

## A Study on Job Performance of Anganwadi Workers in Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS): Evidence from Palwal, Haryana, India

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### ABSTRACT

The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme, launched in 1975, is one of India's flagship programmes for early childhood care and development. Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) form the backbone of the scheme, delivering services such as supplementary nutrition, immunization, health check-ups, referral services, preschool education, and health awareness to marginalized populations. Despite their critical role, the performance of AWWs is often constrained by socio-economic, infrastructural, and organizational challenges. This study investigates the job performance of Anganwadi Workers in Palwal district, Haryana, with a focus on their socio-personal characteristics, communication and psychological attributes, and the problems they face in discharging their duties. Data were collected from a random sample of 80 AWWs through structured interviews and analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings reveal that while a majority of workers demonstrate good to excellent job performance, systemic constraints such as inadequate honorarium, excessive workload, insufficient infrastructure, and limited refresher training hinder their effectiveness. The study concludes that strengthening infrastructure, enhancing training, improving community participation, and revising remuneration policies are critical for enhancing the performance of AWWs and, consequently, the effectiveness of ICDS.

**Keywords:** *Anganwadi Workers, ICDS, Job Performance, Rural Development, Child Nutrition, Haryana*

The development of human resources is central to India's national growth strategy, and child welfare has consistently been identified as a critical area of intervention. Early childhood is a decisive period for physical, cognitive, and emotional development, yet millions of Indian children face malnutrition, poor health outcomes, and inadequate educational opportunities. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2020), 38 percent of children under five are stunted, 36 percent are underweight, with maternal undernutrition and anemia compounding the challenge. Malnutrition is not merely a health problem; it is a multidimensional issue tied to poverty, gender inequality, food insecurity, and inadequate public services.

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In this context, the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), launched on 2 October 1975, remains India's most comprehensive community-based intervention for child and maternal welfare. Its objectives are to improve the nutritional and health status of children aged 0–6 years, lay a foundation for proper psychological and social development, reduce infant and child mortality, and enhance the caregiving capacity of mothers. The Anganwadi Centre (AWC) is the operational unit of ICDS, and the Anganwadi Worker (AWW) is its key functionary at the grassroots.

### ***Role of Anganwadi Workers***

The AWWs are entrusted with a wide array of responsibilities: conducting household surveys, maintaining beneficiary lists, distributing supplementary nutrition, providing non-formal preschool education, assisting in health services such as immunization and referral, educating women on health and nutrition, and liaising with local institutions like Panchayats and Mahila Mandals. In practice, their work straddles multiple domains education, health, and social welfare making them the linchpin of rural service delivery.

However, the performance of AWWs is contingent on several factors, including their socio-economic background, education, training, community support, and the infrastructure available at the Anganwadi Centre. Despite being designated as “voluntary workers” and receiving only an honorarium, AWWs are expected to shoulder responsibilities that are often disproportionate to their remuneration and support. Studies across India have documented issues such as low pay, excessive record-keeping, irregular supply of supplementary nutrition, lack of adequate play and learning material, and weak community participation. These factors directly affect both the motivation of AWWs and the outcomes of ICDS interventions.

### ***The Haryana Context***

Haryana, despite being one of India's economically advanced states, continues to grapple with challenges of malnutrition, gender disparity, and rural poverty. The state has expanded ICDS coverage across all districts, yet gaps remain in implementation. Palwal district, in particular, is marked by a relatively high concentration of socially and economically marginalized groups, and reports of child malnutrition remain significant. Evaluating the performance of AWWs in Palwal is thus crucial to understanding both the strengths and limitations of ICDS at the grassroots.

### ***Research Problem and Objectives***

Given the pivotal role of AWWs, it becomes imperative to assess their job performance systematically. The present study addresses the following key objectives:

1. To analyze the socio-personal and socio-economic characteristics of Anganwadi Workers in Palwal district.
2. To examine their communication and psychological attributes.
3. To evaluate the overall job performance of AWWs in delivering ICDS services.
4. To identify the major challenges faced by AWWs and document their suggestions for improvement.

### ***Significance of the Study***

By situating the performance of AWWs within the broader framework of rural development and social policy, this study contributes to both academic discourse and policy debates. While numerous evaluations of ICDS have been undertaken at national and state levels,

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micro-level studies remain essential for capturing ground realities and informing context-specific interventions. The findings from Palwal provide insights not only into the functioning of ICDS in Haryana but also into broader issues of women's work, grassroots governance, and the delivery of public welfare programmes in rural India.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The performance of Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) has been widely studied in India, given their centrality to the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme. The literature spans multiple dimensions, including their socio-economic background, training and knowledge, infrastructural constraints, and job satisfaction. This section reviews key findings from previous research, organized thematically to highlight the major debates and empirical evidence relevant to the present study.

#### ***Socio-Personal and Demographic Profile of AWWs***

Research has consistently shown that the socio-demographic background of AWWs influences their effectiveness. Gotarkar and Ingole (2018), in a study in Wardha district of Maharashtra, found that a majority of AWWs were in the 18-45 years age group and that over half had more than a decade of experience. Similar findings were reported by Thakare *et al.* (2011), who observed that most AWWs were in their forties, with substantial experience, though their educational qualifications were modest, usually limited to secondary schooling.

Studies also reveal a predominance of nuclear families among AWWs (Suryavanshi, 2014), and moderate levels of income. While education and training are considered crucial for performance, many AWWs continue to face limitations in formal schooling. Chaturvedi (2008) reported that while most workers were relatively young and had completed higher secondary education, gaps in knowledge and performance persisted.

#### ***Communication Skills and Information Sources***

Communication ability is critical for AWWs, as much of their work involves mobilizing communities, disseminating health information, and engaging with mothers and children. Shukla (2013) found that a majority of AWWs relied on medium communication methods such as home visits, group discussions, and demonstrations. The use of mass media and advanced communication tools was limited. Similarly, Patil (2007) observed that home visits and meetings were the most common channels of communication, underlining the personalized nature of service delivery.

The exposure of AWWs to information sources is another determinant of their effectiveness. Shukla (2013) found that most AWWs depended heavily on departmental training and supervisors for information, while only a few accessed alternative sources such as exhibitions or mass media. This dependency highlights the importance of formal training structures within ICDS.

#### ***Training Needs and Knowledge Gaps***

Training is designed to equip AWWs with knowledge in areas such as maternal and child health, nutrition, preschool education, and community mobilization. However, research indicates that training is often insufficient, irregular, or inadequately reinforced. Gotarkar and Ingole (2018) reported that while 64 percent of AWWs had received induction or job training, only 19 percent had attended refresher training. Taha Ayub *et al.* (2017), studying

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Kashmir, noted improvements in knowledge post-training, but emphasized the need for continuous refresher courses.

Chaturvedi (2008) found that nutrition and health-related topics were more emphasized than preschool education during training, creating an imbalance in skill development. Singh and Vashist (1993), in an early study, noted gaps in knowledge regarding infant feeding practices, such as the importance of colostrum and appropriate age for introducing semi-solids. More recent work by Arya and Vig (2022) highlighted that despite multiple training sessions, many AWWs retained only average levels of knowledge, underscoring the challenge of translating training into practice.

### ***Knowledge and Scientific Awareness***

Several studies have assessed the scientific knowledge of AWWs in nutrition, health, and childcare. Baliga and Walvekar (2017) found that while most workers had good knowledge of immunization and supplementary nutrition, awareness of referral services was poor. Manhas and Dogra (2012) reported that although AWWs were maintaining growth charts and registers, a majority did not understand their importance. Shravani (2010) similarly observed gaps in the use of growth charts, with only a small proportion of AWWs informing mothers about their child's weight during weighing sessions.

Recent studies (Brahmacharimayum *et al.*, 2023) suggest that knowledge levels vary across regions, with education and training positively correlated with awareness. However, age and experience sometimes showed a negative correlation, indicating that knowledge may decline without continuous training and reinforcement.

### ***Infrastructural and Resource Constraints***

Infrastructure at Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) significantly affects both the performance of workers and the quality of services delivered. Thakur *et al.* (2015), in Himachal Pradesh, found that while most centres were housed in pucca buildings and had access to LPG for cooking, problems persisted with storage facilities, play materials, and sanitation. Chudasama *et al.* (2014) reported gaps in immunization coverage, irregular supply of supplementary nutrition, and poor record-keeping.

Seema (2001), in a study of Anganwadis across Kerala, observed inadequate physical infrastructure, including poor construction, lack of electricity, and absence of basic medical supplies. Datta *et al.* (2010), covering Puducherry and Tamil Nadu, similarly noted that many centres lacked functional weighing scales, safe storage facilities, or adequate space for preschool activities. Such deficiencies limit the ability of AWWs to perform effectively, regardless of their personal motivation.

### ***Job Performance and Workload***

Several studies have attempted to directly measure the performance of AWWs. Sankangoudar (2019), studying Karnataka, reported that about half the AWWs performed at a medium level, with overall job performance estimated at 68 percent. Joshi and Verma (2018) found that many AWWs were hampered by inadequate infrastructure and irregular supplies of essential items, which adversely affected their work.

A recurring theme in the literature is the issue of workload. AWWs are required to maintain multiple registers, conduct surveys, distribute nutrition, manage preschool education, and

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assist in health campaigns. Thakare *et al.* (2011) found that 75 percent of workers reported low honorarium and work overload as their biggest challenges. Desai *et al.* (2012) similarly noted that both urban and rural AWWs felt overburdened and unable to justify all their responsibilities.

### ***Honorarium, Motivation, and Job Satisfaction***

A persistent issue in the ICDS programme is the honorarium paid to AWWs. Palriwala and Neetha (2010) pointed out that their remuneration was often below the minimum wage, undermining both morale and retention. Mohanan *et al.* (2012) observed stress and dissatisfaction among AWWs in Mangalore, linking it directly to poor remuneration and lack of career advancement opportunities. Chaturvedi (2008) and Patil (2007) also found that higher honorarium and better allowances were among the most common suggestions for improving ICDS performance.

### ***Summary of Gaps in Literature***

The literature points to several consistent themes:

1. AWWs are typically middle-aged women with moderate educational levels and long years of service.
2. While training equips them with some knowledge, refresher training and continuous support are inadequate.
3. Infrastructure at AWCs remains poor, with irregular supplies and limited learning materials.
4. Workload is excessive, and remuneration is low, leading to dissatisfaction and reduced motivation.
5. Despite these constraints, many AWWs continue to perform at good to excellent levels, demonstrating commitment to their roles.

However, the literature also reveals significant gaps. Few studies focus on Haryana specifically, and micro-level assessments are limited. Moreover, while national evaluations highlight systemic challenges, localized studies are essential to capture context-specific dynamics. This study attempts to fill this gap by examining the job performance of AWWs in Palwal district, Haryana, with particular attention to their socio-personal attributes, challenges, and suggestions for improvement.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### ***Research Design***

This study employed a descriptive research design, appropriate for assessing the socio-personal characteristics, communication and psychological attributes, and job performance of Anganwadi Workers (AWWs). The purpose was not only to describe their status but also to analyze the challenges they face in service delivery under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). Descriptive designs are widely used in social sciences for generating insights into prevailing conditions, opinions, and practices (Selltitz *et al.*, 1962).

### ***Study Area***

The study was conducted in Palwal district of Haryana, a state located in northern India. Palwal is socio-economically diverse, with significant sections of the population belonging to Scheduled Castes, Other Backward Classes, and economically weaker groups. Despite Haryana's overall progress in agriculture and industry, rural Palwal continues to face challenges of malnutrition, poverty, and gender disparity. This makes it a relevant site for

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studying the performance of AWWs, as ICDS has a crucial role in addressing these developmental gaps.

### ***Sampling Method and Sample Size***

A random sampling technique was adopted to ensure representativeness and reduce selection bias. A total of 80 Anganwadi Workers were selected from different Anganwadi Centres across Palwal district. This sample size was considered adequate for generating meaningful insights within the available resources and time frame. The respondents were chosen from both rural and semi-urban centres, thereby capturing a diversity of experiences.

### ***Data Sources***

Both primary and secondary data were utilized:

- **Primary Data:** Collected through a structured interview schedule administered directly to the selected AWWs. The schedule included questions on socio-demographic characteristics, communication patterns, training experiences, job performance, and challenges faced. Interviews were conducted in the local language to ensure clarity and comfort for respondents.
- **Secondary Data:** Drawn from government reports, official ICDS records, census data, and published research studies. These sources provided the broader policy and statistical context for the study.

### ***Research Tools***

The main tool for data collection was a structured interview schedule, divided into sections corresponding to the study's objectives. Questions were designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative dimensions:

1. Socio-personal and socio-economic attributes (age, education, marital status, caste, income, family type, service experience).
2. Communication and psychological attributes (information-seeking behavior, training exposure, attitude towards ICDS, job satisfaction).
3. Job performance indicators, assessed using criteria such as quality of service delivery, record maintenance, and community mobilization.
4. Problems and suggestions, captured through open-ended questions that allowed workers to share their experiences in detail.

The responses were coded and tabulated for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics (percentages, averages) were employed to interpret the data.

### ***Scope of the Study***

The study was confined to Palwal district, which limits its generalizability to other regions of Haryana or India. However, given the representativeness of the sample and the diversity of the district, the findings offer valuable insights into the ground realities of ICDS implementation in semi-urban and rural settings. The study focuses on the job performance of AWWs and does not extend to evaluating the direct health or nutritional outcomes among beneficiaries.

### ***Limitations***

Several limitations need to be acknowledged:

1. **Self-reported data:** Job performance was assessed primarily through responses provided by AWWs, which may be subject to social desirability bias.

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2. **Sample size:** While adequate for descriptive analysis, a larger sample could have allowed for more robust statistical inferences.
3. **Time constraints:** Fieldwork was limited in duration, which restricted the use of longitudinal or comparative approaches.
4. **External factors:** Variables such as supply chain issues, community participation, and state-level administrative support, though crucial, were not directly measured.

Despite these limitations, the methodology adopted is considered sufficient to achieve the study objectives and provide meaningful insights into the job performance of AWWs in Palwal district.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The analysis of data collected from 80 Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) in Palwal district reveals important insights into their socio-personal profile, communication and psychological attributes, job performance, and the challenges they encounter in implementing Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). This section discusses the findings thematically, linking them with existing literature where relevant.

#### **Socio-Personal and Socio-Economic Characteristics of AWWs**

The socio-personal profile of the respondents indicates that a majority were middle-aged women between 31 and 45 years. Most were married, reflecting the program's emphasis on recruiting women with stable family lives. Education levels were moderate: a majority had completed secondary or higher secondary schooling, though only a few had pursued education beyond this level. This aligns with studies by Thakare *et al.* (2011) and Chaturvedi (2008), which found that AWWs across India typically possess modest educational qualifications, sufficient for basic record-keeping and preschool activities but often inadequate for advanced health and nutrition knowledge.

Caste and community background revealed significant representation from Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Classes, reflecting the government's policy of employing women from disadvantaged groups. Household income levels varied, but a large proportion belonged to middle-income categories, supplementing family earnings through their honorarium. The predominance of nuclear families, as also reported by Suryavanshi (2014), suggests that many AWWs balance their professional responsibilities with household duties without extended family support.

These findings highlight that while the socio-economic profile of AWWs enables close identification with rural communities, limitations in education and household resources may constrain their performance.

#### **Communication and Psychological Attributes**

Effective communication is vital for AWWs, as their success depends on mobilizing community participation and disseminating information on health, nutrition, and childcare. The study revealed that most workers employed medium level communication strategies such as home visits, group discussions, and demonstrations. Reliance on modern communication technologies or mass media was minimal, corroborating Shukla's (2013) findings that AWWs predominantly use interpersonal methods for outreach.

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Psychological attributes such as attitude towards ICDS and job satisfaction were mixed. While many workers expressed pride in their role as agents of change, dissatisfaction with honorarium and workload emerged as key concerns. Workers reported moderate levels of job satisfaction, largely due to recognition within their communities, but frustration with systemic constraints reduced motivation. Similar observations were made by Mohanan *et al.* (2012), who linked stress and dissatisfaction among AWWs directly to inadequate remuneration and lack of career growth.

### **Job Performance of Anganwadi Workers**

Job performance was assessed across multiple dimensions, including service delivery, record maintenance, and community engagement. The findings are summarized as follows:

- Excellent performance: 37.5 percent of AWWs
- Good performance: 43.7 percent
- Average performance: 6.2 percent
- Poor performance: 12.5 percent

This indicates that more than four-fifths of the workers (81.2 percent) were performing at good-to-excellent levels, a positive outcome considering the constraints. Performance was particularly strong in areas of supplementary nutrition distribution and immunization assistance, where standardized procedures exist. However, performance was weaker in preschool education and record maintenance, where lack of training and excessive workload were cited as reasons.

The overall findings resonate with Sankangoudar's (2019) study in Karnataka, which estimated AWW job performance at around 68 percent. The slightly higher levels in Palwal may be attributed to increased monitoring in Haryana or community-driven accountability mechanisms.

### **Challenges and Problems Faced by AWWs**

A recurring theme in both interviews and open-ended responses was the inadequacy of honorarium. Despite their wide-ranging responsibilities, AWWs continue to be treated as "voluntary workers" rather than salaried employees. The honorarium is not only low but also irregularly disbursed, causing financial insecurity. This was identified as the single largest source of dissatisfaction, echoing findings from Palriwala and Neetha (2010) and Thakare *et al.* (2011).

Excessive workload was another prominent issue. Workers are required to maintain numerous registers, conduct surveys, assist in government campaigns (such as immunization drives or census work), and manage preschool activities, often without adequate support staff. Many reported that record-keeping consumed disproportionate time, leaving little for direct engagement with children and mothers.

Infrastructure deficits were also highlighted. Several Anganwadi Centres lacked basic amenities such as toilets, safe drinking water, storage space, or adequate play materials. Some were housed in temporary or dilapidated buildings, compromising both safety and service quality. These findings resonate with Seema's (2001) and Datta *et al.*'s (2010) observations of infrastructural inadequacies across multiple states.



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Community participation was limited in some centres. While Panchayat members and Mahila Mandals were formally linked to ICDS, actual involvement was often minimal. Workers reported feeling isolated in mobilization efforts, with inadequate support from local leaders.

### ***Suggestions from Anganwadi Workers***

When asked for their suggestions, AWWs proposed a range of measures to improve their work environment and effectiveness. The most common were:

- Provision of accommodation facilities: 61.4 percent suggested that Anganwadi Centres should have proper buildings with adequate space and amenities.
- Recreational and learning materials: 43.2 percent emphasized the need for toys, charts, and teaching aids to make preschool education effective.
- Better salary and allowances: 39.8 percent advocated for revision of honorarium and introduction of allowances such as travel or health benefits.
- Basic amenities: 23.9 percent requested toilets, safe drinking water, and storage facilities at centres.
- Refresher training programs: 18.2 percent stressed the importance of regular training to update their knowledge and skills.

These suggestions are consistent with earlier research (Chaturvedi, 2008; Patil, 2007), which highlighted better remuneration, improved infrastructure, and continuous training as central to ICDS reform.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings underscore the paradox of ICDS implementation: while AWWs display commendable commitment and good performance, systemic weaknesses undermine the sustainability and quality of their work. The results affirm that job performance is not merely an individual attribute but shaped by structural conditions such as infrastructure, remuneration, training, and community support.

Comparative literature indicates that many of these challenges are persistent across states, suggesting a need for national-level policy reform. However, localized variations exist. In Palwal, for instance, relatively high performance levels despite constraints may reflect community accountability and workers' intrinsic motivation. Yet, without structural improvements, such motivation may wane over time.

From a policy perspective, the study highlights the importance of:

1. Recognizing AWWs as professional workers rather than volunteers, with appropriate salary structures.
2. Investing in infrastructure at Anganwadi Centres, ensuring safe and child-friendly environments.
3. Reducing administrative overload by streamlining record-keeping and providing digital tools.
4. Strengthening refresher training programs, tailored to local needs.
5. Promoting community participation, ensuring Panchayats and Mahila Mandals play active roles in monitoring and support.

Such measures would not only enhance the performance of AWWs but also improve the overall effectiveness of ICDS in tackling malnutrition and child welfare challenges in India.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme represents India's most ambitious effort to address the interlinked challenges of child malnutrition, health, and early childhood education. Central to this programme are Anganwadi Workers (AWWs), who function as the primary agents of delivery at the grassroots. This study, based on an analysis of 80 AWWs in Palwal district, Haryana, contributes to a micro-level understanding of their socio-personal characteristics, communication and psychological attributes, job performance, and the challenges they face.

The findings reveal that a large majority of AWWs (over 80 percent) are performing at good-to-excellent levels, despite serious systemic constraints. Their socio-demographic profile shows that most are middle-aged, moderately educated, and belong to socially and economically modest households. While they display medium levels of information-seeking behavior, favorable attitudes towards ICDS, and commendable commitment, their performance is undermined by inadequate infrastructure, excessive workload, and poor remuneration.

Crucially, the voices of AWWs themselves underline the reforms needed: improved honorarium and allowances, proper buildings with essential amenities, provision of teaching-learning material, and refresher training opportunities. These findings are consistent with national trends but also provide specific insights into the realities of ICDS implementation in Palwal.

### ***Policy Implications***

The study has several implications for policymakers, administrators, and practitioners engaged in rural development and child welfare:

1. **Recognition and Professionalization of AWWs:** The current status of AWWs as “voluntary workers” receiving a modest honorarium is incongruent with the wide-ranging responsibilities they shoulder. Upgrading their status to regular employees with structured salaries, career progression, and social security benefits would enhance motivation and reduce attrition.
2. **Infrastructure:** Development Many Anganwadi Centres continue to operate in inadequate facilities. The government should prioritize constructing child-friendly, safe, and adequately equipped centres. Provision of toilets, drinking water, storage, and learning materials must be standardized across centres.
3. **Training and Capacity Building:** Regular refresher training should be institutionalized, focusing equally on nutrition, health, and preschool education. Use of digital tools, audiovisual aids, and community-based learning can make training more effective.
4. **Streamlining Workload:** Excessive record-keeping has emerged as a key source of dissatisfaction. Simplification of registers and introduction of digital applications could reduce paperwork, allowing workers to focus more on service delivery and community engagement.
5. **Community Participation and Support:** Effective ICDS implementation requires active participation of Panchayati Raj Institutions, Mahila Mandals, and local community leaders. Encouraging community monitoring and ownership can improve accountability and relieve some burden on AWWs.
6. **Policy Coherence with National Goals:** Strengthening the ICDS is directly linked to India's commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),

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particularly Goal 2 (Zero Hunger) and Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being). Reforms in the functioning of AWWs will therefore contribute to both national and international development priorities.

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***Conflict of Interest***

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