

An article on
“Adolescent Girls in the Integrated Child
Development Services Programme:
A Proposed Scheme”
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Adolescent Girls in the ICDS Programme A Proposed Scheme

K.R. Venugopal

The adolescent girl has been the centre of much discussion over the past few years among those concerned with the upliftment of the quality of our human resources. Adolescent girls represent a crucial segment of our population; they will not only contribute to nearly half of our adult population in the next few years, but even more importantly, they will usher in the next generation. Eminent thinkers, the chief of them Dr. C. Gopalan, have on various occasions called for the comprehensive care of the adolescent girl and her active involvement in the country's development process.

In this communication, a very brief outline of a proposal of the Department of Women and Child Development (of the Ministry of Human Resource Development) for the inclusion of a programme of upliftment of adolescent girls as part of the total agenda of its ICDS operation is presented. The details of this proposal are available elsewhere and only its broad features are being indicated here.

It must be pointed out, at the outset, what is being proposed is only a small beginning, consistent with available resources. It is fully realised that the proposal that is envisaged is by no means the total answer to the problem. The upliftment of adolescent girls will call for programmes and actions in several sectors. The basic idea behind this proposal is to lay a foundation – however modest – for building of a corps (or brigade) of trained young motivated girl volunteers in the village who will not only benefit from a programme of education and training but will also contribute to community development, acting as the link (resource persons) between the services and the community.

The objective of the proposal is to improve the nutritional and health status of adolescent girls in our rural areas and to provide them the required literacy and numeracy skills through the nonformal stream of education and thereby to improve their qualities and competence as future citizens and as potential community leaders. As a first step towards achieving this objective, it is proposed to train and equip the girls: (a) to manage

the anganwadi centres in the village, working in close association with the trained anganwadi worker, and (b) to fully utilise the available facilities and to avail themselves of the benefits of the rural employment and antipoverty programmes.

In an average Indian village, it is estimated that there would be about 25 adolescent girls between the ages of 11 and 16 years. The selection of subjects for inclusion in the present programmes will be restricted to just three adolescent girls, keeping in view the resources and management constraints. The attempts in the initial stages is only to create a small nucleus of trained girl volunteers who will play a catalytic role in the community. Should the experiment succeed, the programme will be further extended. The girls selected in this project would be those belonging to households below the poverty line and who, for one reason or other, had dropped out of school and are, therefore, outside the formal school system.

The selected girls will receive in-service training at the anganwadi centre from the anganwadi worker, the ANM, the ICDS supervisor and the health assistant in all the activities of the anganwadi. On the basis of this in-service training which would include her accompanying these functionaries on their home visits, the adolescent girls will learn, over a period of two years, to become a fully equipped individual capable of managing an anganwadi on her own in the same manner as an anganwadi worker but in a more effective way as a leader so as to fully realise the ICDS objectives. Thus, the adolescent girl would be trained in all aspects of the anganwadi work performed both by the helper and the anganwadi worker such as management of the stores, organisation of the feeding and immunisation schedules, weighing of children, home visits and preschool activities for children, among others.

The adolescent girl would be invariably a member of the village mahila mandal so that she acts as an organic link between the anganwadi and the mahila mandal.

It should be fully understood that in

our pursuit of the objective of educating, training and enhancing the capability of the adolescent girl, no "incentive" like promise of future employment will be offered. The objective is to promote the ethic of self-reliance and voluntary work for community uplift, while improving the overall competence and skill of the girl thereby equipping her for safer motherhood and better citizenship.

The adolescent girl would be provided at the anganwadi centre itself a daily meal on the same scale as the pregnant woman or the nursing mother, namely, one that would provide 500 calories of energy and 20 grams of protein, throughout her period of training.

The adolescent girls selected in an anganwadi area would work in the anganwadi centre for two days in a week each, either on two continuous days or on any two days as is convenient to them and the anganwadi worker. The deciding factor would be the manner in which training to the adolescent girl could be imparted best, allowing for interactions with the ICDS supervisor, the health assistant and the ANM. This arrangement will still leave the girls free to carry out their household chores on the rest of the days for the benefit of the family.

Training

The training will be particularly geared to areas where the anganwadi worker is at present finding it difficult to focus her attention in the context of the goals of the ICDS programme namely:

- Concentrating on children below three years for all services relevant to them.
- Monitoring the growth of children both at home and at anganwadi centres.
- Nutrition education and care of pregnant women and nursing mothers.

Apart from such guidance as would be given to the adolescent girl by the ANM, the ICDS supervisor and the health assistant during their visits to the anganwadi, there would be an initial training programme for the adolescent girls through the ICDS functionaries at the circle headquarters of the ICDS supervisor for a period of three days and thereafter a one-day refresher course once in a quarter at the headquarters of the ICDS supervisor during the remaining period of the two-year programme for the adolescent girl.

The objective of training of the adolescent girl will thus be achieved through three different streams:

- On-the-spot continuing education (in-service training) by working alongside the anganwadi worker at the anganwadi centre with inputs from the ICDS supervisor, health assistant and ANM during their visits to the anganwadi centre.
- Training programme during the two-year period when the adolescent girl will be attached to the anganwadi, at the hands of the senior ICDS functionaries in a formal fashion.
- Reading, writing and numeracy through the nonformal education training available at the village level.

As part of the goal of generation of awareness in the adolescent girl of the various health and nutrition needs of adolescent girls as a group, the adolescent girl herself will be provided the following further facilities: a general health check-up every six months for treatment of minor ailments; deworming; prophylaxis measures against anaemia, goitre, vitamin deficiencies, etc., through appropriate provision of drugs; and referral to PHC/ District Hospital in case of acute need.

Monitoring And Evaluation

An appropriate system of monitoring of the progress of the programme of adolescent girls would be followed to ensure that the objectives of the scheme are achieved.

The programme will be under continuous review and will be modified on the basis of further experience.

A programme that involves just three adolescent girls in a village may seem small. Let us not forget, however, that the ICDS programme is to be extended to cover the entire country. Several thousands of villages and several thousands of adolescent girls will stand to benefit. Acting as the catalytic nucleus in each village, the adolescent girls involved in the programme, if properly trained and motivated, can contribute significantly to the qualitative upgradation and transformation of our village communities.

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