CHILD MALNUTRITION IN INDIA: AN ASSESSMENT OF ICDS PROGRAMME

ABSTRACT

The imbalance between the nutrients the body needs and nutrients the body receives is known as malnutrition. Child malnutrition causes loss of health in short run and loss of productivity at in the long run, eventually truncating the growth rate of the economy at the macro level. India bears a disproportionate share of global malnourished children, even after a decade of steady growth with reasonable food security. Among several other programmes of the government, the flagship programme Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) attempts to offer supplementary nutrition to children aged 0-6 years, along with some pre-school education. However, even with such a prolonged presence of this scheme, child malnutrition have not shown any sign to fall appreciably in India.

On this background, basic objectives of the study are to divide the country on the basis of child stunting level and to identify the socio-factors affecting child growth and accessibility to ICDS using nationally representing unit level data of NFHS 3. Econometric analysis using bivariate probit model posits that maternal employment and education status, along with her health seeking behaviour, are prime determinants of child stunting. Supplemented by a primary survey of 390 children from two districts of West Bengal, the thesis, using Propensity Score Matching technique, also found that the impact of ICDS program on child stunting would be limited unless it offers nutrition awareness among caregivers and offers not just khuchri, but also protein-rich food supplements.

From the analysis it is clear that policy matrix to reduce child stunting should be region specific, targeting some particular socio-economic groups. To have a significant impact of ICDS on child malnutrition, not only the supplementary nutrition, but other services should also be given focus, along with improved overall supervision at grass-root level.