

HUNGER AND ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN INDIA**Mirza Muneeb Manan****Dr. Dinesh Chahal****School of Education Central University of Haryana****ABSTRACT**

Ironically India is having one of the largest elementary education system in the world and at the same time having a large number of economically weak populations. Every person is required to focus primarily on physical needs and then psychological, social, emotional etc. It is a matter of concern that students are being taught in the schools, attempting to fulfill the very important need of education, but on the other hand their physical need is at stake. Students attending the school empty stomach usually belong to the weakest sections of the society and those students are expected to be retained in schools without food. Classroom hunger is an emergent problem at elementary school education level in India. In this paper an attempt is made to unveil the reality of classroom problems in Indian context and effect of intervention programs on the very issue.

Keywords: classroom hunger, elementary education, Physical needs..

Introduction

Hunger, as perceived in everyday life, is a state of disquiet or discomfort for an individual on account of not having enough food. It is associated with a set of symptoms that could vary in a range and intensity depending on the degree and the duration for which a person experiences food scarcity. Hunger has an obvious element of subjectivity that makes it difficult to assess its incidence accurately in a society. It is more evident in a poor developing country, where hunger also poses some difficult policy challenges. In a well-liked public discourse in India, there is also a lack of clarity about the concept of hunger, malnutrition, and poverty that underpins the official data categorizing the people in one or the other of those categories. In fact, these terms are often interchangeably used making, for instance the activists, who are concerned about the scale and expression of the problem, deemed that the policymakers are not responding properly to these concerns. While hunger refers to insufficiency of food or starvation, malnutrition refers to a discrepancy of both macro and micronutrients, which could be because of derisory or improper intake and inefficient biological consumption due to physiological or environmental factors. Evaluation of poverty in India involves the use of a least consumption expenditure level (poverty line), which was originally fixed in an average (food) energy capability norm. Thus, there is some overlap in the concepts, but they are certainly different and require a separate policy focus. There is also a matter that surfaces every now and then about the aptness of using developed country anthropometric standards for measuring starvation or malnourishment in India, given the racial, climatic and cultural divergences. Without going into the tinges of this debate, it is possible that more appropriate context specific benchmarking for India may yield lower incidence of malnourishment in the country than the levels currently estimated. However, even that is likely to be too high to tolerate for a country aspiring to be among the ranks of developed nations in the near future. Trends in undernourishment and malnourishment on different measures are analyzed, followed by an evaluation of the efficiency of policy framework in the country to address the problem.

Hunger in India

India is residence to the world's biggest food insecure population, with more than 200 million people who are hungry, India State Hunger Index (ISHI) said, adding that the country's poor performance is driven by its high levels of child under-nutrition and poor calorie count. It is further noted that "The child malnutrition of India" is higher than most of the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2003). As per the global hunger index report which was released in 2009 India ranks at 65 out of 84 countries.

In India more than 200 million people suffer from hunger which is more than any other country in the world, as according to 2008 report. Report also brings attention to some specific states of India where child nutrition should be addressed urgently. The key features of scheme like Mid-day meal scheme are defense of children from classroom hunger, improving social inclusion, minimizing caste discrimination, dealing with malnutrition and social empowerment of women (Sengupta, 2012).

Child Labor and Hunger

The occurrence of child labor is another main problem, which developing countries are facing, in the liberalized economic system. Various suitable policies are sought today by the dealing authorities of the concerned fields (such as economists and policy makers) to overcome these problems. In theoretical perspectives the child labor has largely been attributed to high poverty and faults in capital market (Chaudhuri, 2007). Relationship between "Access to Education and Child Labor" has received greater attention during the last two decades. The issue became popular due to the publication of Myron Weiner's influential work, *The Child and the State in India* (Weiner, 1991). As pointed out by Weiner: "Primary education in India is not compulsory, nor is child labor illegal. The result is that less than half of India's children between age six and fourteen (82.2 million) are not in school (Weiner, 1991: 3). He also stated that "depending upon how one defines "work" (employment for wages, or full time work whether or not for wages) the number of child laborers in India varies from 13.6 million to 44 million or more (Weiner, 1991: 3). After fifteen years, the circumstances are still not acceptable, with large population of children suffering as child workers instead of attending educational institution regularly. The practice of child labor employment still continues across the country. As per Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) data conducted by UNICEF (2004: 57), there are above 12 million children working as laborers in India. Poverty is attributed as the main reason for the upholding of child labor and the related segregation of the children from educational institutions. A number of intellectuals blame the authorities for not implementing the "Child Labor Act" and for a failing to provide a Universal Access to Education for all children. According to the Census, there is a spiky turn down in the proportion of child laborers working full-time from 4.3% in 1991 to 2.3% in 2001. At the same time, the population of secondary workers increased from 2.2 million to 6.9 million, so in effect the sum total of child workers increased from 12.9 million in 1991 to 16.35 million in 2001. Maximum children were engaged in agricultural activities on a part-time basis.

Elementary Education and Intervention Program

An initiative by the government was taken to tackle the problem of hunger with special reference to education. In the state of Kerala the Mid-Day Meal has been proved as one of the important policies at elementary school education level which depressed the cost of education for parents and also aided in improving the child nourishment to promote learning, hence allows an increment in returns to education. But during the course of study it seems that scheme could not improve the dietetic status of the lower primary school children. It was also revealed that scheme has not been proved very fruitful so far as the Nutrition Echelon, Enrolment and Dropout of students are concerned. But it may surely contribute in enhancing the nutritional status when the government would enrich the menu and start monitoring it sincerely. (N. Karunakaran & Krishnaraji, 2015). As per the figures available through the study, that 42.5% of the primary level students below 5 years of age falling below the optimal value of weight. Usually most of the students did not get enough food to eat which may meet the needs of children. The follow-up should be very much dynamic to make outcomes positive and hence the scheme can be truly be advantageous and supportive for the poor children. (Sarkar & Battacharyya, 2015). After the implementation of the scheme it can be clearly reflected that scheme has positively affected the enrolment, attendance and gender equity at elementary school education level. It also affected the retention level, learning ability and inclusion. Children from about 84% families enjoy the scheme and ensure their educational survival. Parents reported that they get rid of the burden of their children s day meal. Teachers however observed that scheme is showing some positive results regarding learning ability and academic achievement. It also brought social integrity and social equity among students. Scheme is more affective in the areas where there are poor families as compared to the areas with elite classes. (Penisetty, 2015),

Conclusion

After having such a significant contribution government schemes to the needs of children at elementary level we are still underprivileged of having access of all children to education in India. There are huge numbers of children getting exploited as child labors where it is clearly marked that they are not getting equal opportunities. Our right to equality slogan is also getting questioned when looking it on empirical grounds. Intervention programs are implemented well but neither executed nor followed up properly. If we take the mid-meal scheme as reference it is clearly evident that it has brought a positive output in many states especially north east but is deteriorating in cities like Delhi and Punjab (Manan, 2016). All citizens should take a responsibility to fulfill the task of bringing out of school children into the schools.

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