

"Analyzing the Contribution of State and National Programs to Improve Maternal Knowledge on Child Nutrition and Feeding".

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Abstract

The problem of malnutrition among children in India is a case of grave concern in the country. One of the major causes is associated with the mothers being lackadaisical on proper nutrition and feeding habits. To enhance maternal knowledge and to mitigate malnutrition, there exist different state and national programs, including Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and POSHAN Abhiyaan and Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY). This paper will examine the role played by these programs in assisting mothers to learn about child nutrition and complementary feeding. This was implemented utilizing a mixed-methodology of survey-based and interview-based data collection both in the city and the countryside. The results indicate that the development prompted by the government had a positive contribution and so the gaps in awareness and implementation must be filled.

Keywords: Maternal Knowledge, Child Nutrition, Complementary Feeding, Government Programs, ICDS, POSHAN Abhiyaan, Public Health.

Introduction:

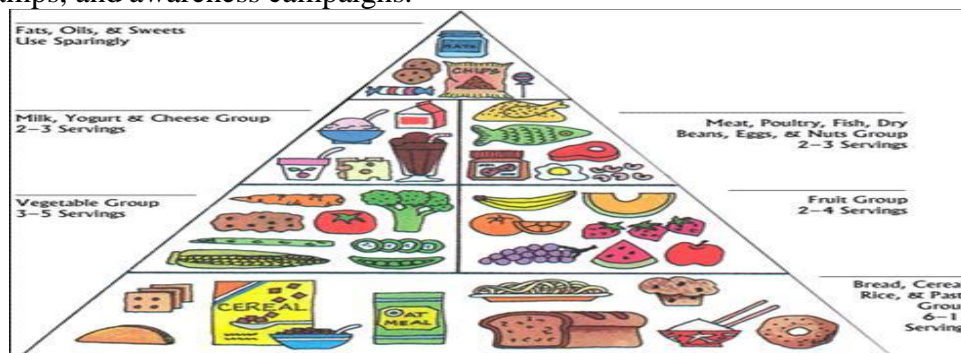
Proper nutrition in the childhood period of a child is extremely vital to the child in terms of growth, cognitive development and general health status. Malnutrition in children can be seen at many places in India and particularly in the poor and backward regions where mothers lack the adequate knowledge of what kind of food to start giving and when they should transition the child to a semi-solid food or solid food. Most mothers lack information on when they should breast feed and after how long and when to feed the child on other foods. Such ignorance may result to healthiness as well as slow growth of children.



The Government of India has initiated some programs at the national and state levels to alleviate this issue. These mighty programs are the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), POSHAN Abhiyaan (National Nutrition Mission), Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY), and National Health Mission (NHM), among others. The objective of these programs is to inform the mothers on the value of proper nutrition and feeding. They also offer services such as free food, check-ups, counseling, homemakers visits by the health workers.



Improving the health of mothers and children is the main objective of such program's communication, health promotion and reducing the number of cases of malnutrition. The effort to cover as many mothers as possible is put in by these programs via the Anganwadi centers, health camps, and awareness campaigns.



Nonetheless, these programs are successful or not based on the quality of implementation and the number of mothers learning through these programs. To certain extent, these programs are performing in certain regions, but they are failing to reach out to the most vulnerable people. In this research paper, the writer seeks to know whether these programs offered by the government are useful in raising the knowledge among the mothers regarding child nutrition and feeding. It will further examine the number of mothers who know such programs, the number that participate in them and their obstacles. It is the hope of the study to provide valuable recommendations on the types of suggestions that can render such programs more effective and beneficial to both mothers and children.

Literature Review:

In India, several studies have been carried out by researchers to examine the level of influence that mothers feeding style and child nutrition knowledge has on the health of children. According to Kumar et al. (2006), the initial feeding style of children among the mothers in the early years has a very pronounced effect on the nutritional level of that child. They demonstrated that good child under-five feeding could be used to minimize malnutrition in children.

The International Institute of Population Sciences (2021) under the NFHS-5 survey provided significant information about the development of children and how mothers feed their children in India and in particular, in Maharashtra. As outlined in the report, despite some improvements so far, too many children are undernourished, and too many mothers still do not have the right knowledge about feeding.

According to Rao, Joshi, and Bhide (2012), who conducted a study on the rural children, dietary diversity i.e., the consumption of various kinds of foods is significant to the health of the children. They have observed that most rural families fail to offer balanced diet to their children and this is due to lack of awareness in most cases.

The study conducted by Singh and Sahu (2018) appraised the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and concluded that it contributed to the enhancement of children health and nutrition, yet the issues of consistent service delivery and participation of the community remained. Varghese and Roy (2019) added that a high number of lactating mothers do not have full awareness of government nutrition schemes. According to their study, it was indicated that there should be improved communication and education.

In this case, Gupta and Mathur (2017) concentrated on tribal regions and discovered that mothers provided with nutrition education selected more appropriate food choices when it came to their children. This demonstrates that awareness campaigns are capable of actual feeding practices transformation.

A study conducted by Chaturvedi and Srivastava (2020) on the POSHAN Abhiyaan highlighted that the program was set up in good ways to raise awareness but still required improved monitoring and follow-ups in order to be more successful. Likewise, Das and Bose

(2021) investigated the knowledge level among many mothers in West Bengal, and they discovered that the mothers were knowledgeable when it comes to the basics of feeding practices, though they remained ignorant to some degree on balanced diets and the frequency of meals.

Finally, ICDS in Madhya Pradesh was examined by Pandey and Tiwari (2022). They discovered that the government was doing something to alleviate the problem but that the success rested heavily on the community involvement and the local population.

Generally, these studies reveal that governmental initiatives seem to have achieved some strides in enhancing child nutrition, but more efforts are required to enhance awareness, training and involvements at the community levels.

Objectives of the Study:

- To examine how state and national programs were influencing the enhancement of the knowledge of mothers on child nutrition and feeding practice.
- To evaluate how aware or active the mothers are in such government programs.
- To establish the obstacles encountered during the implementation of such programs at the community level.

Hypothesis:

- H1: The knowledge of the government programs on child nutrition and feeding practices by the mothers have remained much better.
- H0 Government programs have not been found to have made a significant difference as far as maternal knowledge on child nutrition and feeding practices is concerned.

Research Methodology:

The study was conducted both in Rural and urban Maharashtra. A mixture of quantitative (number related) and qualitative (experience related) methods was employed in order to gather useful information. Structured questionnaire has been developed first and contained the questions regarding the knowledge of women about breastfeeding and complementary feeding as well as their awareness of programs like ICDS and POSHAN Abhiyaan. The sample size used in filling this questionnaire is 200 mothers with children below the age of five. Such mothers were sampled through a stratified random sample technique which assisted in the selection of mothers of varying income groups and location so as to have a better and justifiable outcome.

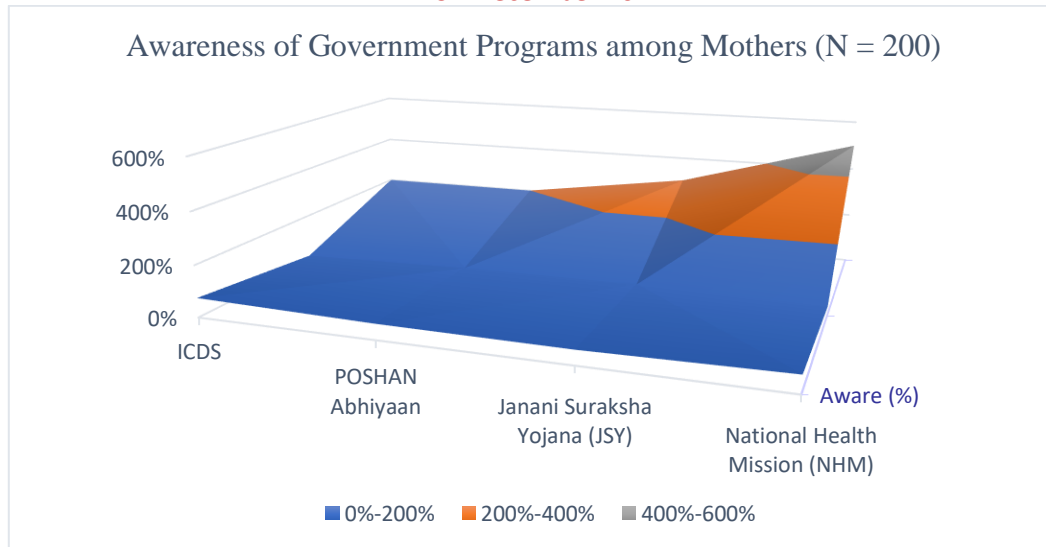
Besides the survey, the interaction with Anganwadi workers, ASHA workers, and local health officers was implemented. These interviews assisted in comprehending the way the programs are functioning in the ground level, and what are the issues that come up in the way of health workers and mothers carrying out the programs. The research was also supported using government reports, National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data and records at local Anganwadi centers.

After gathering all the information, the data obtained through the questionnaire was analyzed through simple statistics such as percentages and charts in order to identify the patterns and outcomes. Thematic analysis was done on the responses obtained in the interviews and this line of analysis entails going through the responses and identifying general themes or ideas. This approach has assisted the researcher to know the figures and the factual accounts of the numbers.

Analysis of the study:

Table 1: Awareness of Government Programs among Mothers (N = 200)

Program Name	Aware (%)	Not Aware (%)
ICDS	75%	25%
POSHAN Abhiyaan	60%	40%
Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY)	55%	45%
National Health Mission (NHM)	65%	35%



Analysis:

This table brings into attention the degree of awareness that the mother has about key State programs. The maximum awareness relates to ICDS (75%) that may be attributed to the fact that it ranks among the oldest and most widely used programme through Anganwadi centers. Mothers are better known to this program since they frequently attend Anganwadi to get such services as food supplements and health checks.

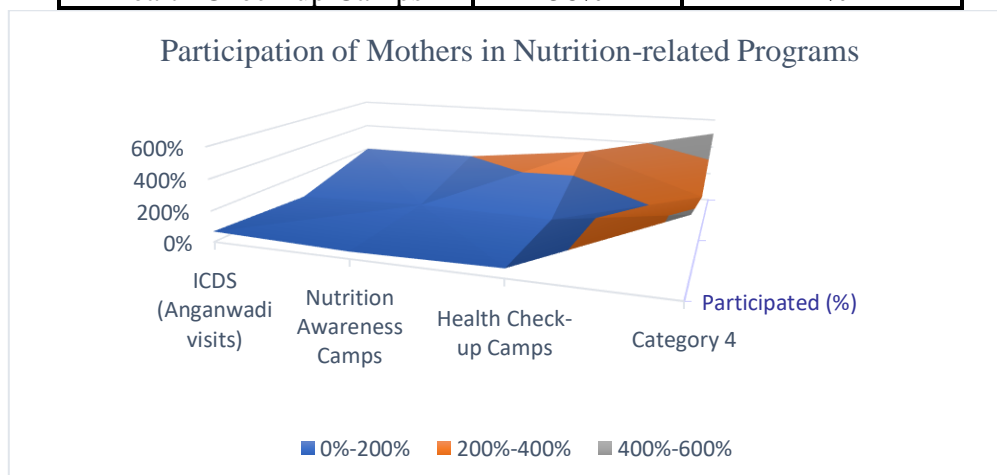
But the POSHAN Abhiyaan that is targeted specifically to increase nutrition awareness has received recognition of just 60 percent among the mothers. It is worrying since POSHAN Abhiyaan is the leading national initiative aimed directly at malnutrition. The below awareness level places an implication on promotion and outreach.

JSY (Janani Suraksha Yojana) is even below awareness (55%) yet it gives monetary rewards of deliveries in institutions. This shows a failure in either communication or appropriate counseling during pregnancy.

NHM (National Health Mission) reveals good awareness of 65 percent, and 35 percent of mothers remain ignorant though this is a program that entails maternal and child health. It indicates that there is a necessity of better IEC (Information, Education, Communication) strategies.

Table 2: Participation of Mothers in Nutrition-related Programs

Program Name	Participated (%)	Did Not Participate (%)
ICDS (Anganwadi visits)	68%	32%
Nutrition Awareness Camps	45%	55%
Health Check-up Camps	58%	42%



Analysis:

Based on the table, it will be seen that the levels of participation are lower than the levels of awareness. Although 75 percent of mothers are not information-poor of ICDS, they have attended Anganwadi centers only 68 percent. The latter implies a lack of direct access caused by time, space, or social inhibitors that do not allow the mothers to be involved.

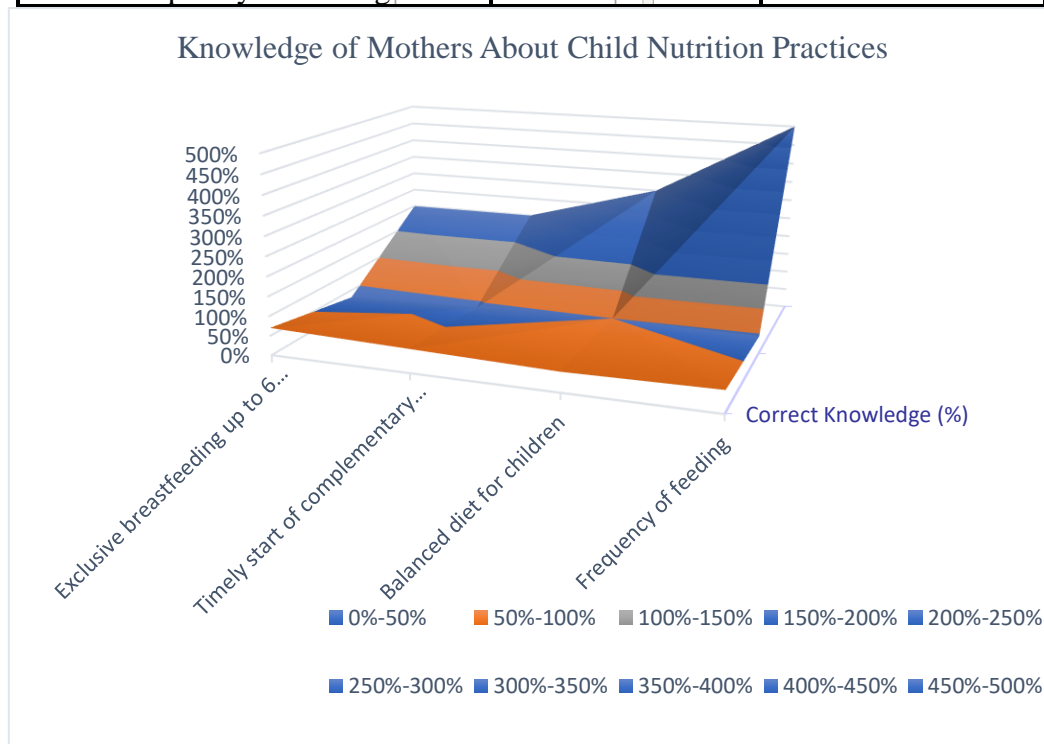
The lowest (45%) is the participation in nutrition awareness camps. Mothers can learn about such practices in these camps but more than half of the respondents did not attend. This could be as a result of irregular time, lack of publicity, or boring delivery of information.

On the contrary, 57 percent of the mothers attended health check-up camps, which is a good sign, but 42 percent of the mothers still lack access to regular monitoring of the health of their children. There are ways of promoting the attendance of these camps, such as enhancing community access and enabling the community to participate.

Looking at the difference between awareness and participation more generally, it can be said that simply telling mothers about a program is not sufficient since the aim should be to engage and encourage mothers to participate.

Table 3: Knowledge of Mothers About Child Nutrition Practices:

Nutrition Practice	Correct Knowledge (%)	Incorrect/No Knowledge (%)
Exclusive breastfeeding up to 6 months	70%	30%
Timely start of complementary feeding	60%	40%
Balanced diet for children	50%	50%
Frequency of feeding	55%	45%



Analysis:

This table is targeted at the knowledge of mothers with regards to the necessary feeding practices. The 70 percent of the mothers have the right knowledge that breastfeeding is to be conducted exclusively within the initial 6 months, which is promising that indeed families are being reached by the health operators and the breastfeeding week campaign.

Nevertheless, 60 per cent of the parents understand when to introduce complementary food into their child (approximately 6 months), and 40 per cent are non-aware or confused. Premature or late introduction of solid or semi-solid foods may result in health complications; hence this constitutes a big gap in knowledge.

The worst is that half of the mothers do not know what a balanced diet of children entails. It implies that 50 percent of the mothers possibly are not feeding their children with an assortment of grains, proteins, vegetables, and fruits. The result of this absence of knowledge can be the so-called hidden hunger because even though the child may appear to be healthy there is vitamin and mineral deficiency.

Close to 55 percent of mothers understand the appropriate frequency of feeding (how often a child should eat in a day) which can be taken to indicate that close to half the mothers are not sure. It impacts the level of calories that a child consumes and growth rate.

The combination of all these facts demonstrates the truth of this table by indicating that though general knowledge regarding breastfeeding is rather high, nutritional awareness in the breastfeeding field is low and focused support system information on what and how to feed is a high-priority area.

Conclusions Overall Results:

In this research, the authors indicate that the government initiatives such as the ICDS, POSHAN Abhiyaan, JSY, and NHM have assisted numerous mothers to acquire information on child nutrition and feeding. ICDS is one of the programs many mothers have heard about. A lot of them make their visits to health check-up camps, Anganwadi centers. This implies that the programs are not targeting people fully.

Nevertheless, all the programs are unknown to some mothers. They are not one of those who participate in the awareness camps or the other programs even when they are aware. This cuts down the full benefit of the programs.

In the aspect of knowledge in nutrition, most mothers are aware that 6 months is the time to breast feed. However, not all people know at what age they should begin giving other food, how frequently they should do that, and what the balanced diet is. Their child can be adversely impacted by such a lack of knowledge.

Besides, health workers reported that they encounter such problems as inaccessibility of materials, reduced training, and poor turnout in meetings.

Therefore, even though the programs have proved to be helpful and have had a good beginning, there still exists the necessity to enhance awareness, more active involvement as well as easy and simple education to the mothers. There should be additional efforts to ensure that every mother receives the appropriate information and support of their child regarding nutrition and health.

Outcomes of the Study:

The research has taught us the extent to which the government has used its initiatives to make mothers enlightened on child nutrition and feeding. The findings revealed that a significant number of mothers have proper information about schemes such as ICDS and POSHAN Abhiyaan and some mothers are utilising the services being offered, e.g. going to the Anganwadi centers and attending health camps. Nevertheless, not every mother would attend the sessions that aim to raise awareness or does not understand correctly how to feed their children. It was also established in the study that breast feeding information is quite positive among majority of the mothers but there is still confusion on when to begin solid foods, how frequently to feed and what comprises of a balanced diet. Health workers reported facing such problems as shortage of materials and poor turnout on the part of the mothers. In general, the research demonstrates that these government initiatives are beneficial yet they have to be improved with more intensive communication, engagement, and easy education techniques to enable mothers to pay adequate attention to feeding their children in the optimal manner.

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