

Nutritional status of Women and Children in Gujarat: Current trends, challenges and Government Schemes

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Abstract

Malnutrition remains a major public health concern in Gujarat, especially among children under five years. Similarly, Anaemia among women in the age group of 15-49 years is highly prevalent. Children who are malnourished may underperform in various areas of life and miss out on opportunities to become active and productive members of society. Gujarat is making strides to improve nutritional indicators of the children. In view of this, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and POSHAN Abhiyaan are key initiatives implemented in Gujarat to address malnutrition and promote health of women and children. State has also actively rolled out digital intervention like Poshan Tracker under Poshan Abhiyaan, aiming to improve real time monitoring. This is expected that combined efforts of ICDS and Poshan Abhiyaan will be instrumental for enhanced service delivery coverage, nutrition awareness and interdepartmental convergence. The objective of this study is to assess the nutritional status of children and anemia among pregnant and lactating women in Gujarat, highlighting current trends, persistent challenges, and the role of government schemes in addressing malnutrition. The study is based on secondary data sources, especially gathered from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (CNNS), and various reports from the Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD) and websites, to examine malnutrition status, Government schemes under flagship programs like ICDS and POSHAN Abhiyaan. The study also highlights implementation of various schemes by WCD Department, Government of Gujarat and provides recommendations to improve nutritional outcomes in the state.

Keywords: Malnutrition, Anaemia, National Family Health Survey, Poshan Abhiyaan, ICDS, Poshan Tracker, Government schemes

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Introduction

Malnutrition remains a major public health issue in India, particularly affecting women and children. Gujarat, despite its economic development, continues to grapple with high levels of undernutrition, anemia, and micronutrient deficiencies. Insufficient dietary intake and illnesses are immediate and most common causes of malnutrition. The health service provision needs to move from the first 1,000 days to the first 3,000 days as well as focus on the interventions aimed at early childhood development. Multi sectoral interventions through Angawadi Centers and Schools (through education department) needs to be conducted. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) conducted in 2015-16 and 2019-20, an increased prevalence was seen

in the children under five years who are stunted and severely wasted, however, the prevalence of children under five who are wasted improved in Gujarat. However, the survey has also revealed the percentage of pregnant women suffering from anemia has increased from 51.3% to 62.6% and the percentage of anemia among women in the age group of 15-19 years has increased from 56.5% to 69.0%. Hence, it is evident from the NFHS report that the prevalence of malnutrition and anemia among children has increased over the years. This study also captures schemes introduced by the WCD Department Government of Gujarat aimed at improving Children's nutritional indicators and addressing anemia among pregnant and lactating women.

Objective of the Study

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- To assess the level of malnutrition and Government schemes associated with Women and children in Gujarat
- To examine on going Nutrition related Schemes in Gujarat and its accomplishments

Research Methodology

The study is based on the secondary data. Data on malnutrition, Government schemes and Poshan Abhiyaan progress are collected from the Government reports, NITI Aayog report and websites.

Nutrition Scenario in India and Gujarat

According to the Global Nutrition Report 2022, there has been no progress towards achieving the target of reducing anemia among women of reproductive age. Presently, 53% of women aged 15 to 49 years are affected. India is on track for the exclusive breastfeeding target with 58.0% of infants aged 0 to 5 months exclusively breastfed. Similarly, India is on track to meet the target for stunting, but 34.7% of children under 5 years of age are still affected, which is higher than the average for the Asia regions (21.8%). Furthermore, India has made no progress towards achieving the target for wasting. Presently, 17.3% of children under 5 years of age are affected, which is higher than the average for the Asia region (8.9%) and among the highest in the world. The prevalence of overweight children under 5 years of age is 1.6% and India is taking necessary steps to prevent it from increasing.

Gujarat, despite being one of the most economically advanced States in India, has exceptionally high rates of malnutrition, with 39 percent of children under five years old estimated to be stunted (where a child is too short for their height) and 25.1 percent wasted (where a child weigh too little for their height). Anemia is a significant public health challenge in the State with over half of women 65 percent in the age group of 15-49 years and more than 69 percent adolescent girls in the age group of 15-19 years are anemic.

Gujarat is among the States with a high prevalence of malnutrition and anemia particularly among women and children. The NFHS-5 (National Family Health Survey-5) data reveals that the State faces multiple underlying factors that need to be addressed to improve its nutritional indicators among women and children. According to the NFHS-5, there has been no progress in reduction in stunting, wasting and underweight children under 5 years in comparison to NFHS-4 (2015-16) in the State of Gujarat.

Table 1: Nutrition Scenario in Gujarat: National Family Health Survey of India 2015-16 and 2019-2021

	NFHS-4 (2015-16)	NFHS-5 (2019-21)
Children under 5 years who are stunted (height for age)	38.5	39.0
Children under 5 years who are wasted (weight-for-height)	26.4	25.1
Children under 5 years who are severely wasted (weight-for-height)	9.5	10.6
Children under 5 years who are underweight (weight-for-age)	39.3	39.7
Children age 6-59 months who are anemic (<11.0 g/dl)	62.6	79.7
Pregnant women age 15-49 years who are anemic (<110.0 g/dl)	51.3	62.6
All women age 15-49 years who are anemic	54.9	65.0
All women age 15-19 years who are anemic	56.5	69.0

Source: National Family Health Survey Report 2015-2016 and 2019-2021

Government schemes to address nutritional status of Women and Children in Gujarat:

POSHAN Abhiyaan is the flagship program of Government of India, launched by Hon'ble Prime Minister on 8th March, 2018 to cover all States/UTs. The focus of Abhiyaan is to lay emphasis on nutritional status of adolescent girls, pregnant women, lactating mothers and children from 0-6 years of age. Recent progress under POSHAN Abhiyaan shows steady improvements in nutrition outcomes across India. As of 2025, over 14 lakh Anganwadi Centers are active on the POSHAN Tracker, covering more than 9 crore beneficiaries. While in Gujarat more than 52289 Angawadi Centers are functional with Poshan Tracker. National reports also indicate gradual reductions in stunting and underweight prevalence. However, states like Gujarat continue to face significant challenges, with high levels of anemia among women and persistent child malnutrition.

To address the high level of malnutrition and anemia in Gujarat, WCD Department, Government of Gujarat has launched Mukyamantri Matrushakti Yojana in order to improve maternal and child health with specific focus on

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the first 1000 days of life- the time between conception to the child's second birthday-is a unique period of opportunity when the foundations of optimum health, growth and neurodevelopment across the lifespan are established. The first 1,000 days are considered the "First window of opportunity". In recognition of the necessity of nutrition during these 1000 days, the government of Gujarat has launched "Mukhyamantri Matrushakti Yojana (MMY)" across the State in the financial year 2022-2023. The aim of the scheme is to improve the nutritional status of pregnant women and mothers of young children while meeting their calorie and protein needs. Eligible beneficiaries who are conceiving for the first time and mothers who give birth to the child till the child completes two years of age are provided a nutrition kit that includes 1 litre of groundnut oil, 1-kilogram Tuver dal and 2-kilogram chana. Expected outcome of the scheme is to improve the nutritional status of mother and child, to reduce the prevalence of preterm or low birth weight babies and reduction in Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) and Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR).

Doodh Sanjivani Yojana in Gujarat is another nutritional support scheme for children and pregnant and lactating mothers in tribal and underdeveloped communities. It provides free, fortified, flavored milk to eligible beneficiaries through Anganwadi Centers. The scheme aims to improve nutritional status of children and mothers. Under the scheme, children aged 6 months to 6 years are provided 100 ml of fortified flavored milk 5 days in a week and pregnant and lactating mothers are provided 200 ml of fortified flavored milk 2 days in a week. The scheme is operational in 138 tribal blocks in 20 districts of Gujarat.

Poshan Sudha is another significant scheme of WCD, Gujarat. To meet the women's special nutritional needs, Gujarat state initiated Poshan Sudha Yojana on pilot basis in the year 2017-2018. Considering the positive impact and results of the pilot scheme, the State expanded the scope of the scheme to cover all 14 tribal districts from the year 2022-2023. Under the Poshan Sudha scheme, pregnant and lactating mothers registered at Anganwadi Centre are provided one full meal along with iron and calcium tablets and health nutrition education. Expected benefits of the scheme is reduction in the number of children having low birthweight and improvement in the nutritional status of mothers and child and ultimately reduction in maternal and infant mortality rate.

The PURNA Scheme (Prevention of Under Nutrition and Reduction of Nutritional Anemia) in Gujarat is a flagship initiative of the Department of Women and Child Development aimed at improving the nutritional and health status of adolescent girls aged 15–18 years. The scheme focuses on preventing undernutrition, reducing anemia, and promoting overall development by providing monthly *PURNA Shakti* packets fortified with essential micronutrients, along with weekly Iron and Folic Acid (IFA) supplementation through schools and Anganwadi centers. It also includes regular health check-ups, counselling on health, hygiene, and nutrition, life skills education, vocational training, and special outreach to out-of-school girls to encourage education and empowerment. Activities like PURNA Divas—held monthly at Anganwadi centers—and exposure visits to public institutions further enhance awareness, confidence, and social participation, making the scheme a comprehensive approach to adolescent girl development in Gujarat.

Conclusion:

Despite substantial national investments under POSHAN Abhiyaan and multiple targeted nutrition initiatives in Gujarat—such as Mukhyamantri Matrushakti Yojana, Poshan Sudha, Doodh Sanjivani, and PURNA—nutritional challenges remain significant, particularly with respect to anemia in women and persistent child malnutrition. While the POSHAN Tracker has enabled large-scale digital monitoring across more than 52,000 Anganwadi Centers in Gujarat, existing evidence suggests that improvements in service delivery depend not only on technological adoption but also on frontline capacity, system-level support, and sustained behavioral change. Continued efforts to strengthen digital governance, improve beneficiary reach, and integrate complementary nutrition schemes are essential for achieving long-term improvements in maternal and child nutrition outcomes in the state.

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