

Protecting Children From Hunger: Significance of Mid-Day Meal through the Parent's Vision

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Abstract-

Mid-Day meal (MDM) is one of the imperative strategy conducted by Government of India as half of the Indian children are undernourished. Till now 25% people of India were victim of hunger. The aim of this study is to understand the perception of parents about their child's classroom hunger and how MDM was shaping them. A qualitative cross-sectional study is conducted among school going girls (N=20) of upper primary section (V-VIII standards) along with their mothers (N=20). Focus group Discussion and In-depth interviews were conducted among students and with their mothers. Data was analyzed by coding. It was observed that MDM can turn out a part of life-style not only for a child but also for parents.

Keywords- Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMs), School Attendance, undernutrition, Maternal and Child health.

Introduction:

With 1.2 billion populations, having a crown of world largest democracy and being third largest economy in purchase parity item, India has improved a lot in economic growth [1]. Despite of that in 2011-2012, National Poverty Estimation was 21.9% below poverty line [2]. Thus India is in a critical condition where we are in economical, demographical and epidemiological transitional phase [15]. From the beginning of human existence, health is an imperative aspect and to maintain our social, physical and psychological wellbeing it is need to be understand through the anthropological eyesight [3]. Maternal and child health is

a crucial aspect of every population; any population cannot show its evolution without these factors. Maternal and child care service is majorly dependent on adequate food and balanced diet, but this can be abridged because of poverty. So poverty can able to create a scenario of malnutrition along with obstacles for other important parameters viz. health, education and many others [7]. It is very unfortunate that after having a lot of growing crops and agricultural development, India remains the home of 25% of world's hungry poor [19]. Nowadays, India initiated on different programs related to health specially focused on maternal and child care health issues viz. Janani Shishu Suraksha Yojana,

JananiSurakshaYojana, NavjaatsishuSurakshaKaryakram and more others, but the gap till remains there.

Unlike India, United Kingdom (1945), United States of America (1946), Switzerland (1946), Japan (1947), Australia (1950), China (1964), Indonesia (1967), Thailand (1970), Korea (1973) and Singapore (1975) started the school meal programs [14]. The concept of mealprogram had started way back in India but in an unusual structure. Beforeindependence, it was alreadyobserved from 1925 in the previous Madras Presidency, presently Tamil Nadu where started to distribute meals to poor children. After that in 1928, Keshav Academy of India, situated in Eastern India, Kolkata had started a compulsory Tiffin system for boys[18].There are ample number of examples are observed in India regarding different kind of meal program in different states. Tamil Nadu (1957), Kerala (1961), Uttar Pradesh (1962), Andhra Pradesh (1962), Orissa (1962), Karnataka (1964) and Bihar (1965) are those states in India, creates initiative to start a school meal program [10].

Introduction of Mid-Day Meal Scheme in India-

The National Program of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP-NSPE) was launched on 15th August 1995. Government of India tried to develop a lucid scheme regarding distribution of nutrition among the less-privileged population of India, thus the MDM Scheme went through different path repetitively and these major changes are shown. The main objective of the scheme is to eradicate absence from school, improving enrolment and encourage attendance in school as well as the development of nutritional status of children [4]. In 2004, the scheme get revised on the aspects of cooking cost, transport subsidy, management monitoring and evaluation costs[5]. Cooking Cost is a most important factor to Indian Government and it was further revised during 2006 and 2007. First anthropological insight used to revised MDM schem during

2007 where government first time majorly focused on Educationally Backward Block as well as in Madrasas of different states[6].

Coverage and growth of the Scheme-

During 2009-2010, under MDM scheme 11.04 crore children were being covered, though the estimated figure were 11.77 crore. During 2010-11, 11.36 crore children i.e. 7.97 crore children in primary and 3.39 Cr. children in upper primary are expected to be covered in 12.63 lakhs institutions [11]. The growth shows the logistic curve as it shows slightly decline during 2005 [7]. From 1995-2004 it showed positive growth in every possible variable.

There are ample number of governmental reports (both States and Central) to justify this statement rather focusing on the developmental strategies and the positive outcomes. But a study in Hassan district in India shown that only 10 (4.81%) students like the food provided by the schools during Mid-Day meal [15]. An interesting outcome from a study conducted in Ahmedabad found out from the laboratory results that the nutritional components of meals was low in comparison to the daily requirements, also very poor in nutrients such as protein, fat, iron [8].Another study conducted in Himachal Pradesh concluded that 92.58% teachers thought that the effect of Mid-day Meal program had very little upsurge in enrolment[13].On a different note a primary school based study in Uttar Pradesh had shown that MDM creates an huge impact in enrolment but improvement of quality of food was also suggested [17].A mixed-method study happened in the slum area of Delhi to find out the parents perception about the Mid-day Meal program opined that 90% parents were satisfied by the MDMs [14].Apart from that, there are little number of qualitative studies about the perception of those individuals who are majorly related to the scheme, i.e., schools going children and the parents of beneficiaries. It is very unfortunate that their perception and opinions were majorly neglected through the passage of

time. The aim of this study is to understand the perception and opinion of parents about the significance of Mid-Day Meal program conducted in the upper primary section of school and how it affects their life-style.

Materials and Method:

Study Subjects:

The present study consists of an approximate total of twenty (20) school going students and their parents (specially mothers) respectively, had been covered in Salkia, of Howrah District by interviewing the parents aged from 30-45 years as well as the children of a particular school (Standard VI-VIII, Age group- 12-15 years,) to understand their views regarding MHM. The school and the students are selected through convenience sampling.

Study Design and data collection:

The qualitative data was collected through Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and In-depth Interview (IDIs) from parents. Five (5) IDIs and four (4) FGD were done to understand the perception of parents regarding Mid-day Meal and how it effects on the beneficiaries. The five IDIs and two FGDs are conducted with their mothers in the colony and two FGDs were conducted between students in school.

Analysis:

The data was analyzed in MS Word 2007. The data was collected in native language (Hindi and Bengali) and transcribed and segmented. Most frequent and meaningful segments are allocated a code. Codes were further analyzed and clustered into separate four different categories to understand parent's and student's perception regarding MDMS.

Results:

Characteristics of study participants:

Forty individuals were recruited in this study, among them twenty participants are students from standard VI-VII and their parents (N=20) aged at 30-45 years. All the participants were Hindu and residing in a same colony just beside the school. The socio-economic condition of those participants are very poor.

Findings:

Result from this qualitative study associated with the field data are categorized into four major sub-categories which are given below (Table 1):

1. Knowledge regarding MDMS
2. Social aspects related to MDM
3. Choice or preferences related to food
4. Awareness related to food quality, hygiene and maintenance.

Table 1: The theme, categories and codes as identified from the qualitative data

1. Food security related to MDMs

100% participants were well aware about MDMs, but the level of knowledge varies respectively. Almost every parent enjoys this food security of their children. Different types of narratives of mothers and beneficiaries are given below:

“MDM gives us relief and we get rid of thinking about their lunch.” (FGD1, Mother)

“I am sorted that at least (she and her father) two members of the family are taking proper lunch everyday” (IDI-1 Mother)

“It’s a very hectic for us to make lunch, sometimes we didn’t have time to make lunch for her, because I went for work and also can’t give my child money to buy their lunch.” (IDI-5 Mother 5)

The statement from mother 5 reflects the socio-economic condition of the family as well as the colony. These twenty mothers worked in different home as a maid.

“The principle and other teachers of the school is very sensible person, when they have extra left over meal they give to their students and if we are lucky then we have a chance to eat AluBiryani, Soyabeankisabji, and many other delicious meals.” (IDI-3 Mother 3)

Boorish behavior of teacher can create an intriguing effect in children’s mind and dilemma regarding consuming food according to their hunger.

“At the beginning we are unknown about MDM program and don’t have any idea whyschool teacher are serving meal, but later we came to know about governmental plan, and other friends from different school also said that lunch

Theme	Perception of parents and students about classroom hunger			
Categories	Food security related to MDMs	Social aspects related to MDM	Choice or preferences related to food	Awareness related to food quality, hygiene and maintenance
Codes	Save money	Religion and caste	AluBiryani was preferred.	Little information about kitchen
	Less tension	Improvement of social interaction	Parwal Curry was less consumed.	Unclean toilets and messy lawn
	Getting regular food	Biasness of teachers	Milk Rice is not at all consumed.	Nutritional increment
	Include fruit and vegetables	Increment of enrolment		Include fruit and vegetables

are provided by their school also.” (FGD 1 Beneficiaries/Daughter)

The FGD1 was happened among V-VII standard girl students and they were facing a lull regarding MDMs.

“Sometimes, my daughter have menstrual problem, when she have pain in her stomach, despite of that she went to school, may be that day of the week she get some protein based food like soybean.” (IDI-4 Mother-4).

From the above statement it became quite observable that MDM became germane in this colony.

2. Socio-religious belief regarding MHM:

The recurring concept of the discussion was about the social gathering during lunch time, and aftermath of MDMs was increment of students in a school, a friendly environment

during lunch time. Side by religion, caste differences became a factor of concern of mothers.

“Though it is started from that time before my girls enrolled in the school, we really don’t know about the religion of the cook and the labor, as you know we live in a Hindu colony, but there are lots of students from other places belong from Muslim families, also eat in the school premises during lunch. This kind of issues bothers us a little bit, but at least our child is getting food security from school.”(FGD-2, Mother).

“It is very uncomfortable for us, we and the other two houses, we are the Brahmins, but there are people of lower class whose children went to the school and share the food also, during MDM. We are poor, but at the end of the day, we are Brahmins, its bother me very much.”(IDI-2, Mother 2)

Caste differences are embedded in this colony so deeply that despite of having socio-economical constrain they are in dilemma about the companionship of their children during the consuming food.

“Sometimes we feel that because of poor performance in studies, children are scolded by teachers and they feel shy to ask for food during MDM, but after erstwhile teachers are able to make them understand that they only scold them, if they don’t do their homework, it’s nothing to do with their food.” (FGD-2, Mother)

“My child is in class VIII and her elder sister is in class XI now, when the school has lots of meal after distributed among different classes (V-VIII), the extra food is further distributed among the higher classes, and my elder daughter also have something is lunch, it’s like her lucky day also, she didn’t get it every day.”(FGD1 Mother)

“We are residing in a slum, but we observed after starting the MDMs, all the parents are willing to send their child in school and among us, me and my friend (Taking another mothers name) also send our child just because of it. We didn’t have any expectation that our child will study well, because I personally cannot give her that kind of atmosphere in home, sometimes I cannot afford the food also, that’s why we sent our child to school.”(FGD-1 Mother).

3. Preferences related to food:

The choice of food had an association with the increment of attendance of the students.

“Mainly the food is delicious except some dishes like milk rice, pointed guard curry is moderately good, but some of us don’t like it. We very much love alubiriyani, Paneerkisabji (Cottage cheese curry), Purisabji a lot.” (FGD-1, Beneficiaries/students)

“We can’t even tolerate the milk rice, as it does not have any proper sweetness, but somehow get used to it. The food are more or less good, and it also reduce our hunger, sometimes we went to school because some special food only.” (FGD- 2, Beneficiaries/Students)

“It is very obvious that we cannot get any kind of breakfast before coming to school; we ate our first meal of the day, on the lunch time in school. If we miss the school, then it became more difficult for us to find out food for lunch also.” (FGD-2, Beneficiaries/ Students)

“It was Friday and Wednesday. We never miss, because school were going to provide some kind of good food, so we always eager and hope a day before something we will get to eat and if they make it extra then we were able to pack it in tiffin box and share it with our brother or sister and mother also.”(FGD2, Beneficiaries/ Students)

4. Awareness related to food quality, hygiene and maintenance:

It is observed that not only food but mothers and students are also concern with the hygiene of the cooking area, washroom as well as the beneficial aspects of MDM.

“It’s all pretty good food but, during lunch time the lawn became very clumsy and post-lunch the washroom became very dirty, so we can’t use it properly”.(FGD1, Beneficiaries/students)

“Teacher also gave us iron supplements every week and we are expected that students will get fruits and packed food for home sometimes.” (FGD-1 Mother).

Discussions:

Colony, a modern version of slum is the most neglected and marginalized part of any geographical zone in India. The socio-economic condition not only below the belt, but also they are the people who migrate for better salary, marriage, secure long term jobs, don't have any secure place to live in a city and many other other socio-economic situation. Thus, colony, the epitome of heterogeneous population where every family has different origins, religion, caste, believe, attitude, awareness toward their life-style. Because of colony is always overpopulated it always resides near to city for better prospects and opportunities. The children who brought up in those colonies generally went to school in empty stomach and dropped out from there in their early stage of life because they were more engaged to search a job as alabor or as a maid. At the end of the day, they may bring money in their house but this economic circumstances not only ruin their life, education but also make them blind, thus they are unable to see how they are exploited by others. It is quite obvious that education is impossible with empty stomach. Thus the concept of MDMs is way to encourage

drop out children to come back again for not only hunger but also understand that there is a strong association between mental, physical wellbeing and education. Children are not only the vulnerable aspects of society but they are the fundamental part which completes the sphere of family, and the face of upcoming generation. Thus this particular group needs special kind of attention in their mental, physical growth. MDM tries to focus on social equality, overall child growth, and ability to stay in a healthy mental and physical space. This study area is not an exception. This school also tries to focus on child health as well as on enrolment. The parents are totally convinced that almost every day they are unable to feed their child properly, so MDM become a daily need in their life as well as a great source to save money.

Conclusion:

MDMs, was one of the important milestone which create an huge increment of enrolment in governmental schools as well as it able to eradicate classroom hunger, which may create an obstacle for those individuals, who will represents the future generation of India. There are some suggestions are taken to be considered and i.e. fruit and packed food should be introduced, good quality food should be equally distributed. It is quite palpable that the marginalized group was majorly dependent on MDMs, so their opinion should matters and further taken to consideration in future strategies, to maintain a healthy, beneficial life-style of the nation's future generation.

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