



Role of Nutrition Awareness Programmes in Preventing Malnutrition among Rural Communities of Durg District, Chhattisgarh

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Malnutrition is a major public health problem that affects individuals, particularly children, women, and vulnerable communities. It includes both undernutrition and deficiencies of essential nutrients and can lead to poor physical growth, weakened immunity, reduced learning ability, and increased susceptibility to diseases. Lack of awareness about balanced diets, inadequate food intake, poor sanitation, and limited knowledge of appropriate nutrition practices are important factors contributing to malnutrition. An awareness program was conducted to improve knowledge regarding the causes, consequences, prevention, and management of malnutrition. The program focused on promoting balanced and nutritious diets, proper infant and young-child feeding practices, personal hygiene, sanitation, and the importance of locally available nutrient-rich foods. Educational activities such as awareness talks, demonstrations, discussions, and distribution of informational materials were used to communicate key nutritional messages. The program helped participants understand the importance of adequate nutrition and encouraged healthy dietary and hygiene practices. Continuous nutrition education and community participation are essential for reducing malnutrition and improving the overall health and well-being of the population.

Keywords: Malnutrition, Undernutrition, Nutritional Awareness, Balanced Diet, Nutrition Education, Community Health, Food Security, Hygiene, Child Nutrition.

Introduction

Malnutrition is a major public health problem that occurs when the body does not receive adequate, excessive, or balanced amounts of nutrients required for normal growth, development, and functioning. It includes undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, overweight, and obesity. Malnutrition can affect individuals of all age groups, but children, pregnant women, adolescents, and elderly people are particularly vulnerable. Poor dietary intake, poverty, food insecurity, infections, inadequate sanitation, lack of health awareness, and improper feeding practices are among the important factors contributing to malnutrition. Malnutrition can have serious consequences on physical and mental development, immunity, learning ability, productivity, and overall quality of life. In children, prolonged undernutrition may result in stunting, wasting, underweight, and increased susceptibility to infections. Micronutrient deficiencies such as iron, vitamin A, iodine, and other nutrient deficiencies can further affect health and development. Therefore, prevention and early identification of

malnutrition are essential for improving community health. Awareness programmes play an important role in addressing malnutrition at the community level. Such programmes can educate people about the importance of a balanced and nutritious diet, breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices, personal hygiene, sanitation, prevention of infections, and appropriate use of locally available nutritious foods. Community participation, health education, regular growth monitoring, and timely referral of malnourished individuals can contribute significantly to reducing the burden of malnutrition. A well-planned malnutrition awareness programme helps people understand the causes, signs, health consequences, prevention, and management of malnutrition. By improving nutritional knowledge and encouraging healthy dietary and hygiene practices, awareness programmes can contribute to healthier families and communities and support the overall development of society.

Methodology

The awareness programme on “Malnutrition Problems and Awareness” was conducted among children, mothers, parents and community members through selected Anganwadi centres in villages. The methodology was designed to assess awareness regarding malnutrition and to provide practical knowledge about balanced nutrition, child feeding and prevention of malnutrition.

1. Selection of Study Area: The Anganwadi centres were selected because they provide nutrition, health and preschool services to young children and act as an important link between the community and health services.

2. Selection of Participants

- Children attending the Anganwadi centre
- Mothers and caregivers of children
- Pregnant and lactating women
- Parents and other interested village residents
- Anganwadi workers and helpers

3. Pre-Assessment of Awareness

- Signs and symptoms of malnutrition
- Importance of a balanced diet
- Breastfeeding and complementary feeding
- Hygiene and sanitation
- Prevention of malnutrition

4. Awareness Programme

- Effects of malnutrition on growth and development
- Importance of a balanced and diversified diet
- Importance of exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months
- Importance of iron-, protein- and vitamin-rich foods
- Importance of clean drinking water, sanitation and handwashing
- Importance of timely health check-ups and referral when required

5. Demonstration and Educational Activities: To make the programme more effective, practical demonstrations and educational materials were used. These included posters, charts, pictures, food models and locally available food items. A simple demonstration of a balanced meal using locally available foods was also conducted. Participants were encouraged to ask questions and share their experiences.

Result and Discussion

The awareness programme indicated that malnutrition was mainly associated with inadequate dietary diversity, irregular meal patterns, limited knowledge about balanced diets, poor awareness regarding appropriate complementary feeding and insufficient consumption of locally available nutrient-rich foods. Some mothers were also found to have limited knowledge about the importance of breastfeeding, iron-rich foods, protein sources, fruits and vegetables in the daily diet of children. Following the awareness programme, a noticeable

improvement in the understanding of participants regarding malnutrition and its prevention was observed. Participants became more aware of the importance of a balanced diet containing cereals, pulses, vegetables, fruits, milk and other locally available foods. The participants were also informed about the importance of regular growth monitoring and utilizing services available through the Anganwadi centre. The programme also highlighted the importance of hygiene and sanitation in preventing malnutrition. Participants were encouraged to follow proper handwashing practices, maintain cleanliness during food preparation and provide safe drinking water to children. The Anganwadi centre played an important role in spreading nutrition-related information and creating awareness among mothers and children. Sustained awareness programmes at the village level can contribute significantly to improving nutritional knowledge and promoting healthy growth and development among children.

Future Scope

- Awareness programmes should be conducted regularly in villages.
- Promotion of balanced and locally available nutritious foods is needed.
- Parents and communities should be actively involved in nutrition programmes.
- Maternal and child nutrition should receive special attention.
- Regular follow-up of malnourished children should be ensured.
- Digital media can be used to spread nutrition awareness.

Conclusion

Malnutrition is a major public health problem that affects physical growth, mental development, immunity, and overall quality of life, particularly among children, women, and vulnerable communities. It may occur due to inadequate food intake, poor dietary diversity, infections, poverty, lack of nutritional knowledge, and improper feeding practices. The awareness programme helped participants understand the causes, signs, prevention, and harmful effects of malnutrition. It emphasized the importance of a balanced and nutritious diet, proper hygiene and sanitation, breastfeeding, appropriate complementary feeding, and regular health and growth monitoring. The programme also encouraged the use of locally available, affordable, and nutritious foods. In conclusion, reducing malnutrition requires continuous nutritional education, early identification of nutritional problems, community participation, and coordinated efforts of families, health workers, educational institutions, and government programmes. Creating awareness at the community level can play an important role in promoting healthy dietary practices and improving the nutritional status and well-being of the population.

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