



Poshan Pakhawada From Himachal Pradesh

Story



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Building Connections in the Community

Solan District, Himachal Pradesh

A range of activities were carried out at the anganwadi centre (AWC) at Matival in Solan district of Himachal Pradesh on March 19, 2019. To begin with, interactions of the staff with children at the centre were focused on identifying vegetables and fruits and their nutritional benefits, thereby establishing messages of nutrition.

“What is this?”, said a staff holding up a cardboard cutout with a picture of a carrot. The children were ready with their answers. When asked what carrots are good for, they pointed at their eyes. There was much excitement amongst mothers of the children at the centre for there was a double celebration that day.

Bringing women on board

“We had an annaprashan ceremony and the birthday celebration of one of the mothers,” said Kaushalya Thakur, a helper at the AWC.

Kaushalya had earlier baked a cake using rations available at the centre - nutri biscuits, ghee, gur and the final products garnished with grated coconut. In her nearly 25 years of service at the AWC, she said she had seen more inclusive activities that addressed the health of women and children over the years.

“Earlier, Anganwadi staff used to talk only to pregnant or lactating women but over the last few years, I am seeing that other family members like mothers-in-law and husbands and even other community members are getting involved,” she said, adding that she liked the challenge of making nutritious food in such a way that the children at the centre love to eat.

Ruchika Sharma (38) of Matival village who had a five-year-old daughter attending the AWC said, *“Those who are pregnant or have infants starting with complementary feeding are so lucky! I didn’t get such a chance to be the centre of such celebrations!”*

Ruchika said that she attended the community based event (CBE) on March 15, where apart from the celebrations, a discussion on the correct techniques for breastfeeding infants and when and how to take up complementary feeding was facilitated. *“There is so much fun and sharing of experiences taking place that I attend it even though I am not pregnant or currently breastfeeding!”*, she said, adding that there are now more women attending the events as many women often bring their mothers-in-law or sisters-in-law along to take part. *“The mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law go back more aware and that really helps the women,”* she said.

Annaprashan – Initiating Complementary Feeding at the right time

Tita Devi’s six month old child was the focus of everyone’s attention at the AWC as her child’s annaprashan was being celebrated. The beaming mother said that she had been taking part in such ceremonies and that the accredited social health activists (ASHAs) and anganwadi workers (AWWs) kept reinforcing her knowledge and awareness regarding her own care and that of her child. She

rattled off the list of immunisations that her child had received till date and what she planned to feed her child now along with continued breastfeeding.

“I received a lot of tips on what to eat from other women apart from ASHA didi and others who came for home visit. I had all my ante natal checkups (ANCs) done and was counselled on the importance of taking iron and calcium supplements post my delivery,” Tita added.

“We have annaprashan ceremony in our homes but the one we take part in at the anganwadi is totally different as it is beyond the ceremonial aspects and leads to a lot of learning. I love it that we get to celebrate birthdays together too; we have never had that ever in our lives. We get to exchange recipes for nutritious food at our birthday celebrations as everyone brings something or the other,” said Tita.

“The annaprashan ceremonies at the AWC include sharing sessions on what food and nutrients are to be included for infants as per their growth and development,” according to AWW Babli Thakur.

Learning together through *Godh Bharai* ceremonies

In the AWC at Kotikhander, Nirupa Devi (48) was beaming as her daughter-in-law Chandrakanta Devi (24) received blessings for her *Godh Bharai*. “This was going to be the first child and Chandrakanta was in her 8th month of pregnancy.



Nirupa Devi (48) blessing her daughter-in-law Chandrakanta Devi (24) at the latter's *Godh Bharai*, Anganwadi Centre, Kotikhander (Solan).

Alluding to the CBEs taking place every 15th and 24th of the month, Nirupa went on to add that the meetings are **great support systems** for women. *“I also go to these meetings and a few other mothers-in-law come as well. We didn't have any of these happening in our time but we are happy that there are now so many facilities for pregnant and lactating women,”* she added.

According to Jayawanti Devi, the AWW at the centre, *“Such events not only connect pregnant and lactating women in shared celebrations but are becoming a learning process where the staff at the AWC steer the talk on required immunisations, health check ups, adequate diet and nutrition besides updating on the next milestone.”*

With the advent of Jan Andolan for POSHAN Abhiyaan, all 12 districts of Himachal Pradesh have earmarked the 15th and 24th of every month for CBEs. These events often have women of all ages come together to observe '*Godh Bharai*' and '*Annaprashan*' ceremonies as a celebration but also include messages on diet, nutrition and feeding for infants and small children. While the latter is often conducted in family settings, *Godh Bharai*, which takes place to bless pregnant women in their final trimester, is not really observed amongst the people of the state but has become very popular amongst women as a medium for learning and sharing experiences.

Creating Partnerships across Sectors

Shimla District, Himachal Pradesh

March 20, 2019

Starting with adolescents

A health awareness programme followed by an anemia screening was held at the Government Girls Senior Secondary School at Portmore in Shimla on March 20, 2019 as part of the activities in the district. A poster painting competition on the topic 'Nutrition during Adolescence' was also organised as part of the day's programme at the school.



Students at Government Girls Senior Secondary School at Portmore, Shimla taking part in a poster painting competition on nutrition.

The highlight of the health awareness programme was a session by Dr. Preeti Sharma, Medical Officer of the community health centre (CHC) at Mashobra, who spoke on diet and nutrition along with the after effects of anemia. She emphasised on what diet elements need to be included for adolescents in order to avoid anemia.

According to the Medical Officer, ***“More often than not, students do not give as much attention to their diet as they do to their studies and such programmes can really make a difference. I often put in fun questions so that students find the programme more interactive.”***

Following the talk, students from Class VII standard onwards (in the age group of 12 onwards) were tested for anemia and those with low haemoglobin (Hb) levels were given iron tablets with instructions on when they should be taken.

Shivani Kashyap (16), a student in Class X, said the awareness programme was an eye opener. ***“I never realised that I could be anemic but on hindsight, I had not been eating properly for sometime. I will be more careful about my eating habits and will strictly adhere to taking the iron tablets,”*** she said.

Integrating service delivery at CHCs

The immunisation day was conducted at the CHC in Mashobra. Sardar Singh, the Male Health Supervisor at the CHC, said that immunisation is done on every first and third Wednesday of the month.

“Frontline workers like ASHAs and AWWs link the community with our programmes. The doctors and the nurses administer immunisation



Immunisation Camp at CHC Mashobra, Shimla district.

but weighing of infants, counselling of mothers in case their children are underweight, etc. are all done by them to be followed up later,' he said.

He further added that every 9th of the month, the auxiliary nurse midwives (ANMs) facilitate ANC at the CHC with the involvement of ASHAs and AWWs. At the CHC, once immunisation for the infants gets over, the accompanying ASHA or AWW use the Mother and Child Protection (MCP) card to reaffirm the messages on correct feeding techniques for infants, hygiene and nutrition, etc.

A mela with a difference

Elsewhere at Bharari AWC in Flower Dale, Shimla Urban, a nutrition mela and health awareness for AWWs was organised. AWWs from various centres put on a display of nutrient packed meals and snacks.

Santosh Bharadwaj (48), an Anganwadi worker with the Dhanain Mashrobra Project said that such nutrition melas were being replicated as activities for Poshan Pakhwara wherein the occasion was used to talk about diet and nutrition for pregnant and lactating women as well as for adolescents.



Food items for display at the Nutrition Mela at Bharari Anganwadi Centre in Flower Dale, Shimla Urban

“We focus on locally available vegetables, fruits, pulses and cereals that have high nutritive value and share recipes on how best to incorporate them into the diet of growing children,” said Santosh, adding that she had used the fortified nutri biscuits available as dry rations to make a birthday cake. *“I used the juice of beetroot and spinach to get red and green colours for the cake icing instead of artificial colour. I also put in wheat and a bit of rice paste as the cake base,”* she added.

Building capacity and awareness

Training programmes for the capacity building of AWWs and other frontline workers is conducted from time to time so that knowledge can be shared further with people who avail services at the community level. There is an ongoing training for AWWs using Incremental Learning Approaches Module 4 which is on ‘Observing Breastfeeding in New Born Babies’ where the facilitators include discussions on elements of diet and nutrition.



Capacity building of anganwadi workers, Supervisor Circle, ICDS Project, Shimla

At various AWCs across the state, the staff use the Himachali folk art form of 'Natti' to talk of an array of issues around women - from health care for pregnant women and the importance of what diet to incorporate to which immunisation has to be administered at what time period, ANC to pregnancy milestones, correct feeding for infants and other areas. This form of communication is interactive, educative, entertaining and locally relevant, leading to discussions among women who come to the centres.



'Natti', a folk dance form of Himachal Pradesh, being used to talk of issues relating to women's health.

Convergence and leading from the front

Initiatives at the ground level are strengthened by inter-government departmental convergence at the district and state levels.

Rajesh Sharma, Director, Women and Child Development, said, *'The biggest takeaway from convergence amongst various departments is that we are all on the same page and are concerned about plugging existing gaps in terms of issues we face in the state'*. He went on to add that after the Jan Andolan initiative started in the state last year, there were more concerted efforts to integrate activities and programmes that each department was taking up so that at least two or three departments are getting together.

'All the Government departments are concerned about stunting amongst children in Himachal Pradesh and there is now a common concern and a realisation that we need to address anemia among adolescents,' he added.

He went on to say, *"Rations meant for pregnant and lactating women and children registered at the centres are double fortified by nutri biscuits or milk powder. We are continuing with this initiative and have recently started supplying fortified salt. For this, we engaged with the Food and Civil Supplies department, besides reaching out to private manufacturing firms to give us subsidised rates."*



A packet of Double Fortified Salt which is part of the supplies to anganwadi centres across Himachal Pradesh.

The Director added that steps had just begun to engage with the Rural Development department to take up sensitisation programmes on nutrition for Panchayati Raj Institutions as they are important stakeholders in rural settings. However, it had to be put on hold after the Model Code of Conduct came into effect due to the announcement of the forthcoming General Elections.

