

Effectiveness of IYCF training under ICDS scheme in Kutch district: A study based on the views of Anganwadi workers

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Abstract—Child malnutrition, infant mortality and maternal and child health related problems remain a serious public health challenge in India. The first two years of a child's life are considered to be very important for his physical, mental and intellectual development. If proper nutrition, breastfeeding and health care are not available during this period, long-term negative effects are seen on the child's development. Keeping this situation in mind, the Government of India has implemented the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme. Under the ICDS scheme, Anganwadi workers provide health, nutrition and education related services at the community level. Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) training is provided to enhance their efficiency.

The main objective of the present study was to know the views of Anganwadi workers in Kutch district regarding the effectiveness of IYCF training and to assess the development in their knowledge and skills through the training. Descriptive research design was used for the study. A total of 60 Anganwadi workers were selected through convenient sampling method. A questionnaire was used to collect data and the data was analysed using percentage method. The findings of the study showed that most of the respondents had adequate knowledge about ICDS and IYCF. The training increased understanding of breastfeeding, infant feeding, kangaroo mother care, growth monitoring and maternal counselling. The video-based education and sessions conducted by the doctor were considered very useful by the respondents. Based on the study, it can be said that IYCF training significantly increases the knowledge, skills and service efficiency of the Anganwadi workers.

Index Terms—IYCF, ICDS, Anganwadi worker, Child nutrition, Breastfeeding, Training effectiveness, Kutch district

I. Introduction

India has one of the largest child populations in the world. Millions of children in the country still face problems like malnutrition, low birth weight, infectious diseases and inadequate health services. The first 1000 days of a child's life – i.e. the period from conception to the age of two years – are crucial for their development throughout their lives. The nutrition a child receives during this period affects their brain development, physical growth, immunity and future functioning.

According to the World Health Organization, initiating breastfeeding within the first hour of birth, exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months and continued breastfeeding with appropriate complementary foods for two years or more is essential for the health of the child. However, due to social beliefs, ignorance and lack of information, many mothers are unable to adopt appropriate infant feeding practices.

In this situation, the role of Anganwadi workers becomes extremely important. Since they have direct contact with mothers and children, they work to disseminate nutrition and health-related information at the community level. The efficiency of Anganwadi workers is directly related to the health and nutritional status of children.

The Integrated Child Development Services Scheme was launched by the Government of India in the year 1975. Under this scheme, supplementary feeding, health check-up, vaccination, health education, pre-primary education and referral services are provided. The main objectives of ICDS include improving the health and nutrition of children, reducing malnutrition and increasing the care capacity of mothers.

IYCF (Infant and Young Child Feeding) training is a special training programme designed for Anganwadi workers under the ICDS scheme. This training provides guidance on breastfeeding, complementary feeding, kangaroo mother care, growth monitoring, maternal counselling, nutrition education and proper care of the child. The main objective of IYCF training is to enhance the knowledge and skills of Anganwadi workers so that they can provide more effective services at the community level.

Kutch district is geographically the largest district of Gujarat and the population distribution here is spread over a wide area. In such a situation, the work of Anganwadi workers becomes more challenging. Therefore, it becomes necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of IYCF training.

II. Research Problem

How effective is the IYCF training conducted for Anganwadi workers? To what extent does the training increase their knowledge, skills and service efficiency? What are their opinions about the training? The present study was conducted to find answers to these questions.

3.1 Hypotheses

H1: IYCF training will have increased the knowledge and skills of Anganwadi workers.

H2: Anganwadi workers will not have faced any significant difficulties during the training.

H3: Anganwadi workers will have positive views towards IYCF training.

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IV. Literature Review

Research Literature review is considered the pillar of any study. Based on previous studies, the researcher gets a deeper understanding of the subject and helps identify research gaps.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of a child's life significantly reduces child mortality and infectious diseases. WHO further suggests that nutritious complementary feeding should be started after six months.

According to a report published by UNICEF (UNICEF, 2022), implementation of appropriate IYCF practices can be successful in reducing the prevalence of malnutrition in children under five years of age. UNICEF has described community-based nutrition education as a highly effective strategy.

Several studies have been conducted on the ICDS scheme and Anganwadi services in India. Various studies have found that trained Anganwadi workers can guide mothers more effectively and increase the quality of child nutrition-related services.

A study by Patel (2020) found that knowledge of child nutrition was significantly higher among Anganwadi workers who received nutrition training. The study also found that the training improved their ability to communicate with mothers.

Sharma and Singh (2021) noted that IYCF training is not limited to knowledge alone but also develops practical skills and counselling skills. Training is particularly important for providing appropriate guidance on breastfeeding and complementary feeding.

The available literature on the ICDS scheme shows that Anganwadi workers play a significant role in improving child development and maternal and child health. However, there are limited studies evaluating the effectiveness of training at the local level.

V. Research Gap

A review of the available literature reveals that there have been many researches on ICDS and child nutrition, but there is a dearth of specific studies on the effectiveness of IYCF training in the context of Kutch district. There are very few studies on the evaluation of training, especially based on the opinions of Anganwadi workers. Therefore, the present study attempts to fill this research gap.

VI. Research Methodology

The reliability of any research depends on its research approach, methodology and data analysis process. In the present study, scientific research method was used to find out the opinions of Anganwadi workers regarding the effectiveness of IYCF training provided under the ICDS scheme in Kutch district.

6.1 Type of Research

The present study is of Descriptive Research Design type. The main purpose of descriptive research is to provide a factual description of the current status of any social event, situation or program. This type of design was considered appropriate to find out the opinions of Anganwadi workers regarding the effectiveness of IYCF training.

6.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Kutch district of Gujarat state. Kutch district is the largest district of Gujarat and has a geographically large area. There are 10 talukas, 951 villages and a large number of Anganwadi centres functioning in the district.

6.3 Study Population

All Anganwadi workers who had received IYCF training in Kutch district were the study population.

6.4 Sampling Method

Convenience Sampling Method was adopted for the study. Under this method, Anganwadi workers who had received training and were available to provide information were selected.

6.5 Sample Size

A total of 60 Anganwadi workers were included in the study. All the selected respondents had received IYCF training.

6.6 Sources of Data

(a) Primary Data

A structured interview schedule was prepared to collect primary data. The schedule collected information related to the personal details of the respondents, their opinions about the training, knowledge level and effectiveness of the training.

(b) Secondary Data

The following sources were used for secondary data:

- Books
- Research articles
- Journals
- ICDS guidelines
- Reports of the Department of Women and Child Development
- Publications of WHO and UNICEF
- Website based information

6.7 Data Analysis

The data was analysed through classification, tabulation and percentage method. Descriptive analysis method was used to present the findings in a simple and clear manner.

VII. Results and Discussion

Based on the analysis of the data obtained, the following results were obtained.

7.1 Information about the age of the respondents

Most of the respondents included in the study were in the age group of 31 to 40 years. Then the proportion of respondents in the age group of 41 to 50 years was higher. This makes it clear that most of the workers who participated in the IYCF training were from the experienced and mature age group.

Since mature age workers are generally considered more trustworthy in the community, they can use the knowledge gained in the training more effectively.

7.2 Educational Qualification

Most of the respondents in the study had secondary and higher secondary education. Some respondents had graduation and post-graduation qualifications.

This result shows that the information given during the training can be easily understood as the basic educational capacity of the Anganwadi workers is good.

7.3 Marital Status

Most of the respondents were married. Married women, having practical experience of motherhood and childcare, can better relate to the training topics.

7.4 Family Type

Most of the respondents in the study lived in joint families. Joint families tend to have more experience in childcare and nutrition.

7.5 Knowledge about ICDS

83.33 percent of the respondents in the study knew the full name of ICDS. This result indicates that most of the workers have adequate knowledge about their scheme.

The ICDS scheme is designed to improve the health and nutrition of children, pregnant women and lactating mothers. Since Anganwadi workers are the main implementers of this scheme, knowledge about the scheme is essential for them.

The study also found that most of the respondents had proper information about the main beneficiaries and services of ICDS.

This result indicates that the understanding of the scheme had increased through the training.

7.6 Knowledge about IYCF

90 percent of the respondents in the study knew the full name of IYCF.

This result is an important indicator of the success of the training. Having knowledge about the full name of IYCF and its main objectives is one of the basic educational outcomes of the training.

Most of the respondents said that through the training they received detailed information about proper nutrition, breastfeeding and complementary feeding during the first two years of a child's life.

7.7 Opinions on Training Planning

58.33 percent of the respondents said that the planning of the IYCF training was very good.

This result indicates that the training planning, venue arrangement, study materials and performance of the trainers were satisfactory.

A well-planned training program makes the learning process more effective. When the trainees get a conducive environment, they can participate more actively.

7.8 Duration of Training

Most of the respondents in the study said that the duration of the training was appropriate.

Sufficient time for training provides an opportunity to understand the subject in depth. If the duration is too short, the information may remain incomplete, while if the duration is too long, it may become boring.

This result indicates that the duration of the training was decided appropriately.

7.9 Understanding of Breastfeeding and Infant Nutrition

61.67 percent of the respondents said that detailed understanding of breastfeeding and infant nutrition is gained through IYCF training.

This result is very important because the main purpose of IYCF training is to provide knowledge about child nutrition and breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding is a complete and natural diet for the baby. The training guided the workers about the importance of starting breastfeeding within the first hour after birth, the need for exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months and the process of starting complementary foods thereafter.

This information provided to mothers by Anganwadi workers can play an important role in reducing child malnutrition.

7.10 Understanding of Kangaroo Mother Care

56.66 percent of the respondents said that they received useful information about Kangaroo Mother Care through the training.

Kangaroo Mother Care is an effective method for low birth weight and premature babies. In this method, the baby is brought into direct contact with the mother's body, due to which the baby's temperature is maintained and breastfeeding is encouraged.

The training provided practical information about this method to the Anganwadi workers, which can be useful for providing guidance at the community level.

7.11 Effectiveness of Video-Based Learning

65 percent of the respondents said that information provided through video is more effective in training.

Video-based learning method helps the trainees to understand the subject visually. Information provided through video is remembered more easily than information provided through oral only.

This result shows that more use of audio-visual aids in IYCF training in future can enhance the quality of training.

7.12 Role of Trainers

Most of the respondents said that sufficient time was given by the trainers and their problems were solved properly.

A positive role of trainers is very essential for the success of the training. When the trainer encourages the trainees for discussion and questioning, the learning process becomes more effective.

7.13 Effectiveness of sessions conducted by doctors

63.33 percent of the respondents in the study said that the sessions conducted by doctors during IYCF training were very useful and effective. The information provided by the doctor is scientifically based, which helps the workers to gain a clearer understanding of the subject.

The doctors provided guidance on topics related to breastfeeding, infant nutrition, causes of malnutrition, complementary feeding, care of low birth weight children and child health. Such expert guidance increases the confidence of the workers and they can provide more reliable information to mothers in the community.

This result shows that the active participation of health professionals in IYCF training contributes significantly to increasing the quality and effectiveness of the training.

VIII. Discussion

The results of the present study show that IYCF training significantly enhances the knowledge, skills and service efficiency of Anganwadi workers. Through training, workers acquire not only theoretical information but also practical skills.

The study found that most of the respondents had adequate knowledge about ICDS and IYCF. This indicates that the educational objectives of the training were successfully achieved. The understanding gained about breastfeeding and infant nutrition indicates that the training enables workers to provide child nutrition related services more effectively.

The positive feedback received about video-based learning and doctor-led sessions indicates that the inclusion of modern teaching methods and expert guidance in the training helps in increasing the effectiveness of the training.

Sharma and Singh (2021) also found that IYCF training enhances the counselling capacity of workers. The findings of the present study also support this. The ability of workers to provide appropriate guidance to mothers is developed, which helps in improving child nutrition and health.

As per the recommendations given by UNICEF (2022) and WHO (2021), community-based capacity development programs are essential to improve child nutrition. IYCF training is a prime example of such programs. In the context of Kutch district as well, this training appears to be working as an important tool in improving child nutrition and maternal and child health.

The results of this study show that training is not just an informational process but has the potential to bring about practical change. Anganwadi workers develop self-confidence, communication skills and problem-solving abilities, which enhances the quality of their service.

IX. Major Findings

The following key findings were obtained based on the study:

1. Most of the respondents were in the age group of 31 to 40 years.
2. Most of the respondents had secondary or higher secondary education.
3. 83.33 percent of the respondents knew the full name of ICDS.
4. 90 percent of the respondents knew the full name of IYCF.
5. Most of the respondents had proper information about the beneficiaries and services of ICDS.
6. 58.33 percent of the respondents said that the training was very well organized.
7. Most of the respondents said that the duration of the training was appropriate.
8. 61.67 percent of the respondents said that they got detailed understanding about breastfeeding and infant nutrition through the training.
9. 56.66 percent of the respondents admitted that they got useful information about Kangaroo Mother Care.
10. 65 percent of respondents considered video-based education effective.
11. Most respondents agreed that sufficient time was given by the trainers.
12. 63.33 percent of respondents considered the sessions conducted by the doctor useful.
13. The training increased the knowledge, skills and confidence of the Anganwadi workers.
14. IYCF training proved to be effective in improving the quality of services related to child nutrition and maternal and child health.

X. Suggestions

Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions are made:

10.1 Regular Refresher Training

Refresher training of IYCF training should be organized at regular intervals so that the knowledge of the workers remains up to date.

10.2 Increase in practical approach

Training should include more practical demonstrations, case studies, group discussions and field visits.

10.3 Use of digital teaching tools

Videos, animations, mobile applications and other digital tools should be used more.

10.4 Increase in participation of experts

The number of sessions of doctors, nutritionists and paediatricians should be increased.

10.5 Nutrition education campaign

Special nutrition awareness campaign should be conducted in villages and remote areas.

XI. Conclusion

The present study was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of IYCF training provided under ICDS scheme in Kutch district. The results of the study showed that the IYCF training proved to be highly useful and effective for the Anganwadi workers.

The knowledge, skills, communication skills and confidence of the workers were significantly increased through the training. In particular, there was an improvement in understanding of topics such as breastfeeding, infant nutrition, kangaroo mother care and mother counselling. Video based learning and expert sessions helped in enhancing the quality of training.

Anganwadi workers are the foundation staff of ICDS scheme. They play a key role in delivering government services to mother and child. So it is very important to continuously develop their capacity. IYCF training is an effective tool for capacity development, which can significantly contribute to reducing child malnutrition and improving mother-child health.

Based on the study it can be said that if IYCF training is made more practical, technology based and continuous then the objectives of ICDS scheme can be achieved more effectively. This training is important not only for the Anganwadi workers but also for improving the health and nutrition of the entire community.

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