

## 'MATERNITY SCHEME REACHES ONLY ONE-THIRD OF BENEFICIARIES'

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Government policies & interventions for development in various Sectors and issues arising out of their design & implementation incl. Housing

A vital programme to support lactating mothers and pregnant women by compensating them for loss of wages during their pregnancy has been able to reach less than a third of the eligible beneficiaries, researchers who extrapolated from data obtained under the Right to Information (RTI) Act said.

Almost 61% of beneficiaries registered under the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) between April 2018 and July 2019 (38.3 lakh out of the total 62.8 lakh enrolled) received the full amount of Rs. 6,000 promised under the scheme, according to an RTI reply. However, the researchers, who are development economists, assert that since the scheme failed to reach at least 49% of all mothers who would have delivered their first child (an estimated total of 123 lakh for 2017 according to the researchers), the scheme was able to benefit only 31% of its intended beneficiaries.

The PMMVY is targeted only at women delivering their first child. A cash amount of Rs. 6,000 is transferred to the bank account of the beneficiary in three instalments upon meeting certain conditions including early registration of pregnancy, having at least one ante-natal check-up and registration of child birth.

Given the stipulated conditions, the scheme brings under its ambit 23% of all births and pays full benefits to a mere 14% of all births, which was at 270.5 lakh for 2017. The meagre reach calculated is also an overestimate, asserts Ritika Khera, Assistant Professor, IIM Ahmedabad. The actual number of beneficiaries would have been higher for 2018-2019, she contends, as the figure increases from one year to the next.

The data extrapolated from the RTI reply is also consistent with a survey coordinated by three development economists Jean Dreze, Anmol Somanchi and Ms. Khera. The survey was conducted to assess the implementation of the scheme. The survey team covered a district each in six States — Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Odisha — in 2019 to interview women and inspect anganwadis. A total of 706 women were interviewed, including 342 pregnant and 364 lactating women.

### **Inadequate awareness**

The study found that only 50% of pregnant women and 57% of nursing women surveyed were eligible for the scheme. It also throws light on the need for higher awareness among the pool of beneficiaries — only 66% of pregnant women and 69% of nursing women knew about the scheme. Only 8% of pregnant women and 23% of nursing mothers received some benefits.

Several factors impeded proper implementation of the programme that aims to fight malnutrition among children. These include an application form of about 23 pages, a slew of documents such as mother-child protection card, Aadhaar card, husband's Aadhaar card and bank passbook aside from linking their bank accounts with Aadhaar.

The requirement to produce the husband's Aadhaar card results in excluding women who may be living with men they are not married to, single mothers and those who may be staying at their

natal home. Women must also have the address of their marital home on their Aadhaar card, which often results in newly weds being either left out or forced to go from door-to-door when pregnant and needing rest and care.

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