



## Challenges in Accessing ICDS Services for Preschool Children in Rural Areas of Raipur District, Chhattisgarh

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The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme is a flagship program of the Government of India aimed at improving the nutritional and educational outcomes of preschool children. Despite its significance, accessing ICDS services remains a challenge in rural areas. This study focuses on the challenges faced by preschool children in rural areas of Raipur district, Chhattisgarh, in accessing ICDS services. The ICDS scheme provides a package of services including supplementary nutrition, immunization, health check-up, and non-formal preschool education. However, the effectiveness of the program is hindered by various challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of trained workers, and limited community awareness. This study aims to identify the specific challenges that hinder the access to ICDS services for preschool children in rural areas of Raipur district. The findings of this study will help policymakers and program implementers to develop targeted interventions to improve the accessibility and utilization of ICDS services in rural areas. The study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on ICDS and provide insights into the challenges faced by rural communities in accessing these services. The recommendations emerging from this study will be useful for improving the effectiveness of the ICDS program and ensuring that preschool children in rural areas receive the benefits they deserve.

**Keywords:** ICDS, preschool children, preschool education, rural areas, Chhattisgarh, challenges, accessibility, utilization.

### Introduction

The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme is one of the world's largest and most ambitious programs aimed at improving the health, nutrition, and education of young children in India. Launched in 1975, the program provides a package of services including supplementary nutrition, immunization, health check-ups, and non-formal preschool education to children under six years of age, as well as pregnant and lactating women. The ICDS program is a critical component of India's efforts to address child malnutrition, improve early childhood development, and enhance the overall well-being of its youngest citizens. Despite its significance, the ICDS program faces several challenges in its implementation, particularly in rural areas where access to services is often limited. Children in these areas are among the most vulnerable to malnutrition, illness, and lack of educational opportunities, making it essential to ensure that they receive the benefits of the ICDS program. This study focuses on the challenges faced by preschool children in rural areas of Raipur district, Chhattisgarh, in accessing ICDS services. By examining the specific hurdles that prevent these children from benefiting from the program, this research aims to contribute to the ongoing efforts to improve the effectiveness of the ICDS scheme and ensure that all children, regardless of their geographical location, have access to the services they need to thrive.

## Methodology

This study was conducted in the Chhattisgarh Plains during 2024-25, involving personal interviews and surveys with 120 respondents, including ICDS beneficiaries, Anganwadi workers, and villagers, in four randomly selected villages (Dharampura, Temri, Banarsi, and Sammanpur) from Block Dharsiwa. Pre-tested questionnaires were used to assess knowledge and awareness of the ICDS program, including health and nutrition services, preschool education, and benefits, as well as challenges in accessing these services. Anganwadi centers were visited to gather relevant information.

## Findings

The survey of different Anganwadi centers in selected villages revealed several challenges impacting the delivery of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). Key findings include:

### Infrastructure-Related Challenges

- 1. Inadequate Drainage Facilities:** Stagnant water accumulation creates breeding grounds for mosquitoes, posing health risks.
- 2. Inadequate Sanitation Facilities:** Unhygienic and broken toilets hinder personal hygiene among children and staff.
- 3. Lack of Clean Drinking Water:** Most Anganwadi centers lack water purifiers or RO systems, posing health risks.
- 4. Insufficient Space:** Overcrowding affects the learning and development environment.
- 5. Lack of Outdoor Play Materials:** Insufficient equipment hinders physical and mental development.
- 6. Inadequate Storage Facilities:** Improper storage practices delay supplementary nutrition distribution.

### Accessibility Challenges

- 1. Distance to Anganwadi Centers:** Long distances deter parents from sending children, resulting in lower attendance.

### Anganwadi Worker Challenges

- 1. Workload-Related Challenges:** Additional responsibilities and limited time for individual attention impact child care.

### Community Engagement Challenges

- 1. Limited Parental Involvement:** Parents' lack of involvement impacts child development and program effectiveness.
- 2. Lack of Awareness:** Limited awareness about ICDS scheme and Anganwadi centers' role hinders support.

### Other Challenges

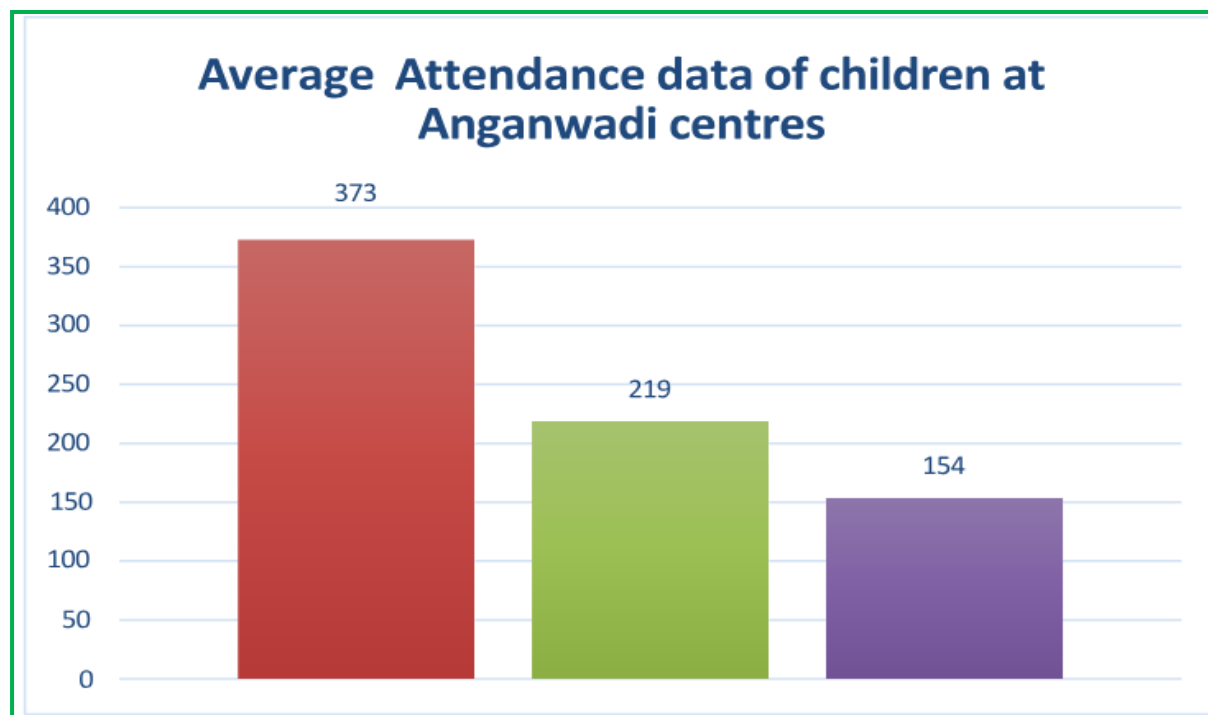
- 1. Private School Involvement:** Decreased enrollment in Anganwadi centers due to private school attendance.

**Table 1: Present status of children aged 3-6 years at different Anganwadi centres of selected villages:**

S.No.	Village name	Enrolled	Present	Absent	Reason for absence
1.	Sammanpur (Nakti)	98	64.29%	35.71%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Private school</li> <li>• Accessibility issue</li> <li>• Limited parental involvement</li> </ul>
2.	Dharampura	78	58.97	41.03%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Private school</li> <li>• Accessibility issue</li> <li>• Limited parental involvement</li> </ul>

3.	Temri	112	46.43%	53.57	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Private school</li> <li>• Accessibility issue</li> <li>• Limited parental involvement</li> </ul>
4.	Banarsi	85	68.24%	31.76	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Private school</li> <li>• Limited parental involvement</li> </ul>

These findings highlight the need for improvements in infrastructure, accessibility, and community engagement to ensure effective implementation of the ICDS scheme.



**Diagram 1: Presence and absence rate at Anganwadi centres across different rural areas**

Table 1 and Diagram 1 reveal that out of 373 children enrolled in the ICDS program, 219 (58.7%) were present, while 154 (41.3%) were absent. This shows that approximately 59% of enrolled children availed the services, whereas about 41% did not. Notably, private school enrollment and distance to Anganwadi centers and Lack of parental and involvement in some cases are significant factors contributing to absenteeism, depriving these children of essential preschool education and hot meal nutrition provided under the ICDS scheme.

## Conclusion

The study concludes that while the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme has the potential to promote community development in rural areas of Raipur by positively impacting the health, nutrition, and education of beneficiaries, its effectiveness is hindered by several challenges. These challenges include inadequate infrastructure, insufficient resources, accessibility issues, operational problems, and the impact of private schools. To achieve the scheme's objective of holistic development, including health and nutrition, education and cognitive development, and social and emotional development, it is essential to address these challenges.