

From Past to Present: A Case Study on the Evolving Workload of Anganwadi Workers

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Abstract: Purpose: The purpose of the study is to know the change in the workload of Anganwadi Workers over the past three decades.

Methodology and Approach: This study was conducted among the anganwadi workers of Koppa taluk, Chickamagaluru district, Karnatka, India. The qualitative study conducted with the help of interview method. 15 anganwadi workers were interviewed using semi structured questionnaire. The data was collected using Criteria Sampling Method

Findings: The findings of the study revealed that the workload of anganwadi workers have increased at a high level without a proper increase in the honorarium and welfare benefits provided to them.

Implications: The directorate of women and child development department must consider this issue seriously and address the challenges faced by the anganwadi workers since its inception.

Originality value: This pioneering study analyses the evolution of Anganwadi workers' workloads over the past thirty years. Although previous research has addressed various aspects of their roles, few have examined long-term workload changes. By systematically assessing these shifts, the study fills a critical gap in the literature. Utilizing historical data and comparative analysis, it provides insights into how evolving demands have affected their responsibilities and working conditions. The findings enhance understanding of long-term trends impacting this workforce and offer recommendations for future policy adjustments and workload management strategies.

Keywords: *Anganwadi Workers (AWWs), Integrated Child Development Services Workload, Honorarium, Job satisfaction, Working conditions and Child care.*

1 First Section

1.1 Introduction

The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) initiated in 1975 aimed to address child health, nutrition, and pre-school education. Anganwadi Workers are considered as back bone of this scheme and they playing a crucial role in its implementation through Anganwadi centers, providing health check-ups, immunizations, and supplemental nutrition (Somani et al., 2023). Presently there are 13,94,647 anganwadi centers. Anganwadi Workers(AWWs) along with the Helper are not classified as employees instead they are given a status of volunteers/social workers (Cullinan, 2020) . Anganwadi workers(AWWs) have done a significant contribution in irradiating several deadly deceases like tackling child malnutrition (Sajan & Navya, 2024), eradication of dermatoses in slums, (Patel et al., 1982) Paralytic Poliomyelitis (Khajuria et al., 1989), Diarrhea prevention , lymphatic filariasis (Nandha et al., 2007), childhood injuries (Mahalakshmy et al., 2011) , infantry care, early detection of disability among children (Raj et al., 2013), providing ORS and Zinc supplementation for treating diarrhea (Lamberti et al., 2015), cardio vascular risk reduction (Jeemon et al., 2016) etc .. They have also served as covid warriors by putting their life at stake (Ghosh & R Sengupta, 2022) . If in our country there is reduction in death rate due to diarrhea, colara, malaria, dengue,child morbidity etc the reason behind this is the contribution of anganwadi workers and their dedicated service (Awad et al., 2024). Presently no body dies due to above-mentioned deceases which was once considered as a deadly disease. In 1975 they were paid an honorarium of Rs.50. It's been 49 years of its inception, highest pay for the anganwadi worker (AWWs) is Rs.11,500 per month. However, over the time, their workload increased without a proportional rise in compensation or support (Mauludi AC et al., 2024). The

major challenge faced by anganwadi workers (AWWs) is no proper and timely pay of honorarium and there is no alignment with the workload and honorarium paid.

This study aims to investigate the changes in the workload of Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) over the past three decades.

2 Second Section

2.1 Problem Statement

The workload of Anganwadi Workers in India has significantly increased over the past three decades without a corresponding increase in compensation or welfare benefits. This study aims to investigate the changes in workload experienced by Anganwadi Workers in Koppa taluk, Chickamagaluru district, Karnataka, India, and analyze the implications of these changes on their working conditions and job satisfaction. By examining the evolution of their responsibilities and challenges faced since the inception of the Anganwadi program, this research seeks to provide insights that can inform policy decisions and improve support for this critical workforce in the women and child development sector.

2.2 Research Objective

The objective of this research is to examine the task distribution among Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) in Koppa Taluk, Chickmagalur District, Karnataka, spanning over thirty years.

2.3 Methodology

There are thirty AWWs with more than thirty years of work experience in Koppa Taluk. The data was gathered through interviews using a qualitative methodology. Using the Criteria Sampling Method, fifteen AWWs were chosen for this investigation. To conduct the interviews, a semi-structured questionnaire was created. After informing the participants of the study's goal, their informed consent was acquired. The AWWs do not understand English as proficiently as the local language; therefore, the original questionnaire in English was translated into Kannada with the help of a language expert.

Selection Criteria

Chikkamagaluru consists of seven Taluk headquarters, with Koppa Taluk chosen for this study. Information was gathered using a criteria sampling method. The selection and overview of the employees selected for the study is mentioned in the below given table.

Table 1: Basis of sample selection

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30 Years of Experience		

Table. 1. This table gives information on anganwadi workers working in Koppa taluk. In Koppa taluk the available posts are 155, but presently 148 anganwadi workers are in post. Out of 148, 30 anganwadi workers have got more than 30 years of experience. Out of which 15 of them are interviewed for the current study.

Table 1 explains that Koppa Taluk has 148 anganwadi workers in total, and the study focused on those with 30 or more years of experience. Authentic sources identified 30 AWWs who met the study's criteria. Out of these, 15 were interviewed using a semi-structured interview method.

3. Third Section

3.1 Discussion

Provision of Food for Anganwadi Children

To combat child malnutrition, the ICDS introduced meal facilities for Anganwadi children in 1992 (Chopra et al., 2023), providing a one-time meal with a menu specified by the ICDS, prepared by the Anganwadi Helper using firewood (Kaur et al., 2018). Currently, AWWs face difficulties in sourcing firewood and kerosene, with a stipend of Rs.50 to cover expenses. In 2009, Anganwadi hours were extended from half-day to 9:30 am - 4:00 pm to provide nutritious food, including milk, eggs, nut bars, and sprouts, alongside regular meals, prepared by the helper. Additionally, ICDS allocated funds for malnourished children, with AWWs required to assist in securing these benefits. Post-2010, many Anganwadis in this ICDS Block received gas stoves from the panchayat.(Kaur et al., 2018)

Holding Meetings and Awareness Program

Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) must hold various meetings to provide ICDS services: -

- ❖ Mothers' Meeting: Monthly meetings for lactating mothers. - Parents' Meeting: Monthly meetings with parents of enrolled children.
- ❖ Health and Nutrition Camp: Held to promote nutritious food consumption to combat malnutrition and support pregnant women's welfare.
- ❖ Bala Vikas Samithi Meeting: Quarterly meetings to monitor children's growth at the anganwadi center.

To address low haemoglobin levels in women, AWWs should conduct meetings on the first and third Fridays of each month to educate women on healthy eating habits that maintain haemoglobin levels (Jain et al., 2020) . The scheme provides Rs.500 to cover meeting expense

Working for Other Departments

Anganwadi Workers aim to achieve the objectives of the ICDS(Nimmagadda et al., 2019) (Shanthi, 2024). Over the years, they have also taken on responsibilities from other departments, such as:

Health Department: Anganwadi Workers perform several health-related tasks, including: - Creating awareness and educating the community about various vaccines (John et al., 2019). They are also integral to the Pulse Polio drive, from educating parents about doses for children under six to being present at bi-annual camps (John et al., 2020). If any child misses the camp, Anganwadi Workers visit homes to administer the vaccine. Since 1995, they have received Rs.70 for this additional work.

- ❖ Leprosy Surveys: Anganwadi Workers conduct surveys to identify active leprosy cases and recommend treatment (John et al., 2020) .
- ❖ Immunization Surveys: They estimate vaccine coverage for selected vaccines(S S et al., 2017) , such as BCG, DPT, Hepatitis B, MMR, and booster doses among infants, children, and women of childbearing age, a task typically managed by the health department (Anwith et al., 2018).
- ❖ HIV Awareness Survey: Anganwadi Workers are expected to conduct this survey to identify the cases and to refer them to the hospitals (Verma & Bhatnagar, 2016).

Revenue Department: Anganwadi Workers are expected to gather data on community population, assets, and the number of livestock such as cattle, sheep, pigs, and poultry. **Education Department:** Anganwadi Workers must account for children in the community, document school dropouts, and provide adult education on weekends and evenings, tasks that schools could handle.

Panchayat Work Allocation: Although Anganwadi Workers are part of the Panchayat, they are also tasked with duties such as surveys on BPL cardholders and family demographics, which could be managed by Panchayat personnel (Jain et al., 2020). They must attend ward and village meetings and participate in Panchayat programs, in addition to their ICDS responsibilities.

Social Welfare Department: Anganwadi Workers are required to conduct caste surveys to identify SC and ST populations and assess the number of people with disabilities in the community(John et al., 2020).

Election Commission: On election days, Anganwadi Workers are assigned duties alongside government employees, making their attendance mandatory.

Work Related to the Schemes Introduced by the Government

Governments have developed new schemes to benefit the community, resulting in an increased workload for honorary-based Anganwadi Workers. As new schemes are introduced, the administrative burden on Anganwadi Workers grows, as they serve as the connection between the government and the community. However, this increased workload is not matched by a corresponding increase in honorarium (Ghosh & R Sengupta, 2022).

- ❖ **Sthree Shakthi:** Introduced by the Karnataka government in 2000-01, this scheme requires Anganwadi Workers to handle registers for illiterate women, conduct regular meetings, allocate funds and loans, and manage administrative and bank-related tasks.
- ❖ **Bhagyalakshmi:** Anganwadi Workers are responsible for identifying beneficiaries, maintaining records, and handling administrative processes to ensure benefits reach the beneficiaries. Later, the Bhaghyalakshmi Sukanya Samridhi scheme was merged, adding to the workload.
- ❖ **Mathrupoorna:** This scheme requires Anganwadi Workers to cook nutritious food for pregnant women in addition to preparing meals for enrolled children at the center.
- ❖ **Mathruvandana:** Pregnant and lactating women receive Rs.5000 for delivery and related expenses. The Mathrshri scheme specifically funds delivery costs, and Anganwadi Workers identify beneficiaries, educate them about the scheme, and track participation.
- ❖ **Poshan Abhiyaan:** This scheme requires Anganwadi Workers to identify malnourished children, monitor their weight regularly, and ensure all community children avoid malnutrition. Workers and helpers grow vegetables in gardens and cook meals without additional funding.
- ❖ **Kishori Survey:** Anganwadi Workers conducted a survey to identify and educate teenagers about nutrition. They held meetings to provide guidance on proper food intake for malnourished teenagers.
- ❖ **Gruhalakshmi:** Launched by the Karnataka government in 2023, this scheme supports family women. Anganwadi Workers identify beneficiaries, assist with registration, and track progress.

Financial Assistance

Funds are allocated for specific expenses, and Anganwadi workers are expected to utilize these funds to benefit the recipients. However, often Anganwadi workers end up paying additional money from their pockets, indicating that ICDS is not properly managing financial aspects. Egg supplements for Anganwadi children and pregnant women are to be provided daily. Anganwadi Workers must purchase these eggs at market prices, but funds are released only once every three months. When funds are finally disbursed, workers are reimbursed based on the current fund release rate, not the actual amount spent. For example, if they pay Rs.6.50 per egg, they might be reimbursed only Rs.5-6 per egg. This raises the question of why the workers should cover these costs themselves and why the government doesn't address this issue seriously. For buying vegetables, Anganwadi Workers are allotted Rs.1.50 per day, amounting to Rs.90 per month. This amount is insufficient to buy a month's supply of vegetables, especially when the center aims to combat malnutrition and other severe diseases. Nutritious food is necessary, but it is unattainable with the current funding.

Other funds include:

ECCI FUND: Quarterly, Rs. 250 is provided for pre-school education, including teaching aids and play kits. **Gas Fund:** For purchasing gas. **Center Maintenance Fund**

FLEXI FUND: Annually, Rs. 1000 is allocated, divided as follows: - Rs. 600 for health and nutrition camps - Rs. 150 for emergency transport for children, pregnant women, and lactating mothers - Rs. 50 for breastfeeding awareness meetings - Rs. 200 for celebrating Children's Day Departmental funds are insufficient, often forcing anganwadi workers to cover expenses from their own pockets despite financial constraints. They face significant work pressure and humiliation without adequate compensation or welfare benefits.

Mobile Tracking

The introduction of mobile phones increased the workload and mental stress of Anganwadi Workers. The second-hand phones provided are often in a poor condition, and those working in rural areas struggle with network connectivity. Department-issued SIM cards are ineffective, and workers must log their tasks in multiple registers and the mobile app, along with photographs. This tedious process causes significant mental, emotional and physical stress (Chen & Wu, 2023). WhatsApp groups require Anganwadi Workers to operate beyond working hours to send details, as demanded by higher officials and it increases the anxiety and stress among them (Ryani et al., 2023). Mobile expenses are also borne by workers, affecting their personal lives and mental peace and leading to misunderstandings and family conflicts.

Register Maintenance

Over time, the need to maintain registers for all activities at anganwadi centers has grown, requiring reports to be presented at meetings. Anganwadi workers spend their entire day maintaining these registers (Jain et al., 2020). This excessive record-keeping prevents them from providing effective preschool education. Initially, there were few registers, but now, they must maintain nearly 50 different registers. Register entries must be updated daily on mobile phones.

Honorarium and Welfare Benefits

Initially, Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) were paid Rs. 50 per month. After nearly 49 years, the maximum pay based on the service was Rs. 12,500. AWWs do not receive monthly salaries; their honorarium is often paid in arrears, which affects their ability to make regular loan payments and meet expenses. Despite their increased responsibilities, their pay has not seen a corresponding increase. Although they fall under the central government, they are not granted central government employee status and are referred to as "voluntary workers," "honorary workers," or "service providers." (Palriwala & Neetha, 2010) Despite economic and sectoral progress in the country, there has been no improvement in the status, pay, or benefits of AWWs. However, their significant contributions remain unrecognized and unappreciated.

AWWs have been striking for years for their salaries and basic needs, with occasional minor increases by the central or state government without structural changes. Social benefits such as ESI, pensions, scholarships for children, provident funds, and gratuity are not provided. The ICDS website claims scholarships for AWWs' children, but none has received them. Insurance is mentioned, but not properly implemented. Upon retirement, AWWs receive money called "hidigantu," which depends on government investment in shares and share prices at the time. Although the government announced gratuity payments, none of the retired AWWs in this block received them. Despite the stated benefits, interactions with AWWs revealed that they have not received any of the below mentioned

A. Pradhan, 11Vlantri Jeevan Jyoti Bhima Yojana {PMJJBY}

Beneficiaries: The Anganwadi Workers (AWWs)/Anganwadi Helpers (AWHs) under Anganwadi Services (Phalswal et al., 2023).

B. Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bhima Yojana {PMSBY}:

Beneficiaries: The Anganwadi Workers (AWWs)/Anganwadi Helpers (AWHs) under the Anganwadi Services (Phalswal et al., 2023).

C. Anganwadi Karyakarti Bhima Yojana (AKBY) [modified]:

Beneficiaries: The Anganwadi Workers (AWWs)/Anganwadi Helpers (AWHs) under the Anganwadi Services (Phalswal et al., 2023).

D. Critical female illness (under the erstwhile AKBY):

Beneficiaries: The Anganwadi Workers (AWWs)/Anganwadi Helpers (AWHs) under Anganwadi Services [Umbrella Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme].

E. Scholarship:

Beneficiaries: Children of the Anganwadi Workers (AWWs)/Anganwadi Helpers (AWHs) under the Anganwadi Services [Umbrella Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme] studying in 9th to 12th Standard.

Employee Wellbeing

As per the researcher's interaction with Anganwadi Workers, the Ministry of Women and Child Development does not give priority to the physical, mental, social, and financial well-being of Anganwadi Workers.

Increased workload and the introduction of mobile phones have affected the family life and health of Anganwadi Workers. Even though husbands and wives are both breadwinners, financial problems have no end. Anganwadi Workers are unable to contribute to the increased standard of living and end up borrowing money either from banks or friends. The honorarium they receive is not sufficient to save and even bear regular expenses. In the case of a single parent, this is even more complex. The honorarium is not paid on time. Sometimes, they will not be paid for three months.

One of the anganwadi workers even mentioned that due to over workload, she had undergone depression and was unable to handle work pressure. Work stress is felt even beyond working hours, which has affected the health (Kikuchi et al., 2020) of Anganwadi Workers.

4 Fourth Section

4.1 Conclusion

Interactions with Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) have revealed that their workload has grown significantly over time, without a corresponding increase in their honorarium (Jain et al., 2020). They are now required to handle tasks beyond the scope of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) program. Despite the growing demand, AWWs often pay out of pocket for essential items such as egg supplies, phone recharges, and updating work records due to inadequate compensation. The primary issue they face is the lack of a minimum wage; for the past 30 years, they have been categorized as either workers or volunteers, resulting in stagnation in their status and delays in honorarium payments. Additionally, there is a disconnect between the scope of their responsibilities and the honorarium that they receive.

Furthermore, AWWs do not receive social welfare benefits despite their role in raising community awareness about pension schemes and insurance. In demand of minimum wages and bringing other issues several times, anganwadi workers along with the helpers have gone for hunger and different forms of strikes.

It is crucial for both central and state governments to officially recognize AWWs as employees and address this issue urgently. Acknowledging their work and ensuring fair compensation and benefits would significantly contribute to both societal improvement and individual well-being. In this regard, both central and state governments have a greater responsibility to address anganwadi workers' issues.

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