

Awareness About the Integrated Child Development Scheme Among Women in Raipur District of Chhattisgarh

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The Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) is an important government initiative aimed at improving the health, nutrition, and overall development of children and women. Women, particularly mothers, are among the major beneficiaries and participants in the implementation of the scheme at the community level. Their awareness of the objectives, provisions, and benefits of the scheme is essential for its effective utilization. The present article examines the importance of awareness about the Integrated Child Development Scheme among women in Raipur district of Chhattisgarh. It discusses the objectives of the scheme, its major components, the role of Anganwadi Centres, factors influencing women's awareness, and the need for strengthening awareness at the community level. Education, socioeconomic status, access to information, family support, and interaction with Anganwadi workers are important factors that may influence women's awareness. Improving awareness through community participation, health and nutrition education, mass media, and effective communication by frontline workers can enhance the utilization of the scheme and contribute to better maternal and child health outcomes.

Keywords: Integrated Child Development Scheme, ICDS, women, awareness, Anganwadi Centre, child development, nutrition, maternal health, Raipur, Chhattisgarh.

Introduction

Women and children constitute an important section of society whose health, nutrition, and development have a direct influence on the overall development of the nation. In India, various programmes have been introduced to address problems related to malnutrition, maternal health, child health, and early childhood development. The Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) is one of the major government initiatives developed to address these concerns through an integrated approach. The Integrated Child Development Scheme was launched in India in 1975 with the broad objective of improving the nutritional and health status of children below six years of age and laying the foundation for their proper psychological, physical, and social development. The scheme also focuses on improving the health and nutritional status of pregnant women and lactating mothers and enhancing the capacity of mothers to look after the health and nutritional needs of their children. At the grassroots level, the scheme is implemented primarily through Anganwadi Centres. These centres provide a link between government programmes and the community. Anganwadi workers play an important role in communicating information to women, providing supplementary nutrition, promoting health and nutrition education, supporting preschool



activities, and facilitating access to health-related services. Awareness among women is an essential factor in determining the effectiveness of the Integrated Child Development Scheme. A woman who is aware of the objectives and benefits of the scheme is more likely to participate in its activities and utilize the facilities available through the Anganwadi Centre. Therefore, understanding and improving awareness among women is important for the successful implementation of the scheme.

Integrated Child Development Scheme

The Integrated Child Development Scheme represents an integrated approach to early childhood care, nutrition, health, and development. It seeks to address the multiple factors that influence the growth and well-being of children and women.

The major objectives of the scheme include:

- Improving the nutritional and health status of children.
- Reducing the incidence of malnutrition among children.
- Promoting proper physical, psychological, and social development of children.
- Providing appropriate care and support to pregnant women and lactating mothers.
- Promoting awareness regarding nutrition and health among mothers and women.
- Supporting early childhood care and preschool education.
- Establishing coordination between different health, nutrition, and child-development programmes.

The scheme recognizes that child development cannot be separated from the health and nutritional condition of the mother and the family environment. Therefore, women are an important target group for awareness and intervention under the scheme.

Major Components of the Scheme

The Integrated Child Development Scheme provides an integrated package of interventions for children and women. These include:

Supplementary Nutrition

Supplementary nutrition is an important component of the scheme. It aims to improve the nutritional intake of children and eligible women and to reduce the risk of nutritional deficiencies.

Health Check-up

Regular health monitoring of children and women helps in identifying health and nutritional problems. Early identification can facilitate timely intervention and referral.

Immunization

The scheme supports immunization activities through coordination with the health system. Awareness among mothers is important for ensuring that children receive vaccinations according to the recommended schedule.

Referral Services

Children and women who require medical attention can be referred to appropriate health facilities. Awareness about referral mechanisms can help beneficiaries seek timely treatment.

Nutrition and Health Education

Nutrition and health education is particularly important for women. Information regarding breastfeeding, complementary feeding, balanced diets, hygiene, sanitation, maternal health, and child care can influence household health practices.

Preschool Education

Early childhood care and preschool education are important components of the scheme. Preschool activities at Anganwadi Centres can help promote children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development.

Importance of Awareness Among Women

Awareness is a key factor in the successful implementation of any welfare programme. The availability of a government scheme alone does not ensure that its intended beneficiaries will receive its benefits. Women must have adequate knowledge about the scheme, eligibility

criteria, available facilities, and the role of Anganwadi Centres. Awareness can influence women's decisions regarding maternal nutrition, breastfeeding, child feeding, immunization, hygiene, and healthcare. A knowledgeable mother can recognize the importance of regular health check-ups and nutritional support for herself and her child. Women can also act as important sources of information within their families and communities. When women understand the benefits of the Integrated Child Development Scheme, they may encourage other mothers to participate in Anganwadi activities and make appropriate use of available facilities.

Awareness Among Women in Raipur District

Raipur district is an important administrative and social centre of Chhattisgarh and includes populations with diverse socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. Differences in education, income, occupation, access to healthcare, and availability of information may influence the level of awareness about government welfare schemes among women. Women living in urban areas may have greater access to information through television, newspapers, mobile phones, the internet, healthcare institutions, and social media. Women in rural and economically disadvantaged communities may depend more on Anganwadi workers, ASHA workers, ANMs, family members, and community-based networks for information. The level of awareness may therefore differ among women according to their educational and socioeconomic background. Regular interaction with Anganwadi workers can play a particularly important role in improving awareness among women who have limited access to other sources of information.



Factors Influencing Awareness

Several factors can influence awareness about the Integrated Child Development Scheme among women in Raipur district.

Educational Status

Education plays an important role in developing awareness. Educated women may have greater ability to understand health-related information and seek information about government programmes. However, awareness can also be improved among women with limited formal education through effective interpersonal communication.

Socioeconomic Status

Economic conditions can affect women's access to information and government facilities. Women from disadvantaged households may face barriers related to transportation, household responsibilities, and limited resources.

Role of Anganwadi Workers

Anganwadi workers are important community-level functionaries. Their regular interaction with women provides an opportunity to explain the objectives and benefits of the scheme and encourage beneficiaries to participate in various activities.

Access to Information

Access to television, newspapers, mobile phones, the internet, and social media can increase awareness. However, interpersonal communication remains particularly important in communities where digital access is limited.

Family Support

Family members can influence women's ability to participate in government programmes. Support from husbands, parents, and other family members can encourage women to access services and attend activities at Anganwadi Centres.

Distance and Accessibility

The location of Anganwadi Centres and ease of access can influence participation. Women who live far from centres or face transportation difficulties may have fewer opportunities to obtain information and benefits.

Role of Anganwadi Centres in Creating Awareness

Anganwadi Centres are important community-level institutions under the Integrated Child Development Scheme. They provide an accessible platform through which women can receive information related to nutrition, maternal health, child care, and early childhood development. Anganwadi workers can improve awareness through individual counselling, group meetings, home visits, nutrition demonstrations, community meetings, and participation in health-related activities. Effective communication between Anganwadi workers and beneficiaries can build trust and encourage women to seek information and participate actively. Regular training of Anganwadi workers is also important. Well-trained workers can communicate health and nutrition messages more effectively and respond appropriately to the questions and concerns of women.

Need for Improving Awareness

Although government programmes have expanded considerably, awareness among beneficiaries remains an important area of concern. Improving awareness should therefore be an integral part of the implementation of the Integrated Child Development Scheme. Awareness programmes should use simple language and locally appropriate communication methods. Information should be provided repeatedly rather than through one-time campaigns. Special efforts should be made to reach women from disadvantaged and marginalized communities. Women's self-help groups, community organizations, healthcare workers, schools, local leaders, and Panchayati Raj institutions can also participate in awareness activities. The use of mobile phones and digital communication can supplement traditional methods of communication.

Suggestions

The following measures may help improve awareness about the Integrated Child Development Scheme among women in Raipur district:

1. Regular awareness programmes should be organized at Anganwadi Centres.
2. Anganwadi workers should provide continuous counselling to mothers and pregnant women.
3. Information should be communicated in simple and locally understandable language.
4. Nutrition and health education sessions should be conducted regularly.
5. Women's self-help groups should be involved in community awareness programmes.
6. Local media and digital platforms should be used to disseminate information.
7. Community meetings should be organized to explain the objectives and benefits of the scheme.

8. Special attention should be given to women from economically and socially disadvantaged groups.
9. Coordination among Anganwadi workers, ASHA workers, ANMs, and other frontline workers should be strengthened.
10. Periodic assessments should be conducted to measure awareness and utilization of the scheme among women.

Conclusion

The Integrated Child Development Scheme is an important initiative for promoting the health, nutrition, and development of children and improving the well-being of women. The effectiveness of the scheme depends not only on the availability of facilities but also on the awareness and active participation of beneficiaries. Women in Raipur district can play an important role in improving the health and nutritional status of their families through effective utilization of the benefits available under the scheme. Education, socioeconomic conditions, access to information, family support, and interaction with Anganwadi workers can influence their level of awareness. Strengthening awareness through Anganwadi Centres, community participation, women's groups, health education, mass media, and digital communication can improve the reach and utilization of the scheme. Greater awareness and participation among women can ultimately contribute to improved maternal health, child nutrition, early childhood development, and the overall well-being of families and communities in Raipur district of Chhattisgarh.