

INDIA'S NUTRITIONAL STATUS UNDER POSHAN ABHIYAAN

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Abstract

Malnutrition is a significant health concern that affects both undernourished and obese individuals. It is an important indicator of a country's overall health. People who are malnourished may underperform in various areas of life and miss out on opportunities to become active and productive members of society. As a country strives to achieve its economic and social development goals, addressing malnutrition is crucial. India is making strides in economic, educational, and technological growth. However, malnutrition remains a significant challenge, hindering the country's socio-economic progress. The government is implementing several schemes and programs under the Integrated Child Development Services Scheme to tackle the issue of malnutrition. The ICDS Scheme has initiated Poshan Abhiyaan to enhance the nutrition of children aged 0-6 years, pregnant and lactating mothers, and adolescent girls. The objective of the study is to assess the level of malnutrition in India examine the Poshan Abhiyan Scheme as a nutritional program in India and evaluate its progress and accomplishments. The study is based on secondary data sources, specifically gathered from government reports and websites, to examine malnutrition and the Poshan Abhiyan Scheme.

Keywords: Poshan Abhiyaan, Malnutrition, ICDS, Covid-19, National Family Health Survey

Introduction

Malnutrition has been a persistent challenge for India for a long time, affecting people of all ages. It refers to a deficiency, excess, or imbalance in the nutritional intake of individuals. The problem is significant enough for the Indian government to consider it a national priority. To tackle this issue, the government is implementing several schemes and programs under the Integrated Child Development Services Schemes. In 2018, India launched a major initiative called POSHAN Abhiyaan, which is the Prime Minister's Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nourishment, aimed at tackling various forms of malnutrition. Despite the high levels of malnutrition in India that have remained unchanged over the past decade, this National Nutrition Mission is designed to address the critical components required to fight malnutrition, including leadership and a supportive environment,

implementing high-impact interventions, scaling up behaviour change communication, multisectoral collaboration to address underlying factors, adequate funding, tracking progress through monitoring, and utilizing technology effectively. The objectives of Poshan Abhiyaan are to prevent and reduce stunting in children aged 0-6 years, prevent and reduce under-nutrition (underweight prevalence) in children aged 0-6 years, reduce the prevalence of anemia among children aged 6-59 months, reduce the prevalence of anemia among women and adolescent girls in the age group of 15-49 years, and reduce low birth weight.

Review Literature

Sadhna Mishra *et.al* (2021), The study was based on risk factors of malnutrition in Uttar Pradesh. For this purpose, the NFHS-4 (2015-16) data was used, and stunting, wasting, and underweight as dependent variables, and age, literacy, schooling, religion, caste, etc as independent variables. The study found that there is a significant association between child age and the mother's education with stunting and underweight on the other hand wasting had only a significant association with the age of children.

Anjana Verma *et.al* (2021), A study was conducted among 200 children under the age of 5 living in rural Udaipur, Rajasthan. The study discovered that 58% of the children were stunted, 45% of them were wasted, 54% were underweight, and 5% were overweight. Malnutrition was found to be high among female children with lower socioeconomic status, children of less-educated mothers, and those who were not exclusively breastfed.

Ms. Deepika *et.al* (2021), A study was conducted between 1st January 2020 and 28th February 2020 to determine the prevalence of malnutrition among children aged one to five years living in selected slum areas of Petlad Town. The study included a total of 380 samples. The results showed that 35.30% of children were underweight, 8.90% were severely underweight, 15% were stunted, and 21.90% were severely stunted.

Sujata Murarkar *et.al* (2020), A study was conducted in two districts of Maharashtra state to assess the prevalence of undernutrition among under-five children. The study covered a total of 2929 mothers and their 3671 children. The study found that 45.9% of the children were stunted, 17% were wasted, and 35.4% were underweight. The prevalence of wasting, stunting, and underweight was higher in urban slums than in rural areas. The sex of the child, exclusive breastfeeding, type of family, income of the family, birth order of the child, diarrhea, and maternal education were identified as determinants for undernutrition among under-five children.

Objectives of the study

- To assess the level of malnutrition in India.

- To examine the Poshan Abhiyan Scheme as a nutritional program in India and evaluate its progress and accomplishments.

Research Methodology

The study is based on secondary sources data. The various data and information on malnutrition and the Poshan Abhiyan Scheme are collected from the Niti Aayog Report, other government reports, and websites.

Malnutrition in India

India's rank in the Global Hunger Index 2023 has dropped from 107 to 111 out of 125 countries. The country has the highest rate of wasting at 18.7% globally. India's hunger level is rated as serious with a score of 28.7%. The rate of undernourishment is 16.6% of the population, while the prevalence of anemia in women aged between 15 and 24 is 58.1%.

According to the Global Nutrition Report 2022, there has been no progress in reducing anemia among women of reproductive age. Currently, 53% of women aged 15 to 49 are affected. India is making progress towards meeting the target for reducing stunting in children below 5 years of age. However, the current stunting rate of 34.7% is still higher than the Asia region's average of 21.8%. On the other hand, India has not achieved any progress in reducing wasting, as the current rate of 17.3% is higher than the Asia region's average of 8.9% and one of the highest in the world. The prevalence of overweight children below 5 years of age is low at 1.6%, and India is taking steps to prevent it from increasing.

Table 1: National Family Health Survey of India 2015-16 and 2019-21

	NFHS-4 (2015-16)	NFHS-5 (2019-21)
Children under 5 years who are Underweight	35.8%	32.1%
Children under 5 years who are stunted	38.4%	35.5%
Children under 5 years who are wasted	21%	19.3%
Pregnant women aged 15-49 who are anaemic	50.4%	52.2%
Children aged 6-59 months who are anaemic	58.6%	67.1%

Source- National Family Health Survey Report 2015-16 and 2019-21

According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) conducted in 2015-16 and 2019-20, the prevalence of underweight children has decreased from 35.8% to 32.1%, stunting has decreased from

38.4% to 35.5%, and wasting has decreased from 21.0% to 19.3%. However, the survey also revealed that the percentage of pregnant women suffering from anemia has increased from 50.4% to 52.2% and the percentage of children suffering from anemia has increased from 58.6% to 67.1%. Therefore, it is evident from the NFHS report that the prevalence of anemia among children and women has increased over the years.

Main Findings of 4th Poshan Abhiyan Report (July 2021) Poshan Abhiyan was designed to cover all states/UTs and districts in three phases: 315 districts in 2017-18, 235 districts in 2018-19, and the remaining districts in 2019-20. The budget allocated for the program was Rs. 9,046 crores. According to the 4th progress report on Preserving Progress on Nutrition in India: Poshan Abhiyan in Pandemic Times, which was published by Niti Aayog in July 2021, the total utilization of funds by the states/UTs was less than 50%. The report highlights that Nagaland (87%), Meghalaya (78%), Sikkim (71%), Mizoram (67%), and Lakshadweep have utilized the maximum amount of funds. On the other hand, Punjab (22%), Puducherry (22%), Tripura (16%), Arunachal Pradesh (9%), and Odisha (8%) have the lowest utilization of funds. Additionally, the report shows a decrease in the total utilization of funds from FY 2017-18 to 2019-20 in states like Telangana, Mizoram, Daman & Diu, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, and Puducherry.

In certain large states such as Gujarat, Jharkhand, Kerala, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Rajasthan, the distribution of Take-Home Ration (THR) was 100% provided to pregnant women who were registered in AWCs. On the other hand, in the states of Jharkhand, Kerala, Maharashtra, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh, the distribution of Take-Home Ration was reported to be 100% among lactating women in six Indian states - Jharkhand, Kerala, Maharashtra, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh - Take-Home Ration is distributed to 100% of children aged between 6-36 months. However, in Bihar, the coverage of the delivery of Take-Home Rations is lower with only 65% coverage for pregnant women, 62% for lactating women, and 52% for children.

Among the small states, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura have achieved 100% delivery of Take-Home Rations to pregnant women and children aged 3-36 months. In Goa, Meghalaya, and Tripura, Take-Home Rations have been distributed to 100% of lactating women, whereas Sikkim has the lowest coverage of Take-Home Rations. Among Union Territories, the lowest Take-Home Rations coverage was observed in Jammu & Kashmir, with only 49% of pregnant women, 51% of lactating women, and 54% of children receiving the benefit. Anaemia is a public health problem that affects children and women of childbearing age. It not only increases maternal mortality but also inhibits physical and mental development. Only Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, and Puducherry covered more than 75% of children who were given doses of IFA (Iron and Folic Acid) syrup and other states/UTs had less than 25% coverage. It has been observed that most states and union territories

have successfully provided more than 75% of pregnant women with 180 IFA tablets, except for Punjab and Tripura where the coverage is less than 25%. Additionally, the coverage for lactating women who were given 180 IFA tablets is also low across the board. Moreover, the percentage of pregnant women who were given Albendazole tablets after the first trimester is also low.

According to the report, the nationwide lockdown imposed to control the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic discontinued the delivery of many health and nutrition services that are part of Poshan Abhiyan. During the pandemic, Anganwadi centers were not operational, so various services were provided to the beneficiaries at their doorstep. The Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Day (VHSNH) was organized in a graded manner and in non-containment areas to expand the access of ICDS services to the beneficiaries. Even though many health centers were struggling to cope with the pandemic, maternal and child health services were provided on-demand by home visits.

Conclusion

Although the Poshan Abhiyan Schemes have shown improvement in system readiness and service delivery coverage in states and UTs according to the 4th progress report, the prevalence of malnutrition, stunted growth, and underweight among children remains high, as per the NFHS 15-16 and 19-21. Furthermore, the incidence of anemia among children and pregnant women has increased from NFHS 2015-16 to NFHS 2019-21. Over the past five years, there has been no significant reduction in any form of malnutrition. Although the Poshan Abhiyan program aimed to reduce stunting, wasting, and underweight in children, only three out of the five indicators have seen a small decrease. Unfortunately, the prevalence of anemia among women and children has increased over the years. The ongoing pandemic has severely impacted food and health systems, making people in developing countries more vulnerable to food and nutrition insecurity. In India, reducing malnutrition in all its forms remains a significant challenge, and the country is lagging behind the global standards to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) targets. Despite the efforts of Poshan Abhiyan Schemes, they failed to utilize the available funds of 9046 crore. Mission Poshan has been relaunched as Mission Poshan 2.0, to prevent further decline in nutrition indicators. Launched by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in February 2021, this initiative brings together various schemes like Integrated Child Development Services-Anganwadi Services, Supplementary Nutrition Program, Poshan Abhiyan, Adolescent Girls Schemes, and National Creche Scheme. The objective is to implement a comprehensive and integrated strategy that strengthens nutrition content, delivery, access, and outcomes. There is a renewed focus on developing practices to promote national health, well-being, immunity to disease, and combat malnutrition. The ultimate goal is to implement these programs to prevent declining health and nutrition indicators.

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