

Study on mid-day meal scheme

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In news- A new study on the intergenerational benefits of India's midday meal scheme published in Nature Communications recently.

Key findings of the study-

- As per the study, girls who had access to the free lunches provided at government schools, had children with a higher height-to-age ratio than those who did not.
- The study used representative data on cohorts of mothers and their children spanning 23 years.
- It has revealed that by 2016, the prevalence of stunting was significantly lower in areas where the mid scheme was implemented in 2005.
- The paper was authored by a researcher from the University of Washington and economists and nutrition experts at the International Food Policy Research Institute.
- It found that the midday meal scheme was associated with 13-32% of India's improvement in height-for-age z-scores (HAZ) between 2006 and 2016.
- It has also found that the linkages between midday meals and lower stunting in the next generation were stronger in lower socio-economic strata and likely work through women's education, fertility, and use of health services.
- According to it, more than one in three Indian children are stunted, or too short for their age, which reflects chronic undernutrition.
- The study has attempted a first-of-its-kind inter-generational analysis of the impacts of a mass feeding programme.
- The study tracked nationally representative cohorts of

mothers by birth year and socio-economic status to show how exposure to the scheme reduced stunting in their children.

- The findings of the study exacerbate concerns that the interruptions to schooling and to the midday meal scheme could have even longer term impacts, hurting the nutritional health of the next generation as well.

About midday meal scheme-

- It was **launched in 1995** to provide children in government schools with a free cooked meal with a minimum energy content of 450 kcal, but only 6% of girls aged 6-10 years had benefited from the scheme in 1999.
- **Tamil Nadu was the first state in India** to introduce this scheme, and in 2001, the Supreme Court asked all state governments to begin this programme in their schools within 6 months.
- **In 1925, a Mid Day Meal Programme was introduced for disadvantaged children in Madras Municipal Corporation.**
- By the mid 1980s three States viz. Gujarat, Kerala and Tamil Nadu and the UT of Pondicherry had universalized a cooked Mid Day Meal Programme with their own resources for children studying at the primary stage.
- By 2011, with an expansion in budget, and state implementation following a Supreme Court order, coverage had grown to 46%.
- The Midday Meal Scheme is covered by the National Food Security Act, 2013.
- The programme supplies free lunches on working days for children in primary and upper primary classes in government, government aided, local body, Education Guarantee Scheme, and alternate innovative education centres, Madarsa and Maqtabs supported under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, and National Child Labour Project

schools run by the Ministry of Labour.