

Women Empowerment and Status of Integrated Child Development Services in Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract

A variety of rights are included by the extremely wide concept of women's empowerment. Women who live in urban slums and rural regions are among the underprivileged group who are denied even the most fundamental rights. Due to archaic societal traditions, women are not permitted to leave their communities for employment in rural areas and continue to be illiterate. They are left with little choice but to stay behind the walls of their houses, oblivious to their own and their kids' needs. They must be given the tools they need to raise their own kids well, among other things. Similar disadvantages affect young children, particularly in developing nations like India. The Indian government created the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme, a national flagship scheme that offers children a bundle of six services for their overall development. These services are offered through ICDS centers, also referred to as Anganwadi Centres. Local women serve as the functionaries who carry out the duties of anganwadi workers, anganwadi helpers, and members of self-help groups in the implementation of ICDS. The two primary employees that manage the ICDS centres are the Anganwadi worker and the anganwadi helper. These workers assist in empowering local women, teenage girls, and mothers of the children who frequent the Anganwadi Centres in addition to carrying out the duties of the child care service. This paper explores how women in Himachal Pradesh's rural and urban slums are empowered through ICDS institutions, also known as Anganwadi institutions. The study's conclusions are based on the researcher's interviews with anganwadi workers, anganwadi helpers, and members of self-help groups from several districts in Himachal Pradesh.

Key Words: Anganwadi worker, ICDS centers, Anganwadi Helpers, Self-Help Groups

I. Introduction

The Women and Child Development department (WCD) of the Ministry of HRD, Government of India, is implementing women's empowerment programme in a big way. Since 1999, the department adopted the strategy of social mobilization through formation of small Self Help Groups of women as a first step. In our society women has been given special place in since ages. Numerous indices show that India does poorly in terms of gender equality and the empowerment of women. In several places, the sex ratio has fallen to disturbingly low levels. Less than 850 girls per 1000 males are now the norm. According to the Global Human Development Report's Gender Inequality Index, India is rated 132 out of 148 nations. Women from underprivileged groups, such Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Minorities, in particular, experience prejudice, exploitation, and a lack of job prospects. Programmes for the empowerment of women have been started by a variety of government ministries at the Central and State levels. The Government of India's Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme, which aims to empower women while also providing services to children, is the subject of this essay. Local women assist in the implementation of ICDS. Here is a quick overview of ICDS and the services offered by Anganwadi Centres (AWCs). The scheme was launched on 2 October 1975 in 33 (4 rural, 18 urban, 11 tribal) blocks. Over the last 25 years, it was expanded progressively and at present it has 5614 (central 5103, state 511) projects covering over 5300 community development blocks and 300 urban slums; over 60 million children below the age of 6 years and over 10 million women between 16 and 44 years of age and 2 million lactating mothers (MHRD Report-1995-96)

II. Objectives of the Study:

- To study the system of Integrated Child Development Services.
- To study the status of Integrated Child Development Services in Himachal Pradesh.
- To study other programmes through the ICDS Platform in Himachal Pradesh.
- To study the Anganwadi Worker's and Anganwadi Helpers role in Empowering Women.

III. Methodology:

There are two types of the research methods i.e. quantitative and qualitative. Both quantitative and qualitative research method have been used for analyzing the data. Since the overall objectives of the present study is to evaluate the availability of primary and secondary data of the study area and then to consider the optimum utilization. The descriptive approach, which is analytical and exploratory in character, is utilized for the analyze "The Empowerment of Women and Status of Integrated Child Development Services in Himachal Pradesh", Status of Integrated Child Development Services in Himachal Pradesh. Secondary sources including newspapers, magazines, books, and articles will also be used in addition to these main sources. The research paper is divided into two parts i.e. the system and status of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and groups discussion with Anganwadi Worker's and Anganwadi Helpers.

System of Integrated Child Development Services

ICDS, a centrally supported child welfare programme that was first introduced in 1975–1976, offers children a bundle of six services and believes that their total impact would be greater if they were delivered in conjunction with related services. Its goal is to help women and children who are suffering from poverty, illiteracy, sickness, hunger, and other social ills. The recipients receive these services from ICDS right at their door.

Other Programmes through the ICDS Platform

Other programmes provided from the ICDS platform include:

- Improving Infant and Young Child Feeding;
- Best Mother Award Scheme
- Ladli Scheme
- Awareness Campaigns by Sakshar Mahila Samooh
- Kishori Shakti Yojana

Beneficiaries of ICDS

Through the AWCs, ICDS offers services to all of the stakeholders, including young children between the ages of 0 and 3 and babies between the ages of 0 and 36 months. This community outreach campaign, which is being carried out with the assistance of local women, aims to encourage community involvement in the delivery of services to the beneficiaries.

Empowering Women Using the ICDS Platform

Women's empowerment is a fairly broad concept that includes not only giving women access to work possibilities but also developing their knowledge and abilities in a variety of fields. In this essay, we'll look at how women may be more emancipated through work options, more education and skills, and chances to play bigger roles in the family and community.

Women Participating in ICDS

Women have been conducting the ICDS initiatives by filling diverse roles and undertaking a variety of duties. The ICDS promotes women's empowerment by:

1. Giving them the chance to work as Anganwadi Workers and Anganwadi Helpers
2. Educating the beneficiaries about health and nutrition
3. Educating young adolescent girls about nutrition;
4. Teaching girls between the ages of 11 and 18 about home-based vocational skills.

Creating Employment Opportunities for Women to Empower Women

Women, including Anganwadi Workers (AWW), Anganwadi Helpers (AWH), Supervisors, and Women Child Development Project Officers (WCDPO), are in charge of running the ICDS initiative. This essay's major focus is on AWW and AWH, two local women who support other local women. In this section of the study, the researcher discusses how to empower women by giving them the chance to work and improve the lives of young children.

Anganwadi Worker (AWW) and Anganwadi Helpers (AWH)

The locals in the neighbourhood trust the Anganwadi Worker, a lady who is trained in basic nutrition and health issues. Through the Anganwadi centre located in the middle of the beneficiaries in the countryside and the slums, she offers the bundle of services. A passing grade in the tenth standard is a requirement for educational eligibility to become an AWW. If a woman with the 10th pass is not available, a local woman with the 8th pass or even the 5th pass may be favoured over a woman from outside the country. A 30% reservation of

positions is made for women from underrepresented groups (20% for Scheduled Castes and 10% for Backward Classes).

A local woman who works at the centre in addition to the AWW is known as the Anganwadi Helper. She prepares and distributes supplemental nourishment, helps the AWW with pre-school instructional activities, provides advice to the parents of the children who attend the AWC, and aids with health-related activities. Primary pass is the minimum qualification for schooling for the position of AWH, and if no women meet this criteria, an illiterate woman may be hired to fill the position. ICDS empowers women by:

- Giving them local work chances;
- Giving employment to even less educated or uneducated women;
- Giving employment to women from the disadvantaged groups in society; and
- Giving employment to widows and abandoned women.

IV. Findings

The researcher had several interactions with Anganwadi helpers and workers from various areas in Himachal Pradesh. They were questioned by the researcher about their ICDS functionary duties. These were their responses:

- a. The families permit them to work because the Anganwadis are close by and they disapprove of their leaving the village to work.
- b. they are also permitted to work at the centres because they primarily deal with children and women; some who were less educated felt they would not have gotten a job if the centre hadn't been there (ICDS centres even employ uneducated women);
- c. A few widows and deserted women felt that the centres were very good opportunities for them to earn money and also spend their time amongst children in a worthwhile manner;
- d. The majority of the women believed that although though the honorarium they received was quite meagre, they nevertheless saw this employment as an opportunity to make their living in a decent manner.
- e. The functionaries also felt that it provided them a feeling of responsibility and increased their confidence.

ICDS employees' empowerment of women

Through the additional welfare activities that merge with or are carried out from this platform, the ICDS functionaries also empower local women in the following ways:

Improved Nutrition for Infants and Young Children

A research by the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) found that breastfeeding exclusively for six months decreases infant mortality by 13%, making it one of the most successful child survival initiatives. The AWW educates women, nursing mothers, and grandmothers on the importance of breastfeeding newborns and of continuing to nurse them when they turn six months old.

The AWWs are taught by master trainers as part of the programme launched by the government in 2005–2006, giving them the information and abilities necessary to successfully raise awareness of infant and young child feeding and counsel mothers.

Self Help Groups (SHGs)

The AWW is assisted in delivering supplemental nourishment to children and other beneficiaries in the anganwadis by Self Help Groups set up at the rural and urban slum level. These organisations are paid a little amount of money to prepare and serve supplemental nourishment in centres. Mothers of the children visiting the AWCs may be SHGs. In addition to preparing meals, they also keep a watch on the centres to assist ensure that they run well. It keeps them engaged in the children's activities and affords them the chance to participate in community-focused events.

Kishori Shakti Yojana

Through the Kishori Shakti Yojana, which is being implemented in 87 ICDS projects, adolescent girls are empowered. This programme aims to improve the health and nutritional status of adolescent girls in the age range of 11 to 18 years, train and equip them to improve home-based and vocational skills, and raise awareness of issues such as nutrition, hygiene, and child care. Adolescent females receiving Take Home Rations under this programme, which is being run by 10% of the AWCs for six months, receive additional nutrition. This programme benefits a significant number of females.

Anganwadi Worker's role in Empowering Women

The main employee of the ICDS, an AWW, engages in the following tasks to empower women:

1. arranges for the recipients' supplemental nutrition feeding;

2. gives moms advice on feeding infants, young children, and themselves, as well as health and nutrition instruction;
3. encourages married women to use birth control and family planning methods;
4. pays visits to villagers' houses to teach mothers how to play a productive part in their children's growth and development, with a focus on the newly born kid;
5. supports the staff of the Primary Health Centre in carrying out the vaccination programmes, health checks, and antenatal and postnatal exams.
6. keeps in touch with mahila mandals, SMSs, and SHGs, including female teachers and girls in elementary and intermediate schools.
7. The Kishori Shakti Yojana (KSY) is implemented to inspire and inform adolescent girls, their parents, and the community at large by organising social awareness programmes, campaigns, and rallies in the village.
8. It also identifies children with disabilities and refers them to the closest PHC or District Disability Rehabilitation Centre.

Findings

The researcher conducted interviews with those who benefited from the AWC and came to the following conclusions:

- The pregnant women who benefited felt that the functionaries informed them about the immunisation schedules well in advance so that they could take advantage of the same whenever the immunisation camp was set up;
- The mothers of children who benefited from the AWCs expressed that the workers informed them about the immunisation schedules and also took their children for immunisation. A number of beneficiaries felt that though the centres were good but there was a general lack of cleanliness in them. The researcher too felt that there was lack of cleanliness in a number of centres;
- The Self Help Groups (SHGs) members believed that even though the centres gave them the chance to help with cooking and delivering supplemental meals, they were only paid a pitiful sum. Many SHGs were considering ending their employment at the centre in the urban slum regions because they believed it would be more lucrative for them to serve as housemaids in the neighbouring homes;
- The general populace of the hamlet is neither involved in the operation of the facility nor concerned with what is happening there;
- Workers believed that programmes like Ladli would not be very helpful until and until the social perception of female children changed;

Strengthening of the Important Functionaries

Only until the essential players are empowered themselves can they empower other women. The empowerment of the important functionaries is the topic of this section of the study.

Workers' Empowerment in Anganwadi

At the Anganwadi Training Centre, an AWW receives training for one month (26 working days). The training includes:

1. information on the country's condition of women and children and understanding of the social issues that affect them;
2. knowledge of the Constitution's provisions, programmes, and policies pertaining to the development of women and children knowledge of the legal system; and
3. ECCE's Early Childhood Care and Education programmes are described in the introduction. Understanding the value of informal pre-school education for children ages 3-6. understanding of the physical and motor growth of preschoolers;
4. knowing about the ICDS's nutrition and health component, caring for pregnant and nursing mothers' nutrition and health, and caring for newborns, young children, and teenage females;
5. extensive understanding of diagnosing, treating, and managing paediatric ailments. information about childhood disabilities;
6. conversations on the significance of community, panchayat, village level committee, and mahila mandals / shakshar mahila samooH engagement in ICDS;

Enabling Anganwadi Helpers

Six days of instruction are spent at the Anganwadi instruction Centres educating AWHs so they can assist AWWs in performing their duties at the AWC. The topics covered in their training include:

1. understanding of the ICDS programme and its functionaries;
2. understanding of early childhood care and development;
3. awareness of the value of pre-school education;
4. knowledge of the health and nutrition of infants, young children, pregnant women, and nursing mothers;
5. understanding of the significance of community participation and education; and
6. understanding of issues relating to gender sensitization.

- The AWWs were generally happy with the training that was provided to them; but, some employees who did not have matriculations said that they did not comprehend certain topics and frequently asked the trainers to explain the difficult concepts to them in plain terms. They received instruction in their own tongue.

- All employees had received initial training. According to the older employees, the training lasts one month now although it used to last three months. The elder employees had received in-service training several times.

- A significant percentage of employees claimed that despite the training's extensive substance and themes covering the majority of the job they had been doing, it had not adequately prepared them for the challenges they would experience in the field.

- The supervisors of their regions were praised by the AWWs, who believed that they had done a great job of explaining how the AWCs worked and filling in the gaps where necessary.

V. Conclusions

Paediatric malnutrition has always been a matter of national concern. The various vertical health programmes initiated by the Government of India (GOI) from time to time did not reach out to the target community adequately. In a progressive move towards gender equity and economic empowerment the state government launched so many schemes for the benefit and empowerment of women. In a culture where males predominate, integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme had a significant impact on the empowerment of women and an initiative aimed at providing women with the means to pursue their entrepreneurial dreams, engage in livelihood activities, and uplift their families. Both in the rural and urban regions, working for women and children is seen as respectable, therefore the AWWs believed their work is meaningful. Maintaining the excellent work requires regularly evaluating their position and empowering them so they may empower more women. Because integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme is world's largest community based programme.

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