

## Impact of mid-day meal programme on educational and nutritional status of school children in Srinagar with specific reference to district Pulwama

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■ **ABSTRACT** : This paper is an endeavor to scrutinize midday meal (MDM) schemes operational in Srinagar with specific reference to district Pulwama, which is one of the largest child development programmes consecutively all through and is considered as a triumphant programme all over India. Introduction of mid-day meal occurred almost centuries ago. The MDM programme is also identified as “School lunch programme. The core intention of this programme is to magnetize more children for admission to schools, to retain them so that literacy augmentation of children could be brought about and it was seen that a child who is physically and mentally weak cannot be expected to obtain full advantage of schooling. The diet of the school child should, therefore, receive first consideration. The diet should contain all the nutrients in proper proportion, passable for optimum health. In order to combat malnutrition and improve the health of school children, the School Health Committee (1961) recommended that school children should be assured of at least one nourishing meal. The programme envisaged the stipulation of cooked meals / possessed foods of caloric value equivalent to 100 g of wheat / rice for children studying in classes I – VIII in all Government, local body and Government aided Primary Schools free of cost. However, it was about 50 years later that such schemes were given grim attention. The main purpose of the study was to assess the effect of MDM programme on enrolment attendance, dropouts and its impact on nutritional status as well as to evaluate the overall role of MDM programme in the government schools of the particular district. The study found that the MDMs have bent an affirmative collision in case of attendance, dropout rate and nutritional status of the students.

■ **KEY WORDS** : MDM programme, Nutritional status

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**M**id Day Meal programme was initiated on the basis of the philosophy that “when children have to sit in class with empty stomachs, they cannot focus on learning”. The scheme is important for improving enrolment, attendance and retention of primary school children, while simultaneously improving their nutritional status. Mid Day Meal Scheme has proved to be an effective means to check high dropout rates of children from economically weaker sections, while also addressing their nutritional needs. Nutrition Support to Primary Education popularly referred to as (MDM) is considered as a means of promoting improved enrolment, school attendance and retention. MDM seeks to provide for each school child roughly a 1/3rd of the daily

nutrient requirement in the form of a hot fresh cooked meal. It is sometimes argued that in the case of children of poor households, the school meal may become a substitute rather than a supplement for the home meal. It is important to note that it is not merely the long-term effects of the school meal on the nutritional status but its short-term effects on better attention, memory and learning that is important. There are several published reports based on well-conducted studies pointing to these beneficial short-term effects of the school meal on learning ability. A hungry child is a poor learner lacking in concentration. A mid-day meal is an important instrument for combating class room hunger and promoting better learning. Many children reach school with an empty stomach

in the morning, since a good early morning breakfast is not a part of the household routine. Under these circumstances it is important to acknowledge the short term effects of MDM on learning. MDM could thus be a means for not only promoting school enrollment but also better learning in schools. With children from all castes and communities eating together, it is also instrumental in bringing about better social integration. MDM could serve the important purpose of improving school enrolment and attendance especially for girls thus contributing to gender equality. With MDM, it will be easier for parents to persuade their children to go to school and for teachers to retain children in the class rooms. MDM can also contribute to gender equality by reducing the gender gap in education by boosting female attendance in school. Most importantly MDM could trigger all round development of the entire school system- leading to better infrastructures in schools, better teaching facilities, a School Health Service and community involvement (Singh and Mishra, 2010). Within this backdrop, the present study is aimed at the following objectives:

-To collect data from the schools providing MDM, to evaluate the impact of MDM on school attendance, to evaluate the impact of MDM on school enrolment and to evaluate the

overall role of MDM programme in Government schools.

### ■ RESEARCH METHODS

The study was based on comprehensive fieldwork impend. The data collection was carried out in two modules. In the first segment, secondary data were collected that assisted finalization of the sample MDM centres and reinforce design of MDM programme in 30 schools of Pulwama district. In the second stage, primary data were collected from a sample of 90 students, teachers and parents. Primary data were collected by a structured questionnaire and during the collection of the data some important aspects like enrolment, attendance and dropouts; infrastructural availability, etc. were also focused. Information in respect of occupation of the parents/guardians, distance of the residence from the school, socio-economic profile of the beneficiaries was also obtained.

### ■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As per the information provided by teachers, 100 per cent schools got supply of MDM from Government stores (Table 1). Every school is being provided with proper funds

**Table 1: Supply of MDM**

Supply for MDM	Number of schools	Percentage (%)
Government	30	100
Shops	0	0
Total	30	100

**Table 2: MDM is a supplement or a substitute to regular food**

MDM is a supplement or a substitute to regular food	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	88	97.77
No	2	2.23
Total	90	100

**Table 3 : MDM has positive effect on the health of children**

Positive effect on health	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	87	96.66
No	3	3.34
Total	90	100

**Table 4: MDM increased the interest of children towards education**

Increased interest	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	82	91.11
No	8	8.89
Total	90	100

**Table 5 : Students regularly attending school**

Regular to the school	Nubmer respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	87	96.66
No	3	3.34
Total	90	100

to get supply on time and it is seen that more than half of schools received supply on time which is quite encouraging.

The study conducted by Rajivin (2001) also revealed that the MDM schemes got its supply of grains (wheat, rice etc.) from Central Government free of cost at the rate of 100 g for Primary and Upper Primary students and the transport subsidy of Rs.100 per quintal (Rajivin, 2001).

Table 2 reveals that majority (97.77%) of the parents thought that MDM is a supplement to regular food. It has been that revealed sometimes it is argued that in case of children of poor households, the MDM may become a substitute rather than a supplement for the home meals. (Singh and Mishra, 2010). In contrast to the present study wherein it was found that maximum parents were of the opinion that MDM is a supplement not a substitute to regular food. The survey further revealed that 100 per cent children received MDM daily at school. It was further revealed that 100 per cent parents sent their children to school every day. The study of Mohan (1992) found that if education is made compulsory then all children below 14 years irrespective of sex, class, caste and religion would enroll in the school and receive the benefits of MDM.

Table 3 shows that a huge number (96.66%) of the respondents believed that MDM has a positive and good effect on the health of the children. A similar study conducted by Divan (1992) also revealed that MDM scheme brought improvements in the general health of children resulting in the decreasing dropout rates and thus contributing to increase in the enrolment.

As per the information (Table 4) of the parent's majority (91.11%) of the respondents think that MDM increases the interest of the children towards education. A study conducted by Sexena (1982) revealed that enrollment of boys increased from 75- 103 and enrolment of girls increased from 55- 106 during this season because of the MDM scheme. Another study conducted by Dass and Garg ( 1985) revealed that children who attended pre- primary classes before joining the primary classes achieve slightly higher in class 5<sup>th</sup> MDM is only scheme that attracts children towards school and pre-primary education, which is similar with the present study.

As per the information (Table 5) of the respondents

maximum (96.66%) students came to school every day. The study further revealed that all of the schools provide MDM daily to students. It also revealed that majority (96.66%) students ate entire amount of food given to them, while rest of the students were unable to eat all food given to them.

### Conclusion :

Government schools are providing MDM to the children from I to VIII, which is attracting the children towards education and also helps to increase the attendance and reducing nutritional related problems among school going children. Government is providing supply of MDM free of cost and most of the schools receive supply on time. Government also keeps watch on the working of MDM programme. Parent's attitude is also changing and they try to send their children to school every day. Students are also satisfied with the programme they attend and every lesson with full consciousness and come to school every day. It also helps them to improve their general health.

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