



## A Study on Perception of Parents on Mid Day Meal Scheme Among Slum Communities of Delhi

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### ABSTRACT

The National Programme for Nutritional Support to Primary Education was started in 1995. Also popularly known as the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS), was limited to providing dry rations. It was year 2001, when the Supreme Court in its major landmark passed an order directing all states to start providing cooked midday meals within six months. By March 2004, all primary schools were providing cooked midday meals in all states of the country including Delhi. Later, it was extended to upper primary (classes VI to VIII) school children also. Today, MDMS is world's largest feeding programme reaching up to about 12 crore children. The aim MDMS was to enhance enrolment, retention and attendance of children in schools, as well as of improving their nutritional levels. The MDMS is also expected to use the opportunity to impart a spirit of equality among and sharing by children of different social backgrounds. Many studies have suggested that unlike Southern states, the concept of the government providing a cooked midday meal in its schools is not well established in North India especially in urban slums. The present study was designed to collect opinion on perceived benefits by beneficiaries on functioning of the scheme in slums of Delhi i.e. in Madanpur Khadar and Nizamuddin Basti, with an objective to assess the perception, belief, opinion and acceptability of parents on Mid-day Meal Scheme. The results revealed that the children as well as parents were satisfied with the functioning of the programme, quality of food, menu. The children irrespective of their background were found to enjoy the sharing of food with visible social interaction. The poor parents had a very positive view on the Scheme, thus suggested for its continuation with addition of

newer food items to enhance nutrition level. However, few viewed the scheme as a hindrance in teaching and hence there is not breakthrough in learning achievement of children.

**Keywords:** *Mid Day Meal Scheme, Slum Communities, Enrolment, Retention, Social Inclusion, Social Interaction.*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Since independence, the Government of India has been expanding the provision of primary education to realize the goal of Universalization of Primary Education. With the objective to enhance enrolment, attendance and retention of children in schools by mitigating their class room hunger and improving nutritional status Mid Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) was started in India by Madras Corporation in 1925 as a school lunch programme. In 1956, K. Kamaraj, the then Chief Minister of Madras, set up a feeding programme to distribute food to the poor children from the rural areas. In 1982, M. G. Ramachandran, the then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, set up a state wide scheme called the Nutritious Meal Programme. Some states like Gujarat, Kerala and Tamil Nadu and the Union Territories of Pondicherry had universalized a cooked Mid Day Meal Programme with their own resources for children studying at the primary stage. A study by Babu and Hallam (1989) found a highly significant increase in school enrolment due to school nutrition. Gradually by 1990-91 the number of states increased to twelve in implementing the mid day meal programme on a large scale basis with their own resources. The states, namely Karnataka, Odisha and West Bengal

implemented the programme with state resources along with international assistance.

The success of Tamil Nadu's noon-meal programme and the availability of adequate food stocks in the country led to the setting up of a National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NPNSPE) in 1995; where all children in government, local-body and government-aided primary schools were to be provided with a cooked meal or processed food. The objective was to boost universalization of primary education by increasing enrolment, retention and attendance, and simultaneously impact the nutritional status of children in the 6-10 age group. But the scheme was limited to providing 3 kgs of food grain to children enrolled in primary school, with the caveat that they must have 80% attendance in school. In practice, this did not happen and while the dry ration scheme succeeded in pushing up enrolment, it had little impact on improving attendance, and impacting retention levels.

A historical order by the supreme court of India in 28 November 2001 changed the picture of MDMS. In response to public interest litigation on the right to food, initiated by the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL, Rajasthan) in 2001; The Supreme Court passed an order directing all States to start providing cooked midday meals within six months. The meal was to have a minimum content of 300 calories and 8-12 grams of protein each day of school and provided for a minimum of 200 days in the year. Not all states were responsive to the Supreme Court's order of 2001. Even by May 2002, some states had made little progress, and in May 2003, the Supreme Court asked the laggard states<sup>10</sup> to implement the scheme in at least 25% of the districts which were poor. By March 2004, all primary schools were providing cooked midday meals in all states of the country including Delhi.

Mid-day meal scheme has become an effective means to check high dropout rates of children from economically weaker sections of the society. Besides, it addresses the nutritional needs of the children. Mid-day meal scheme is considered as a means to promoting improved enrolment, school attendance and retention; and social interaction among children of different backgrounds. The MDMS is also expected to use the opportunity to impart a spirit of equality among and sharing by children of different social backgrounds and is visualized a means to promote

friendship and feeling of brotherhood among the children belonging of different caste, colour and creed. This was also found by the Centre for Equity Studies field survey in rural Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Karnataka in 2003 by Dreze and Goyal. Enrolment, particularly female enrolment had increased in response to the introduction of the cooked mid-day meal. Parents also reported that attendance had improved, because children were now keener to go to school. Contrasting results were found in the studies by Indian Institute of Dalit Studies (2003) in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar Rajasthan, Tamilnadu and Uttar Pradesh shows that 37% report caste discrimination in MDMS and 48% report opposition to Dalit cooks. Thorat and Lee (2005) studied on access of mid day meal among Dalits of Rajasthan and Tamilnadu, They found that in access to MDMS for Dalit children is hampered by the fact that the meals are served primarily in dominant cast hamlets. Segregated seating or different foods being served to children of different caste are also instances of discrimination. In Bihar plates were labelled with initial of the child's caste, in Rajasthan children from the lower caste had to be given water by other children, whereas the other children were allowed to help themselves to the water directly.

Mid Day Meal Scheme of Karnataka was evaluated by Naik in 2005 reported that 34 per cent of children in Karnataka go to school without breakfast. Cuts (2007) studied the implementation of Mid Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) in Rajasthan and found initially, students were distributed boiled wheat supplemented with groundnut and jaggery (Gur) under the Mid Day Meal Scheme. More than 90.0 per cent parents and students were satisfied with the Mid Day Meal Scheme. Noronha and Samson (2007) in a survey of 12 Mid Day Meal schools undertaken in Delhi reported that 53% of the parents said that they were happy with the quality of meal. Impact on attendance is likely to be more on girls who come without breakfast. Vineeta (2007) in her study in Andhra Pradesh revealed that mid day meal not only filled children's empty stomachs but also saved them from starvation and malnutrition. For many children it was the only meal for the day.

Kumar (2008) in his research paper reported that most of the teachers teaching in government primary schools of Himachal Pradesh were not in favour of implementation of cooked Mid Day Meal Scheme. Gupta (2009) studied teacher's and student's

perceptions towards Mid Day Meal Scheme in district Mandi of Himachal Pradesh and concluded that the Mid Day Meal Scheme is helpful in encouraging poor children belonging to disadvantaged sections of the society to attend school more regularly. Deodhar et al (2010) opinion, there is a potential for general increase in hygiene and cleanliness at the schools and kitchens. Ashwini et al (2013) in her study reported that beneficiary mothers as well as teachers were satisfied with the functioning of the programme, quality of food, menu and thus suggested for its continuation with addition of newer recipes.

Unlike Southern states like Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, the concept of the government providing a cooked midday meal in its schools is not well established in North India Noronha (2007). There were attempts to locate studies which studied the potential benefits of such a scheme encompassing all the objectives envisaged. Numerous other studies conducted in rural areas in Bihar, Punjab, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa have also found similar results.

However, the present study was designed to collect opinion and gauge the perception from parents of the slums of Delhi about the mid day meal scheme. Empirical evaluation enabled the researcher to make necessary improvements and changes. Hence an attempt was made with an objective to assess the opinion of parents on Mid Day Meal Scheme. This paper details the findings of a study to assess and determine the perception of MDMS, to investigate acceptance and opinion about midday meals, and to gain some insight into the issues and suggestions with regard to the MDMS.

#### Materials and Methods:

The study was carried out in two purposively chosen slums of Delhi named as **Nizamuddin Khadar** and **Madanpur Khadar**. Altogether 100 households were surveyed for the study. In all 100 parents were selected from the two selected slums whose children are beneficiaries of Mid Day Meal Scheme. Semi structured schedules were used to record the opinion of the parents regarding school meal programme. The main focus of the study is to find and assess the common perception about the mid day meal scheme in the schools, particularly their perceived benefits of it on children. In order to supplement the findings of the study, the study also employed other tools like

including Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and home visits.

It included questions relating to Caste, Religion, Working status of both the parents, Income of the household, Number of Children, Number of Children going to school, Number of children not going to school and the reason, Number of children availing MDM, If Not then the reason for not availing MDM, If they have any objection on the caste of person cooking and distributing MDM, benefits, negative and positive impact of MDM and suggestion pertaining to MDM, likes and dislikes of the menu, regularity of the meal, quantity of the food, health problems ever faced due to consumption of school lunch, opinion towards continuation of programme, benefits of programme, inclusion of additional foods to existing menu, information regarding breakfast was elicited. The responses were recorded, tabulated and presented using percentage.

#### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The parent survey schedule contains item which deals with the gender, age, category, and education level, occupation, working status, income and the number of children in the family of the respondent parent of the two communities under the study.

Table 1: Specific Information collected from parents (n=100)

Gender	No. of parents	%
Male	60	60%
Female	40	40%
Religion		
Hindu	62	62%
Muslim	38	38%
Age Group		
20-30	14	14%
31-40	42	42%
41-50	44	44%
Social Category		
General	16	16%
OBC	34	34%
SC	50	50%
ST	0	0%

Education Level		
Illiterate	4	4%
Primary	52	52%
Secondary/Sr. Secondary	38	38%
Graduation	6	6%
Post Graduation	0	0%
Working Parents		
Single parent working	90	90%
Both parent working	10	10%
Income Level		
<10,000	58	58%
10,000 – 15,000	32	32%
15,000 – 20,000	8	8%
>20,000	2	2%
No. of children in a household		
1 child	24	24%
2 child	42	42%
3-4 child	28	28%
>4 child	6	6%

Information was collected from the parents regarding their opinion about MDMS and benefits expressed were analyzed. Information and opinion collected from beneficiary parents is tabulated in Table-2. It is evident from the table that higher per cent of parents (95%) reported that the child consumes school lunch every day and about 85 per cent (85%) parents felt that MDMS is beneficial to children especially from underprivileged backgrounds. children consumes breakfast before going to school. Only few parents (10%) reported that they are not satisfied with the quality of meals served in mid day meal in the school do not encourage their children to eat school food as they feel that it may lead to sickness any day. The table also shows that majority parents (100%) have shown positive response to the question of whether they ask for the caste and religion of the cook and serving person during the mid day lunch given in the schools. All responding that they have not asked for the caste and religion of the cook or the server.

Table 2: Specific Information and opinion collected from parents regarding mid day meal scheme (n=100)

Information	Yes		No	
	Number	%	Number	%
Children go to school daily	94	94%	6	6%
Information about MDMS in the school	100	100%	0	0%
Eat MDM	95	95%	5	5%
Eat breakfast regularly	56	56%	44	44%
Beneficial to children	85	85%	15	15%
Disturb classroom teaching	33	33%	67	67%
Object if the cook/server is SC	0	0%	100	100%
Satisfied with the quality of MDM	90	90%	10	10%
Continuation of the program	95	95%	5	5%
Need improvement in the meal items	98	98%	2	2%

Majority of the parents opined that their children eat mid day meal (95%), needs change in the menu (98%) and are satisfied (90%) by the MDMS. Forty four percent parents (44%) expressed that their children go to school without breakfast and they send their children to the school as lunch is provided.

The table also reveals that majority of beneficiary parents (85%) reported that, after introduction of mid day meal scheme, the enrolment and attendance of children were improved. Thirty three percent of the parents (33%) were also of the opinion that as far as possible the teacher's time should be utilized in teaching-learning activities and there should be no wastage of teaching time in school. Higher per cent of parents (90%) reported that the quality of the food served in the school is good and few parents (10%) opined that the quality of the school lunch is below average. Table also revealed that almost all the parents (100%) feel that the school lunch programme should continue. Many parents noticed the development of good practices in children such as washing their hands before eating at home and take their meal properly.

Table 3: Benefits and negative effects expressed and changes suggested by beneficiary parents regarding sss

Benefits of Mid Day Meal	No. of Parents	%
Enhanced enrolment	100	100%
Beneficial for weaker sections	85	85%
Nutrition improved	40	40%
Learning good habits	90	90%
Children concentration improves in the classroom	40	40%
Social interaction improves	76	76%
Learning outcomes improved	48	48%
Negative effects of MDMS		
Teachers time is wasted	33	33%
Disturbs teaching activity	40	40%
Classroom and Class become messy or spoilt	32	32%
News of sickness by MDMS	10	10%
Changes suggested		
Include fruits and vegetables	90	90%
Include eggs and milk	56	56%
Provision of packaged dry food	20	20%
Maintain hygiene	30	30%

Table-3 shows the benefits of Mid Day Meal Scheme as expressed by parents of beneficiary children. The table reveals that 100 per cent parents reported that the school lunch programme has improved enrolment and attendance of children. Forty per cent parents (40%) expressed that the nutritional level has also improved for their children as mid day meal is an additional food other than what they get at home and that has improved the health and nutritional status of children. Table also revealed that ninety per cent (90%) parents feel that eating together the same meal has brought social interaction among children and a sense of togetherness. On asking whether academic improvement of children is due to the mid-day meal; only Forty eight per cent (48%) parents said mid Day Meals programme has helped for increasing learning outcomes of children. Thirty three per cent (33%) feel that mid day meal has disturbed the teaching activities in the school and teachers are busy in

supervising throughout the lunch time. Thirty two per cent (32%) parents also felt that school premises get dirtier and messier during mid day meal. Very few parents (10%) expressed their fear of children falling sick has deteriorated the mid day meal reputation but only to some extent otherwise has received positive response from parents.

The changes suggested by parents of beneficiary children with respect to existing menu are summarized in Table 3. Majority of parents interviewed opined for the inclusion of fruits and vegetables (90%), egg and milk (56%) in mid day meal to make it more nutritious. Twenty per cent (20%) of parents opined that in order to make mid day meal more nutritive and safe, the cooked meal should be replaced by packaged dry food as they feel that these foods are easy to serve and children also enjoy eating. Children as well as parents were satisfied with the functioning of the programme, but thirty per cent (30%) still feel that hygiene should be maintained along with quality of food. At school level the programme is successfully functioning. They were happy with the functioning of the programme by central kitchen and have suggested some modifications for success of the programme.

## DISCUSSION

Slum communities are characteristically most marginalized and poverty ridden. Search of employment, better wages, marriages and education are some of the key forces responsible for the migration from rural areas and settle in slum clusters in major cities like Delhi. These slum areas are highly heterogeneous in nature. Smaller ghettos are often observed in these slum communities with incidents of conflicts related to region, religion and caste. Lack of employment and extremely low wages forced parents of these slums to put education on secondary priority. Low enrolment, high dropout rate and poor academic performance are common in slum communities. Slums of Delhi are predominantly populated by migrant population from its neighboring states. People migrate to outskirts of Delhi in search of better livelihood opportunities. Many Indian children reach school on an empty stomach in the morning, as both the parents go for work or early-morning breakfast is not part of the household routine. In the absence of a mid-day meal, pupils often go hungry after a few hours and find it hard to concentrate. This eventually led to poor performance and which in turn causes drop out. Parents also do not find it relevant to send

their children to school after some grades, as the child can be added to earn the livelihood for the family. This long stayed problem was largely solved when Government of India introduced Mid Day meal scheme. The Mid Day Meal Program, also known as school lunch program, is aimed at providing one meal of the three meals for a child in the school. Mid day meal program helped children feed on cooked meal within the school and stays longer there. MDMS was implemented MDMS was first implemented for the children aged between 6-11 years to maximize enrolment and reduce school dropout rates, which were important from the viewpoint of universalization of elementary/primary education as well as achievement of higher literacy rates in the country. The mid-day meals has been successful to attract the children into primary schooling but also to provide nutritional support for generating, necessary interest both physical and psychological among the children to ensure they stay longer in the school. Not only mid day meal provided impetus to the fragile schooling amongst children both in rural and urban setting but also has helped in attainment and fulfillment of achieving universalization of Elementary Education Covering Children in the age group of 6 to 14 years. Data provide the evidences that MDM have had positive effects at least on enrolments and attendance if not on achievement level. Many good habits have inculcated amongst children such as washing hands before having their meal, enhanced social values and equity as children from different caste, class and religion sit together at one place and eat their meal. However, data also reveals that children from affluent families tend to avoid mid day meal and carry their home cooked lunch. There is an uneven perception across groups and communities over the mid day meal scheme and its role on bringing social equity amongst children. There have been incidences where upper caste parents are still reluctant to allow their children to sit and have meal with lower caste children. There has been an even opinion on the impact of mid day meal on enrolment, attendance and bringing good habits among children. The school meals have likely boosted the enrolment and attendance of the youngest primary school children, but their ability to affect the attendance and retention of older students is questionable. Parents have also recommended for the dry packets of food rather than cooked meal. This may be because many parents would not want to eat food cooked by a lower caste cook but no parent has come out openly to investigate about the caste of cook and have an objection.

## RECOMMENDATION

1. Dry food packets should be provided as it does make the mess out in the school premise.
2. The meal (cooked food) supplied at Mid-Day Mealsprogramme should be of good quality and sufficient inquantity.
3. Fruits should be included
4. Additional staff should be posted in the primary school.

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