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Positive Feeding Practices Among Toddlers in Poor Fishing Families

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Abstract: Toddlers have a vulnerability to nutritional problems; their growth and development are influenced by family feeding patterns. Positive feeding practices can help maintain the nutritional condition of children in families living in limited food. The study aimed to explore positive feeding behavior in toddlers in poor fishing family's environment in Sei Barah Village. The study applied a qualitative approach to narrative design. The participants included of five mothers from poor fishing families who had toddlers with normal status, four supporting informants. Data collection through in-depth interviews, data is analyzed descriptively to describe the research findings. The findings of the study are positive feeding practices in toddlers, including the use of seafood as the main food source of the family, the use of market vegetables that are still suitable for consumption, food processing adapted to the child's age stage, the implementation of a regular meal schedule, the creation of a comfortable and pleasant eating atmosphere. The conclusion, positive practices that have developed need to be recognized and strengthened, increased attention to the process of growth and development, strengthening positive feeding is the basis for improving the nutritional status of children in the family.

1 INTRODUCTION

Nutrition problems in children under five remain an important issue in health development in many countries, especially in developing countries. The early childhood period is a crucial stage in the life cycle because during this period, physical growth and brain development occur very rapidly. Malnutrition in the early stages of life can have long-term effects, such as stunted growth, reduced learning ability, low productivity in adulthood, and an increased risk of non-communicable diseases later in life. Meeting nutritional needs from an early age is considered one of the main determinants in improving the quality of a country's human resources (Hasanah 2023).

Global reports continue to show that child malnutrition is an issue that requires ongoing attention. Although various nutritional interventions have been implemented in many countries, the number of children with stunted growth is still relatively high. This situation indicates that improving children's nutritional status is not solely determined by food availability, but is also greatly influenced by parenting patterns and feeding practices within the family environment. In this

context, families play an important role in determining the quality of children's nutritional intake, especially in communities with limited economic resources and access to food sources. (Arif et al. 2020).

Nutritional problems among toddlers in Indonesia are still found in various regions with diverse socioeconomic conditions. Communities with low levels of welfare generally have a higher risk of facing nutritional disorders in children due to the family's limited ability to meet adequate and nutritious food needs. One group that is vulnerable to these conditions is fishing families living in coastal areas. Dependence on marine catches as the main source of income means that the family's economic condition is greatly influenced by the season, weather, and marine environmental conditions, so that family income is often uncertain (Bappenas 2019).

The instability of fishermen's family income can affect household food security, including the ability to meet children's nutritional needs. Under certain conditions, families may find it difficult to provide sufficient variety and nutritional value in their children's diets. This situation makes toddlers the most vulnerable group to nutritional disorders if families are unable to adapt in utilizing available

food sources. However, poverty is not always synonymous with poor child nutrition. In some communities, there are families who are still able to maintain their children's nutritional status through the use of local food ingredients and the implementation of feeding practices adapted to local environmental conditions (WHO 2018).

A number of research studies on child nutrition have tended to focus on assessing risk factors and various nutritional problems, such as poverty, limited access to food, and low utilization of health services. This approach is important for understanding the main causes of nutritional problems, but attention to positive practices that have developed within communities has been relatively limited. In fact, the experiences of families who are able to maintain their children's nutritional status despite limitations can be a valuable source of learning in designing family- and community-based nutrition improvement programs (Asiku 2022).

Positive feeding practices within families can be understood as a form of community adaptation in the face of limited resources. These practices include the use of local food ingredients, regulating children's meal schedules, preparing food according to the child's age, and creating a comfortable eating atmosphere to increase children's appetite. However, these practices are often not scientifically documented, so their potential as part of community-based nutrition improvement strategies has not been fully utilized (Suparmi, S Rahayu, R Fajrin and Kurniasih 2023).

Based on this situation, a more focused study is needed to identify positive feeding practices that have developed within families, especially among poor fishing communities living in coastal areas. Understanding these practices is expected to provide insight into how families maintain their children's nutritional status despite limited resources. Therefore, this study aims to examine positive feeding behaviors among toddlers in poor fishing families in Sei Bilah Village, as an effort to explore local practices that have the potential to support improved child nutrition in coastal communities..

2 LITERATURE

Teori The theory of positive deviance explains that in a community or group of people facing relatively similar resource constraints, there are always certain individuals or families who are

able to achieve better living conditions than other members of the community. This success is not due to greater access to resources, but rather to the existence of certain practices, strategies, and behaviors that are more effective in dealing with the same problems. In other words, solutions to a problem often already exist within the community itself, but have not been systematically identified and disseminated (Marsh et al. 2004).

Positive practices are often simple and in line with local wisdom, making them easy for other families to implement without requiring significant additional resources. Indicators of positive behavior can be seen in several aspects, namely Positive feeding behavior in the family can be seen in the ability of parents to utilize available local food sources and process simple ingredients into foods that are acceptable to children and still meet their nutritional needs. This practice is also demonstrated through consistent and regular feeding, adjusting the type and texture of food according to the child's age and eating abilities, and responsive parental guidance during the feeding process so that children can consume food optimally (Fitriyatun and Putriningtyas 2021).

In addition, positive feeding behaviors are also reflected in families' efforts to create a pleasant eating atmosphere, maintain children's appetite when they are sick, and develop strategies to cope with food shortages so that children's nutritional needs are still met. These practices demonstrate families' adaptive strategies in maintaining adequate nutrition for their children despite socioeconomic constraints (Marsh et al. 2004).

Positive behavior is used to describe a positive deviation related to the health, growth, and development of a particular child compared to other children in the same community or family environment. Positive behavior is based on the assumption that some solutions to nutritional problems already exist within the community; they just need to be observed in order to identify the form of positive deviation that exists. Efforts can be made by utilizing local wisdom based on the belief that each individual has specific or uncommon habits and behaviors that enable them to determine better ways. Various stimuli routinely provided by mothers or caregivers to infants, including visual, verbal, and auditory stimuli, can stimulate growth hormones, normalize energy metabolism, and improve immune responses (Dahlia 2010).

There are several elements in child care, especially the role of mothers in raising children, which will determine the growth and development of

children. Mothers' behavior in breastfeeding or feeding, healthy eating habits, providing nutritious food, and controlling portion sizes will improve children's nutritional status. According to (Singhal 2022) the elements of child care include:

a. Feeding children

Feeding children during the first six months is the fulfillment of the child's needs by the mother in the form of breastfeeding or complementary/substitute foods for the child. It is considered sufficient if the child is exclusively breastfed from birth to 4-6 months of age, whenever the child demands it, and is considered insufficient if it does not meet these criteria. Feeding children in the second six-month phase is the fulfillment of the baby's nutritional needs by the mother. It is considered adequate if the child is given breast milk plus pureed food consisting of flour mixed with milk, and/or rice (in the form of porridge or regular rice) with fish, meat, or other egg whites, plus vegetables (in combination or alone), given three or more times a day, and is considered insufficient if it does not meet these criteria.

b. Child care

Basic child care includes caring for sick children and preventive care to keep children from getting sick. This requires mothers to be able to recognize and care for sick children, including the ability to recognize respiratory tract infections and diarrhea, two diseases that often affect children. Therefore, children need to be trained to develop healthy habits such as: bathing twice a day, washing hands before and after eating, eating regularly three times a day, brushing teeth before bed, and urinating in the toilet.

c. Mother and child interaction

In order for children to grow and develop well, reciprocal interaction between mother and child is necessary in providing stimulation. Thus, childcare is a form of interaction and stimulation from the adults around the child.

d. Health care

Child health care is related to the cleanliness of skin folds, the anogenital area (especially after urinating or defecating), and the cleanliness of nails and teeth (for children who have grown teeth). Attention should also be paid to the cleanliness of the

umbilical cord, whether it has dried or become infected (the umbilical cord usually dries within 24 hours and falls off within four to ten days). Personal hygiene for children also includes caring for their hair and scalp. They may have cradle cap (eczema with dirty crusts on the scalp, which can be treated by shampooing the head or removing the crusts with coconut oil). Maintaining oral hygiene for children includes paying attention to the presence of moniliasis in the mouth, which is characterized by white spots on the oral mucosa and/or tongue (Widiyanti, Rosita, and Sayekti 2021).

Positive feeding practices for toddlers are parenting practices that aim to meet children's nutritional needs by providing food that is appropriate for their growth and development. This practice is not only related to food availability, but also includes the selection of food types, processing methods, feeding times, and how parents feed their children. Proper feeding can help maintain children's nutritional status, especially in families with limited resources who need to manage food optimally (Gibney 2009).

a. Types of Food

The types of food given to toddlers need to meet the principles of balanced nutrition by providing sufficient sources of energy, protein, vitamins, and minerals. Children need a variety of foods that include sources of carbohydrates, animal and plant-based proteins, vegetables, and fruits so that their nutritional needs can be met. Food diversity is important to prevent certain nutrient deficiencies and help children become familiar with various types of food from an early age.

b. Food Preparation

Food preparation is an important factor in making food easy for children to consume while maintaining its nutritional content. Food needs to be prepared in a manner appropriate for the child's age, such as being softened, finely chopped, or cut into small pieces so that it is easy to chew and swallow. In addition, proper preparation techniques help maintain food hygiene and reduce the risk of infection that can affect a child's nutritional status.

c. Meal Times

Regular feeding times are an important part of good feeding practices. Toddlers

generally need three main meals accompanied by snacks to meet their daily energy requirements. A regular feeding schedule helps children get enough energy intake and form good eating habits from an early age.

d. Feeding Methods

The way parents feed their children also determines the success of the feeding process. Parental guidance with a patient and responsive approach to children's needs can increase children's interest in eating. A calm eating atmosphere and positive interactions help children develop healthy eating habits, while pressure or coercion during meals can cause children to refuse food (Hardinsyah and Supariasa 2017).

3 RESEARCH METODHS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a narrative method to understand the experiences and practices of families in implementing positive feeding behaviors for toddlers in poor fishing families in Sei Bilah Village, Sei Lapan District. The research was conducted in 2025, involving five mothers with toddlers in good nutritional status as primary informants, as well as the informants' husbands and health cadres as supporting informants to enrich the information about family conditions and the local environment. Data were collected through in-depth interviews based on interview guidelines, direct observation of feeding practices and family environmental conditions, and the use of secondary data from local health facilities. Data validity was ensured through source and technique triangulation and reconfirmation with informants. Data analysis was conducted continuously through data reduction, narrative data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification to obtain an overview of positive feeding practices as a family strategy in maintaining toddler nutritional status amid socioeconomic limitations.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Identifying Positive Behavior in Feeding

Informants believe that to avoid stunting, families need to make the best use of marine products because fish and other marine products are the most easily accessible sources of nutritious food.

The fish and marine products consumed by families are usually obtained through CL, which involves hiding part of the catch before it is handed over to the boss. The types of catch that are hidden include grouper, red snapper, shrimp, blue crab, and squid. The catch that is taken is generally fish with a high selling value that is usually exported to Malaysia, as stated by the first informant:

"The food issue I raised is actually not difficult, Ma'am. We eat what the people here eat. We are all fishermen, so we eat fish, shrimp, squid, and crab. We only eat fresh fish, and we deliberately set aside a small amount so that the boss doesn't find out. If he finds out, we could be asked to pay or be fined. The fish are actually good quality, usually exported to Malaysia. Besides, the fish that reach the auction site are said to be mixed with various chemicals, like formalin, alum, or white powder—I'm not really sure. That's why my child is healthy, ma'am, because they never eat the fish sold at the market. Even so, our income has decreased a bit, but that's okay".....

In addition, to maintain the health of their children, families also commonly give them Chinese capsules containing snakehead fish essence or worm extract mixed into their food or drinks, especially when the catch is abundant at certain times. These capsules are purchased at the Kesuma herbal shop. This practice has been passed down from generation to generation within the family and is considered one way to maintain children's immunity, as stated by the fourth informant:

.... "I didn't forget to ask her grandmother to give her Chinese capsules so that she would be healthy. Here, people often go there. They usually buy vitamin capsules for children at the Kesuma store so that they will be healthy. Don't get me wrong, ma'am, there are also Chinese capsules for children with diarrhea. The price is cheap, depending on where you buy them"...

The results of the study show that families practice positive behavior by utilizing fish catches and other marine products for sale to meet their daily needs. Meanwhile, the marine products consumed by families generally come from CL, which is setting aside a portion of the catch before handing it over to the boss. Although this practice results in uncertain income because the amount of catch is not always large, families continue to do so because they realize that fish is the main source of food they can provide to support their children's health. In addition, the unequal distribution of the catch is also one of the reasons families engage in this practice.

4.2. Identifying Positive Food Behavior

Based on interviews with informants, namely mothers who have children with good nutritional status, it is known that the food ingredients most often used in families come from seafood, such as grouper, snapper, giant prawns, tiger prawns, blue

crabs, and squid that are still fresh or have not been preserved. In addition, other food items that are also frequently consumed include chicken feet, potatoes, gambas, and bean sprouts. Chicken is consumed relatively infrequently, while meat is almost never consumed except on special occasions such as parties. The mothers also acknowledged that to meet their families' food needs, they more often buy affordable food items, including retail food items or leftover market goods that are still fit for consumption. This was conveyed by the first informant:

“When he was a baby, he didn't eat anything except breast milk and bananas. When he was about ten months old, I gave him rice flour mixed with milk. When he got a little bigger, he ate rice porridge, then as he grew older, his food became a little coarser, and now he eats rice just like us. Whatever we eat, he eats too. The most common foods are snapper, shrimp, crab, and squid, but sometimes we set aside a little bit of our catch so that the boss doesn't find out, because if he does, he might get angry. As for vegetables, the most common are potatoes and bean sprouts, because they are the cheapest and always available at the store. For fruit, oranges are the cheapest, usually sold in small quantities, the leftover oranges that didn't sell out.”

The informant's statement was corroborated by her husband's statement. Here is what he said:

.....“It's always been like that, it's no secret. We work hard to catch the fish, but other people enjoy them. So we set aside a little for our children at home. On one boat, everyone usually does the same, setting aside a little. We are afraid of being caught, but if everyone does it, it's okay. Reportedly, a lot of the fish are sent to Malaysia”.

This statement indicates that the practice of setting aside or hiding part of the catch has become commonplace among fishermen. The types of fish that are usually set aside are those with high market value, which are generally sold overseas, including to Malaysia.

The following is information from the informant regarding the types of food consumed by her child on a daily basis for one week.

Food type	Frequently (>3 times)	Ocasional (1-3times)	Never
Animal protein			
- Eggs	✓		✓
- Snapper/grouper	✓		
- Soft-shellcrab		✓	
- Squid			
- Tiger prawns	✓		
- Meat			✓
- Milk			✓
Plant-based protein			
- Tofu		✓	
- Tempe		✓	
Vegetables			
- Bean sprouts	✓		
- Carrots			✓
- Beans	✓		
- Potatoes			✓
- Kangkung			✓
- Daun ubi			✓
- Sawi			✓
Fruits			
- Oranges	✓		
- Bananas			✓
- Apples			✓

Table 1. Types of Food Consumed in One Week

Based on the informant's statement, it can be understood that the mother applies positive behavior in feeding by making fish and other seafood, such as shrimp, crab, and squid, the main menu for her child. The mother believes that these foods are sufficient to meet her child's nutritional needs, so she does not feel the need to add other types of food. This condition is also influenced by the family's economic limitations, which limit their food choices to the most readily available sources.

4.3. Identification of Positive Behavior in Food Processing

The process of preparing food to obtain the taste, aroma, and nutritional value contained in food ingredients. The food preparation process can affect the nutritional content, thereby reducing the nutritional value of the food ingredients if not done carefully.

The following statement was obtained from

the first informant regarding food processing, namely :

.....*"My child is one year and six months old. His food is the same as what we eat, ma'am. However, if the food is a little hard, I mash it a little, and I also shred the fish so that it is easy to eat. He eats a variety of foods, ma'am. Vegetables are usually boiled or stir-fried. The vegetables are washed first before being cut so that nothing is wasted. Sometimes the fish is mixed with clear soup, with a little bit of soup greens added. If my child gets bored, I sometimes fry it. Squid is usually fried in batter, but not for too long so it doesn't get tough like rubber. Crab is usually just boiled with fried onions, because my child likes soupy foods. As for his older brother, Hanafi, he'll eat whatever is cooked for him".*

This statement is also reinforced by the opinion of the informant's husband, as follows :

.....*"We don't just work to eat, ma'am. There are many other needs that must be met. Actually, we also want our family to eat well every day, but our income doesn't allow it. So, when it comes to meals, I ask my family at home to cook the fish I bring from the sea. I usually bring fish that is still good so that we don't have to buy meat or other side dishes. It's okay if we lose a little money, anyway the fish that is set aside is not allowed to be sold. For the children, the fish is of course cut into small pieces first, it can't just be given to them as is, otherwise it could get stuck in their throats, ha-ha".*

Based on the identification results, it can be concluded that there is positive behavior in processing food ingredients according to the age of toddlers. Seafood ingredients are processed by boiling or stewing. Plant-based protein ingredients are simply fried, and ingredients are washed before being cut into pieces to preserve nutrients during the processing.

4.4. Identifying Positive Behavior During Feeding Time

Some informants fed their children according to their wishes or requests, while others followed a predetermined feeding schedule. The following are statements from informants regarding the timing of feeding their children.

....*"I emphasize meal times, ma'am. When it's time to eat, then eat; when it's time to sleep, then sleep. I don't want my child to be like other children who wander around until they forget when it's time to eat and sleep".*

This statement shows that the mother has

accustomed her child from an early age to follow a set schedule for eating and sleeping within the family, because she does not want her child to get used to playing without regard for time. This statement is also reinforced by the informant's husband, as conveyed in the following statement.

.....*"How can he eat with us, It will be noisy. Usually, he eats first with his brother, and after he is full, his mother eats. Like now, when his mother came, he was sleeping because after lunch, it was his nap time. To be organized, don't be like his parents who don't have a regular schedule"....*

The following is the fourth informant's statement regarding the timing of feeding her child:

.....*"When my child was little, I breastfed him whenever he wanted, whenever he asked for it. But since he's gotten a bit older, around six or seven months old, I started giving him porridge and set his mealtimes, at seven in the morning and five in the afternoon. As he grew older, his meals became three times a day. If he doesn't eat regularly, he can get a stomachache, Ma'am. Even we can get a stomachache if we don't eat on time. He's my only child, so I really take good care of him".*

This statement shows that feeding the child has been scheduled since the age of six months until now, because the mother believes that irregular eating can cause the child to get sick easily. The mother also views the child as very precious, so it needs to be protected and cared for as well as possible. This condition differs from the fifth informant, who said that since childhood, her child had been introduced to various types of food as part of the process of introducing food to children. The following is the statement of the fifth informant :

"My child has always been given a variety of foods, bananas, honey, rice, porridge, eggs, fish, everything, ma'am, so that he doesn't cry. Because when babies are fussy, they are usually hungry, maybe their mother's milk is not enough. Even now, his eating habits are sometimes irregular; sometimes he wants to eat constantly in the morning, afternoon, and evening. For snacks, I sometimes give him chicken feet made into a clear broth, or clams with soy sauce skewered on sticks, like satay for snacks".

This statement is also reinforced by the opinion of the informant's husband, as follows:

My child eats anything, as long as he wants to eat, Ma'am. If he wants to eat, just give it to him, no need to stick to a meal schedule. The important thing is that the child is healthy and strong. Right now, my child is a source of pride

because he never gets sick, thank God. His older siblings also rarely get sick, even though his father is in this condition.

Based on research findings, feeding times for children generally follow a schedule agreed upon within the family. Although the arrangement does not fully comply with the guidelines recommended by the Indonesian Pediatric Society (IDAI), the pattern applied is basically still geared towards providing main meals accompanied by snacks at certain intervals. Meal times are arranged to fit in with the child's daily activities so that their nutritional needs are met on a regular basis.

4.5 Identifying Positive Behavior Feeding Methods

Feeding toddlers should be done without coercion, because giving them large amounts of food in a short period of time can make them feel pressured and cause them to refuse to eat. Children need to be given the opportunity to enjoy the process of eating calmly. If the eating experience is enjoyable from the start, then the process of eating at subsequent times will usually be easier. During mealtimes, it is important for parents to create a safe and comfortable environment for their children, whether they are sitting in a high chair or being held in their parents' lap or arms.

The results of the study show that feeding practices for toddlers in poor fishing families are carried out using a persuasive approach, whereby mothers try to persuade their children to eat while creating a comfortable and pleasant atmosphere during mealtimes.

The following was revealed by the informant as follows:

.....“My son, Zefri, knows that he has to wash his hands before eating. Sometimes he uses soap, sometimes he doesn't, but more often than not he doesn't use soap. I have taught him this since he was little. Usually, if I persuade him, he will eat, but if he doesn't want to, I have to coax him a little, ha...ha...”.

Research findings show positive practices in feeding infants, where mothers actively help their children eat while creating a pleasant atmosphere, for example by coaxing, singing, taking their children to places they like, or inviting them to play so that they continue to eat without feeling forced. However, in practice, hand hygiene during feeding is not always maintained properly, which mothers explain is due to limited access to water sources that are located quite far from their homes..

5 CONCLUSION

The identification of positive behaviors in feeding practices among infants with good nutritional status in poor fishing families in Sei Bilah Village can be summarized as follows:

- a. Positive feeding practices were observed, where families utilized seafood as their main food source and added snakehead fish oil capsules to their children's meals to support nutritional adequacy.
- b. The types of food consumed by children generally come from seafood such as grouper, shrimp, crab, and squid, and are supplemented with vegetables and fruits such as potatoes, carrots, gambas, bean sprouts, and oranges.
- c. Food ingredients are processed by adjusting the texture and shape of the food to the age of the child, generally through boiling or making soup so that it is easier to consume.
- d. Mealtimes for children follow the daily meal schedule established in the family.
- e. The feeding process is carried out actively by the mother by creating a pleasant eating atmosphere through persuasive approaches such as coaxing and cajoling the child to eat.umakan.

6 SUGGESTION

This research is expected to provide several benefits, including:

- a. For the community, the findings of this study can be a source of information that solutions to various problems faced have actually developed within the community itself, so they need to be explored and recognized for optimal use.
- b. For the Desa Lama Community Health Center, the results of this study are expected to encourage a more active role in monitoring the growth and development of toddlers more intensively, so that cases of malnutrition can be detected earlier, while also making positive feeding practices for toddlers with good nutrition a reference in efforts to improve the nutritional status of children in Sei Bilah Village..
- c. For educational institutions, this research can be used as an academic reference source on positive feeding practices for toddlers with normal nutritional status.

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APPENDIX



Figure 1. Sei Bilah Barat Village Office, Sei Lapan Subdistrict, Langkat Regency

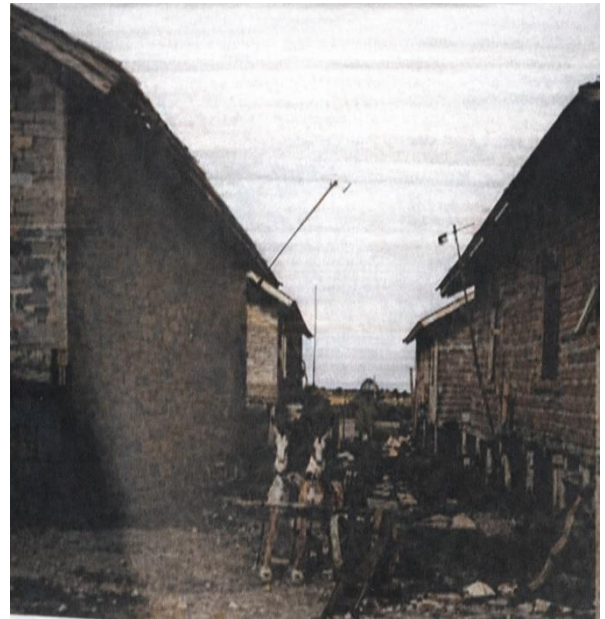


Figure 3. Fishermen's housing built by the Langkat Regency government

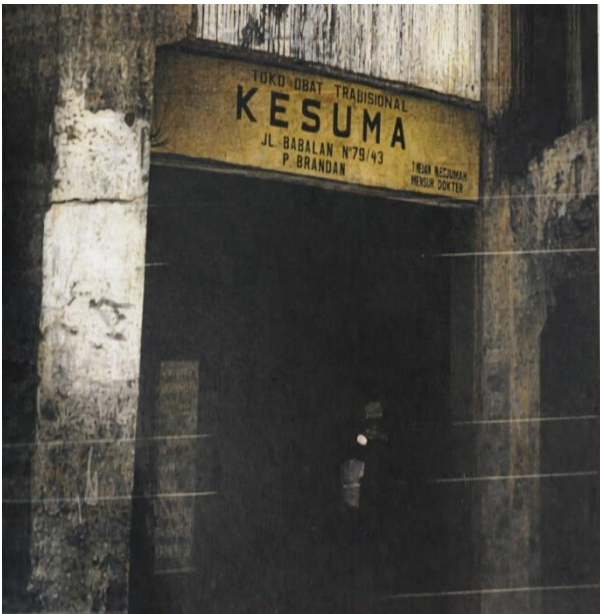


Figure 2. Kesuma Pharmacy Where informants purchase traditional medicines



Figure 4. With the family of Mrs. Samsiah, the first informant