

# India's integrated child development program increases educational attainment

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India is home to an estimated 114 million children under the age of five years—the largest population of this age group in the world. Undernutrition is common; thirty percent of all children and 45 percent of adolescent girls are underweight and 39 percent are stunted. Numerous studies have demonstrated that undernutrition during the first two to three years of life has short-term adverse consequences related to infectious diseases and child mortality and long-term impacts including poorer health, educational, and labor market outcomes.

In 1975, the Government of India introduced the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) program, the largest mother and child welfare program in the world, to provide supplementary nutrition, [preschool education](#), immunization, and health and nutrition education, among other health and development services. In 2015, ICDS served 102 million women and children.

Evidence of the long-term benefits of early-life interventions remains inadequate in developing countries. In a new study funded by Grand Challenges Canada through the Saving Brains project, researchers at CDDEP and the University of Pennsylvania evaluated the long-term impact of ICDS on schooling attainment of adolescents and adults in India. The research team led by CDDEP Senior Fellow Arindam Nandi reviewed the National Family Health Survey 2005-2006, a nationally representative, cross-sectional survey, to obtain data on [socioeconomic status](#) and educational attainment for the members of 109,041 households. The researchers then combined novel information on the year an ICDS center opened in each village or city ward with birth year and migration status of each individual to determine whether an individual was exposed to the ICDS program during the first 3 years of life.

The researchers found that men aged 15 to 54 years and women aged 15 to 49 years who were

fully exposed to a local ICDS center during the first three years of life completed 0.1-0.3 more grades of schooling than those who were not exposed. The effect was stronger among women than men.

"Considering the high levels of child undernutrition in India, ICDS is one of the most important nutrition programs in the world both in terms of scope and coverage. This is the first national study to show that the program can bring substantial long-term schooling benefits," said Nandi.

The study titled, "The Impact of a National Early Childhood Development Program on Future Schooling Attainment: Evidence from ICDS in India" was published in February 2019 in the journal *Economic Development and Cultural Change*.

**More information:** Arindam Nandi et al, The Impact of a National Early Childhood Development Program on Future Schooling Attainment: Evidence from ICDS in India, *Economic Development and Cultural Change* (2019). [DOI: 10.1086/703078](https://doi.org/10.1086/703078)

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