

Ensuring safety of mothers and babies through SMSbunda

With many pregnant women unenthusiastic about reading KIA guideline, SMSbunda offers an alternative method of reminding them to follow necessary steps for a safe pregnancy, delivery and postnatal period.

Pregnant Indonesian women must be well familiar with a book on maternal and child health published by the Health Ministry. Widely known as KIA or a 'pink book', the guidelines contain information on recommended steps related to safe pregnancy, delivery and the postnatal period. Surely, the book is very useful for pregnant women wishing to have their fetus healthy during pregnancy, childbirth and the days that follow.

In reality, however, many pregnant women keep a distance from the real content of book. According to discussions with pregnant women and midwives, many women do not care so much for the book, with some using it just for fanning themselves or as a game material for their children.

As a consequence, many pregnant women lack the knowledge of the health services needed to keep their fetus safe during and after pregnancy.

The mother's lack of knowledge has a long list of serious implications for the fate of herself and her fetus, with her death or the death of her newborn being the worst.

Based on the Indonesia Demographic Health Survey 2012, the maternal mortality ratio (MMR) in Indonesia reached 359 per 100,000 live births and the infant mortality rate (IMR) reached 32 per 1,000 live births. In fact, Indonesia has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in Southeast Asia and it has shown a rising trend, compared to the Philippines (94), Malaysia (48), Thailand (40) and Myanmar (32). Each year, approximately 9,000 women die from complications during pregnancy or the days after delivery. In addition, each year an estimated 72,000 babies die within the first month of life.

Concerned about such an alarming rate of maternal and neonatal mortality, GE Foundation provided a grant to Jhpiego to work with the Indonesian Ministry of Health to develop a Short Messages Service (SMS) program through mobile phones to provide prenatal and postnatal information, directly to pregnant and newly delivered mothers called "SMSbunda".

SMSbunda aims to enhance a mother's knowledge of health services needed during pregnancy, delivery and the postnatal period and also to increase a mother's ability to identify health-

threatening signs during pregnancy and the early period after delivery.

A mother's tendency not to carefully read the KIA book has driven the MOH and Jhpiego to design another concept of maternal and child safety related to pregnancy, providing an alternative in this regard in parallel with its motto in terms of information: 'low dose, high frequency'.

"We give information little by little. SMS is limited in terms of words and we give the information in stages," said SMSbunda Project Director Sushanty.

The program is intended for all mothers across Indonesia irrespective of educational background and social status and that's why, "we choose SMS through cellular phones, instead of offering an application."

"If it's an application, only those coming from the middle-income and upward can afford it. SMS through mobile phones has a wide coverage in terms of users because it is much simpler and does not differentiate between brands," she said.

Stages of pregnancy

Pregnant women wishing to join the program are first required to have cellular phones and, secondly, must register by sending an SMS to a predetermined number to mention their expected due date. The registered mothers will receive free SMS messages on antenatal (ANC) and post-natal (PNC) care tailored to their stage of pregnancy, starting from the first trimester to two years after delivery.

The content of the SMS messages has been developed in accordance with the Health Ministry's "Maternal and Child Health" guidelines, such as identifying the life-threatening signs in pregnancy, nutrition information, immunizations, breastfeeding and access to health care and family planning centers.

She said that SMSbunda has been designed for one-way communication, not as a tool of counseling, even though many still misunderstand the program, as they think they can ask questions and receive answers through the phone.

"An auto reply will answer every question and ask them to refer to a particular midwife for further consultation," she said.

Kicked off in 2014, the GE Indonesia-funded SMSbunda project will run through 2017, with the Karawang regency the first of



Expecting: Pregnant women register with the SMSbunda program to obtain access to information on safe delivery in Cirebon, West Java.

the 15 mass campaign-targeted regencies across six provinces. North Sumatra, Banten, West Java, Central Java, East Java and South Sulawesi account for more than 50 percent of the maternal mortality rate nationally.

As of June 10, the number of registered SMSbunda users reached 14,000. "We receive an average 100 new registrations per day," Sushanty said.

Expanded partnerships

GE Foundation and Jhpiego partnered with the Center for Health Promotion Ministry of Health and Indonesian Midwives Association, local governments, NGOs and business partners to implement the program and encourage pregnant women to register for free with the SMSbunda.

Commitment and trust has set the basis for the role of the partners. GE Foundation provides funding, while GE Indonesia provides volunteer staff for the implementation of activities. Jhpiego designed and developed the concept of the program, managed activities and facilitated the communication with cross-sectoral institutions and organizations, including government, business and professional organizations.

"In collaboration with the local health offices and government, hospitals, community health centers (Puskesmas) and midwives, mass campaigns are conducted to attract pregnant women to register with the program," Sushanty said.

In addition to funding from GE Foundation, the program allows local health offices and local governments to collaborate with other organizations or companies in terms of seeking funds for promotional or socialization activities.



Kicking: Pakpak Bharat Regent Remigo Yolanda Berutu touches the stomach of a pregnant woman to detect movement of the fetus following an SMSbunda promotional drive in Pakpak Bharat, North Sumatra.

Citing an example, she mentioned Krakatau Steel, which financed the gathering attended by around 800 pregnant women in front of the local regent's house in Cilegon, West Java, to promote the SMSbunda initiative.

"As we have found on the ground, many parties are eager to contribute to the program. We want the Health Ministry at the central level and regional level to continue the program through expanded partnerships," she said.

Development starts from the fetus

Regents mostly hailed the presence of the SMSbunda initiative, including those whose regions that were not originally targeted to be included in the project, but who care for the future generation.

North Sumatra's Pakpak Bharat regent Remigo Yolanda Berutu, for example, has found that the SMSbunda is the most suitable that the regency has been adopting so far because "the programs help us realize our vision of creating

the Generasi Emas (Golden Generation), a generation that is healthy, perfect and smart." The PakPak Bharat government, through the local health office, adopted the project by allocating its government budget to finance promotional activities.

"Smart brains develop in the fetus and so SMSbunda is highly relevant because it reminds pregnant women to take steps according to the KIA book recommendations," said Remigo.

"We will adopt any program as long it is aimed at reducing the number of maternal and newborn deaths and to see perfect and healthy newborns," he said.

SMSbunda serves as an 'alarm' for pregnant women so they do not experience a difficult and dark period during pregnancy, delivery and postnatally, according to Remigo.

"I have invited pregnant women to register with SMSbunda to enable them to access correct and scientifically proven information in every stage of pregnancy so that they will end their traditional way

of handling pregnancy and delivery, which may endanger their own lives and infants," he said, adding, "I also ask them not to change the number because otherwise, they are required to register."

"But for me, two mothers who died during child birth is considered a high maternal mortality rate because I expect no mother should die during child birth," he said.

Jhpiego, which is affiliated with Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, the US, always conducts a series of studies with every implementation of the program.

Based on the first study on program acceptability, conducted from October until December 2014, pregnant mothers welcome the program as they gain benefits from the program. The study has also found that "they often change their numbers and forget to reregister with SMSbunda."

"This is our challenge, but we face it by keeping reminding them to reregister, to which they generally respond well," Sushanty said.

The study also showed that there are registered pregnant women who have to share their mobile phones with their husband or children. "The positive side is that, by sharing the phone with their husbands, their husbands are also informed about the messages they receive in SMS," she said.

Growing awareness

Even though it is still too early to know the impact of SMSbunda, midwives interviewed perceived that there was an increase in the number of pregnant women visit health facilities.

"This may indicate that there is a growing awareness among pregnant women on the importance of caring for their pregnancy," said Sushanty, quoting a midwife.

Although the program is still being funded by GE Foundation, endeavors are underway to consider the program's sustainability after the funding stops in 2017.

There are several alternative mechanisms, which include the possibility that local health offices adopt the system and mechanism or, in terms of funds, charge the pregnant mothers who are financially capable of paying a slight amount of money to pay the mobile phone credit and providing funds, sourced from local budgets, for those who are financially weak.

"Currently, GE Foundation provides funds to finance the program. Karawang started to initiate the possibility of self-financing the program. It has built a call center in this regard," she said.

Handry Satriago, CEO of GE Indonesia, saw program sustainability from the perspective of leaders as, according to him, developing leaders in the organization is critical. "The leaders will continue the activities," he said. **(Sudibyo M. Wiradji)**

HAVING THEIR SAY

Beneficiaries share their experiences of becoming members of SMSbunda.

'Thanks to SMSbunda, I knew what I had to do'

For Yayuk, being pregnant was a wonderful time but one that also brought with it a range of complaints, making her feel anxious and self-conscious.

Since the beginning of her pregnancy, she often experienced headaches, swollen ankles and feet, and vaginal discharge.

"I had some vaginal discharge and I was afraid that it would affect my fetus. Thanks to SMSbunda, I knew what I had to do," she said, recollecting her improved awareness after joining SMSbunda.

The young mother went to meet a midwife for consultation as recommended by SMSbunda after she expressed her concerns.

Yayuk became a member of SMSbunda two months ago when her pregnancy reached seven months.

An SMSbunda promotional drive was held in Nganjuk regency's sports hall where a midwife helped her register with the program, she said.

"I was curious to know what SMSbunda was all about and after

joining the program, I found it very helpful because it reminds me to refer to a maternal and child health (KIA) book at every stage of pregnancy," she said.

In her village, Tempel Wetan, in East Java, she was the only pregnant woman who joined the program. "Other pregnant women were afraid of joining the program. I did not know why," she said.

She said she received messages from SMSbunda twice a week in the morning or afternoon. "But recently I often receive messages in the evening. It does not make any difference for me. The important thing is I receive it," said the senior high school graduate.

She acknowledged that before joining the program, she was reluctant to read the KIA book, but "since I've received SMSs from SMSbunda, I often read it because I want to deliver my baby safely. And I also want my baby to be born healthy," she said.

Her second pregnancy came 12 years after the birth of her first son. "I began family planning and I used injections as my contraception for seven years and it was safe but then I changed to pills for contraception," she said.

"One day, we stayed the night at my relative's and I forgot to take the pill," said Yayuk, who is due to deliver her child on June 30. **(JP)**



'Serving as a reminder of the best steps to take'

Siti Rodiah acknowledges that her reluctance to read her maternal and child health (KIA) book left her somewhat uninformed about pregnancy.

However, she said, thanks to SMSbunda, which she joined several months ago, she got useful information on the importance of caring for her fetus at every stage of pregnancy, the value of breast feeding and a number of other dos and don'ts.

"Once my mom said that a pregnant woman sleeping during daylight makes her lazy. That's why she did not allow me to sleep during daylight. Now I know that what my parents say regarding pregnancy is not always right," said the 34-year-old mother.

"Pregnant women should have

enough time to relax and avoid working hard. That's the right information that I've learned in consultations with a midwife," she said. Through SMSbunda, she has learned that she is supposed to consult with a midwife or a doctor regarding any concerns or anything that she wants to know related to her pregnancy.

"For me, SMSbunda serves as a reminder of the best steps to take during my pregnancy, and it always asks me to read the KIA book," said the mother who gave birth to her second child two months ago.

Siti registered for SMSbunda when she was four months pregnant early this year, when she took part in a maternal health contest in Kramatjati, Central Jakarta, where several midwives approached her and suggested her to join the program.

"In the beginning I was doubtful about joining the program because I was worried that my cell phone credit would get used up. However, based on my experience, it does not affect my cell phone credit at all," she said. **(JP)**

Making impact on people

As corporate social responsibility (CSR) becomes increasingly important in companies' integrated business strategies, many multinational companies now allocate budgets to fund community projects.

In deciding which projects are most deserving, companies can align their long-standing principles with their long-term visions. For GE Foundation, for instance, impact is the key; only projects that are sure to have wide-reaching impact are considered for funding by the Foundation.

"There are a many good programs, but how big is the impact on people at the national level? That's critical. GE Foundation always funds projects that have national-level impacts," said GE Indonesia CEO Handry Satriago.

Apart from impact, GE Foundation also takes severity level into account. "How severe is the situation facing Indonesia? For example, maternal mortality rates in Indonesia is still very high and it is one of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for Indonesia. That's why reducing maternal mortality rates became one of our focuses," he said.

The final thing to consider is the credibility of the recipient, because, he said, everything must be transparent based on the law and prevailing policy. Handry also underscored the importance of partnership. "We will grow when our customers grow."

Today, customer satisfaction is not enough. "That's why we implement our values: "Customers determine our success" and so we make sure that they also grow, and that's why partnership is critically important here," he said.

GE Foundation funds various programs in Indonesia through several partners, and one of them is Jhpiego. "GE Foundation funds Jhpiego SMSbunda because of its reputation as well as the program's expected impact to reducing maternal mortality rates in the country," he said.

"I think having partners is very important because they are the ones that have the knowledge on the ground. They give feedback to us, which allows us to make better decisions." **(JP)**

PARTNERS FOR CHANGE

This page is produced by *The Jakarta Post* in cooperation with Company-Community Partnerships for Health in Indonesia (CCPHI). It promotes best practices in community partnerships. For more information, contact the Supplements & Supplemental Products section at supplement@thejakartapost.com.