

Impact of mid day meal scheme on Health and Education of children

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ABSTRACT

This Mid Day Meal programme, also known as the Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (PM POSHAN) scheme, provides free meals to school children in India. The programme was introduced in the 1950s and 1960s and has many positive impacts including reducing classroom hunger, Increasing school enrollment and attendance, Improving social distancing, addressing Malnutrition and creating employment for women.

Keywords: Mid Day Meal Programme, School enrollment, social distancing, Malnutrition.

Introduction:

The Mid-Day Meal Scheme is a school meal programme in India designed to better the nutritional status of school age children nationwide. The scheme has been renamed as PM-POSHAN Scheme. The programme supplies free lunches on working days for children in Government primary and upper primary schools. The Mid Day Meal Scheme in India is considered to be the world's largest school meal programme serving hot cooked meals to the under privileged children. The ideas behind the introduction of this programme are to remove malnutrition, supplement nutritional foods in school meals, to motivate out school children towards regular school to decrease absenteeism and drop out rate and to bridge inequality among the children irrespective of their caste, class and gender backgrounds. After the enactment of the Right of Children to free and compulsory education Act 2009, the programme is being monitored by the school management committees.

The Mid Day Meal Scheme aims to improve the nutritional status of children and encourage them to attend school more regularly. It provides at least one nutritious meals a day to children in government aided and local body schools Mid Day Meal (MDM) is the biggest school lunch programme in the world with 120 million children being fed. It is administered by the Ministry of Education and is a centrally sponsored scheme. India's poor people are unable to send their children to school as children work as labours to earn money for the household. Neither are children able to get education and nor do they get nutritious food hence getting stuck in a cycle of poverty and malnutrition. The lunch at school scheme was launched first in Tamil Nadu and then slowly spread in other states. It was then adopted by the central government as well. Mid Day Meal Scheme is part of India's Nutrition policy. It is key to ensuring that poor children in the country are able to get food, nutrition and also good education.

Nutritional Content of MDM:

The Mid Day Meal Guidelines prescribe the following nutritional content to achieve the objectives of the scheme in the Mid-Day Meal.

Items	For children of Primary Classes	For children of Upper Primary Classes
(A) Nutritional Norms (per child per day)		
Calorie	450	700
Protein	12 gm	20 gm

(B) Food Norms (per child per day)

Food Grains	100 gms	150gms
Pulses	20 gms	30gms
Vegetables	50 gms	75gms
Oil & Fat	5 gms	7.5gms
Salt & condiments	As per need	As per need

Impact on Education:

The MDM scheme in India has a significant impact on education. By providing a nutritious meal to millions of children daily, the scheme helps combat hunger and malnutrition while simultaneously encouraging school attendance and academic performance. This comprehensive approach to child welfare has far-reaching implications for the overall development of the nation.

Improving school attendance and retention:

The MDM programme has significantly boosted school attendance and retention rates. By offering a free nutritious meal, the scheme incentivizes parents to send their children to school regularly. This is particularly impactful for children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds who might otherwise skip school due to hunger or to work for food.

Enhancing learning and academic performance:

Well-nourished children are better equipped to learn and participate in classroom activities. The MDM programme has shown positive effects on students' cognitive abilities, concentration levels, and overall academic performance. Children can concentrate better on their studies by providing meals during school, leading to improved learning.

Promoting social equity and inclusion:

The shared meals in the MDM programme promote social inclusion and help reduce caste and class barriers. Children from diverse backgrounds sit together, share meals, and interact with each other. This inclusive environment helps combat discrimination and promotes a sense of equality among students, contributing to a more cohesive society in the long run.

Awareness about healthy eating habits:

Through the MDM programme, children are exposed to balanced nutritious meals, often including locally sourced fruits and vegetables. This exposure helps create awareness about healthy eating habits and the importance of a balanced diet. Schools can use this opportunity to educate children about nutrition, hygiene, and the benefits of consuming a variety of foods.

Alleviating economic burdens on families:

The provision of free meals through the MDM programme helps reduce the economic burden on low-income families. This financial relief can allow families to allocate resources to other essential needs, potentially breaking the cycle of poverty. Thus, the scheme serves as an indirect form of economic support for vulnerable communities.

Improving Nutritional Status:

One of the primary goals of the MDM programme is to combat malnutrition by providing balanced meals that meet a child's daily nutritional needs. This helps address stunting, wasting, and micronutrient deficiencies, leading to improved growth, stronger immune systems, and better health for school-going children.

Ensuring the Quality and hygiene of Mid-day Meals:

Ensuring quality and hygiene in the MDM programme is essential. This includes strict food safety measures, regular quality checks, proper ingredient storage, and hygienic food preparation by trained staff.

The MDM programme in India stands as a symbol of the country's commitment to child welfare and education. Its multifaceted impact on nutrition education and social equity makes it essential to India's development strategy.

Impact on Health:

The MDM programme in India has a positive impact on the health of children.

Enhancing community Health and Well being:

The MDM Programme contributes to the overall health and wellbeing of communities. By improving the nutritional status of children the scheme helps reduce the incidence of malnutrition related diseases and enhances the general health of the student population. This in turn can lead to reduced health care costs for families and improved public health outcomes in the long term.

Improving growth and immune system:

The programme helps children grow and develop stronger immune system.

Combating malnutrition:

The MDM programme provides balanced meals that address stunting, wasting and micro nutrient deficiencies. This needs improve the nutritional status of children and reduce the incidence of malnutrition related diseases.

These are some irregularities also seen on the side of Mid-day Meal Scheme.

- The focus is mainly on reach and not on quantity or quality of food.
- Corrupt practices taking place
- There are many such unreported cases where students who eat this meal have reported dysentery and ill-health. So, parents and children fearing safety have declined to have food served in these mid day meals.
- Casteism is still being practiced and setting the wrong example in some places.
- Implementation is faulty. Proper guidelines are not followed everywhere be it food menu or caloric intake.
- Adequate and timely financing for schools is essential for proper functioning.

Conclusion:

Though the Mid-Day-Meal programme has significantly improved students success in school including enrolment, attendance, retention and positive effect on health.

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