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# Study of Mid-Day Meal in Social Perspective

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**ABSTRACT:** As the world grapples with issues of hunger and malnutrition, mid-day meals have emerged as a critical tool in building a better future for our children. In India, the mid-day meal programme, also known as MDM yojana, has been a lifeline for millions of children, providing them with nutritious meals during school hours. At the forefront of this movement are the numerous Indian NGOs that have taken up the mantle of ensuring that no child goes hungry. With their tireless efforts, these organizations have not only helped feed millions of children but have also played a crucial role in improving the overall health and well-being of their communities.

According to a recent UN report, over 828 million people around the world suffer from chronic hunger, and 149 million children under the age of five are stunted due to malnutrition. In India, the situation is no different, with more than one-third of the country's children under the age of five suffering from malnutrition. The MDM scheme has emerged as a game-changer in such a scenario, providing nutritious meals to millions of children daily. The MDM programme provides nutritious meals that include cereals, pulses, vegetables, and fruits, helping to combat hunger and malnutrition among school children. It has been reported that mid-day meals have led to improved nutritional status, reduced stunting and wasting, and increased school attendance.

**KEYWORDS:** mid day meal, children, school, social, nutrition

## I. INTRODUCTION

### Improving School Attendance and Retention

Access to education is crucial for building a better future. However, hunger and malnutrition often act as barriers to school attendance and retention, particularly among children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The Mid-Day Meal programme has been successful in addressing this issue. According to a study, mid-day meals have significantly increased school attendance and retention rates. The study found that students who received mid-day meals had a higher attendance rate and were more likely to complete primary education than those who did not.

### Enhancing Learning and Academic Performance

Nutrition plays a critical role in cognitive development and academic performance. Malnourished children are likelier to have lower IQ levels, impaired cognitive abilities, and perform poorly in school. The MDM programme helps improve learning outcomes by providing essential nutrients that support brain development and academic performance. According to a study conducted by the Indian Institute of Management in Calcutta and the European School of Management and Technology in Berlin, a positive correlation exists between the duration of school meals and students' performance on standardized reading and mathematics tests. The study found that children who received mid-day meals exhibited better attention spans, increased classroom participation, and higher academic performance. In particular, students who had school lunches for three to four years had an average reading score of 18% higher than those who had them for less than a year and those who did not receive mid-day meals.[1,2,3]

### Promoting Social Equity and Inclusion

The MDM yojana promotes social equity and inclusion by providing free meals to all children, regardless of their socio-economic status, caste, or religion. It ensures that children from marginalized communities have access to nutritious meals, helping to reduce disparities in health and education. The programme also promotes gender equality by encouraging the enrollment and retention of girls in schools. It has a long-term impact on breaking the cycle of poverty and creating a more inclusive and equitable society.

### Boosting Local Agriculture and Economy

The PM Poshan Yojana positively impacts local agriculture and the economy. The programme sources local farmers' food grains, vegetables, and fruits, creating demand for local produce and supporting local economies. It not only boosts farmers' income but also promotes sustainable agriculture practices and reduces the carbon footprint associated with transporting and storing food items.



Creating Awareness about Healthy Eating Habits

Mid-day meals programmes also play a vital role in creating awareness about healthy eating habits among children. By exposing children to diverse and nutritious meals early, the Indian NGOs encourage healthy eating practices that can be carried forward into adulthood, promoting a healthier lifestyle and reducing the burden of non-communicable diseases in the long run.

The mid-day meals are much more than just a meal. It is the lifeline for building a better world, one child at a time. By investing in mid-day meals, we are addressing hunger and malnutrition, empowering children, promoting equality, supporting local economies, and fostering sustainability. Let us unite to prioritize and support mid-day meal programs, as they hold the key to feeding the future and creating a brighter, more equitable world for future generations. Together, we can ensure that every child has the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential, leaving a lasting impact on our planet and its people.

II. DISCUSSION

Mid Day Meal Scheme was started in India from 15th August 1995 under the name of ‘National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP-NSPE)’. In October 2007, NP-NSPE was renamed as ‘National Programme of Mid Day Meal in Schools,’ which is popularly known as Mid-Day Meal Scheme. Recently, the Vice President of India has proposed the inclusion of milk in mid-day meals of children.

In September 2021, the Mid-Day Meal Scheme was renamed ‘PM POSHAN’ or Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman. PM POSHAN will extend the hot cooked meals to students studying in pre-primary levels or Bal Vatikas of government and government-aided primary schools, in addition to those already covered under the mid-day scheme.[4,5,6]

PM POSHAN

The revamped scheme has been launched for 5 years, from 2021-22 to 2025-26, with a budget of Rs 1,30,794.90 crore. The government hopes it will benefit 11.80 crore children studying in 11.20 lakh schools across India. The scheme is different from the mid-day meal scheme in the following ways:

1. Apart from providing nutritional meals to schoolchildren, the revamped scheme will also focus on monitoring the nutritional levels of schoolchildren.
2. A nutritional expert will be appointed in each school to ensure that the BMI, weight levels and haemoglobin levels of the students are monitored.
3. In districts with a high prevalence of anaemia, special provisions for nutritional items would be made.
4. The government is also considering developing nutrition gardens on school campuses with active participation by students.
5. There could also be cooking competitions held under the scheme to promote ethnic cuisine and innovative menus based on local ingredients.

Aspirants can read similar articles from the links mentioned below:

UIDAI	Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan
Sukanya Samridhhi Scheme – Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Campaign	Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)
Poshan Abhiyan – National Nutrition Mission	Child Health Programmes

What is a mid-day meal?

It is one meal that is provided to all children enrolled in government schools, government-aided schools, local body schools, special training centres (STC), madrasas and makhtabs supported under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA).

What is the objective of MDMS?

The main objectives of the MDM scheme are:

1. To increase the enrolment of the children belonging to disadvantaged sections in the schools.
2. Leading enrolment to increased attendance in the schools.
3. To retain children studying in classes 1-8.
4. To provide nutritional support to the children of the elementary stage in drought-affected areas.

Salient Features of Midday Meal Scheme

1. It is the world's largest school meal programme aimed to attain the goal of universalization of primary education.
2. The Ministry of Education (earlier known as the Ministry of Human Resources and Development) is the authorized body to implement the scheme.
3. It is a centrally sponsored scheme hence cost is shared between the centre and the states. [7,8,9](Centre's share – 60 percent.)
4. Tamil Nadu is the first state to implement the midday meal scheme.
5. In 2001, MDMS became a cooked midday meal scheme under which each eligible child was provided with a prepared midday meal for a minimum of 200 days:
  - Energy intake – 300 calories
  - Protein intake – 8 to 12 grams
6. Till 2002, the scheme was only designed for government, government-aided and local body schools. Later, children studying in Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) and Alternative & Innovative Education (AIE) centres too were included under the scheme.
7. In 2004, MDMS was revised:
  - Central assistance provided for cooking cost
  - Transport subsidy included for all states (Max. of Rs 100 per quintal for special category states and Rs. 75 per quintal for other states.)
  - Management, monitoring and evaluation of the scheme.
  - Provision to serve midday meals during summer vacation to the children of drought-affected areas was also added.
8. In 2006, the MDMS was again revised:
  - Cooking cost was enhanced to Rs 1.80 per child/school day for States in the North Eastern Region and Rs 1.50 per child/school day for other States and UTs.
  - Nutritional norm was revised – Energy intake was increased from 300 calories to 450 calories and protein intake was increased from 8-12 grams to 12 grams.
9. In 2007, class 6-8 children studying in 3,479 Educationally Backwards Blocks (EBBs) were included in the scheme.
10. SSA-supported madrasas and maktabs were included in this scheme in 2008.
11. Apart from the calories and food intake, for micronutrients (tablets and deworming medicines), each child is entitled to receive the amount provided for in the school health programme of the National Rural Health Mission.

MDM Rules, 2015

Midday Meal Rules 2015 are notified on 30th September 2015 under National Food Security Act (NFSA) 2013.

1. Under the MDM rules, schools are empowered to utilize other funds for midday meals in case MDM funds get exhausted.
2. On occasions where schools and other required bodies are unable to provide cooked meals to children; they are to provide food allowances to beneficiaries.



3. Accredited labs to take on the monthly testing of meals on a random basis.
4. Under MDM rules 2015, if children of any school don't get food for 3 consecutive school days or 5 days in a month, the concerned state government has to fix the responsibility on a person or an agency.

Salient Features of MDM Rules, 2015:

- Each child from class 1-8 within the age group of six to fourteen years is eligible for a cooked nutritious meal every day except school holidays; with the following nutritional requirements:

Calories Intake	Primary	Upper Primary
Energy	450 calories	700 calories
Protein	12 grams	20 grams
Food Intake	Primary	Upper Primary
Food Grains	100 grams	150 grams
Pulses	20 grams	30 grams
Vegetable	50 grams	75 grams
Oil and Fats	5 grams	7.5 grams

- The schools procure AGMARK quality items for preparation of midday meals.
- The meals are to be served in the school premises only.
- Each school should have a hygienic cooking infrastructure to cook midday meals in a hygienic manner.
- The School Management Committee (SMCs) play a vital role in the monitoring of MDMS. SMCs are mandated under the right to free and compulsory education act, 2009 or Right to Education Act
- The headmasters or headmistress are empowered to utilize the school funds on the account of midday meal fund exhaustion. However, the same has to be reimbursed to the midday meal fund as soon as the school is credited with the MDM fund.[10,11,12]
- The Food and Drugs Administration Department of the State may collect samples to ensure the nutritive value and quality of the meals.
- Food allowance to be provided to the children whenever cooked meals are not provided due to unforeseen circumstances in the manner stated below:
  1. Quantity of Food grains as per entitlement of the child; and
  2. Cooking cost prevailing in the State.

How is the Midday Meal Scheme implemented?

It is implemented using one of the three models:

1. Decentralized model – Preparing meals on the site by local cooks, Self-help groups etc.
2. Centralized model – In the place of local on-site cooks, under this model, an external organization cooks food and delivers it to the schools.
3. International assistance – Various international charity organizations aid government schools.

### Criticism of the Midday Meal Scheme

There are several loopholes that are a point of discussion:

1. Despite such integrated child development schemes, India faces severe issues like child stunting, child mortality, child wasting and undernourishment. The same is reflected with India's rank of 94 in Global Hunger Index 2020.
2. Caste-based discrimination mars the objective of MDMS -The 2008 Report by the National Campaign on Dalit Rights to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights also highlights that midday meals are usually served in upper-caste localities and that during times of caste tensions, Dalit children are denied the meal to assert the dominance of these upper caste communities.[13,14,15]
3. The National Family Health Survey 2015-16 reported 39 percent of children to be chronically undernourished.
4. Quality of food is often debated where various media reports mention the health of children deteriorating with the food provided under the midday meals.
5. Linking Aadhar to midday meal scheme has its own demerits of limiting the children's access to the MDMS due to many not having aadhar cards.

### III. RESULTS

This piece of work examines the impact of the midday meal program on body mass index using secondary data on several Indian states. India has implemented the Mid-day Meal Program to improve the enrollment, attendance, retention, and academic success of school-aged children. A significant portion of schoolchildren from lower socioeconomic categories rely on cooked midday meals. When it comes to the pattern of midday meal consumption, girls outnumber boys among those who never ate it and those who stopped eating it, but when it comes to those who maintained eating it, boys outnumber girls. Less youngsters who take use of the midday meal the higher their academic grades are. The majority of kids are underweight (have a low body mass index), and boys make up a larger percentage of the underweight kids than girls do. When compared to children who are Above Poverty Line (BPL), a greater percentage of youngsters who fall into the Below Poverty Line (BPL) group have low body mass indices. To meet the goals of the Mid-day Meal Scheme, it is important to avoid repetition of the roughly same sort of meal menu.

#### Background of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme

Centered on the philosophy that a hungry child is unable to focus and work on his / her studies, the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) was implemented. The Mid-Day Meal Scheme was introduced specifically with a view to ensuring the nutritional needs of increasing children and the right to education of children provided by the Indian Constitution. The Mid-Day Meal Scheme is the Government of India's main initiative aimed at securing the child's right to health, the right to education, the right to life, and other facets of growth and development. The Mid-Day Meal Scheme is introduced by the Ministry of Human Resource Growth, Government of India, Department of School Education and Literacy. The method tackles the underlying and essential determinants of malnutrition in infants. On 15 August 1995, the Mid-Day Meal System was introduced as a nationally funded program. The National Nutritional Support System for Primary Education (NP-NSPE), widely referred to as the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, seeks to improve the Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) by the student registration, participation, retention, and concurrently enhancing student nutritional status.

#### Origin of Mid-Day Meal Scheme in India

The Mid-Day Meal System was first launched in 1923 for children belonging to deprived families; one of the proponents of the system that began offering cooked food to impoverished children in the city of Madras (now Chennai) is the Madras Municipal Corporation. The Keshav Academy in Calcutta (Kolkata) launched tiffin in 1928, a kind of snack for boys on food charge, at around the same period as the demand for free school meal was launched in Madras. A similar form of meal program for school-going children was initiated by the state of Kerala in 1941, and a similar type of school meal [16,17] program was launched in Bombay (Mumbai) in 1942. Bangalore City in 1943, Uttar Pradesh in 1953, Tamil Nadu in 1957, Orissa in 1953,

## Norms of Mid-Day Meal Scheme

In September 2004, the National Nutritional Support Policy for Primary Education (NP-NSPE) launched in 1995 was updated to include 300 calories and 8-12 grams of protein for cooked mid-day meals to all children enrolled in I-V classes in Country, Country-Aided and Local Body School and Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) and Alternate and Creative Education (AIE) centres. The framework was supposed to decrease dropout rates, increase the quality of learning of children and self-esteem. It was also projected to improve

## Mid-Day Meal Scheme and Nutrition Related Aspects

The cause of ruining the wellbeing of rising children is malnutrition / malnutrition; it also adversely impacts their degree of achievement in education. This is obvious that a malnourished infant rarely attends school much of the time that he / she is overweight and sickly. This adversely hampers the aim of Elementary Education Universalisation. The effect of children's wellbeing and nutritional status on schooling should not be ignored because it can affect learners by seriously hindering children's physical, auditory, cognitive, social and emotional growth. Therefore, in consideration of the comprehensive existence of increasing children's health, in conjunction with dieticians and nutrition experts who may prescribe sufficient Prescribed Dietary Intake (RDI), it is important to provide policies and programs that include adequate nutritious supplements required by rising children. The Centre for Equity Studies (CES) survey found that among tribal groups, parental satisfaction of mid-day meals was strongest. It further notes that Mid-Day Meals have a significant socialization benefit besides encouraging school attendance and child nutrition, as children learn to sit together and eat a shared meal, there was some degradation of caste biases and class inequity (Dreze and Goyal). It further stated that there were no incidents of different seating arrangements or racist activities such as different eating or drinking arrangements, but implicit manifestations of caste bias and social inequality were visible as some parents of the upper caste requested their children to come home for lunch or send them with prepared food to school. Dreze and Goyal, (2003) observed that cases of Scheduled Caste cooks were mainly limited to schools with no upper-caste children in Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan. They observed that teachers usually had optimistic views of the effects of mid-day meals, as most teachers thought that mid-day meals improved the participation of pupils and raised the participation of children in studies. Dreze and Goyal (2003) observed that by establishing an environment of sitting together and enjoying food together in school, the Mid-Day Meal Scheme has managed to undermine caste stereotypes. In a study conducted in Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu by Thorat and Lee (2005), it was argued that the inclusion of Scheduled Caste children in the Mid-Day Meal Scheme allowed them to achieve higher levels in the education system and reduced the incidence of exclusion and thus caste discrimination. Pathania and Pathania (2006) deals with the roots, development and success of MDMS in the nation in effects of MDMS on various aspects. The authors sought to illustrate the viewpoints of students, parents, community leaders, and educational administrators on the success, vulnerability, and repercussions of MDMS. The analysis was carried out in Himachal Pradesh province. It was observed that 17.6 percent of students in the caste group were scheduled, while 60 percent belonged to the upper caste group. 11.2 percent of ST students were studying in colleges, compared with the same number of students in the OBC division. It was noticed that one hundred percent of kids were marked as familiar and gained from the system's advantages. The research shows that all students were found to engage in the MDMS, regardless of their social, political, and economic context. Along with [18] Neha, Rao and Zacharia, they advocated in yet another study by Dreze and Goyal that the Mid-Day Meal Scheme encourages the abolition of classroom hunger and children shared the company of each other by sitting and eating along. In the course of dining together, they socialize. They also observed that the gender disparity in schooling was minimized by the Mid-Day Meal Program. The program has even managed to provide disadvantaged women with employment. The National Curriculum Structure (2005) highlighted the value of improving the Mid-Day Meal Scheme to ensure the empowerment of every child in schooling, through caste, faith, gender and disability barriers, in order to ensure wellbeing, education and an equitable school climate. Different research surveys undertaken by research organizations have indicated that in colleges, MDMS will practice racial and gender equality. It was essential to achieve universalization of elementary education and to abolish gender inequality in education by 2015.

## Mid-Day Meal Scheme and Its Effects on Students' Enrolment, Attendance and Retention

Elementary education has twin purposes which are: (i) to produce a literate and numerate population who can deal with problems at home and at work (one who can find solutions to the problems of a society) and (ii) to serve as the base upon which higher secondary and tertiary education can be built. With elementary education in India, we mean the education provided to all children in the age group 6-14 years or in classes I to VIII. Some of the most difficult hurdle

to cross while achieving the goal of —Universalisation of Elementary Education, are non- enrolment, low attendance and low retention rate. Several attempts have been made to achieve the goal of UEE. One such effort made by the Government of India is the initiation

Meal Scheme; many studies have revealed that MDMS exerts a positive influence on enrolment and attendance at school.

#### Relationship between Mid-Day Meal Scheme and Economic Aspects

It is a well-known reality that the MDMS is a subsidized meal given by the Government of India to primary school children to provide nutritional support for children studying in University, Government-Aided and Local Body Colleges, AIE and EGS centers, Madrasas and Maktabas sponsored by Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) from Classes I-VIII (i.e. primary and upper primary phase) to improve 'Universalisa [Explanation of the word 'Sarva Siksha Abhiyan' (SSA): SSA aims to provide all children in the age group of 6-14 years of age with usable and meaningful elementary education by 2010; SSA also aims to bridge educational, gender and geographic differences with the active involvement of the society in school management]. Therefore, in any specified conditions, the consistency of the meals delivered under the program cannot be affected. In order to develop a professional population, it is important to enhance the health status of children and raise their level of learning in order for a prosperous nation to have a prosperous economic and social existence, a prosperous education and a safe body and mind. India's Mid-Day Meal Scheme was seen in a global report by the World Food Project (WFP), 2013, as a positive illustration of a 'Mixed Delivery Model' in the research, a major suggestion was made that MDMS should be related to the agriculture sector and should support the whole country and students attending elementary school. This would not only strengthen the critical position of school-going kids, but also produce local farmers' profits. This form of connection would cause jobs in the agricultural sector to be created[19] and the procurement of important food commodities such as vegetables, fruits, etc. at the grassroots level to be increased. Under the MDMS, along with other ingredients required for the preparation of the Mid-Day Meal, the vegetables for the curry should be bought at the local level. The mechanism follows two procurement procedures, i.e. I food grains (rice / wheat) are supplied through the nationally subsidized channel and through the Food Corporation of India (FCI) of the Government of India, and (ii) food goods such as fruits , vegetables and condiments are procured at the state and local level, benefiting local citizens through increasing their earning capacity. The free meal programme of the Karnataka Government called the Akshara Dasoha scheme experienced a big downside when more than 150 children fell ill in a school in Gadag District of Karnataka after ingestion of Mid-Day Meal. Children have become sick due to the ingestion of tainted products. In this event, several NGOs and social activists alleged that the meal was served and cooked in unhygienic conditions by untrained staff / cooks. The involvement of the Non-Governmental Agency in the Mid-Day Meal Scheme is carried out through the Voluntary Agency Partnership in the hot-cooked Mid-Day Meal supply and resource support network through capacity development , testing and assessment and analysis. Under the Society Registry Act or the Public Trust Act, a private group interested in administering the Mid-Day Meal Scheme has been registered. The MDMS guidelines represent that the effective execution of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme is vital to community engagement. It guarantees successful local-level oversight and therefore provides a feeling of collective ownership of the project. The Mid-Day Meal is cooked locally on the school premises via the Self Help Group (SHG) or School Management Committee (SMC) formed under the Children's Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 or any similar committee responsible for operating the scheme. There are some requirements for metropolitan communities where the program may be enforced by an NGO. The NGO can introduce the Public Private Partnership (PPP) model of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme. The Mid-Day Meal Scheme may be introduced by NGOs where there are room constraints for setting up school kitchens in classrooms. The developed areas are capable of A research by Kalpana Parikh and Summiya Yasmeen (2004). 22"Groundswell of Support for Mid-Day Meal Scheme Implement the framework via the Unified Kitchen Framework. The guidelines indicate that if schools where cooking can take place in automated kitchens and cooked hot meals can be delivered to separate schools under hygienic conditions with the aid of transport networks, a centralized kitchen may be built for a cluster. It is important to assess the success of NGOs at regular intervals.

The Mid-Day Meal Scheme contributes significantly in the enhancement of children's nutritional status. After having eaten the mid-day meal in the reduced to some degree. The MDMS has been able to deliver good outcomes in the state, but there are so several places in the scheme that call for reform. For eg, the timely release of the fund, revised fee for the Cook-cum-Helpers, for most of the Headmasters / Headmistresses, the curry cost is an issue. The school where there is sufficient cooking and serving space has been observed to decrease the time spent in the cooking, serving phase and in no way hamper the teaching-learning method of the classroom. The method has increased the degree of



children's accomplishment and no kid is involved in the preparing or serving process. School children take advantage of the system 's services and get access to healthy food at noon time and reduce their hunger in the classroom, which makes them focus on their studies. Many of the respondent headmasters / headmistresses also stated that with the introduction of the program, children became more involved in their research. The MDMS menu in the school contains variations such as meat, tomatoes, dal (pulses), chatni (ironba), etc. to minimize the monotony of the meal's taste. This holds the student's motivation in having the school meal alive, since it is not practical and kids do not want to consume the same thing every day. The study further found that schools provide school children with hot cooked mid-day meals, and the Reasonable Average Standard (FAQ) of the Food Corporation of India (FCI), Government of India, is the nature of the food grain supplied. In our state, rice is the main staple product, so product grain is supplied to the schools in the form of rice. Since the advent of MDMS, the overall wellbeing of children has increased thus exerting a beneficial impact on the rate of enrolment and retention. Cook-cum-Helpers have been named for the task of heating, sweeping and serving, so that children cannot engage in the cooking process. This encourage the student to dedicate his time to studies.[20]

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In the present study, out of total 5 selected schools, 3 schools were providing good quality of rice, 2 schools were providing good quality of dalia and 1 school was providing good quality of dal (lentil and moong whole), rest of the school in each food items either providing fair or poor quality of food items. It interesting point was noticed that tahiri was the most repeated food item of mid-day meal, which was given more than twice a week. In the present study, it was observed that only 280.33 Kcal and 9.12 gm of protein were provided to each child per day through the MDM program and the content of energy and protein showed a insignificant effect on the nutritional status of MDM school children. The results of above study were found reverse to Laxmaiah (1999) study, where the average energy and protein supplied to a child by the supplement was 303 Kcal and 7.2 gm, respectively. Synergistic initiatives and collaboration from the Department of Health can be conducted to ensure the program 's progress. Wherever practicable, grain and other raw materials should be bought from local farmers and SHGs should be made available.[20]

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