

SNACKING HABITS AND DIFFICULTY EATING (PICKY EATER) INCIDENCE IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN IN EAST JAVA

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Abstract

Picky eating is a significant challenge among preschool children, characterized by their reluctance or selectiveness towards certain foods. This behavior not only troubles parents but also raises concerns about meeting children's crucial nutritional needs during their growth period. In East Java, a study aimed to explore the correlation between snacking habits and the prevalence of picky eating in preschoolers. Conducted through a descriptive analytic approach with a cross-sectional design, the research involved 400 respondents sampled through accidental selection. Findings revealed that a majority of preschoolers in the region had a habit of snacking more than twice a day (59.2%), while a considerable proportion (54.0%) experienced difficulty with eating. Statistical analysis further indicated a significant association ($p < 0.05$) between snacking habits and the incidence of picky eating. This underscores the importance of understanding and managing children's snacking behaviors to address picky eating tendencies and ensure adequate nutrition during this critical developmental stage.

Keywords— Snacking Habits, Picky Eater, Preschool Children

INTRODUCTION

Difficulty eating is a common issue among preschool children, characterized by a reluctance or selectiveness towards certain foods. Preschoolers, aged 3 to 6 years, undergo rapid physical growth, necessitating increased nutritional requirements compared to later stages. Adequate nutrition is crucial during this developmental phase to support growth and prevent complications. Hence, it's essential for parents to address this challenge effectively. The feeding habits adopted for preschoolers significantly impact their growth journey, as nutritional intake directly influences physical development, overall health, and cognitive abilities (Novi, 2015).

According to a study published in the International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity, approximately 26% of children exhibit picky eating behaviors, while 37.2% experience eating difficulties, with "very selective intake" being the most prevalent at 25.4% (Steinsbekk et al., 2017).

The problem of difficulty eating, especially in children, is a common problem in Indonesia. Research conducted at the Picky Eater Clinic Jakarta Indonesia stated that in preschool children aged 4-6 years, the prevalence of eating difficulties in children was found to be 33.6%, most of which 79.2% had lasted more than 3 months (Vina, 2008 in Aizah, 2019). The number of children experiencing malnutrition continues to increase. Data on the nutritional status of children in Indonesia is based on 2018 Riskesdas data, 3.9% of children experiencing malnutrition and 13.8% of children experiencing malnutrition. In 2018, 3.35% of children in East Java Province experienced malnutrition and 13.43% of children under five experienced malnutrition (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019). The prevalence of children who have

difficulty eating in East Java is based on research by Kusmiati (2019), namely 46.2% of children have difficulty eating and the habit of consuming snacks is 53.8%.

Street food is a problem that needs attention from the public, especially parents, educators and school administrators. Snack food currently being sold is still a risk to health due to unhygienic handling, which allows the snack food to be contaminated with microbes or food additives (BTP) (Cahyadi, 2016). Consuming snacks can delay hunger. When consumed excessively, it can trigger a decrease in appetite for main foods so that children will have difficulty eating main foods (Kusmiati, 2019). The habit of consuming excessive snacks can cause obesity problems (Anggraeni, 2015).

In addressing this issue, parents assume a pivotal role in mitigating children's eating difficulties. Strategies include offering visually appealing meals to prevent food monotony, restricting snack intake to prevent fullness before main meals, and ensuring a variety of nutritious foods aligning with toddlers' nutritional requirements (Idris, 2015).

The impact of eating difficulties in children can cause delayed puberty, slow growth and short stature, impaired bone mineral formation (osteopenia, osteoporosis), and psychological disorders (anxiety and depression) (Siska, 2018). If a child has difficulty eating, the nutrition consumed is not in accordance with the body's needs, resulting in poor nutritional status.

Researchers selected preschool-aged children as subjects for the study due to their developmental stage, which typically involves increased independence, autonomy, enhanced interaction with the environment, and improved emotional expression. Additionally, children at this age exhibit a natural inclination towards exploring new experiences. These developmental characteristics significantly impact eating patterns. Preschoolers, aged 3 to 6 years, undergo a transition in their eating habits, often experiencing difficulties with eating during this period.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs an analytical descriptive research methodology with a cross-sectional design. Conducted online in East Java in September 2023, the research focuses on mothers with pre-school-aged children in the region. The total population of pre-school-aged children in East Java is 2,843,152. The sampling technique used was accidental sampling, which resulted in a sample size of 400 respondents. Accidental sampling, also known as convenience sampling, involves selecting participants who are readily available and willing to take part in the study. This method was chosen to facilitate data collection within the given time frame and resource constraints. The study aims to provide a snapshot of the current situation regarding mothers with pre-school-aged children, examining various factors that might influence their experiences and behaviors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 Frequency Distribution of Respondents Based on Demographic Data in the East Java region in September 2023.

No	VARIABLES	F	%
1	AGE		
	<20 year	5	1,3
	20-35 year	354	88,6
	>35 year	41	10,2
2	Education		
	elementary school	55	13,75
	junior high school	59	14,75
	senior high school	175	43,75
	College	111	27,75

3	Work		
	Housewife	197	47,8
	private work	157	43,5
	civil servants	46	11,5
4	child's age		
	3 year	137	34,3
	4 year	93	23,2
	5 year	94	23,5
	6 year	76	19,0

Source: Primary Data 2023

Based on table 1, it can be explained that of the 400 respondents, the majority of respondents were aged 20-35 years, namely 354 respondents (88.5%) and a small proportion were aged <20 years, namely 5 respondents (1.3%), the majority of respondents with high school level education, namely 175 respondents (43.75%) and a small number of elementary school graduates, namely 55 respondents (13.75%), most of the respondents were housewives, namely 197 respondents (49.3%) and a small number were civil servants. namely as many as 46 respondents (11.5%) and the majority of respondents with children aged 3 years, namely as many as 137 respondents (34.3%) and a small number of children aged 6 years, namely as many as 76 respondents (19.0%).

Table 2 Frequency Distribution of Respondents Based on Snacking Habits and Difficulty Eating Incidences in the East Java Region in September 2023.

No	VARIABLES	F	%
1	Snacking habits		
	often (>2x a day)	237	59,2
	seldom (\leq 2x a day)	163	40,8
2	Difficulty Eating		
	Happen	216	54,0
	not occur	184	46,0

Source: Primary Data 2023

Based on table 2, it can be explained that out of the 400 respondents, the majority exhibit frequent snacking habits (>2 times a day), accounting for 237 respondents (59.2%), while a smaller portion have infrequent snacking habits, comprising 163 respondents (40.8%). Additionally, the majority experience difficulty with eating, with 216 respondents (54.0%), whereas a smaller portion do not encounter difficulty eating, totaling 184 respondents (46.0%).

Table 3 Cross Tabulation Between Snacking Habits and Incidence of Difficulty Eating in Pre-School Age Children in the East Java Region in September 2023.

Difficulty eating \ Snacking habits	Difficulty eating occurs		didn't happen difficult to eat		Total		Value p
	n	%	N	%	N	%	
often (>2x a day)	147	36,8	90	22,5	237	59,2	0,000
seldom (\leq 2x a day)	69	17,2	94	23,5	163	40,8	
Total	216	54,0	184	46,0	400	100	

Source: Primary Data 2023

Based on table 3, it can be interpreted that out of the 237 respondents whose children have a frequent snack habit (>2 times a day), 147 children experience difficulty eating (36.8%),

while 90 children do not encounter difficulty eating (22.5%). On the other hand, among the 163 respondents whose children had an infrequent snack habit (≤ 2 times a day), 69 children face difficulty eating (17.2%), and 94 children do not face difficulty eating (23.5%).

Statistical analysis using the chi-square test yielded a p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis (H_1). This signifies a significant relationship between snack habits and the incidence of difficulty eating in preschool children.

Discussion

Based on the results of the research, it can be explained that of the 400 respondents, the majority had the habit of snacking frequently ($>2x$ a day), namely 237 respondents (59.2%) and a small portion had the habit of snacking rarely, namely 163 respondents (40.8%).

Snacks play an important role in providing energy and other nutritional intake for school-aged children. School children's consumption of snacks needs to be considered because children's activity is high (Sutardji, 2012).

Too often and making consuming snacks a habit will have negative consequences, including: Decreased appetite. Unhygienic food will cause various diseases. One of the causes of obesity in children. Malnutrition because the nutritional content of snacks is not necessarily guaranteed. Waste (Irianto, 2013).

Based on table 6, it can be explained that of the 400 respondents, the majority experienced difficulty eating, namely 216 respondents (54.0%) and a small percentage did not experience difficulty eating, namely 184 respondents (46.0%). According to Febry (2013 in Fransiska, 2019), difficulty eating in children can be caused by several factors, namely organic factors including disease (throat/stomach infections), congenital abnormalities and disorders of the teeth and oral cavity, psychological factors are the impact of influential parents. on children's psychology, and nutritional factors include food provided to children including snacks and snacks. Apart from that, the mother's attitude can shape the child's character so that it is difficult to eat, including how to prepare food, how to give the child to eat, calming the child by giving snacks, forcing the child to eat, being late in giving solid food, and the mother not getting the child to eat on time (Nafratilawati, 2014).

Based on the research results, it can be explained that of the 237 respondents whose children had a frequent snack habit ($>2x$ a day), it showed that 147 children had difficulty eating (36.8%) and 90 children did not experience difficulty eating (22.5%). Meanwhile, of the 163 respondents whose children had an infrequent snack habit ($\leq 2x$ a day), it showed that 69 children had difficulty eating (17.2%) and 94 children did not experience difficulty eating (23.5%). Preschool children are those aged between 3-6 years. During this period, children experience a process of changing eating patterns where children generally have difficulty eating. At this time, children have demonstrated a process of independence where cognitive development has begun to show progress and children have prepared themselves to enter school and children need learning experiences from the environment and their parents (Hidayat, 2012). Based on table 7, it shows that the results of statistical analysis use the chi square test, namely the value of $p=0.000$ ($p<0.05$) so that H_1 is accepted and H_0 is rejected. This explains that there is a significant relationship between snack habits and the incidence of difficulty eating in pre-school children.

CONCLUSION

Most children in East Java have the habit of snacking >2 times a day (59.2%). Most children in East Java experience difficulty eating (54.0%). There is a significant relationship between snack habits and the incidence of difficulty eating in pre-school children.

SUGGESTION

Future research should involve the school environment to understand the role of schools in shaping children's eating habits. This study can explore how school policies and nutrition education programs influence children's snacking habits and eating patterns.

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