathers' Accounts of Caregiving in Nonbes

Main theme	Subtheme	Evidence from participants' accounts
1. Meanings of fatherhood and caregiving	Sharing care in dual-earner households	RP described dividing morning tasks with his wife. EA understood fatherhood as combining financial provision with shared attention and care.
	Assuming primary care while a spouse worked abroad	RT and YT described taking responsibility for meals and other daily needs while their wives worked abroad.
	Emphasizing financial provision	SM and AN described earning income as their principal responsibility and attributed most daily childcare to their wives.
2. Forms of paternal involvement	Food, feeding, and household routines	Fathers described preparing meals, taking turns feeding children, budgeting for food, and fitting these activities around work.
	Attending and coordinating Posyandu visits	RP attended with his wife. JF usually provided transport and received updates afterward. YT reported taking his child to Posyandu and sharing updates with his wife abroad.
	Play, learning, and emotional presence	Fathers described playing, reading picture books, using digital media, and making time to talk with their children.
3. Motives for involvement	*Because-motives*	Fathers drew on earlier concerns about their children's growth, experiences of seeing their wives struggle with care, and religious understandings of parental responsibility.
	In-order-to motives	Fathers wanted their children to grow well, remain healthy, feel secure, and stay emotionally close to both parents.
4. Constraints and negotiation	Time and income constraints	Work fatigue and uncertain earnings affected when fathers could provide care and how they budgeted for food.
	Feeding difficulties and coordination with grandparents	Fathers described responses to poor appetite and differences with grandparents over snacks and meals. RT reported telling the child's grandmother what food he wanted her to serve.

Note. The table summarizes patterns in the interviews. The same participant may illustrate several subthemes.

4.1. How Fathers Understood Their Caregiving Roles

4.1.1. Sharing Care in Dual-Earner Households

RP and EA described fatherhood in terms of providing income and participating in household care. RP emphasized flexibility in how he and his wife divided tasks. EA, whose wife worked as a teacher, included affection and attention in his understanding of a father's responsibilities. Their accounts give concrete meaning to shared caregiving. They describe organizing household work around both spouses' employment and recognizing that children need attention from both parents. RP's reference to "helping" his wife also suggests that fathers can take on domestic tasks while continuing to use language that associates those tasks primarily with mothers.

> *"I work to meet the needs of the family, and also help my wife in doing household chores together." (RP, 33)*
>
> *"For me, being a father means being a balanced life partner for my wife. This applies in earning a living and building and maintaining a household." (EA, 36)*

4.1.2. Taking Primary Responsibility for Care While a Spouse Worked Abroad

RT and YT described assuming primary responsibility for daily care at home while their wives worked abroad. RT combined earning a living with preparing food and attending to his child's health. YT described a similar arrangement and presented his wife's migration as a family decision made in response to economic circumstances. Their accounts show how a change in where spouses live and work can alter who carries out everyday care. They also show that migration can expand a father's practical responsibilities while both spouses continue contributing to family life.

> *"Sometimes I feel heavy, but I have to take responsibility because my children still need my attention. Every day I have to make a living, but I also prepare food and pay attention to the children's health." (RT, 40)*
>
> *"In this situation, I remain a responsible father. Taking care of the children is completely my duty." (YT, 37)*

4.1.3. Defining Fatherhood Primarily Through Financial Provision

SM and AN described earning income as their principal responsibility. SM connected paid work directly to care through the money it provided for meals, milk, and other household needs. AN likewise emphasized providing for the family and acknowledged that his wife took responsibility for most daily childcare. These accounts help explain why a father may see himself as contributing to a child's care even when his involvement in feeding or other daily routines is limited. Alongside the accounts of RP, EA, RT, and YT, they show that caregiving arrangements and understandings of fatherhood varied across the households studied.

> *"In our house, the division of tasks is clear. I focus outside the home to earn a living, while my wife is fully focused at home taking care of the children." (SM, 34)*
>
> *"So far, my main focus has been more on work... At home, to be honest, the one who takes care of the children on a daily basis is indeed my wife." (AN, 33)*

4.2. What Fathers Did in Daily Care

4.2.1. Preparing Food, Feeding Children, and Budgeting for Meals

Fathers described involvement in feeding through combinations of practical work and financial provision. RP prepared bath water and porridge before work and described taking turns feeding the children. EA reported setting aside money for foods such as eggs and meat and preparing ingredients the previous evening. YT described preparing meals and feeding his child while trying to provide protein-rich foods despite an uncertain income. These accounts show how decisions about food were connected to the timing of paid work, who was available to prepare meals, and which purchases families could prioritize.

> *"I am actively involved in taking care of the children's food and drinking. I wake up every day at 5 am to prepare hot water for the children to bathe, cook porridge and the mother bathes and takes turns feeding our two children." (RP, 33)*

4.2.2. Attending Posyandu and Sharing Information About Growth

Fathers' involvement at *Posyandu*, the community health post, took several forms. RP attended with his wife and described helping when the children became restless. JF typically provided transport and learned about the results from his wife afterward. YT reported taking his child to monthly visits and sharing information about the child's growth with his wife abroad. These examples show how arrangements for attending a visit can shape how information reaches each parent. The interviews give clearer evidence about attendance, practical support, and the relay of information within families than about the content of direct conversations between fathers and health workers.

> *"I always take my wife and children to the posyandu, but I rarely go in and participate in the posyandu activities until it is finished. Usually my wife will tell me about the condition of the child... after the examination." (JF, 32)*

4.2.3. Spending Time Together Through Play, Reading, and Conversation

Fathers also understood care as spending time with their children. EA described playing with his children and reading picture books with his wife. JF used toys and online videos to introduce colors, letters, and numbers. RT described talking and playing with his child after collecting the child from the grandmother's home. These activities mattered to the fathers because they offered ways to participate in their children's daily lives, show affection, and support learning. RT's account also illustrates how care could continue across settings during the day, with the grandmother providing care while he worked and RT spending time with his child afterward.

> *"Usually after I go home, I pick up my child at his grandmother's house. While unwinding we tell stories and play together. The affection I give by being present and accompanying my child." (RT, 40)*

4.3. Why Fathers Became Involved and What They Hoped to Achieve

4.3.1. *Because-Motives*: Experiences That Shaped Involvement

Fathers drew on different experiences when explaining their involvement. AN acknowledged that his participation in daily care was limited, while describing concern about his children's growth and development as a reason to become more involved. EA also connected his attention to caregiving with concern about his child's condition. RP recalled seeing his wife struggle after the birth of their first child. JF spoke of wanting to support his wife during and after her postpartum recovery, and RT linked his caregiving to an appreciation of the sacrifices his wife had made by working abroad. RP also connected his sense of responsibility to his

religious beliefs.

> *"Since the birth of my first child, I have seen that my wife has also had difficulties, which makes me to be involved in taking care of and caring for the child." (RP, 33)*

From Schutz's perspective, these accounts connect present actions to experiences the fathers regarded as significant (Schutz, 1932/1967). RP's recollection of his wife's difficulties helps explain why he came to see direct care as part of his role. RT's account likewise gives meaning to taking on daily care by situating it within his wife's contribution to the household through migration. Concern about a child's growth also had different implications across cases. AN described wanting to become more involved while continuing to identify paid work as his main responsibility. His account illustrates how a motivation to participate can coexist with an established division of work.

4.3.2. *In-Order-To Motives*: Goals Fathers Associated with Care

Fathers described goals that included healthy growth, fewer illnesses, and children feeling secure and loved. EA spoke about wanting to see improvements in his child's growth, while JF hoped his child would grow well, learn, and stay healthy. RT emphasized the child's relationship with both parents while his wife worked abroad. RP likewise hoped his children would receive affection from both parents. In Schutz's terms, these are *in-order-to motives* because they describe what fathers hoped to achieve through their involvement. They give meaning to actions such as preparing meals, attending Posyandu, and spending time with children (Schutz, 1932/1967).

> *"I want my child to grow up healthy, feel safe, and still get attention even though his mother is far away." (RT, 40)*

4.4. Constraints and Negotiation in Daily Care

4.4.1. Making Time for Care Around Paid Work

Paid work shaped when fathers could take part in caregiving. SM described leaving for the workshop early and sometimes returning after his children had fallen asleep. His account shows how the work that enabled him to provide for the household also reduced his opportunities to spend time with his children. Other accounts describe fitting care into mornings, evenings, or weekends. RP's morning routine and RT's time with his child after work illustrate two ways fathers organized care around employment. Their accounts show that the opportunity to participate depended partly on timing and partly on whether another caregiver was available.

> *"In the morning I have left for the workshop, only at night come home tired. Sometimes I go home, the children are already asleep." (SM, 34)*

4.4.2. Managing Uncertain Income and Food Expenditure

JF described uncertainty about farm income as a source of pressure and pointed to his wife's encouragement when discussing that experience. YT explained that irregular earnings shaped the food he could buy and that he tried to provide protein-rich foods each week. EA's account offered a different example. He and his wife set aside part of their joint income for food they prioritized for their children. Together, the cases show variation in how families managed feeding expenses. JF highlighted support between spouses, YT described adapting purchases to available income, and EA identified budgeting as something the couple did together.

> *"My income is uncertain, we don't always eat good food but I try to provide at least protein food for my child every week." (YT, 37)*

4.4.3. Responding to Feeding Difficulties and Discussing Food with Grandparents

Fathers described difficulty maintaining feeding routines when a child was ill or reluctant to eat. JF worried when his child lost appetite during illness, and YT reported using a phone to persuade his child to eat. These accounts illustrate how fathers responded when a usual routine became difficult. Other feeding concerns arose when grandparents provided care. RP valued having relatives available to look after the children, but reported that snacks at their grandparents' home made it harder for the children to eat meals prepared at home. RT described responding to a similar difference in expectations by speaking directly to the grandmother.

> *"There are common differences of opinion because I leave the child with his grandmother... But I always tell his grandmother to give him only cooked food." (RT, 40)*

RT's account provides a concrete example of how a father communicated a caregiving preference.

He relied on the grandmother for care while also telling her what food he wanted the child to receive. The excerpt establishes that RT made the request. The grandmother's response and whether the feeding routine changed remain unclear. This distinction matters for the study's question about negotiation. Some interviews describe arrangements that fathers said they worked out with their spouses, while others show a request, objection, or attempt to coordinate care from the father's perspective. Each offers a different level of evidence about what happened between caregivers.

4.5. Discussion

4.5.1. Gender Expectations and the Meaning of Fatherhood

The findings show that financial provision remained important across several understandings of fatherhood. SM and AN defined it as their principal contribution. RP and EA described combining it with practical or emotional care. RT and YT reported taking primary responsibility for care at home when their wives worked abroad. Lam & Yeoh (2018) similarly describe how maternal labor migration in Indonesia and the Philippines can reorganize caregiving and prompt fathers to reconsider gender expectations. In Nonbes, the interviews show how such changes were described in relation to particular work and family arrangements. They also illustrate how a father could expand his caregiving role while continuing to value his identity as a provider.

Interaksionisme simbolik provides a way to interpret these differences through the meanings fathers attached to familiar tasks and roles (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). For RP, doing chores alongside his wife was consistent with a more flexible understanding of being a father, even though he described it as helping her. For RT, preparing meals and managing daily care became part of what responsibility meant while his wife worked abroad. These accounts suggest that gender expectations can be negotiated through ordinary decisions about who cooks, who feeds the child, and who is available after work. The meanings of those tasks become visible in how fathers describe and justify their involvement.

4.5.2. Child Feeding and Health Monitoring as Work Shared Across Caregivers

Research on child nutrition has emphasized that fathers, grandmothers, and other relatives can influence feeding practices (Adisu et al., 2026; Martin et al., 2021; Mukuria et al., 2016). The Nonbes accounts add detail about how that involvement was coordinated. At home, it could involve preparing food before work or asking a grandparent to change what was served. At Posyandu, it could involve attending together, providing transport, or sharing information after a visit. These distinctions matter because they show where communication enters the process. A father who learns about a visit from his wife participates differently from one who attends and later sends an update to a spouse working abroad.

The family accounts also show why practical support and differences of opinion may coexist. Grandparents made childcare possible during working hours, while fathers sometimes questioned aspects of the feeding routine. Putri et al. (2024) and Palan Peten et al. (2023) show, in different Indonesian settings, why local social arrangements and gender expectations matter for understanding family participation in child health. In this study, the communication evidence is clearest where fathers describe a specific action, such as relaying a Posyandu update or asking a grandparent to serve cooked food. These examples locate caregiving decisions within relationships that families rely on from day to day.

4.5.3. Connecting Caregiving Motives to Everyday Constraints

Schutz's distinction between past experiences and intended goals helps explain why similar practices carried different meanings for different fathers (Schutz, 1932/1967). Preparing food could express support for a spouse managing paid work, concern about a child's growth, or a sense of responsibility during a spouse's absence. Fathers' hopes for healthy growth and emotional security gave direction to those efforts, while work schedules and income shaped the options available to them. The study's contribution is to show how those motives and constraints entered conversations and arrangements with other caregivers. Growth and well-being appear in these accounts as outcomes fathers hoped to support. The evidence concerns their experiences, reported practices, and attempts to organize care.

5. CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION, SUGGESTION, AND LIMITATIONS

The accounts of seven fathers in Nonbes show that paternal involvement in caring for children under five considered at risk of stunting took several forms. Some fathers understood their main responsibility as providing income, others shared daily care with their spouses, and two assumed primary caregiving responsibilities at home while their spouses worked abroad. They described preparing meals, budgeting for food, attending or arranging transport to *Posyandu*, and discussing feeding practices with other caregivers. In Schutz's terms, earlier concerns about a child's growth and experiences of seeing a spouse struggle with care helped explain their involvement. Their hopes for healthy growth and emotional security gave direction to those efforts. Work schedules, uncertain income, and shared care with grandparents shaped what fathers could do in practice.

The study contributes to family communication research by showing how fathers' understandings of their roles become visible in everyday exchanges about care. A father who learns about a *Posyandu* visit from his spouse, one who relays an update to a spouse working abroad, and one who asks a grandparent to change what a child is served each participates in care through a different form of communication. These accounts also suggest that taking on more caregiving tasks can coexist with a strong sense of responsibility as a provider. For health communication, the findings point to the value of considering how information reaches fathers and how families share that information across households and caregiving arrangements.

Posyandu staff and local health offices could invite fathers to take part in discussions about feeding and growth monitoring and provide a brief summary that caregivers can share with family members who cannot attend. Where grandparents regularly care for a child, family discussions could include them so that feeding arrangements are understood by those who carry them out. Community leaders could support these efforts by recognizing fathers' practical contributions to care, including preparing food and taking children to appointments. Future research could compare accounts from fathers, mothers, grandparents, and health workers and follow families over time to examine how caregiving arrangements and communication change.

The findings reflect the experiences of seven fathers in one community and should be interpreted in light of the work and caregiving arrangements described in Nonbes. The analysis draws primarily on fathers' accounts, so the perspectives of spouses, grandparents, and health workers are represented chiefly through what fathers reported. Some interviews describe a request or an attempt to coordinate care in more detail than the response it received or the agreement that followed. The study also did not track children's growth over time. Improved growth therefore appears in the findings as an outcome fathers hoped to support through their involvement.

REFERENCES

Adisu, M. A., Molla, B., Gessesse, A. D., Tigabu, D., Wodaynew, T., Ali, A. S., & Habtie, T. E. (2026). Paternal engagement in infant and young child feeding: A systematic review and meta-analysis of its extent and associated factors. *Maternal & Child Nutrition, 22*(1), Article e70174. https://doi.org/10.1111/mcn.70174

Badan Kebijakan Pembangunan Kesehatan. (2025). *Potret stunting di Indonesia* [A national overview of stunting in Indonesia]. Kementerian Kesehatan Republik Indonesia. https://www.badankebijakan.kemkes.go.id/potret-stunting-di-Indonesia/

Beal, T., Tumilowicz, A., Sutrisna, A., Izwardy, D., & Neufeld, L. M. (2018). A review of child stunting determinants in Indonesia. *Maternal & Child Nutrition, 14*(4), Article e12617. https://doi.org/10.1111/mcn.12617

Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C., & Walter, F. (2016). Member checking: A tool to enhance trustworthiness or merely a nod to validation? *Qualitative Health Research, 26*(13), 1802–1811. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316654870

Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Prentice-Hall.

Lam, T., & Yeoh, B. S. A. (2018). Migrant mothers, left-behind fathers: The negotiation of gender subjectivities in Indonesia and the Philippines. *Gender, Place & Culture, 25*(1), 104–117. https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2016.1249349

Martin, S. L., McCann, J. K., Gascoigne, E., Allotey, D., Fundira, D., & Dickin, K. L. (2021). Engaging family members in maternal, infant and young child nutrition activities in low- and middle-income countries: A systematic scoping review. *Maternal & Child Nutrition, 17*(Suppl. 1), Article e13158. https://doi.org/10.1111/mcn.13158

Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, self, and society: From the standpoint of a social behaviorist* (C. W. Morris, Ed.). University of Chicago Press.

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412995658

Mukuria, A. G., Martin, S. L., Egondi, T., Bingham, A., & Thuita, F. M. (2016). Role of social support in improving infant feeding practices in western Kenya: A quasi-experimental study. *Global Health: Science and Practice, 4*(1), 55–72. https://doi.org/10.9745/GHSP-D-15-00197

Palan Peten, Y. Y., Lamawuran, Y. D., & Ratumakin, P. A. K. L. (2023). Penanganan stunting dalam budaya patriarki: Analisis gender program Gerobak Cinta di Kabupaten Flores Timur [Addressing stunting in a patriarchal culture: A gender analysis of the Gerobak Cinta program in East Flores Regency]. *Jurnal Trias Politika, 7*(2), 262–281. https://doi.org/10.33373/jtp.v7i2.5618

Putri, L. D., Agustin, H., Bakti, I., & Suminar, J. R. (2024). Addressing health illiteracy and stunting in culture-shocked Indigenous populations: A case study of Outer Baduy in Indonesia. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 21*(9), Article 1114. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph21091114

Schutz, A. (1967). *The phenomenology of the social world* (G. Walsh & F. Lehnert, Trans.). Northwestern University Press. (Original work published 1932)