

Factors related to picky eating in toddlers: A scoping review

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ABSTRACT

Background: Eating problems are common among children, with approximately 25%-40% of toddlers being picky eaters. During the toddler developmental stage, children experience significant growth processes, and the role of the mother is crucial in ensuring that children are not exposed to nutritional deficiencies. Children's eating patterns begin to form before the age of 3. Many parents and children find this eating skill difficult.

Objectives: This study aims to identify the factors associated with the prevalence of picky eating behaviours in toddlers.

Methods: This study employs a systematic review approach, conducting a literature search across three databases: Google Scholar, ProQuest, and PubMed. The selection of articles is guided by the PRISMA Flowchart, followed by critical appraisal utilizing the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) instrument. The findings indicate that 15 articles relevant to the literature review were identified based on the established inclusion criteria.

Results: Upon analyzing the literature, this study concludes that the factors influencing picky eating behaviours are attributed to external factors, specifically parental behaviours, and internal factors related to the child's behaviour. Picky eating, defined as selective eating behaviour, is a prevalent issue often observed in toddlers. This phenomenon can lead to growth disorders and may adversely impact children's nutritional status and overall health in the long term.

Conclusions: Several factors influence the phenomenon of picky eating in children, the most prevalent being insufficient maternal knowledge and the demands placed on working mothers. This phenomenon can lead to growth disorders and may adversely impact children's nutritional status and overall health in the long term.

KEYWORD: toddler; child behavior; parent behavior; picky eater

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INTRODUCTION

Picky Eater is an eating disorder prevalent among children, which can have significant adverse effects on both the child and the caregiver. This disorder may lead to growth impairments and adversely impact the child's nutritional status (1-2). Research indicates that feeding patterns in children are typically established between the ages of 6 months and 3 years. According to Marlina et al., eating disorders frequently manifest in toddlers, characterized by a reluctance to eat, outright refusal to consume food, or difficulties in ingesting meals or beverages (1,3).

Children between the ages of 1 and 5 years undergo a period of relatively rapid growth, necessitating a higher nutritional intake. The prevalence of picky eaters in Indonesia occurs in children around 20%, of the picky eater children around 44.5% who experience mild to moderate malnutrition, and around 79.2% have experienced picky eating for more than 3 months (5,7). The Indonesian Nutritional Status Survey classifies children's nutritional status into three categories: stunting, wasting, and underweight. Stunting occurs when height is low for age, wasting occurs when weight is low for height, and underweight occurs when weight is low for age. These three nutritional issues arise from children experiencing picky eating (14). The nutrients derived from food play a crucial role in their growth and development (3-5). At 6 months of age, children transition into the MPASI (Food Introduction) phase,

during which there is a shift from exclusive breastfeeding to the introduction of adult-like foods. This transition can be challenging for both parents and children; from the child's perspective, there is a need to learn to chew and swallow various food textures, while parents often experience stress as they strive to support their children's eating habits (6).

Throughout this developmental period, children typically encounter changes in their eating behaviours, frequently displaying selectivity towards food (7-8). Picky Eater among children is a behavioral disorder that manifests in a refusal to eat, significantly hindering the child's growth and developmental milestones. Several factors influence the incidence of Picky Eater tendencies in children, including maternal education, knowledge of the child's nutritional requirements, maternal employment status, and the overall attitude of the mother towards feeding practices (9,10).

Picky eating behaviour observed in toddlers has been associated with an increased risk of various health issues and developmental disorders, including stunting, obesity, malnutrition, and compromised brain development. Generally, children exhibiting picky eating tendencies are more likely to experience malnutrition or may be at risk of being underweight. Research conducted by Anggreni et al. indicates that if left unaddressed, picky eating can lead to significant delays in growth and development, affecting children's weight, height, and overall body weight about their age. To facilitate normal

growth and development, it is imperative to provide adequate nutritional support, ensuring optimal nutritional status (11).

Family knowledge is a crucial support system, offering direct care for all family members, whether healthy or unwell (1-2,12). The knowledge mothers possess is particularly significant, as it correlates closely with the family's ability to prevent picky eating (7, 3, 15). It has been noted that children categorized as picky eaters often present with low body weight, mainly due to inadequate nutritional intake (16-19). Suppose this detrimental eating pattern persists over an extended period. In that case, the child's nutritional status is likely to deteriorate further, resulting in suboptimal growth and development, weakened immunity, and an increased risk of morbidity (16, 21). Thus, one of the primary functions of the family is to maintain and safeguard the health of its members who are experiencing health challenges. Given this background, the researcher aims to identify the factors associated with the prevalence of picky eating behaviours in toddlers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs the Systematic Review methodology, designed to systematically describe, collect, and synthesize existing research data regarding the factors contributing to picky eating behaviours in toddlers.

Stage 1: Identify the Research Questions Given the complexity of the topic, four

research questions were identified for this review : 1) What are the intrinsic features of picky eaters in toddlers? (e.g., the child's behaviour); 2) What are the extrinsic features of picky eaters in toddlers? (e.g., others in the child's environment such as parents behaviour);

Stage 2: Identifying Relevant Studies. Comprehensive literature searches were conducted utilizing scientific articles accessed through the Google Scholar, PubMed, and Proquest databases, focusing on publications from 2019 to 2024. The keywords used to identify national journals included "picky eater in toddlers" and "picky eater factors." For international journal searches, the terms "factors" and "picky eater in toddlers"

Stage 3: Study Selection. Inclusion criteria were as follows: Published between from 2019 to 2024. 1) Children aged 1-5 years ; 2) Studies with a focus and definition of paediatric picky eating or other similar labels including fussy eating/choosy eating/faddy eating/selective eating or food fussiness; 3) Factors of picky eating focused on what impacts external factors (Parental Behavior) and internal factors (children behaviour).

Stage 4: Charting the Data. According to the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses) guidelines. were employed, with established inclusion criteria necessitating that articles be in English or Indonesian, available in full text, published within the 2019-2024 timeframe, and not classified as literature reviews or

systematic reviews. The exclusion criteria for this study specified that articles lacking full-text access, published before 2019, and those in Japanese, Chinese, Arabic, or any other language outside of English and

Indonesian would not be considered. The following presents a chart illustrating the article search strategy, utilizing the PRISMA flowchart methodology:

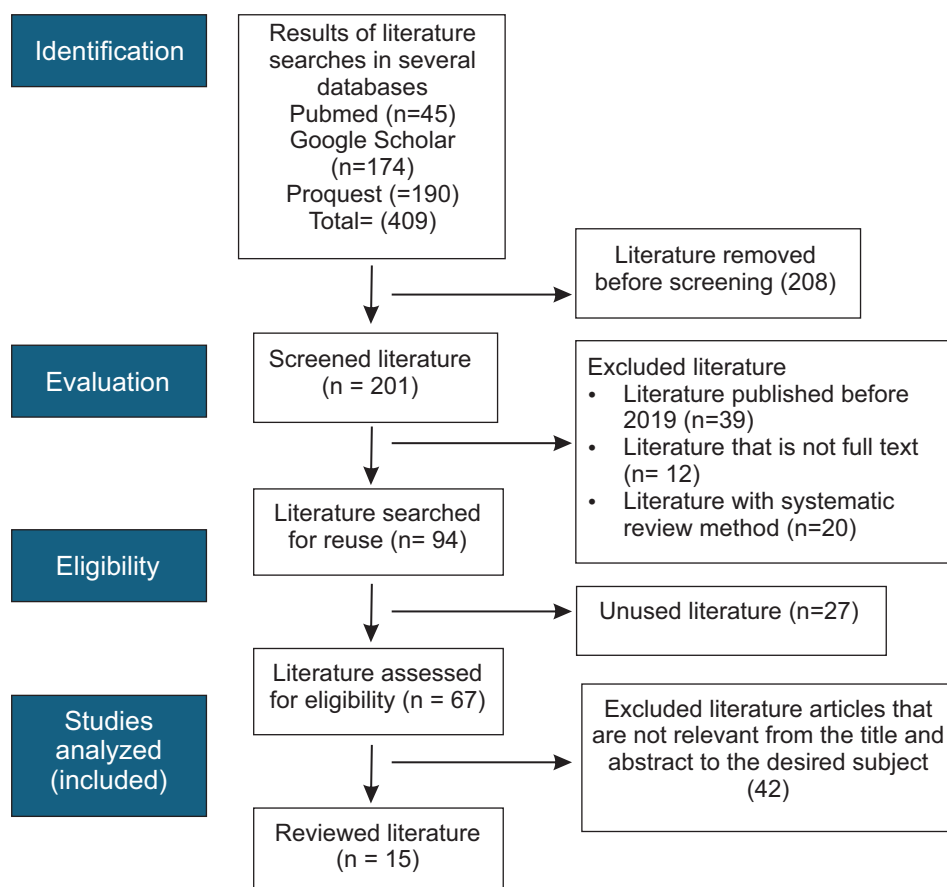


Figure 1. PRISMA (Preferred Reported Item for Systematic Rireview and Meta-analyses)

The search results in the database yielded a total of 409 articles. Before the screening, 201 articles were removed from consideration. Subsequently, several articles were excluded based on specific criteria: 39 articles published before 2019, 12 articles lacking full-text availability, 20 articles utilizing systematic review methodologies, and 36 articles based on laboratory research methods and descriptive research types.

Following the screening process, 201 articles remained for detailed evaluation. Of these, 94 articles were selected for use, while 27 were deemed unsuitable. Sixty-seven articles were assessed for relevance, with 52 excluded due to irrelevant subject matter based on the title and abstract. Ultimately, 15 articles were thoroughly reviewed.

Stage 5: Collating, Summarising and Reporting Results The evidence was

mapped using content analysis according to the above headings, and will be reported in the following section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

Among the 15 articles examined, which

can be seen in the following **Figure 1**. The factors influencing the prevalence of picky eating behaviours can be categorized into two groups: external factors, which encompass parental behaviour, and internal factors, which pertain to child behaviour.

Table 1. Factors That Influence The Occurrence of Picky Eating in Children

External Factors (Parental Behavior)	Internal Factors (Child Behavior)
Mother's knowledge	Gadget playing habits
Working mother	ADHD
Exclusive breastfeeding and complementary feeding	Children's sensory sensitivity
Parenting patterns	
Parity	
Delay in introducing food	

Table 2. External factors (parental behavior)

External Factors (Parental Behavior)	Brief Description	Study
Mother's knowledge	The high knowledge that mothers have can influence the way parents serve food to their children. The lower the knowledge of the family, especially the mother, in providing innovative and attractive food, the greater the incidence of picky eating in children. According to the researcher's analysis, this is because the mother's knowledge of food variations for children can help the child's growth and development in the process of getting to know food.	(1–4)
Working mother	There is a relationship between working mothers and picky eater behavior in children. Research shows that the status of working mothers can affect picky eater behavior, especially in preschool children.	(4,5)
Exclusive breastfeeding and complementary feeding	The role of the mother in forming eating behavior patterns begins when the baby is in the womb. Various stages in feeding are very important, such as exclusive breastfeeding, providing complementary foods, and introducing solid foods to children. The way the mother feeds her child greatly determines the behavioral patterns that are formed. Parents who control their children too much tend to result in children consuming unhealthy foods. Children tend to consume less unhealthy foods when parents guide and monitor feeding.	(2,6,8)
Parenting patterns	Mothers have an important role in feeding children. Parental feeding or maternal feeding is a term often used in parenting, specifically behavior related to parenting and feeding. Maternal feeding practices are the main key in forming children's eating behavior patterns. What children eat, how much, when, and how they eat still depends heavily on their social environment.	(4,9)

Parity	Parity or the number of children ever born does directly affect picky eating behavior in children. However, research shows that mothers with low parity (few children born) may have a tendency to apply a more restrictive feeding style to their first child, which can increase the risk of picky eating. (10,11)
Delay in introducing food	According to the articles were found that late introduction of solid foods was directly correlated with the transmission of picky eater behavioral factors. For example, parents who are late in introducing various types of food to their children will only make their children like one type of food and not like new foods (neo foodphobia). (3,7,10,13)

Parental Knowledge

Based on the results of **Table 2**, The involvement of parents, particularly mothers, is essential in ensuring both the quality and quantity of their children's nutrition. Nutritional quality is fundamentally influenced by the selection of food processing methods, types of foods, portion sizes, and the comprehensive fulfilment of children's nutritional requirements (1, 20, 21). A lack of maternal knowledge concerning dietary practices can significantly impede a child's development and growth, potentially resulting in the child exhibiting picky eating behaviours, which may ultimately lead to a decline in the nutritional status of toddlers (1, 19).

Research conducted by Sofia and Abdi in 2022, titled "The Effect of Nutrition Training on The Mothers' Knowledge Whose Children Are Picky Eaters," elucidates a substantial correlation between maternal nutritional knowledge and the prevalence of eating difficulties among children.

Furthermore, the resource "Gizi Daur Dalam Kehidupan" highlights that parental nutritional knowledge exerts a profound influence on the food choices made by children. Additionally, the child's social-

emotional environment—including meal timing, a positive home atmosphere, and parental eating behaviours—plays a critical role in determining the quantity and quality of children's food intake (3, 22).

Working Mother

The critical role of parents, particularly mothers, in preparing and providing meals for their children may inadvertently contribute to the development of picky eating habits (5, 20). Mothers' differing employment statuses—specifically, working versus non-working—affect the time available for engagement with their children and their ability to influence eating behaviours. Research suggests that a mother's employment status will likely hurt her child's eating practices (6, 23).

The study "The Relationship Between the Status of Working Mothers, Parental Eating Patterns, Exclusive Breastfeeding, and the Occurrence of Picky Eaters in Preschool Children" reveals a p-value of 0.044, as determined by a chi-square test. With an alpha level (α) of 0.05, this finding indicates a statistically significant relationship between the working status of mothers and

the prevalence of picky eating behaviours among their children (6).

Furthermore, additional research indicates a correlation between the number of hours a mother works and her children's Body Mass Index (BMI), which is associated with excessive weight. In particular, children whose mothers are employed for more than 20 hours per week demonstrate a tendency to consume more fast food, fewer fruits and vegetables, and have more limited dietary options (16, 24, 25).

Exclusive Breastfeeding and Complementary Foods

Based on research findings regarding factors associated with picky eating behaviour in preschool-aged children, there is a notable correlation between a history of exclusive breastfeeding and the occurrence of picky eating behaviours (13, 21, 23). Additionally, there exists a connection between a history of exclusive breastfeeding and the subsequent introduction of complementary foods, which also relates to picky eating behaviour in this population. These findings align with research that indicates a significant association between exclusive breastfeeding and the prevalence of picky eating. Specifically, respondents who did not experience exclusive breastfeeding reported a 30% increased risk of developing picky eating behaviours. This suggests that picky eating is considerably higher among those who did not receive exclusive breastfeeding. Furthermore, Pangestuti's 2021 study

identified a significant link between the history of complementary feeding and perceptions of picky eating behaviour in children, with a p-value of <0.001 (4,23).

Parenting Patterns

Parenting patterns play a crucial role in children's growth and development, particularly concerning their psychological well-being, socialization skills, independence, and eating behaviours. Maternal influence is significant in shaping children's dietary preferences, often leading to the development of picky eating habits. Key factors include food preparation methods, feeding techniques, using snacks as comfort, coercion to consume food, delays in introducing solid foods, and a failure to establish consistent mealtimes (14).

Research indicates a correlation between specific parenting styles—namely authoritarian, unstructured, and indifferent approaches—and the prevalence of picky eating in children. Strategies to address and manage such eating behaviours effectively could be enhanced (21, 15).

It is common for parents to exert pressure on their children to eat, which can result in negative associations with food and contribute to the emergence of picky eating tendencies. Conversely, parenting styles characterized by a lack of boundaries, excessive demands, and inadequate control over food preparation are also detrimental. A study conducted by Cerdasari has revealed a significant relationship between parenting

styles and picky eating behaviour, highlighting that 56.2% of children identified as picky eaters come from families exhibiting indulgent parenting practices (15). Parents prioritize their children's preferences in such cases, provided they agree to eat.

Parity

The journal article “Antecedents of Picky Eating Behavior in Young Children” elucidates the impact of parity on children's picky eating behaviours (17). Another relevant article, “Children's Picky Eating: Causes and Consequences of Picky Eaters,” asserts that mothers with low parity are more likely to have picky eaters compared to mothers with high parity (4, 7). This phenomenon can be attributed to mothers' varying experiences through child-rearing. Specifically, parents of multiple children tend to possess more excellent knowledge and experience than those with only one child. Consequently, a mother's previous experi-

ences with her first child significantly influence her parenting practices with subsequent children (3).

Delay in introducing food

A study entitled "Appetite: A Sign of Picky Eating Behavior in Early Childhood" elucidates the correlation between the delayed introduction of solid foods and the development of picky eating habits in children. Research focusing on picky eaters indicates that introducing solid foods at a later age, specifically between 9 and 44 months, significantly increases the likelihood of children exhibiting picky eating behaviours (5). Furthermore, providing fresh fruits and consuming the same foods as one's child has proven effective in mitigating the risk of developing picky eating behaviours later in life. Additionally, ensuring accessibility to a variety of foods as children grow can further prevent the emergence of picky eating tendencies (21).

Table 3. Internal factors (child behavior)

Internal Factors (Child Behavior)	Brief Description	Study
Gadget playing habits	There is a significant relationship between gadget use and picky eating behavior in preschool children with a risk level of picky eating behavior 5 times higher in children who use gadgets more than the recommended time. Efforts to prevent picky eating behavior in children, parents need to pay attention to the time limits for children using gadgets according to recommendations.	(5,10)
ADHD	ADHD in children can affect picky eater behavior. ADHD symptoms such as difficulty regulating oneself and impulsiveness can cause children to often skip meals or choose foods that are not nutritious. In addition, sensory sensitivity in children with ADHD can also make them more picky about the texture and taste of food.	(16,17)

Children's sensory sensitivity	Sensory sensitivity in children can influence picky eating behavior. Children who are more sensitive to sensory input, such as the texture or taste of food, may be more likely to reject foods that do not match their sensory preferences. (18,19) Sensory sensitivity can influence picky eating because exposure to taste increases acceptance and even liking of rejected foods in children.
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Gadget Playing Habits

Based on the results of the analysis of **Table 3**, it can be seen that Excessive engagement with electronic devices, precisely more than two hours per day, with limited physical activity of less than one hour, can significantly impact children's eating behaviours, particularly their tendency towards selective eating. Research indicates increased screen time correlates with unhealthy eating patterns, including frequent breakfast omission or reliance on fast food options. It is noteworthy that I often consume fast food for breakfast and prefer sugary foods (7, 12, 15).

Picky eating behavior in toddlers, with a five-fold higher risk of picky eating in children who use gadgets beyond the recommended time. To prevent picky eating in children, parents need to adhere to recommended time limits for their children's gadget use.

This is in line with research conducted by Yalin, which shows that children who skip meals for three or more hours each day and spend three or more hours eating in front of screens have a higher risk of becoming picky eaters (18,19).

It is important to consider parental influence when trying to foster healthy eating behaviors and lifestyle habits in children.

A study by Ramadani reveals that children who skip meals for over three hours daily or who eat in front of screens for more than three hours per day are likelier to exhibit picky eating tendencies. Consequently, parents must actively promote healthy eating habits and ensure that their children develop a balanced relationship with food (14, 29).

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADHD)

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), also referred to as attention deficit disorder, frequently manifests during childhood. Characteristic symptoms include challenges with concentration, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. Research conducted by Wu et al. at the Department of Child Health, Children's Hospital of Nanjing Medical University indicates that children diagnosed with ADHD are at an increased risk of engaging in hazardous eating behaviours, particularly overeating (5, 16, 26). It has been hypothesized that ADHD and selective eating tendencies may be associated with variations in dopamine activity within the brain. Children with ADHD typically exhibit lower levels of this neurotransmitter, which may lead to a preference for foods that are high in fat or sugar, as these types of foods can stimulate dopamine release (5, 12, 27).

Nevertheless, dopamine is not the sole factor influencing the selective eating habits observed in children with ADHD. Furthermore, these children often demonstrate heightened sensitivities to the sensory attributes of food, including aroma, taste, and texture. As a result, they are likely to reject foods that possess intense flavours or that they have not previously encountered (12, 17, 21).

Children's Sensory Sensitivity

Sensory sensitivity can significantly impact children who exhibit picky eating behaviours. Through repeated exposure to various tastes, A study by Roza *et al.* This type of toddler will only eat foods with soft and smooth textures and will consistently reject foods with hard textures like meat. Children who avoid foods with unusual textures will limit their intake of protein, fiber, and vitamins (31). Children can learn to accept and even develop preferences for foods they initially rejected. A study by Sofiyatin *et al.*, titled "Nutrition Training on The Mother's Knowledge Whose Children Are Picky Eaters," suggests that sensory sensitivity is a prospective predictor of picky eating behaviour. This finding complements the results from a previous cross-sectional study I conducted (7).

To address this issue, it is essential to enhance health service providers' awareness of the factors influencing picky eating behaviours. This can be achieved through the implementation of effective parenting strategies

(5, 16, 20). Research indicates that children with high sensory sensitivity raised by parents exhibiting similar sensitivity within an unstructured environment are likelier to demonstrate picky eating behaviours (5, 11, 16).

Several intrinsic and extrinsic factors contribute to the development of picky eating behaviours (2, 17, 18). Among the intrinsic factors, a child's temperament plays a pivotal role, along with issues related to feeding patterns during infancy and premature birth (9, 10, 22). Previous studies have shown a tendency for picky eaters to be predominantly male (11, 18, 20, 23) and often the firstborn child (7, 12, 15, 21, 26).

Extrinsic factors also contribute to this phenomenon, including the presence of mothers who themselves are picky eaters (9, 17, 26), maternal experiences of depression or anxiety (2, 15, 25, 27), and authoritarian parenting styles (1, 23). Furthermore, practices such as using food as a reward (8, 12, 17, 18, 24) and exerting pressure to eat have been found to increase the likelihood of picky eating in children (15, 18, 25, 28).

DISCUSSION

According to method in **Figure 1**. This review excluded reports in languages other than in English, which potentially limited information on different cultural contexts. Another limitation was that studies that investigated picky eating as secondary to other diagnoses were not included, however,

this was done to ensure homogeneity of the population. This review of picky eating considered a large range of ages of children, with many studies investigating picky eating with a similar range.

As a scoping review is reliant upon the data reported in other studies and does not have access to raw data, specific ages could not be considered. In addition, the current scoping review is based on a wide age range between 1-5 years. Whilst inclusion of children 1 to 5 years old is similar to previously published studies in picky eating, we acknowledge that the wide age range increases the heterogeneity of paediatric feeding skills included in our review.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Picky eating, defined as selective eating behaviour, is a prevalent issue often observed in toddlers. This phenomenon can lead to growth disorders and may adversely impact children's nutritional status and overall health in the long term. An analysis of 15 articles identified two primary factors contributing to picky eating. These include external factors, such as maternal knowledge, the employment status of mothers, practices of exclusive breastfeeding and complementary feeding, parenting styles, parity, and delays in the introduction of solid foods. Additionally, internal factors were identified, encompassing gadget use, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and insufficient sensory sensitivity among children. Among these influences, maternal

knowledge emerged as the most significant factor contributing to picky eating behaviours in toddlers.

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