

A study on Implementation of Mid-day Meal scheme during Covid-19 in Hazaribag district, Jharkhand, India

Introduction

The ongoing pandemic which is caused due to Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has not only disturbed our daily routine but has also affected the whole nation, especially the vulnerable population. Children tend to be the most vulnerable section of the society and so for them Mid-day Meal scheme was introduced in Jharkhand it was started in the year 2003. Which continuously helped to improve the effectiveness of primary education by improving the nutritional status of school children. Due to this new normal situation of the closure of schools for precaution from coronavirus disease has interrupted the practice of the Mid-day Meal scheme. And to overcome this situation Jharkhand state adopted the practice of distributing dry ration with cooking cost and amount provided for egg or fruits.

This study was done to know what are the problems which were hindering the current implementation of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme during Covid-19. And also to explore that the aid which is provided in form of money (i.e. for egg/fruit) for improving nutritional levels among children is being used for the same or not.

Methods

A purposive sampling method was used which was limited to 40 student's parents/guardians as respondents in the Hazaribag district. A telephonic based survey was conducted through the questionnaire.

Results

It was found that male members had more access to technological advancement particularly the cell phone, than a female members of the household. Mid-day Meal scheme was introduced to cover maximum economically deprived students. So it was noticed that it has fulfilled its objective as a higher percentage of children were from low-income households who were availing MDMS. As per the study, household preference to spend the aid was based on where they maximize utility, especially the disadvantaged household. So as a result the maximum number of the household used the money for some other cause. More than half of the sample population neither had any knowledge of why MDM was practiced and its provisions nor had any information regarding filing any complaint in case of any violation to the beneficiary. Because they had less information about the scheme they tend to show less interest in receiving MDM as per provision and less trust in the complaint process.

Discussion and Suggestion

The present study shows that economic condition plays an important role in the decision making of a household. Disadvantage household will focus more on maximizing their utility from various variables which will feel fit to them. Due to a lack of information on the importance of food consumption and its nutritional aspects, the nutrition of the child can be affected. Lack of information about the program lead to less trust and participation as they don't know the provision it will disrupt availing MDM. For better implementation of the Mid-day Meal during pandemic it would be suggested that pre-packed ration including different nutritional items like eggs, milk, nutrient-rich vegetables, fruits, and other alternatives should

be provided to enhance diet quality. A receipt should be generated while distributing ration mentioning the quantity and other relevant details. Children should be asked to give their parents the generated receipt while receiving the MDM ration and money. This can allow the parents to be aware that what and how much is being provided during MDMS practices. The long-term solution to this problem is to have an extension activity to educate disadvantaged households about the importance of nutrition and the healthy growth of children. To gain trust in the complaint process there is a need to motivate by telling the successful completion of any such cases. Feedback forms with pictorial representation for beneficiaries should also be filled and made compulsory which could open more rooms for improvement.