

There is a need to consider the health profile of the parents of a child. In India, about 22% of adults are underweight and, therefore, malnourished. Such underweight parents' impact on the health status needs to be separately studied, which may provide an altogether different perspective to deal with the problem of malnutrition amongst children.

vii) **The progress of children using ICDS services is not tracked**

The practice of availing AW services is being passed on from an earlier generation to the next generation. Women who had availed of services while being a child themselves decades back are now availing benefits meant for pregnant and lactating women, and their children are also enrolled in AWCs. A separate study needs to be carried out to track their overall present socio-economic and educational status to understand their present status and their progress over time after using ICDS services.

viii) **Human Resource (HR) policies are not examined**

Sizable newly recruited AWWs are educated even beyond graduation. It may be interesting to study the implications of such value addition to the quality of AW services, especially pre-school education, in reversing the recent trend of children attending private schools over ICDS run schools. Similarly, it is pertinent to study how to keep the highly educated AWWs interested and motivated at meagre honorarium working in pathetic working conditions. Otherwise, this policy of recruiting highly qualified women as AWWs may backfire.

6.8 SUGGESTIONS

a. ISO

Operations of all AWCs to be standardized by obtaining ISO (International Organization for Standardization) certification. Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) should be in place for all AW functions and procedures.

b. Training

The extensive training program should be organized for all the AW Workers at periodical intervals, and the respective Supervisor may be held responsible for such training. Targeted training should be imparted to all the active beneficiaries.

c. Use of dedicated TV channels

Dedicated TV channels have well-designed programs for pre-school education; all stakeholders' training should be started without any further loss of time. This will free the AWW, to some extent, from imparting knowledge to children and thus focusing on other important functions.

d. Collective E-learning

As an alternative to the above or in addition to the above, lessons may be transmitted live from a centralized place to impart education to all the stakeholders, including children attending pre-school education.

e. Use of English medium

To keep pace with the outside world and compete with other well-placed peers' medium of education should be English.

f. To Use the services of Self Help Group

Cooked food to the children attending pre-school education and the PLW can be provided by the local Self Help Group. On average, every AWC serves food to 31 pre-school attending children and 12 PLW. Thus the size of 43 is optimum enough to make this scheme viable. This has got dual benefits, i.e., AWWs will be spared of cooking duties and use this time for more constructive activities. Women in the area will get employment opportunities besides developing a vision for entrepreneurship. This will also help to encourage having a cohesive community and their active participation in AW activities.

g. Systematic dissemination of information on the Government's scheme

Quite a few beneficiaries do not avail of services due to ignorance. Therefore, information about useful Government schemes like Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojna (PMMVY), under which financial benefits are offered at every important stage, encourages prenatal care, institutional delivery, and vaccination.

h. To use the Reverse Osmosis (RO) plants selectively

RO plants should be set up only in those areas where chemical and arsenic water contents are more. Otherwise, the mindless use of RO water will drastically reduce its essential mineral contents. Otherwise, RO water purifiers are a must to get rid of both live and dead bacteria. Diarrhoea is one of the primary reasons for child deaths and malnutrition, and the installation of the RO purifier will reduce these problems.

i. Weighing scales

Most of the weighing scales used for deciding the child's malnutrition status are very old and outdated. All AWCs should be provided with reliable and functional digital weighing scales. They should be made aware of the requirement to calibrate the weighing scales at least once a year.

j. Increased vigilance

Project Officers and Supervisors are not provided with vehicles to move around. Jeeps provided by the WHO have turned junk due to a lack of budget for maintenance. As of January 2019, Project Officers and Supervisors' travelling allowances were pending for more than 24 months. To increase vigilance and close supervision, the Government should not withhold such allowances.

k. To tackle malnutrition

Despite having a network of ICDS, as per this study, nearly 35 per cent of children below the age of 5 years are suffering from malnutrition. The district administration of the ICDS must carry out a pilot study in the pre-selected rural areas to find out ways and means to mitigate this menacing problem. Insufficient food or lack of it may not be a prime reason for malnutrition. This is because; a lot of food is being distributed through Mid-day meal schemes, SNP, and under the Food Security Act. Therefore, the administration should go beyond this and find the roots of malnutrition in food habits and lifestyle-driven routine and specific activities, having an enormous bearing on a child's health status. This pilot program may encompass strict adherence to the following types of guidelines.

- i) Strict implementation of the prohibition on child marriages.
- ii) Delivery only after attaining the age of 20.

- iii) Sufficient gap between two deliveries.
- iv) Proper antenatal, neonatal, and postnatal care of both mother and child.
- v) Vaccination as per schedule.
- vi) Ensuring that colostrum is fed within two hours of delivery.
- vii) Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months, during which not even water is given to a child.
- viii) Switching over to weaning food at the age of six months and continuing with breastfeeding until two years.
- ix) Inculcating simple habits like hand washing,
- x) Maintenance of acceptable standards of cleanliness and hygiene.
- xi) Use of potable water.
- xii) Maintenance of deworming schedule.

A dedicated team may be formed to implement such a pilot program. Depending on its outcome, which will be positive in all probabilities, a template can be designed for implementation in other areas. This way, the administration may get proactive and attack the curse of malnutrition from a close range.

l. Recruitment of AWWs

This job is specialized and should not be left to the whims and discretion of the local Gram Panchayat. The standard practice of conducting a written examination, testing of Intelligence quotients, and interviews should be followed for recruiting AWWs.

m. Due weightage is given to leadership traits of AWWs during the process of their recruitment

The present study has shown that AWWs having gifted or acquired leadership qualities render better services, especially concerning PSE and health and nutrition education.

n. Performance Appraisal

Overall performance of AWW should be appraised once a year, which may include a test of their knowledge, which should be linked to their increment and promotion.

o. Computerization of records

In this era, all activities of every AWC should be electronically transmitted to the superiors on a real-time basis, which will facilitate initiation of immediate analysis and corrective action besides getting rid of the tedious and cumbersome tasks of manual record-keeping and reporting.

p. To invite funds from Corporates

The Government should invite the corporate world's participation under the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to build modern infrastructure in rural areas to bring about the overall growth of women and children on the NAND GHAR scheme's lines launched by Vedanta Resources Limited.