



## MALNUTRITION AMONG WOMEN AND CHILDREN – GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES AND CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING ERADICATION PROGRAMMES

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### Abstract

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*Nutritional factors make negative and adverse impact on the physical health conditions and wellbeing of the people especially in the context of women and children. Development in nutritional status of children and women is an important way of achieving sustainable development goals but there are many challenges and constraints in achieving sustainable development of nutrition among Indian women and children. These challenges and constraints needs to be addressed low birth weight high rate of morbidity child mortality and poor maternal nutrition condition of mother are some of the major nutritional concerns in India. Government of India is making efforts to overcome these issues and challenges through implementation of various nutritional programmes, schemes in remote tribal areas and rural areas. The present literature focused on the various factors that responsible for malnutrition among women and children in India and explored the government initiatives to overcome the challenges and constraints in the implementation of programmes and factors responsible for increasing malnutrition.*

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**Key words** – Women and child, nutritional status, challenges government initiatives

### Introduction

According to WHO malnutrition means deficiencies excess or imbalances in an individual's food intake or nutrients. It is considered that maternal nutrition infant intuition and child nutrition are having an important role in the growth and international organizations it is pointed out that the rate of malnutrition among percent and lactating women adolescent girls and children in India is still high. The factors like- nutritional status of mother, actuation behavior education of women and their awareness regarding nutrition, sanitation etc. These factors are directly affecting on the nutritional status of children which includes, stunting childhood illness restarted growth etc. Although the government of India has achieved

success in reducing the rate of malnutrition during the last some decades through the implementation of various programmes the results of these programmes are not seen as per the expectations because of many challenges and arised in the implementation of these programmes. Despite of economic growth and development the Indian government is not getting a success to overcome the issue of malnutrition among the children and women especially in remote tribal areas and even in some rural parts due to many reasons. Malnutrition among women and children continues to be a major public health related problem in India yet. The prevalence of malnutrition among children and women deviates further from the expected level at the India's per capita income than in any other developing country. Nutrition is requiring in early childhood for healthy growth and proper organ formation strong immune system neurological and cognitive development etc. Malnutrition among children and women affects cognitive activities and contributes to poverty through impeding ability of person to lead productive lives. The importance of women's nutrition for their right to healthy living and to overcome the issue of malnutrition among children needs to be addressed and accorded a high programmes priority.

### **Review of literature**

- 1) Shobha Rao (2018) – Has focused on the high prevalence of low birth weight high morbidity in children and lack of maternal nutrition among women. Author has pointed out that under nourished women and children in India are exposed to the risks of many diseases owing to present nutritional transition and transition in food intake pattern.
- 2) Sukanya Chakravati (2023) – Has attempted to analyses the available data pertaining to malnutrition condition among women and children in India. Through the study author has also focused on the various factors responsible for the growth of malnutrition among women and children. Author has concluded the Indian government should take influence steps in the implementation of poshan Abhiyan, especially in rural parts.
- 3) V.R. Magdum and S. Honnappa (2024) – Have discussed on the prevalence of malnutrition among children and women in India and attempted to analyses the comprehensive state wise insights of prevalence of malnutrition for the study authors have referred the reports of National family health survey (NFHS). Authors have opined that government could reduce malnutrition through proper channel and strict implementation of programmes.

- 4) J.Naryan and Nirupama Ramdas (2018) – Have critically discussed on the states and government initiatives in the eradication of malnutrition among women and children. Author has also focused on the classification of malnutrition factors responsible for malnutrition and adverse impact of malnutrition on the children. Apart from this authors have critically discussed on the policies and programmatic initiatives taken by government to overcome the problem of malnutrition.

### **Method of the study**

The present literature is descriptive in nature and exclusively based on the secondary information collected from government reports study paper and articles published in national and international journals magazines, periodical etc.

### **Objectives**

- 1) To focus on the factors responsible for malnutrition in India.
- 2) To explore the various challenges in the implementation of programmes for eradication of malnutrition in India.
- 3) To focus on the various governments programmatic initiatives in eradication of malnutrition.

### **Factors responsible for malnutrition in India**

Malnutrition is a severe in India which adversely affecting on children under the age of 5 years and women. As per the information provided in the report of national family health survey (2024) it is observed that 36% children under the age of 5 years in various parts of India are stunted 19.3% children are wasted and 32.1% are underweight, these proportion of malnutrition in India is highest as compare with other developing/under developing countries. Women and children who are malnourished are encountered with the stunted growth impaired cognitive development and growth in risk of various disease. Inequality in economic condition is one of major cause for malnutrition in India. Malnutrition contributes to approximately 3.5 million maternal and child deaths every year and it is related with the negative impacts on physical and mental development of children. Approximately 450 million adult women in developing countries are stunted. Malnutrition is serious health concern for women it threatens their life and future generation. Adequate nutrition is important for maintaining a healthy life especially for children under 5 years and women. There are many factors which are responsible to increase in the malnutrition in India. Some of important factors are,

- 1) Poor dietary food intake – Poor dietary food intake coupled with excess energy utilization because of hard physical activities in farm or related to daily household works are the major factors caused to malnutrition among women in India.
- 2) Extreme poverty/food insecurity – Majority of people in India are living under extreme poverty especially in tribal dominated areas. Due to poverty these people are not able to consume nutritious food. Pregnant women young women and children are often have a poor diet which caused childhood malnutrition it weakened their immunity.
- 3) Gender discrimination – In Indian society women often have limited social right and have limited decision making power this also adversely on their health which resulted malnutrition among them.
- 4) Poor health care facilities and poor maternal nutrition – Poor health care facilities available at local level directly contributed to childhood malnutrition, low birth weight etc. apart from this poor maternal nutrition facilities limited infant feeding practices caused for creating child growth complications and poor immunity power.
- 5) Lack of proper knowledge and eradication – Lack of proper knowledge pertaining to diet nutritious food etc and lack of education among women in rural areas are also some important factors responsible to poor maternal health of women and their nutrition situation and also responsible to poor health condition among children under the age of 5 years.

#### **Challenges in implementation of malnutrition eradication programmes in India**

- 1) Economic inequality – Because of poor financial status people are not to take nutritious food or have a limited access to it. Many studies have concluded that more than 70% of Indian population cannot afford a healthy diet food. Majority of these people encounter by severe food insecurity because of natural calamities, social conflicts and price fluctuations.
- 2) Improper and inadequate dietary food intake – During the last some years dietary pattern has been transformed from diverse and balanced options to processed food and sugar dominated food items, which caused for poor nutrition condition among people. Absence of nutritional food dietary diversity due to different reasons and consumption of poor quality food etc. are also major challenges in the implementation of malnutrition eradication programmes. Consuming nutritional deficient food items is

becomes a habit of Indian people which has also created big challenges in the implementation of eradication programmes.

- 3) Poor sanitation and lack of hygiene practices – poor sanitation facilities and lack of proper hygiene practices among people is become major challenges for the effective implementation of malnutrition eradication programmes in India. Lack of knowledge regarding good hygiene practices among people especially in rural parts of the country has caused to encounter with pathogens and various diseases. It is quite challenging task of removing misunderstanding and misconnects about food among the Indian people living in rural and tribal areas. It created a big hurdle in the effective implementation of malnutrition eradication programmes in India.
- 4) Lack of primary health facilities – Primary health facilities is essential for proper implementation of government programs of malnutrition eradication. Majority of people in India still do not have access to basic health facilities like immunization antenatal care, infection treatment etc which caused to increase the danger of diseases and also caused to increase many other health related complications that make worst malnutrition condition.
- 5) Delayed and inconsistency in delivery – due to delays in implementation of malnutrition eradication programmes by the government and inconsistency in rendering health care services caused to create gaps in nutritional initiatives by the government. As per the NFHS- 5 report approximately 50% children under the age of 5 years are out of Anganwadi services under ICDS.
- 6) Improper and inadequate monitoring and evolution mechanism – The available government mechanism for monitoring and evolution of programmes is not influencible yet in many parts of the country. Poor monitoring and evolution practices creates many obstacles in the assessment and authentic data pertaining to the programme it is very challenging task for government to identify lacuna in the implementation of programmes and take necessary actions for its improvement.

### **Programmatic initiatives taken by the government**

Government of India has implemented many programmes with a view to eradicate malnutrition among women and children. Through these programmatic initiatives government is attempting to increase access to healthcare services for deprived people in the society. These programmes includes national health mission.

- 1) Mid-May mil scheme – Through this scheme free meals to the children enrolled in government and government aided schools. This scheme is implemented for better nutritional condition of school children nationwide.
- 2) Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana – Through this scheme financial help to provide to the pregnant women and lactating mothers. To improve the nutritional status of mothers and their children is the major objective of this scheme. This scheme is specially implemented for the SC ST women, partially of fully disabled women, women having BPL ration card and MGNREGA job card etc.
- 3) National Nutrition Mission (POSHAN Abhiyan) – This is an important programme of the government of India with the objective of reducing malnutrition in India. Through this mission efforts are made to improve access to food, nutrition diet and health care. Apart from this to reduce stunting in children under the age of 6 years and to overcome the problem of anemia among children between 6 months to 5 years etc. are also some of the major objectives of this mission.
- 4) Integrated child development services (ICDS) – This government programme is comprehensive in nature. Through this scheme various services are provided to the children under the age of 5 years. This includes supplementary nutrition, immunization, regular health checkups and early childhood education. To improve the nutritional and health condition of children below the age of 6 years is the main objective of this scheme.
- 5) National health mission – This is also one of the important programmes of Indian government that aims to improve the health condition of people in India. This programme address the issue of malnutrition, make a provision of nutrition services and the promotion of breastfeeding's and ensure equitable health care for all.

## **Conclusion**

Good health condition is a significant criterion and caused to better wellbeing of human life. Adequate nutritional food intake for women would help them to become productive members of the society and also help them to develop the better health generations. Prevalence of malnutrition among women and children under 5 years is significantly higher in rural parts and tribal areas in India. The Indian government has made several efforts to overcome the issue of malnutrition through the implementation of various programmes/scheme. But still there are some issues and problems challenges in the implementation of these programmes due to some factors which have been explored through

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this literature and also explored some important programmatic initiatives taken by the government. There is need of impacting proper education to the women pertaining to importance of nutritional food intake during the pregnancy lactation and infancy etc. There is a need of creating awareness among rural women about health to ensure a better quality of life for the upcoming generation. There is a need of strengthening the current nutritional programmes implemented by the government such as integrated child development services scheme Poshan Abhiyan, Antyoday Anna Yojana etc. to improve the nutritional and health conditions of deprived people in the society.

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