

# Indonesian storytelling: A potential health promotion tool to address inequities in child health and a search for a community model

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## BACKGROUND

Children in Indonesia, particularly the poor in rural areas, experience significant health inequities. Public health strategies which are able to address multiple social determinants of health are likely to have the biggest impact. Effective health promotion efforts need to have a holistic understanding of health, be empowering, strengths based, sustainable and consistent with the socio-cultural context.

In holistic oral cultures traditional stories are used to pass on important messages to future generations and are being recognised globally for their public health potential. Narratives have potential to influence people's beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, values and behaviours and are being used in health communication due to their ability to culturally ground messages, overcome resistance in the listener and reach less educated audiences.

## AIMS

This review of literature explores the current use of traditional Indonesian stories (TIS) from a health promotion perspective and aims to summarize their potential as a health promotion tool. It seeks to open discussion into how traditional stories can be further maximized in health promotion efforts.

## FINDINGS

While the use of traditional Indonesian stories in early childhood education is well documented, their potential and use in other areas is less well documented. Figure 1 demonstrates the key areas where Indonesian stories, such as fables, myths and legends, have demonstrated potential in intersecting with social determinants of health (SDH).



Figure 1 Multilevel intersection of TIS and SDH

### Health Promotion Potential

- **Education:** Improve literacy, creativity, interest in learning
- **Character Development:** Develop identity and values consistent with Ministry of Education's 18 core values, strong in justice, honesty and peace, challenge discrimination
- **Local knowledge:** Disaster risk reduction eg 'Smong', food waste reduction, environmental preservation, herbal medicine, nutrition, hunting
- **Healthy lifestyle:** Hygiene, diet, addictions, sexual health, child safety

### Limitations

- Values that are counterproductive to child health eg encourage stigma and discrimination
- Some researchers have noted a move away from traditional stories
- Stories from one tribe might not be transferable to another
- Healthy lifestyles focus could put the onus on children who are relatively powerless against social, economic and political systems
- The effectiveness of a holistic, multilevel, community approach is difficult to measure

## CONCLUSION

Indonesia contains a rich source of traditional stories which are useful in child education and development. They transmit important local knowledge, encourage environmental preservation and encourage justice and equity but appear to be an underutilised health promotion tool. Their potential as a low cost, culturally appropriate and enjoyable way to address multiple determinants of child health could be further developed. Indiscriminate use would be inadvisable but careful selection and possible modification of stories such as has occurred in other countries would be appropriate.

In seeking to open discussion regarding a community model the author suggests the following steps:

- Compilation of an initial story set: 1. Selection, and modification if necessary, of traditional stories with the most health promotion potential or 2. Creation of new stories using traditional characters
- Development of a holistic health discussion guide and evidence based health resource to accompany each story
- Trial and evaluation of a primary school based storytelling program

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