



Implementation of Mahatma Gandhi's Ideology in Self Sustained Health Development of Rural Adult Girls

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ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi had a vision of India with self-sufficient and self-reliant villages. Nutritionists can do a lot by objectively thinking, planning and implementing nutritional education programs for rural people. Rural adult girls (RAG), 18-20 years old, are in the pre-marriage stage. They are would be wives, mothers & home managers. Improvement in health & nutrition of RAG can benefit themselves, their families & their progeny in future. The study aimed at imparting holistic nutrition education (HNE) based on ideology of Mahatma Gandhi to rural adult girls (RAG) and assessing its impact. Iron Deficiency Anemia (IDA), personal hygiene (PH), Nutritional Knowledge (NK) and dietary practices (DP) were assessed before and after imparting HNE. The RAG after HNE were able to improve IDA from 57.50 percent RAG having moderate IDA to 42.50 percent RAG achieving non-anemic status. Before HNE, 72.50 percent RAG had poor PH level whereas 55.00 percent RAG achieved good PH level after HNE. Excellent PH level was attained by as many as 22.50 percent RAG six months after HNE. NK of RAG improved significantly resulting in 72.50 percent RAG managing to achieve good NK level after HNE. Excellent level of NK was attained by 5.00 percent RAG for the first time in their lives. DP were at poor level in 65.00 percent RAG but HNE helped 77.50 percent RAG achieve good level of DP. No RAG (00.00 percent) remained in poor level of DP. HNE enabled RAG to attain self empowerment in health and nutrition giving practical results to implementation of ideology of Mahatma Gandhi regarding rural masses.

KEYWORDS : Mahatma Gandhi's ideology, rural adult girls, holistic nutrition education

INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi had a vision of India with self-sufficient and self-reliant villages¹. He desired and strived for upliftment of the underprivileged and the oppressed². Gandhiji had empowerment upliftment and wellbeing of the downtrodden on his agenda³. Sixty five years later, in the present times, Gandhiji's dreams remain largely unfulfilled. A lot needs to be done by the educated and the privileged people for the needy sections of society.

Mahatma Gandhi would, probably, have like to see practical encouragement being given to the rural people. According to his ideology, the urban educated people, especially the professionals, ought to help rural masses⁴. People in rural area, especially the poor and uneducated, need to be educated about practical aspects in their lives; in such a way that they become enlightened, self-reliant and achieve sustainable improvement in that particular aspect of their lives⁵.

Gandhiji would have liked to see better nutritional education and facilities especially for children and women, because children are tomorrow's India; and women create the next generation⁶. He would have expected different sections of professionals in the field of nutrition to actively participate, in their respective fields, to achieve the necessary nutritional objectives. In this regard, nutritionists need to formulate schemes and programs and implement them for nutritional upliftment of the underprivileged needy people. Such programs & schemes need to be relatively cost-effective, non labour-intensive, easy-to-implement and sustainable. As far as possible they should not be dependent on government's support or machinery. Nutritionists need to objectively think, plant and implement nutritional programs. Among the many population groups, children below 5 years, adult girls and pregnant-lactating women were found to be quite needy ones; based on data of many population studies and publications^{7,8,9,10,11}. Children below 5 years have high morbidity and mortality rates, but they also have many government schemes and programs operating for their benefits. Pregnant and lactating women also have multiple programs catering to their health and nutritional needs. Adult girls (18-20 years of age) are in the pre-marriage stage in their lives. They are the would-be wives and would be mothers. They create the next generation. Adult girls are would-be 'Home Managers'. Under-nutrition and iron deficiency anemia (IDA) are highly prevalent in adult girls^{12,13,14,15}. Improvement in health and nutrition of adult girls has triple benefits. Firstly, the girls themselves are benefited. Secondly, their families get the benefits and thirdly, their progeny in future gets benefited. The present study aimed at imparting holistic health and nutritional education to rural adult girls (18 to 20 years) and assessing its impact on them.

OBJECTIVES:

- To assess IDA, personal hygiene, nutritional knowledge and dietary practices in rural adult girls (RAG).
- To impart holistic nutritional education (HNE) based on Mahatma

Gandhi's ideology to the respondents.

- To ascertain impact of HNE.

METHODOLOGY:

From a larger pool of RAG, 40 girls with IDA were selected as respondents. Level of IDA was determined by standard biochemical test. Personal hygiene, nutritional knowledge and dietary practices were assessed with the help of questionnaire. The RAG were imparted holistic nutrition education (HNE) through bi-weekly sessions over a period of 2 months. The HNE was patterned according to the principles of Mahatma Gandhi's ideology related to women, nutrition, hygiene, dietary habits etc. Interactive sessions were conducted to solve individual queries. Impact of HNE was assessed after a period of 6 months. Hemoglobin level was also reassessed at the end of 6 months.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS -

IDA was highly prevalent in rural adult girls (RAG). Many facts and concepts related to personal hygiene (PH), nutritional knowledge (NK) and dietary practices (DP) were totally new for the respondents.

Table 1 – Prevalence of severity of IDA:

Sr. No.	Anemia Severity	Hb Level (gm percent)	Respondents (n = 40)			
			Before HNE		After HNE	
			Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
1	Mild	10-10.9	05	12.50	15	37.50
2	Moderate	07-9.9	23	57.50	06	15.00
3	Severe	04-6.9	12	30.00	02	05.00
4	Non Anemic	> 11	00	00.00	17	42.50

Moderate IDA was detected in 57.50 percent RAG. Mild and severe IDA was observed in 12.50 percent and 30.00 percent RAG respectively. 06 months after HNE; 42.50 percent RAG achieved non-anemic status. Only 15.00 percent and 05.00 percent RAG remained in the moderate and severe IDA state respectively.

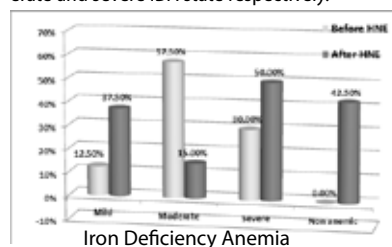


Fig.1 – Prevalence of severity of IDA

The HNE enabled the RAG to achieve improvement in IDA on their own, in a sustainable manner, just as Mahatma Gandhi had desired.

Table 2 – Impact of HNE on Personal Hygiene

Sr. No.	Level	Personal Hygiene			
		Before HNE		After HNE	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
1	Excellent	00	00.00	09	22.50
2	Good	04	10.00	22	55.00
3	Fair	07	17.50	06	15.00
4	Poor	29	72.50	03	07.50

Personal hygiene among the RAG was poor in as high as 72.50 percent RAG while none (00.00 percent) had excellent level. Post HNE; 55.00 percent RAG attained good personal hygiene level, while 22.50 percent achieved excellent level.

Table 3- Impact of HNE on Nutritional Knowledge

Sr. No.	Level	Nutritional Knowledge			
		Before HNE		After HNE	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
1	Excellent	00	00.00	02	05.00
2	Good	07	17.50	29	72.50
3	Fair	10	25.00	09	22.50
4	Poor	23	57.50	00	00.00

RAG had poor, fair and good nutritional knowledge level in 55.50 percent, 25.00 percent and 17.50 percent respectively. After HNE, 5.00 percent RAG attained excellent nutritional knowledge level while 72.50 percent achieved good level, showing significant impact. No RAG remained in the poor level.

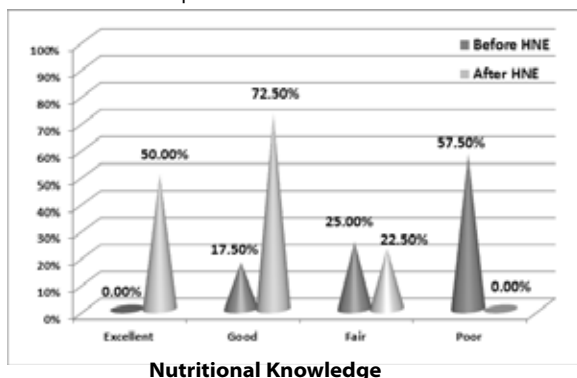


Fig.2 – Impact of HNE on Nutritional Knowledge

The HNE, emphasized on utilization of locally available foods and healthy dietary practices, as per Mahatma Gandhi’s ideology. Most of the RAG appreciated the same.

Table 4- Impact of HNE on Dietary Practices

Sr. No.	Level	Dietary Practices			
		Before HNE		After HNE	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
1	Excellent	00	00.00	02	05.00
2	Good	03	07.50	31	77.50
3	Fair	11	27.50	07	17.50
4	Poor	26	65.00	00	00.00

No RAG had excellent dietary practice level; while poor, fair and good dietary practice level was observed in 65.00 percent, 27.50 percent and 07.50 percent RAG respectively before HNE. Six months after the HNE was imparted; no RAG remained at poor level while 05.00 percent, 77.50 percent and 17.50 percent. RAG achieved excellent, good and poor dietary practice levels respectively.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS:

- Holistic nutritional educational programs; if planned and executed with target beneficiaries in mind, can make rural people enlightened, self reliant and empowered to sustain their health and nutrition on long term basis.
- Nutritionists can contribute a lot towards health and nutritional upliftment of rural society.
- Gandhiji’s ideology of rural development is practically needed and implementable even today; through holistic nutrition education targeted at health & nutrition on sustainable basis.
- Nutritionist can and should contribute concretely towards rural development as per Mahatma Gandhiji’s ideology resulting in low cost, specific and sustainable development and empowerment of needy and underprivileged rural masses for the benefit of Mother India.
- Rural adult girls if empowered for self achieved & self sustainable health and nutrition; can pass on the benefits to their families & progeny in future.
- Different population groups in rural areas, if helped through Mahatma Gandhi’s ideology by the urban educated; can achieve self reliance, empowerment and betterment in different fields in their lives.

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