

"ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNMENT-LED INITIATIVES IN IMPROVING MATERNAL NUTRITION AWARENESS AND INFANT FEEDING BEHAVIORS"

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To Cite this Article

Khan Arshad Tanvir, Dr. Manoj Mathew P, "Assessing The Effectiveness Of Government-Led Initiatives In Improving Maternal Nutrition Awareness And Infant Feeding Behaviors", Journal of Science Engineering Technology and Management Science, Vol. 02, Issue 03(S), March 2025,pp: 1-7, Submitted: 07-02-2025 Accepted: 18-03-2025 Published: 26-03-2025

ABSTRACT:

This paper discusses the way government initiatives can educate the mothers on proper feeding of babies and good nutrition. Most women particularly in rural settings are ignorant on the types of foods that are to be taken during pregnancy and feeding their children during the initial years. To enhance health and awareness, the government has launched a number of schemes such as ICDS, POSHAN Abhiyaan and Janani Suraksha Yojana. This study examines the degree of success in these mechanisms. We employed survey and health work interviews with mothers. Findings revealed that though government schemes worked there is still a need to create better awareness and persistence in regular follow ups in an attempt to create permanent changes.

Keywords:

Maternal nutrition, Infant feeding, Government schemes, Awareness, POSHAN Abhiyaan, ICDS, Health behavior.

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I. INTRODUCTION:

Nutrition plays a very significant role among mother and babies. The baby prospers when the pregnant mother ingests proper food. Once the baby is born, healthy feeding aids towards strengthening and nourishing the baby. However, in most regions in India particularly in villages, mothers lack adequate knowledge on what to eat and how to feed the babies. It may cause underfeeding and undernourishment among kids.



The government has been initiating numerous schemes to overcome this issue such as POSHAN Abhiyaan, ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services), and Janani Suraksha Yojana. Those programs attempt to assist mothers by providing them with free health examinations, with food provision, and beneficial information. The objectives are to enhance the awareness concerning maternal feeding and child feeding.

Messages on good food, breastfeeding, and care of children are shared with the help of health workers, Anganwadi centers, and mobile applications. Such a government programs are a major leap in alleviating malnutrition and preservation of lives.

The current research is interested in knowing: Are such schemes effective? Do the mothers know what they learn and do they actually do it? Are their babies being fed well after receiving assistance of such programs?

This study will assist in answering such questions and proposing on how to make the mothers and children be healthy.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Kumar et al. (2006) explored the relationship between infant-feeding practices and nutrition and health of children aged below five years. They concluded that mothers who give their kids the right food as in breast feeding and proper nutrition, chances of getting malnutrition are low. It was also emphasized that more mothers should be created to be more aware and mostly in the rural regions.

Valuable inputs on maternal and child health in Maharashtra can be sought under National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) by IIPS and ICF (2021). It revealed that despite the fact that there has been certain improvement, a considerable number of children remain underweight and mothers fail to use the appropriate feeding habits. The report indicated that the reason why tougher health programs and access of mothers through effective communication strategies were required.

The POSHAN Abhiyaan Progress Report released by the Ministry of Women and Child Development (2020) describes the actions of the government toward combating malnutrition. The report discusses the ways through which the program is using mobile apps, health workers, and campaigns to make mothers aware of good nutrition. It indicates that the program is of assistance, and that closer follow-up is desirable.

Bharati, Pal, and Bhakta (2017) talked about how government can enhance child nutrition in India. In their research, they concluded that although such programs such as ICDS are significant, they do not always work as fully as expected. The lack of awareness, services delivery and monitoring lapses mean that many mothers do not receive what they are supposed to get. They argued that health workers should be properly trained and regular checkups can enhance the results.

Singh and Singh (2018) focused on how different government policies are helping improve maternal health and nutrition in India. They found that schemes like Janani Suraksha Yojana and POSHAN Abhiyaan are important for spreading awareness among women. Their study showed that when mothers receive support through these programs, both mother and child health improve. However, more focus is needed on rural and backward areas where awareness is still low.

Rao and Dev (2015) conducted the investigation on the performance of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) program in India. They concluded that much as it is a highly significant program to combat child malnutrition, ICDS demands numerous hurdles. In most places services are not being availed appropriately to mothers. It appeared in the study that ICDS has the higher possibility to be more useful to mothers and children when it is better planned and more effectively monitored.

Sharma and Jain (2020) investigated their knowledge of ICDS services and its usage by pregnant women and how many of the latter are using the services. In their research, it was revealed that although several women were aware of the services, few of them frequently accessed the services. The reasons were no information, distance of the Anganwadi centers, and inefficiency of delivery of the services. Their recommendations were that usage can be increased, especially through more awareness and better facilities.

In this article, Das and Chattopadhyay (2016) examined the relationship between infant feeding and maternal health services in India. They established that with good health check-ups and counseling of the mothers during pregnancy, the mother stands a better chance to practice good feeding skills such as breast feeding. Their review confirmed the fact that health services are significant in influencing the behavior of mothers.

In order to enhance the way nutrition messages are communicated to the populace, the Ministry of Women and Child Development (2021) issued its guidelines within POSHAN Abhiyaan. These

provisions are centered on education of mothers via community programs, home visits, and use of digital tools. It was demonstrated in the report that frequent interaction with the mothers can assist in having changed nutrition behavior long-term.

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) developed a training manual with which health professionals can educate the infants and young children on feeding. It is very clear on the emphasis on the unique breastfeeding up to 6 months and appropriately complementary food beyond 6 months. The implications of this guide could enhance the education of the doctors, nurses, and other health workers in most countries including India.

Ghosh (2014) surveyed various nutrition and women health related government schemes in India. He discovered that despite the fact that a number of the programs have been operational over a long period of time, their performance is not always robust. Success is attached to the precise way in which the program is conducted. He proposed as well that the improved collection of data, enhanced cooperating between departments and the appropriate spending of funds can result in improved outcomes.

Objectives of the Study:

- To know the level of knowledge by mothers about healthy food and feeding the baby.
- To determine whether government programs are making mothers educate more on better eating habits.
- To examine the effects that these programs have brought to the feeding behavior of the mother.

Hypothesis:

- Mothers who participate in government health programs are more knowledgeable on good nutrition and feeding of babies.
- The feeding of mothers is made better with government schemes.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This research is concerned with finding the extent to which government initiatives are assisting mothers to be aware of good food and good feeding process on babies. The study was conducted in a simple and straightforward manner in such a manner that we could get candid and good responses of the mothers.

1. Type of Research:

This is a descriptive and analytical research. It entails that we gathered actual data of mothers and examined them keenly in order to interpret the effects of government programs.

2. Study Area:

The analysis was carried in the rural and the urban Nagpur district where various government health schemes are being operated.

3. Population and Sample size:

The sample of the research consists of mothers who are concerned with children under 2 years old. There were 100 mothers, 50 living in rural and 50 living in urban, chosen by simple random sampling.

4. Methods of Data Collection:

We employed primary and secondary data.

Primary Data:

We interviewed the mothers themselves through a questionnaire that had simple questions. We also conducted face-to-face interviews with some of the health workers (e.g. ASHAs and Anganwadi workers) to get more ideas as to how they work with mothers.

Involving Secondary Data:

Various reports given by the government, NFHS-5, POSHAN Abhiyaan reports, and previous research papers were also observed to familiarize the background of the problem.

5. Data Collection Tools:

The survey contained questions regarding:

- Knowledge of nutrition and feeding on the part of the mother
- Knowledge of government schemes (as ICDS, POSHAN Abhiyaan, JSY)

Whether they availed help of any scheme

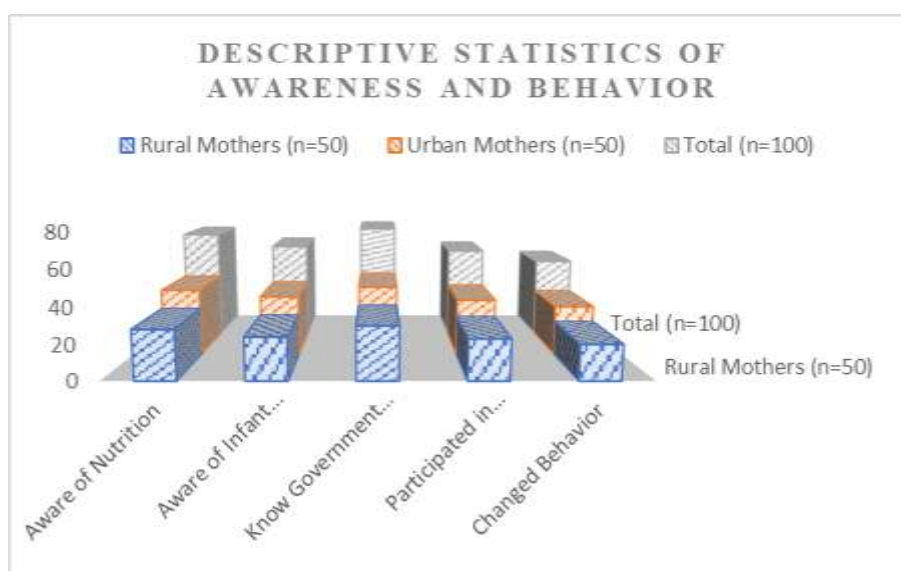
- What Differences occurred joining the program

6. Data Analysis:

Once the responses had been gathered, we tabulated the information and put it into charts. To interpret the results, we took easy percentages and Bar graphs although the comparison between rural/urban responses were not taken.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Awareness and Behavior:

Category	Rural Mothers (n=50)	Urban Mothers (n=50)	Total (n=100)
Aware of Nutrition	28	39	67
Aware of Infant Feeding	24	35	59
Know Government Schemes	30	41	71
Participated in Schemes	23	33	56
Changed Behavior	20	29	49



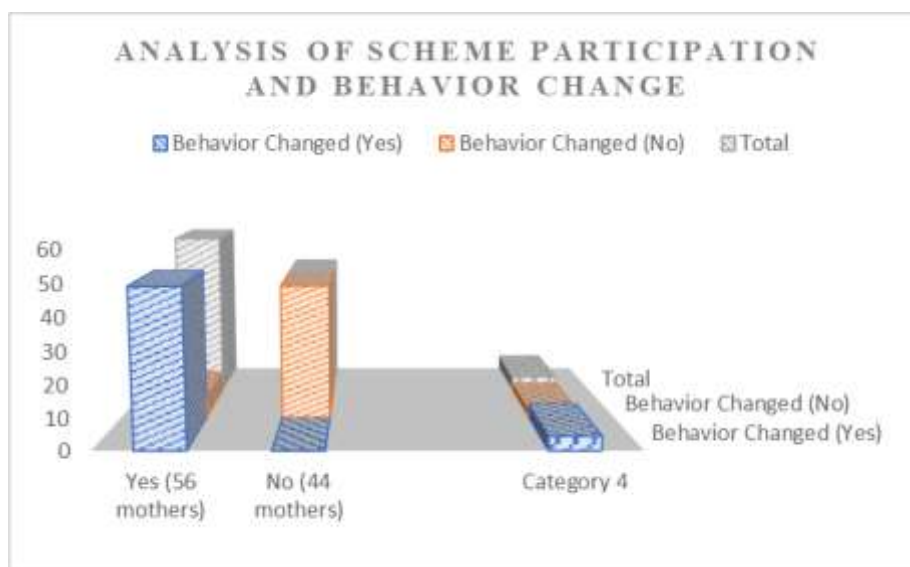
Interpretation:

- Consciousness is more urbanised
- 39 mothers in the urban range are educated on good nutrition as opposed to 28 in the rural range.
- On the same note, 35 urban mothers understand how to nurture the babies, unlike 24 rural mothers.
- This indicates that mothers in the city tend to have an easier access to health information.
- Awareness of the schemes of the government is rising
- 71 of 100 mothers were aware of such schemes as ICDS, POSHAN Abhiyaan, etc.
- Urban mothers were more sensitized as compared to the rural ones (41 verses 30).
- The degree of participation is moderate
- 56 percent (56) of the mothers did in fact participate in any health or nutrition program.
- Nevertheless, a considerable number of mothers were aware of the programs unattended (44%).

- Behavior change is exhibited in fifty percent of the group
- Out of 49 mothers, 49 of them changed their nutrition or the feeding pattern after awareness or participation.
- There was more change in urban mothers (29) relative to rural (20).
- This demonstrates that knowledge is action and even more so when we have reinforcement.

Table 2: Analysis of Scheme Participation and Behavior Change:

Participation in Schemes	Behavior Changed (Yes)	Behavior Changed (No)	Total
Yes (56 mothers)	49	7	56
No (44 mothers)	0	44	44



Interpretation:

- Close correlation between participation and behaviour change
- Among 56 mothers who enrolled in any government scheme, 49 (approximately 88 %) experienced the positive change in the way they eat or feed their babies.
- This implies that the schemes are performing effectively to the people participating in them.
- There is no change without participation
- All the 44 mothers who did not participate in any of the schemes failed to adopt the change of behavior.
- This reveals that mere knowing is not sufficient, they have to invite real participation so that there can be an improvement.
- There is the impact of programs when using the programs properly
- In the findings, it is evident that the programs which government initiates, have potential of enhancing the nutrition and feeding of children among the mothers and this process can only work when the mothers actively participate and adhere to the programs.

IV. CONCLUSIONS OVERALL RESULTS:

This research demonstrates that such initiatives of the government as POSHAN Abhiyaan, ICDS, and Janani Suraksha Yojana contribute to the mother’s gaining knowledge on the topic of healthy food and infant feeding. Majority of mothers who participated in such programs experienced positive changes in their eating patterns as well as the feeding of children. The urban mothers were more informed and proactive as opposed to rural mothers. Through the results, it is evident that the mothers who participate in the government schemes comprehend better and behave in a desirable manner. However,

these programs remain unknown to many mothers or they fail to take part in them. Thus, there is still more awareness, and support is required.

FUTURE SCOPE OF THE STUDY:

In the future, it is possible to conduct more detailed research in the other districts or states. This research can also be conducted using a bigger sample of mothers in order to obtain valid results. It is also possible to research how Anganwadi workers and ASHA workers can enhance their labor. One may also research some new concepts such as mobile apps, audio messages, or local awareness camps to make health messages reach more people in a shorter period. This will enable more mothers particularly in rural areas learn and take better care of themselves and their children.

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