



WOMEN'S HEALTH AND NUTRITION IN INDIA: A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF SELECTED POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

Health and nutrition play an important role in the overall development and well-being of women. This study presents a comprehensive review of selected programs being run by the Government of India for better health and nutrition of women and children. This study focuses on the National Health Mission, Women Health and Development Programme, Family Planning Programme, Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana, Mid-Day Meal, Food Fortification Initiative, and Integrated Child Development Services. The study reveals that social, cultural structure of society, religious beliefs, regional disparities, and limited and insufficient funding are the major obstacles in the way of successful implementation of these schemes.

Keywords: Women, Health, Nutrition, Programme

INTRODUCTION

Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, gender, religion, political belief, economic condition, or social condition (WHO, 1946). Health and nutrition have a significant effect on the welfare and well-being of individuals as well as society. The current health and nutrition status of women in India is one of the serious health problems. In the last 32 years, India has made significant economic progress, but despite this, progress in the health sector is not satisfactory. Socio-economic variables such as poverty, restricted and limited access to education, and inadequate healthcare services exacerbate anaemia, high fertility rates, and abnormal body mass index (IIP & ICF, 2017). Over half of women afflicted with anaemia despite a variety of health and nutrition-related policies and activities (IIPS & IFC, 2022). Indian women encounter particular difficulties that affect their diet and general health. Insufficient calories and restricted access to healthcare facilities are typically caused by economic, gender, and ethnic disparities, which can lead to a range of health problems such as anaemia, an imbalanced body mass index, and poor reproductive rates (Ghose, 2018).

The Indian government has launched numerous programmes in the past few years, with varying degrees of success. These include the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, the Ujjwala Yojana, the National Nutritional Anaemia Control Programme, and Integrated Child Development Services. This study attempts to synthesise previous research and try to identify important areas that require further attention. Through emphasising these facets, the review aims to provide significant perspectives for policymakers to improve the health care of women in India.

OBJECTIVE

This study tries to provide a comprehensive analysis of the health and nutritional status of women in India. The study attempts to assess the current status of health and nutrition among Indian women, highlighting the prevalence of anaemia, fertility rate, body mass index, malnutrition, and obesity. This study also tries to provide a comprehensive and critical analysis of existing and ongoing various programs, policies, and initiatives associated with improving the health and nutrition status of women in India. On the basis of comparative analysis of existing literature, the study tries to provide evidence-based recommendations for enhancing the health and nutritional status of women in India.

METHODOLOGY

A methodical technique has been used to search the existing literature using Research Gate, Academia, Google Scholar, Scopus, etc., in order to conduct a thorough investigation. The review was restricted to trustworthy publications published between 2005 to 2023, peer-reviewed articles, and government reports. The study focused on a number of issues related to women's health and nutrition, such as body mass index, anaemia, fertility rate, malnutrition and obesity, and use of family planning methods. Each study is examined carefully to understand the nutrition levels, health issues and the socio-economic factors affecting women in India. After gathering this information, we identified common trends, disparities and gaps in the current knowledge. By adopting a thorough methodology, we obtained a comprehensive understanding of the nutritional and health issues faced by women in India and assessed the effectiveness of existing interventions.

REVIEW OF HEALTH INITIATIVES FOR WOMEN

Women's deprivation in terms of nutrition and health care rebounds on society in the form of the ill health of their offspring, males and females alike, (Osmani & Sen-2021). The fundamental elements of women's empowerment are health and nutrition. They support women's engagement in all facets of society and gender equality by promoting physical health, economic independence, education, and the capacity to make educated decisions. Empowerment is based on the foundation of physical health.

Review of National Health Mission (NHM) 2018

With a special focus on maternal, child and primary health care systems and with the aim of integrating urban and rural health services, the Government of India launched an umbrella scheme called the National Health Mission (NHM) by merging National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) and National Urban Health Mission (NUHM) in

2013. Its primary objective is to provide better and affordable health care through schemes like Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) and Mission Indradhanush (NITI Aayog, 2020).

Due to lack of better coordination and synergy between the state and central governments and delay in proper allocation of resources and distribution of funds, the National Health Mission has not been as successful as expected in achieving its goals even after almost 10 years (Reddy et al., 2021). The National Health Mission was launched with the aim of reducing the disparity in rural and urban health services and improving maternal health services, but despite this, regional disparities have not yet been eliminated (Chakraborty, 2021).

Review of Women's Health and Development Programmes

Women's Health and Development Programmes in India aim to meet the important health needs of women, which include maternal health, child health, reproductive health, and their overall well-being. These programs, both at the state and national levels, work to improve the provision of healthcare services, promote preventive care, and improve health outcomes for women from different socio-economic and geographical backgrounds. The key initiatives like Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) and Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) provide healthcare and financial support during pregnancy and childbirth to reduce maternal and infant mortality rates (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2020). Furthermore, the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme also provides extensive services, including health check-ups, supplementary nutrition, and pre-school education, addressing both the immediate and long-term needs of women and children (ICDS, 2018).

There are still many obstacles in the implementation of these programs; their execution in different states, lack of resources, and socio-economic barriers lead to the ineffectiveness of these initiatives (Reddy et al., 2021). Moreover, insufficient monitoring and evaluation systems can occasionally jeopardise the efficacy of these initiatives (Chakraborty, 2021). So, to address these issues requires a strong base to strengthen the management, proper allocation of resources, and make sure that all women can enjoy the benefit of these schemes.

Review of Family Planning Programmes

In the 1950s, to promote contraceptive measures and control the rapidly growing population, the Government of India launched an umbrella scheme called the Family Planning Program, which is committed to providing comprehensive family planning services and awareness in India. It is a wide range of contraceptive options, counselling, and family planning education, which is very important to meet the diverse needs of the population (Ministry of health and family planning, 2021). This scheme includes temporary and non-permanent components such as contraceptive pills, condoms, sterilisation, and social awareness (Government of India, 2020).

The family planning program has achieved consistent success since its inception, but social structure and religious culture are the biggest obstacles to its success (Rao et al., 2022). It has been largely successful in increasing contraceptive use among the people and reducing the fertility rate, but despite this, there is still a huge lack of awareness and education related to family planning in less developed and rural areas (Sharma et al., 2021). To make the family planning program more effective and comprehensive, it needs to be integrated with basic and essential health services for comprehensive reproductive health care (Chakraborty, 2021). To overcome these challenges and reduce the disparities between rural and urban areas, a target-based strategy is needed.

Review of Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY)

With the aim of providing financial security to families living below the poverty line for better health facilities, the Government of India launched the National Health Insurance Scheme in the year 2008. It provides financial assistance of up to ₹ 30000 annually on expenses for various diseases, including education. The main objective of RSBY is to provide better health services to poor families in rural areas and reduce the expenses incurred due to it (Government of India, 2019). This scheme has been helpful in providing better health services to the most vulnerable sections of society through health insurance and has also contributed significantly in reducing financial barriers to better health facilities.

There is a lack of awareness about health insurance in rural areas, so despite its success, the National Health Insurance Scheme is facing many challenges. The complex process of claims and delay in settlement of claims are the biggest obstacles to its success (Ravi & Sharma, 2021). Although insurance coverage has reached rural areas and poor people in this scheme, there is still debate about its quality and adequacy of the amount of coverage (Gupta & Singh, 2021). To increase the effectiveness and utility of RSBY, attention should be paid to simplifying its claims process and completing the claims process in the shortest possible time. Apart from this, private hospitals in rural areas should also be integrated under this scheme.

REVIEW OF NUTRITION INITIATIVES FOR WOMEN

A women's nutritional state is crucial to her overall health as well as the health of her unborn child during pregnancy and nursing. For women of all ages, a balanced diet that includes micronutrients is essential. Bettering the health and nutritional status of women through education and economic opportunities can have a favourable effect on their overall development and well-being. But India's nutritional status is dire. India ranked 107 out of 125 countries in the 2023 Global Hunger Index with a score of 28.7.

Review of Poshan Abhiyan

Poshan Abhiyaan, earlier known as the National Nutrition Mission (NNM), launched in 2018 represents a comprehensive initiative by the GoI to address the pressing issue of malnutrition and aims to improve nutritional outcomes in the country. The key focus of this mission is to reduce stunting (low height for age), low birth weight, undernutrition, and anaemia among children, women, and adolescents (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2018).

Poshan Abhiyaan adopts a holistic approach that involves multiple sectors like health, education, and social welfare to provide better nutrition through Anganwadi centres, using Poshan Tracker for better data management and concern with community-based monitoring (ICDS, 2018). There has been notable progress under this mission, as more people are getting access to nutritional services, and reliable data has been collected for tracking the coverage of people who get the benefit of this mission and the effectiveness of the program (NITI Aayog, 2020). However, challenges continue, such as how well the program is implemented in different states, insufficient funding, monitoring, and data quality (Singh et al., 2021; Agarwal, 2021). In spite of these obstacles, the mission has advanced the cause of better nutrition by generating resources and increasing public awareness

(Bhattacharya, 2022). In order to ensure that the mission's objectives are fully achieved, future efforts should concentrate on bolstering program implementation, raising financial investments, and improving data accuracy (Kumar et al., 2022).

Review of Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS)

Many schemes have been brought by the GoI to improve the nutritional status of school children and promote educational attendance, of which the Mid-Day Meal Scheme is one of them, which was initiated in 1995. Under this scheme, free nutritious meals are provided to children in primary and upper primary schools in India, with the objectives to improve educational outcomes and address malnutrition (Government of India, 2020). It provides nutrition-rich meals that include proteins, vitamins, and minerals, which are good for growing-age children, and aims to reduce dropout rates and improve the overall health of children, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (NITI Aayog, 2021). MDMS has seen a remarkable improvement, including the increase in school enrolment and attendance rates and better nutritional intake among children (Desai et al., 2022).

However, certain obstacles exist, like the quality of the meal is of big concern, irregular food supply, and infrastructural constraints at school that weaken the effectiveness of the scheme (Ravi & Kumar, 2021). Furthermore, there have been concerns about the sufficiency of meals and the need for regular review and analysis for ensuring the quality of the meal (Chakraborty & Das, 2021). To address all these obstacles, the program needs to have better supervision, proper implementation, and to make sure that the quality of meals should always meet the required nutritional standards.

Review of Food Fortification Initiatives

The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme, launched in 1975, represents one of India's most comprehensive and long-standing initiatives aimed at improving early childhood care and development. The ICDS program seeks to address the needs of children under six years of age, pregnant women, and lactating mothers by providing a range of services including supplementary nutrition, immunisation, health check-ups, and preschool education through a network of Anganwadi centres (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2021). The scheme has made significant strides in reducing child malnutrition and mortality rates, enhancing school readiness, and improving maternal and child health outcomes (Reddy et al., 2022).

Despite its achievements, the ICDS program faces several challenges. Issues such as inconsistent quality of services, variability in program implementation across states, and inadequate infrastructure at Anganwadi centres have been reported (Gupta & Sharma, 2021). Additionally, there are concerns about the adequacy of nutrition provided, as well as the need for better training and support for Anganwadi workers (Chakraborty & Das, 2021). While ICDS has been instrumental in addressing critical aspects of child and maternal health, addressing these challenges requires strengthening the monitoring and evaluation frameworks, improving resource allocation, and ensuring better coordination between various stakeholders involved in the program (NITI Aayog, 2020).

Review of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)

Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme's main objective is to improve early childhood care and child development. This is the most extensive and long-lasting initiative in India to improve health, nutrition, and pre-primary education for children. The ICDS program targets the needs of children below six years of age, pregnant women, and lactating mothers by offering services like immunisation, supplementary nutrition, health check-ups, and pre-school education through Anganwadi centres (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2021).

Several improvements have been seen under this program, like reducing child malnutrition and mortality rates, improving school readiness, and improving maternal and child health outcomes (Reddy et al., 2022). In spite of all these achievements, the ICDS program has faced several resistances, including implementations across states, unreliable service performance, and inadequate infrastructure (Gupta & Sharma, 2021). Furthermore, better training for Anganwadi workers and sufficiency of the provided nutrition are also major concerns (Chakraborty & Das, 2021). To achieve its objectives, better monitoring and evaluation as well as efficient coordination between various stakeholders is required (NITI Aayog, 2020).

CONCLUSION

It is clear from this study that in the last few years, the schemes being run by the Government of India for the health and nutrition development of women have achieved significant success. NHM has played an important role in providing better health services to all sections of the society at affordable prices; WHDP has empowered and made women aware; FPP has successfully increased the use of contraceptives, which can control the rapidly increasing population to some extent; RSBY has contributed significantly in reaching better health services to the poor sections of the society at a very low cost; MDM has improved nutrition and increased enrolment in schools; FFI has removed the shortage of nutritious food items; ICDP has contributed significantly in the improvement of child health and primary education. Despite their significant achievements, these programs face some challenges, such as insufficient and outdated infrastructure, financial and resource constraints, poor coordination between different stakeholders, limited coverage of insurance services, and quality hurdles. To enhance the effectiveness of these policies and initiatives, we should focus on improving infrastructure, expanding outreach of quality healthcare services for every woman, strengthening the implementation of family planning, and ensuring better quality of food for children and pregnant women.

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