

# PM POSHAN Fostering Nutrition and Education of School Children: A Perspective of Parents

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## ABSTRACT

PM POSHAN erstwhile Mid-Day Meal Program, is one of the world's largest nutritional programs running across India, supports nutritional and educational baggage of children from poor households. It helped to ensure their education, health, and nutrition as well. Though the scheme was not universally operational when introduced, it has now been operationalized in all government schools across the country. Aiming to increase school enrollment and attendance of poor children, the nutritional support and other facilities provided under the scheme have motivated the target children to a greater extent. Besides the benefits of the scheme, parents' perception is an important factor in deciding childrens' enrolment in the school and their daily attendance as well. Concerning this, the present study explored the perceptions of the parents of the children benefiting from PM POSHAN. Using the interview schedule, the data was collected from a total of 100 sample respondents, which were randomly selected from four blocks of Jammu district, which were Gandhi Nagar, Satwari, Miran Sahib, and R.S. Pura in accordance with the pre-defined sample criteria. From the parents' perspective, the government must ensure sufficient manpower for the proper functioning of the scheme, as it has significantly improved the health of the children. Moreover, they perceive the quality of the food as moderate and suggested improving its variety also. It was concluded that the concerned authorities must ensure the active participation of the beneficiaries' parents and also to apply a holistic approach for the scheme to be functionalized to a much better extent.

**Keywords:** Mid-day meal program, Nutrition, PM POSHAN

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## INTRODUCTION

With the view to uplift school enrolment, retention, and attendance along with simultaneous improvement of nutritional levels among children, particularly those belonging to poor families, the Government of India launched a program nationwide, PM POSHAN, erstwhile Mid-Day Meal (MDM) Program, on August 05<sup>th</sup>, 1995. The initial provision of uncooked meals to supplement nutrition to the target children was later replaced in 2001 with cooked school meals. Although it was implemented in the early 1990s across the nation, many states adopted it later; similarly, the Government of Jammu and Kashmir (UT) implemented it in the year 2005. Several research studies supported the active role of the scheme in combating school hunger and enrolment, with the simultaneous existence of many loopholes in the operationalization of the scheme at several levels, some of which were identified as scarcity of funds and negligence on behalf of school personnel and cooks in the context of distribution and maintaining the hygiene of the meal served. Furthermore, to overcome these issues, the government has already implemented a framework both at the central as well as state levels, to ensure active participation by stakeholders at all levels in the proper operationalization of the scheme, by having the provision of Village Education Committee, School Education Committee, a separate teacher-in-charge in every school, ADHAAR linking of the beneficiaries to avail the facilities direct to their bank accounts and to keep them up to date regarding various provisions of the scheme and changes in them, if any.<sup>[1]</sup>

Among stakeholders, namely, teachers, heads of the schools, teachers-in-charge for MDM, members from the village, and several other government officials, are designated to be a part of the implementation and monitoring of the scheme. Among these, the parents of the beneficiary children have a vital role in shaping the scheme's parameters. Research evidence from multiple studies

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supports that PM POSHAN (the MDM Scheme) has remarkably reduced the burden of parents for providing 1 time healthy meals to their children, along with supporting the fact that most of these households were not able to provide regular breakfast to their children in the morning and were not even capable of providing proper lunch boxes to them for the school. The scheme has proven to be a great support to families, particularly those of low socioeconomic status. Despite all of these advantages, PM POSHAN still lacks a place to fully accomplish its goals, as evidenced by nationwide research showing the frequency of unforeseen circumstances, especially with regard to the standard and cleanliness of the food provided and the timely distribution of benefits to the recipients. Even though there have been fewer of these cases recently, they still have a significant impact on the scheme's functionality and quality.<sup>[2-6]</sup> Given the aforementioned, a number of studies have been conducted to learn more about the underlying causes of these incidents, engaging stakeholders at different levels such as beneficiaries, teachers, the head of the school, zonal education officer, and chief education officer. According to the existing literature, research investigations carried out across the country ostentatiously regard the parents of the

**Table 1:** Demographic profile of the respondents

Category	Caste		
	Male (n=50) (%)	Female (n=50) (%)	Total (n=100) (%)
General	11 (22)	8 (16)	19 (19)
Schedule caste	16 (32)	15 (30)	31 (31)
Schedule tribe	15 (30)	20 (40)	35 (35)
Other backward classes	8 (16)	7 (14)	15 (15)
Occupation			
Agriculture	22 (44)	12 (24)	34 (34)
Private job	17 (34)	25 (50)	42 (42)
Self-employed (non-agriculture)	11 (22)	13 (26)	24 (24)

**Table 2:** Frequency of getting breakfast at home

Frequency	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Daily	19 (38)	20 (40)	39 (39)
Sometimes	31 (62)	30 (60)	61 (61)

**Table 3:** Perception regarding the role of Mid-Day meals served to combat hunger and daily nutritional requirement of children

Items	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Hunger satisfaction only	92	86	89
Daily nutritional requirement only	0	0	0
Both (a and b)	8	14	11

**Table 4:** Opinion regarding children's satisfaction from school meal

Items	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Yes	56	34	45
Neutral	34	60	47
No	10	6	8

**Table 5:** Opinion regarding any need of change in school meal

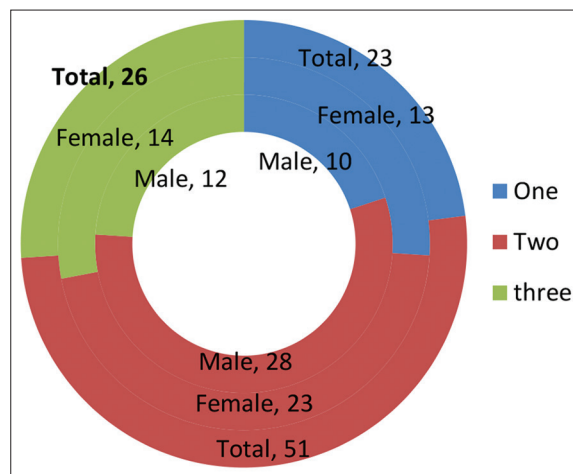
Items	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Variety	12	8	10
Quantity	20	22	21
Both (a and b)	68	70	69

**Table 6:** Perception regarding the sufficiency of staff engaged in PM POSHAN

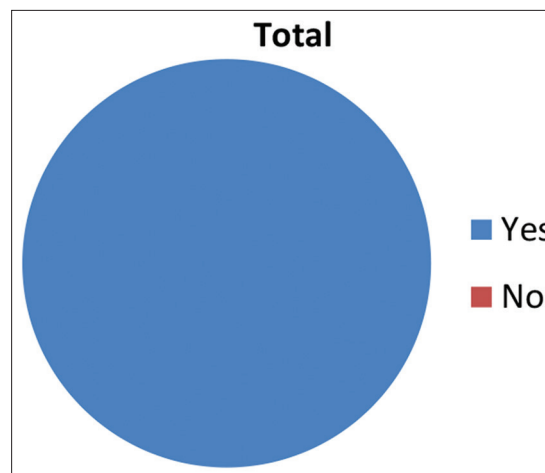
Items	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Doing well	32	40	36
Not enough to operationalize and manage the scheme	68	60	64

beneficiaries as a core sample group. Furthermore, in the Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir, insufficient research has been done over this program involving parents as the primary study group. Since they are the ones who choose to send their children to school to take advantage of the incentives offered under PM POSHAN, the current study becomes significant in the given context.

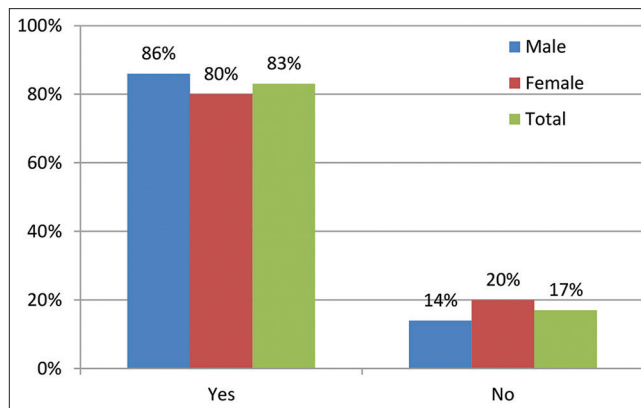
The main objective of the current study was to understand the parents' perspectives, which will be useful in investigating the current ground-level obstacles in the context of the beneficiary children's ability to access benefits. In this context, two objectives were formulated as an exploration of parents' perception regarding PM POSHAN and their perception of existing bottlenecks (if any) in availing of the benefits provided under the scheme.



**Figure 1:** Total number of respondents' children getting benefits under PM POSHAN



**Figure 2:** Regularity in getting mid-day meals at school



**Figure 3:** Perception regarding the role of PM POSHAN in relieving stress in the context of nutritional and educational responsibility toward their children

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To achieve the target objectives, a total of 100 parents; 50 male and 50 females, were selected from four different educational blocks of

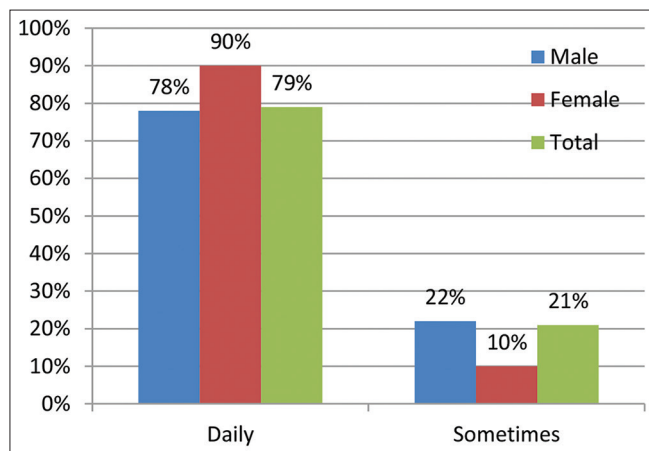


Figure 4: Frequency of enquiring about the mid-day meal menu

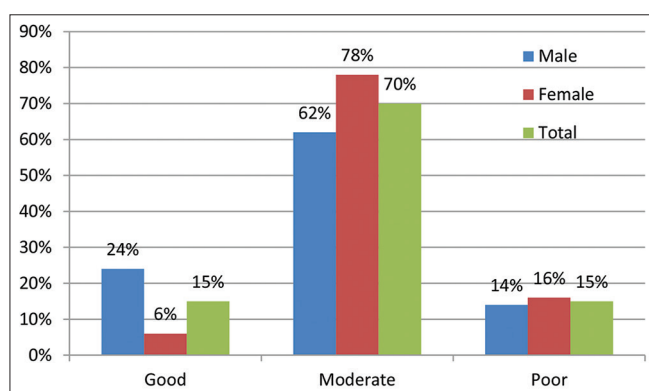


Figure 5: Perception regarding the quality of food served in school meal

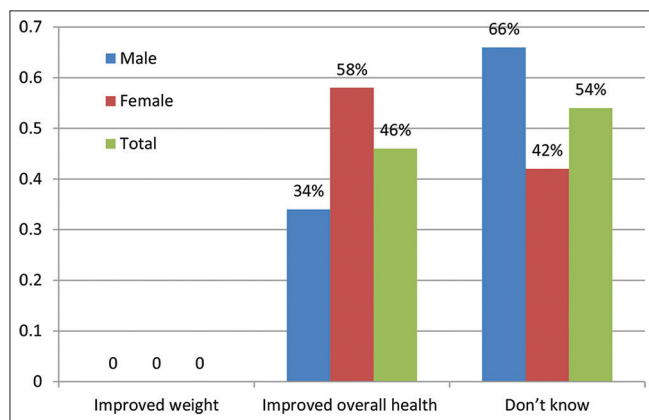


Figure 6: Perceived change in the health of their children

Jammu district namely; Gandhi Nagar, Satwari, Miran Sahib, and R.S. Pura. Only those respondents were selected, whose children were availing of benefits of PM POSHAN for at least the past 3 years, from the point of data collection. The sample was purposively drawn from households belonging to the same socioeconomic group. A self-devised semi-structured interview schedule was administered to obtain the required data, the reliability of which was ensured by conducting a pilot survey before the initiation of the actual data collection process.

It has been obtained from the above table 1 that the majority of the sample parents belonged to the schedule tribe (35%) and schedule caste (31%) category. A similar distribution has also been observed among female respondents for both these categories (40% and 30%, respectively). Across the gender, another backward class was the category with the least number of respondents for both males (16%) as well as females (14%) gender, followed by the general category (22% and 16% respectively). The given distribution also provides the occupation of the study group in overall, as private employed (42%) and non-agricultural self-employed (24%) as their main source of income. In the context of gender, the majority of male respondents were reliant on agriculture, whereas half of the female respondents worked in private employment.

The above-given data (Figure 1) provide that 51% of the sample respondents had two children of theirs, availing benefits under PM POSHAN. Similarly, the gender-specific major sample proportion showed that two of their children were receiving MDM in school.

Regarding the frequency of receiving school meals, every sample parent gave a positive response (Figure 2). They believed that it encouraged their children to go to school more frequently.

Overall, a significant percentage of sample parents (61%) reported that their children sometimes ate breakfast at home (Table 2). Furthermore, before allowing their wards to leave for school each day, 40% of the female respondents and 38% of the male respondents provided their wards with breakfast.

It is quite obvious from the data given in figure 3, that the majority of the parents (83%), both male (86%) and female (80%), perceived PM POSHAN as being helpful in relieving their burden of nutritional and educational responsibility toward their children up to a significant extent.

A major portion of the parents (79%) reported that they frequently inquired about what their children had in the school meal (Figure 4). Moreover, female parents were more actively and frequently involved in enquiring about MDM on a daily basis. Only 21% of the parents reported to inquire about it occasionally. It is quite evident from the data that most of the parents (79%) were not members of the parent-teacher association of the school ever.

The opinion regarding the quality of the school meal is quite significant from the given data (Figure 5) since 70% of the total sample parents considered the quality of the school meal moderate. However, very few of the male (12%) and female (3%) respondents considered good in quality.

It is well evident from the given distribution (table 3) that the majority (89%) of the respondents perceived that the scheme had served its role in combating hunger by providing school meals, whereas only a few of them (11%) opined that it actually fulfills the daily nutritional requirement of the children in addition to their hunger satisfaction.

A similar proportion of the respondents (45% and 47%) reported that their children were satisfied and neutral, respectively, in the context of actually receiving benefits from the scheme (Table 4). While very few of the male (10%) and female (6%) respondents reported that their children were not satisfied with the scheme.

A vast majority of the respondents both male (68%) and female (70%), opined that the meal served in the school must be improved both in terms of its variety and quantity (Table 5). While only 10% and 21% of total respondents were of the opinion that its variety and quantity, respectively, must be improved.

Just 42% of the female respondents were unaware of any

health benefits their children would receive from receiving school meals, compared to 66% of the male respondents (Figure 6). Furthermore, 46% of all respondents reported that their children's general health had improved as a result of receiving school meals.

A substantial percentage of respondents, both male (68%) and female (60%), believed that there was insufficient staff involved in the program to ensure its smooth operation (Table 6). However, 36% of the total respondents found the staff enough to run the scheme.

## CONCLUSION

The results of the study provided that the majority of the recipients were from underprivileged social groups, specifically the Schedule Tribe and Schedule Caste, and their primary sources of income were agriculture and private employment. The majority of sample respondents responded that they had more than one child who frequently received school meals and benefited from the program. They believed that since their kids weren't eating breakfast every day at home, the midday meal program had been effectively easing their burden of giving them the nutritional and educational support they needed. It is quite evident from the results that parents were actively involved in enquiring about the menu of the school meal being served, most commonly on a daily basis. They also perceived that the food quality was moderate and required to be improved in terms of its variety as well as quantity. They also reported that the staff engaged was not sufficient in their view, but agreed that PM POSHAN had significantly reduced the hunger among children and improved their health to a noticeable extent.

## Future Recommendations

One of the biggest nutrition programs in the world, PM POSHAN, covers the educational and nutritional needs of children from low-income families throughout India. Even though numerous

updates have been made over time to make it considerably more functional, it still has significant shortcomings. Currently, there is a need to systematically address the inclusion of stakeholders from the bottom hierarchy. The rules and features of the program need to be communicated to parents in more comprehensive terms. Since they are the lowest in the program hierarchy and are accountable for educating their children on how to effectively utilize the benefits provided by the PM POSHAN scheme for their better health and education, it is imperative that their active involvement be guaranteed to a larger degree.

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