

## The Relationship Between Maternal Eating Behavior and Infant Eating Behavior: A Cross-Sectional Study

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** A mother's eating habits are influenced by various factors. These habits influence her child's attitudes and behaviors regarding feeding. A mother's eating patterns become the prototype for a toddler's eating patterns. **Objective:** The aim of this research is to determine the effect of maternal eating behavior and feeding mode on toddler eating behavior. toddler eating behavior observed among picky eaters and eating disorders. **Method:** This study used a cross-sectional design. The study was conducted from January to September 2025. Primary data was used for data collection. Data processing and analysis were conducted using univariate and bivariate analysis. The population was all toddlers in Ngrundul Kebonarum village. Consecutive sampling was used to select 60 mothers of toddlers. The instrument used is the Healthy Eating Assessment for maternal eating behavior and the Infant and Child Feeding Questionnaire (ICFQ) for toddler eating behavior **Result:** Based on our study, there is no significant relationship between maternal eating behaviour and picky eating behavior in toddlers where p Value >0.05. Second result, there is no significant relationship between maternal eating behaviour and eating behavior in toddlers related to eating disorders where p Value = 0.05. **Conclusion:** There is no significant relationship between maternal eating behavior and toddler eating behavior. Future research should include a larger sample size and measures of several other factors that influence toddler eating patterns and improving case-control research methods is also needed to specifically measure the influence of maternal eating behavior on toddler eating behavior. Implications for clinical practice include identifying maternal eating behaviors to further educate toddlers about balanced diets.

**Keywords:** eating behaviour, mother, toddler

## **Introduction**

The golden period is a child's golden age and is crucial for optimizing their growth and development. During this period, the fundamental formation of the nervous system has occurred, and connections between nerve cells begin to form (when stimulated). The postnatal environment is the environment after a baby is born, which can influence a child's growth and development, including: family socioeconomic factors, endocrine/ hormonal factors, nutrition, the caregiving environment, stimulation, medications, chronic diseases, psychological factors, and the physical/chemical environment (Dewi & dkk, 2023). The mother's dietary care practices will impact the growth and development of toddlers because malnutrition during infancy is irreversible, so toddlers need quality food intake during this period. The mother's dietary care practices will determine the toddler's nutritional status. The better the nutritional care practices, the better the nutritional status. Good dietary care practices are reflected in the increasingly better food intake provided to toddlers. Qualitatively assessed dietary intake is described through the diversity of food consumption. Food diversity reflects a person's level of nutritional adequacy (Fitri, 2026).

A mother's level of knowledge about toddler nutrition significantly influences their nutritional status, as the mother is the person with the greatest attachment to her child. Mothers spend more time with their children than with other family members, making them more aware of their child's needs. A mother's knowledge is key to meeting her toddler's nutritional needs (S Sundari, YN Khayati, 2020.). A child's good nutritional status is influenced by the mother's attitude toward fulfilling their nutritional needs. A mother's positive attitude toward eating and nutrition fosters positive food preparation behaviors. This is because one strategy for addressing eating issues in children is to be creative in preparing food (Setyaningsih & Agustini, 2014).

Poor eating habits in toddlers can lead to malnutrition. According to the Indonesian Nutritional Status Survey, the prevalence of stunting in Central Java Province is around 17.1%, underweight 15.0%, severe wasting 0.5%, and wasting 5.4% (Kementerian Kesehatan RI, 2024). The prevalence of stunting in Klaten Regency in 2024 was around 13.3%. (Dinas Kesehatan Kabupaten Klaten, 2025). Meanwhile, at the Kebonarum Community Health Center, there were around 5.2% of toddlers with malnutrition. Ngrundul Village, Kebonarum, was designated a priority village for stunting management in 2024 based on Klaten Regent Decree no. 424/110 of 2023 concerning the determination of priority villages for stunting management in Klaten Regency in 2023 and 2024 (Widayanti, 2024). Mothers' eating habits can be emulated by toddlers, thus becoming their own eating habits. For this reason, we are interested in investigating the relationship between maternal and toddler eating behavior.

## **Objective**

The aim of this research is to determine the effect of maternal eating behavior and feeding mode on toddler eating behavior. toddler eating behavior observed among picky eaters and eating disorders.

## **Method**

The type of research used in this study is cross-sectional. The study will be conducted from January to September 2025. Data collection uses primary data. The population in this study is all toddlers in Ngrundul Kebonarum village Klaten about 70 toddlers. Sampling used consecutive sampling of 60 toddlers. The inclusion criteria for toddlers begin aged 24 months. Exclusion criteria were sufferers of congenital diseases, sufferers of infectious diseases

treated in the hospital, sufferers of malignant diseases, and incomplete questionnaires. The instrument used is the Healthy Eating Assessment for maternal eating behavior and the Infant and Child Feeding Questionnaire (ICFQ) for toddler eating behavior. Data analysis was performed using univariate and bivariate analysis. Univariate analysis was performed to create frequency distributions. Analysis used the Chi-Square test and Fisher's exact test

## Result

The following are the characteristics of research subjects.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Variable	f	%
<b>Toddler Gender</b>		
Boy	26	43.3
Girl	34	56.7
<b>Age Mother</b>		
20-35 years	37	61.7
More than 35 years	23	38.3
Total	60	100

Based on table 1, most of the toddlers from the respondents were girl, about 56.7% (26 respondents) and the majority of mothers were aged 20-35 years, about 61.7% (37 respondents). Table 2 describes the relationship between maternal eating behavior and toddler eating behavior related to picky eating behavior.

Table 2 Relationship Between Maternal Eating Behavior and Toddler Eating Behavior Related to Picky Eating Behavior

	Toddler Eating Behaviour				P-value
	Picky Eater		Non Picky Eater		
	f	%	f	%	
<b>Maternal Eating Behaviour</b>					
Good	20	44.4	25	55.6	0.233
Enough	10	66.7	5	33.3	
Total	30	50	30	50	

*Uji Chi Square*

Based on table 2, it is known that there is no significant relationship between maternal eating behaviour and picky eating behavior in toddlers where p Value >0.05. From the table it is known that 44.4% of respondents (20 toddlers) are picky eaters even though the mother's eating behavior is good.

Tabel 3. The Relationship Between Maternal Eating Behavior and Toddler's Eating Behavior Related to Eating Disorders

	Toddler Eating Behaviour				P-value
	No Eating Disorder		Eating Disorder		
	f	%	f	%	
<b>Maternal Eating Behaviour</b>					
Good	36	80	9	20	0.049
Enough	8	53.3	7	46.7	
Total	44	73.3	16	26.7	

*Uji Fisher*

Based on table 3, it is known that there is no significant relationship between maternal eating behaviour and eating behavior in toddlers related to eating disorders where p Value = 0.05. From the table it is known that 20% of respondents (9 toddlers) have eating disorders even though the mother's eating behaviour is good.

### Discussion

Based on our study, it is known that there is no significant relationship between maternal eating behaviour and picky eating behaviour in toddlers. This is in line with the results of a study Iradhah Azzahrah et al., (2023) at the Integrated Health Service Post (Posyandu) in Murante Village, Luwu Regency. The lack of a relationship between parental eating behavior and picky eating in children aged 24-59 months is likely due to the fact that most parents' eating behaviors were in the good category. Most respondents consumed staple foods three times a day, frequently consumed vegetables and fruit, and ate a varied diet. Therefore, it can be concluded that parental eating behavior is not related to picky eating in toddlers.

Based on Yuanita et al., (2021), there was a relationship between maternal employment status and the incidence of picky eating in preschool-aged children in Banyumanik District. Furthermore, there was no relationship between parenting patterns and exclusive breastfeeding and the incidence of picky eating. The variable of parenting patterns can be influenced by environmental factors within the family, while the variable of exclusive breastfeeding can be influenced by the mother's food preferences during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

In our study, the majority of mothers were aged 20-35 years. The study Rahma et al., (2020) showed a relationship between maternal age during pregnancy and the nutritional status of toddlers, based on weight for age. Based on Febriana & Sulaeman (2014), maternal preferences and frequency of fruit and vegetable consumption during pregnancy, as well as the age at which children were first introduced to vegetables and fruit, were positively related to children's preferences. Furthermore, maternal support in providing and encouraging children to eat vegetables and fruit had a greater impact on children's preferences. The more children liked vegetables and fruit, the greater the frequency and quantity of their fruit and vegetable consumption.

The nutritional status of preschool children is closely related to maternal nutritional knowledge, consumption patterns, and infectious diseases. There is a significant relationship between maternal nutritional knowledge, the incidence of infectious diseases, and children's eating patterns with the nutritional status of preschool children. A mother's good knowledge of nutrition will result in her considering the types of food she provides to her child. If a child

is provided with healthy and nutritious food, the child's nutritional status will also be normal, as desired by the mother. Mothers with good nutritional knowledge will certainly eat healthy and nutritious food, but conversely, if a child is provided with food that is less nutritious, it will also negatively impact the child's nutritional status (Afrinis et al., 2021).

Based on our study, it is known that there is no significant relationship between maternal eating behaviour and eating behaviour in toddlers related to eating disorders. Based on Golang et al., (2023) there is a significant relationship between the level of mother's knowledge and the behavior of toddlers who have difficulty eating. Knowledge is something that is known to be related to the learning process. The learning process is influenced by several factors, including internal factors (motivation) and external factors (available information facilities and socio-cultural conditions), so it can be interpreted that knowledge greatly influences the decisions that someone will take about whatever they face. Parental knowledge has a big influence on the way parents feed their children. Parents who are well informed will certainly know how to provide the right food and know the things that will impact children if they do not get food according to their nutritional needs .

Based on research Zogara et al., (2025) picky eating behavior is related to several variables, including exclusive breastfeeding, low birth weight (LBW), and medical history. Variables that are not related to picky eating behavior in toddlers include gender, father's education, mother's education, number of children, and early initiation of breastfeeding (IMD). Parents should provide a variety of foods to prevent toddlers from getting bored. Parents can learn how to prepare food from various sources so that children can be given a variety of foods every day. Health workers need to remind parents to always prepare nutritious and diverse foods for toddlers. Furthermore, parents also need to be equipped with food processing skills, especially foods based on local foods.

This study has limitations, including limited sampling and a cross-sectional method, where variable measurements are taken at a single point in time. We recommend research with a larger sample size using a case-control method.

## **Conclusion**

Our research shows no significant relationship between maternal eating behavior and toddler eating behavior. This study is limited by its small sample size and limited methods. Future research should include a larger sample size and measures of several other factors that influence toddler eating patterns. Improving case-control research methods is also needed to specifically measure the influence of maternal eating behavior on toddler eating behavior. Implications for clinical practice include identifying maternal knowledge, attitudes, and eating behaviors to further educate toddlers about balanced diets. It is hoped that mothers will develop good habits before instilling healthy eating habits in toddlers.

## **Conflict of Interest**

No declare.

## **Ethical Consideration**

This research has received ethical approval from the Health Research Ethics Commission of Dr. Moewardi Regional Hospital Number: 1.731/ VII/ HREC/ 2025

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