

Social Awareness, Responsibilities and Psychosocial Challenges of Anganwadi Workers

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Abstract: This study investigated the social awareness, social responsibilities and psychosocial challenges faced by Anganwadi workers in Kerala. A sample of 200 Anganwadi workers was surveyed using a questionnaire designed to assess these three dimensions. The results indicated high levels of social awareness and social responsibility among the workers. However, they also faced significant psychosocial challenges, particularly economic and family-related issues. The study provides insights into the complex role of Anganwadi workers and offers recommendations for enhancing their effectiveness and well-being.

Keywords: Anganwadi workers, social awareness, social responsibility, psychosocial challenges, ICDS.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Anganwadi workers (AWWs) are the backbone of India's Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) program, which was launched in 1975 to address child malnutrition, morbidity, and mortality in rural areas (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2021). These community-based frontline workers play a crucial role in providing basic health care, nutrition, and pre-school education to children aged 0-6 years, as well as supporting pregnant and lactating mothers (Gupta et al., 2013).

The effectiveness of Anganwadi workers is closely tied to their understanding of local social contexts, their sense of responsibility towards the community and their ability to navigate various psychosocial challenges. However, there is limited research examining these aspects in depth, particularly in the context of Kerala, a state known for its high social development indicators.

This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the social awareness, social responsibilities and psychosocial challenges of Anganwadi workers in Kerala. By gaining a deeper understanding of these factors, we can identify areas for improvement and develop strategies to enhance the effectiveness of Anganwadi workers and the ICDS program as a whole.

2. NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

The ICDS program has been instrumental in improving child health and nutrition outcomes in India over the past four decades. However, its success largely depends on the effectiveness of Anganwadi workers, who serve as the primary point of contact between the program and the community. Understanding the social awareness, responsibilities and challenges faced by these workers is crucial for several reasons:

1. Enhancing program effectiveness: By identifying the strengths and weaknesses in AWWs' social awareness and sense of responsibility, we can develop targeted training programs to improve their performance.
2. Addressing psychosocial challenges: Recognizing the psychosocial issues faced by AWWs can help in developing support systems and interventions to improve their well-being and job satisfaction.
3. Policy implications: The findings of this study can inform policy decisions related to the working conditions, training, and support provided to Anganwadi workers.
4. Contextual understanding: By focusing on Pathanamthitta district in Kerala, this study provides insights into the functioning of AWWs in a relatively high-performing state, which can offer lessons for other regions.

5. Contribution to literature: This study adds to the limited body of research on the social and psychological aspects of Anganwadi workers' roles, particularly in the context of Kerala.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Anganwadi workers (AWWs) are critical to the implementation of India's Integrated Child Development Service Scheme, providing essential services such as nutrition, health education, and preschool education (Sandhyarani & Rao, 2013). However, AWWs face a number of challenges, including a heavy workload, inadequate training, and insufficient resources (Tripathy et al., 2014). Many AWWs see pre-school education, house visits, and record-keeping as their primary responsibilities, with growth monitoring and immunisation receiving less attention (Tripathy et al., 2014). Anganwadi teachers in Scheduled Caste colonies face additional challenges, such as a lack of activity space and irregular behaviour among children (Anjaneyulu, 2023). Despite their critical role in supporting millions of women, children, and the sick, AWWs are underpaid and lack retirement benefits, often living below the poverty line (Rakesh & Ranjith, 2022). These challenges highlight the importance of improving working conditions and providing support for AWWs in order to improve the ICDS program's effectiveness.

Goleman's (1995) concept of emotional intelligence provides a framework for understanding social awareness by identifying key components such as emotional self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, respect, active listening, and cooperation. In the context of Anganwadi workers, John et al. (2020) emphasised the significance of local knowledge and social skills in understanding and addressing community health concerns. Malik et al. (2015) outlined Anganwadi workers' broad responsibilities, which included health monitoring, nutrition education, and community engagement.

Jadav and Dave (2022) found that Anganwadi workers have a high level of nutritional literacy. This finding emphasises the significance of comprehensive training programs in supplementing the nutritional knowledge base of community health professionals. Such awareness is critical for effectively disseminating accurate dietary information and implementing nutrition-focused interventions in diverse populations.

Research has also identified a number of challenges that Anganwadi workers face. Gupta et al. (2013) highlighted issues such as low pay, inadequate infrastructure, and a heavy workload. Kumari (2014) discussed the issues and challenges confronting urban working women in India, many of which are relevant to Anganwadi workers. Shanmugam and Agarwal (2019) investigated the impact of flexible work options on career outcomes for women approaching motherhood in India, shedding light on the work-life balance issues confronting Anganwadi workers.

4. METHODOLOGY: This study used a descriptive survey method to look into the social awareness, social responsibilities and psychosocial challenges faced by Anganwadi workers in Kerala.

SAMPLE: A sample of 200 Anganwadi workers was drawn at random from various Anganwadis in Kerala. The sample included workers with a variety of educational backgrounds, age groups, and years of experience.

TOOL: A questionnaire was developed to assess the three main dimensions of the study:

1. **Social Awareness:** The section assessed understanding of community issues, empathy, cultural sensitivity, and communication skills.
2. **Social Responsibilities:** This section assessed workers' perceptions of their roles, commitment to the community, and understanding of their duties.
3. **Psychosocial Challenges:** This section assessed workers' challenges such as economics, work-life balance, and job-related stress.

The questionnaire consisted of Likert-scale items and open-ended questions. It was pilot-tested and refined based on feedback before being distributed to the entire sample.

PROCEDURE: Following informed consent, each Anganwadi worker was given an individual questionnaire and data was gathered from them. The researcher provided necessary clarifications while maintaining the confidentiality of the responses.

STATISTICAL TECHNIQUES USED: The following statistical techniques were employed to analyse the data:

1. Descriptive statistics: Mean, standard deviation, and percentages were calculated to describe the sample characteristics and overall scores on different dimensions.
2. Correlation analysis: To examine the relationships between social awareness, social responsibilities and psychosocial challenges.

5. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:

Socio-demographic Profile: The sample consisted of 200 Anganwadi workers with the following characteristics:

- Education: 46% had completed SSLC, 32% had completed higher secondary education, and 22% were undergraduates.
- Marital status: 96% were married, 2% unmarried, and 2% widowed.
- Annual income: 72% earned between 100,000-150,000 INR, while 28% earned between 150,000-200,000 INR.
- Religion: 64% Hindu, 24% Christian, and 12% Muslim.

Social Awareness: The mean score for social awareness was 16.2 (SD = 3.84) out of a possible 20 points. The distribution of scores was as follows:

- High level (16-20 points): 62%
- Average level (11-15 points): 28%
- Low level (0-10 points): 10%

These results indicate that the majority of Anganwadi workers in the sample demonstrated high levels of social awareness. This suggests that they have a good understanding of community issues, exhibit empathy and possess effective communication skills.

Social Responsibilities: The mean score for social responsibilities was 14.62 (SD = 1.59) out of a possible 18 points. The distribution of scores was as follows:

- High level (15-18 points): 68%
- Average level (10-14 points): 26%
- Low level (0-9 points): 6%

These findings indicate that most Anganwadi workers have a strong sense of social responsibility and understand the importance of their role in the community.

Psychosocial Challenges: The mean score for psychosocial challenges was 12.9 (SD = 2.09) out of a possible 20 points, where higher scores indicate more challenges. The distribution of scores was as follows:

- High level (16-20 points): 38%
- Average level (11-15 points): 52%
- Low level (0-10 points): 10%

The major psychosocial challenges identified were:

1. Economic issues (54%)
2. Family problems (30%)
3. Employer-employee relations (10%)
4. Health problems (6%)

Correlation Analysis: A significant positive correlation was found between social awareness and social responsibility scores ($r = 0.67$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that workers with higher social awareness tend to have a stronger sense of social responsibility.

A moderate negative correlation was observed between social awareness and psychosocial challenges ($r = -0.41, p < 0.05$), indicating that workers with higher social awareness may be better equipped to handle psychosocial challenges.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Social Awareness and Responsibilities: The high levels of social awareness and social responsibility among Anganwadi workers Kerala are encouraging findings. This aligns with previous research emphasizing the importance of these attributes in community-based health workers (Bello, 2012; Parga, 2011). The strong correlation between social awareness and social responsibility suggests that these two aspects are mutually reinforcing.

The high scores in these areas may be attributed to several factors:

- Kerala's high literacy rates and social development indicators, which may contribute to greater social awareness among Anganwadi workers.
- The ICDS program's emphasis on community engagement and social responsibility in its training programs.
- The workers' deep involvement in the community, which naturally enhances their understanding of local issues and sense of responsibility.

However, the presence of a small percentage of workers with low levels of social awareness and responsibility indicates a need for targeted interventions to improve these aspects across all workers.

Psychosocial Challenges: The findings reveal that Anganwadi workers face significant psychosocial challenges, with economic issues being the most prominent. This aligns with previous research highlighting the low remuneration of AWWs agrees with Gupta et al. (2013) Kumari (2014) Shanmugam and Agarwal (2019)

The prevalence of family problems as the second most common challenge underscores the need for better work-life balance support for these workers.

The moderate negative correlation between social awareness and psychosocial challenges suggests that social awareness may serve as a protective factor, helping workers better navigate their challenges. This finding has important implications for training and support programs.

7. IMPLICATIONS:

Based on these findings, several recommendations can be made:

- **Enhance training programs:** Incorporate modules on social awareness and responsibility in AWW training, focusing on those with lower scores in these areas.
- **Address economic challenges:** Review and potentially revise the remuneration structure for Anganwadi workers to address their economic concerns.
- **Provide psychosocial support:** Implement counselling services and support groups for AWWs to help them manage family problems and work-related stress.
- **Improve work conditions:** Address issues related to employer-employee relations to create a more supportive work environment.
- **Health support:** Provide regular health check-ups and support for AWWs to address their health concerns.

8. CONCLUSION:

This study provides valuable insights into the social awareness, social responsibilities and psychosocial challenges of Anganwadi workers in Kerala. While the high levels of social awareness and responsibility are commendable, the significant psychosocial challenges faced by these workers need urgent attention.

The findings underscore the complex nature of the Anganwadi worker's role and the need for a holistic approach to support these crucial community health workers. By addressing the identified challenges and building on the strengths in social awareness and responsibility, the effectiveness of Anganwadi workers and the ICDS program as a whole can be significantly enhanced.

Future research could explore the impact of targeted interventions to address the psychosocial challenges identified in this study. Additionally, comparative studies across different districts and states could provide a more comprehensive picture of the situation of Anganwadi workers across India.

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