



Community Health Social Work as a Practice of Enhancing Child Capabilities in Kerala

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Abstract

Amartya Sen (1980) emphasized that true resource development arises through improving access to education and healthcare. Building on this view, child support development focuses on equipping children with skills and competencies through targeted interventions that foster their overall health, empowerment, and capacity for achievement. In Kerala, this child-centred empowerment is achieved through comprehensive public health interventions that address children's special needs and promote equitable access to health services and information.

Two notable community-based programs—the *Kudumbashree* initiative and *Arogya Kerala*—exemplify this approach. *Kudumbashree*, a women's empowerment and poverty eradication program, enhances child welfare indirectly by improving women's economic independence and social participation. Through microfinance, skill development, and entrepreneurship, women gain confidence and leadership, supporting not only their families but also the growth of their community. Success stories include women-led enterprises such as small-scale farms and handicraft workshops that stimulate local economies. *Arogya Kerala*, supported by government and NGO collaborations, ensures child health by providing accessible healthcare and integrating community participation. Both programs are sustained through state funding, NGO support, and community contributions, reflecting the strength of participatory governance in Kerala.

Public health services play a pivotal role in reducing barriers and enhancing opportunities for children and families. Programs such as the *Child Development Plan*, *Our Responsibility for Children*, and the *National Health Mission* embody Kerala's community health model by promoting participatory management and child protection. This study examines the role of Community Health and Social Workers (CHSWs) in these initiatives, highlighting their contributions to health education, counselling, and social support services. Overall, community-driven interventions have broken cycles of poverty, improved child well-being, and advanced human development. However, challenges remain, including resource limitations and cultural disparities. Future directions emphasize multi-sectoral collaboration, technological integration, continuous research, and supportive policy frameworks to strengthen Kerala's child empowerment ecosystem (Sen, 1980).

Keywords: Community Health Social Work, Child Capability Enhancement, Social Work Interventions, Challenges, and Future Possibilities.

Introduction

Kerala represents a significant case of bad development in the economic and social dimensions, but excellent health. Kerala is remarkably distinct among the Indian states regarding its health indicators, largely comparable with those in developed countries. These robust parameters include low fertility rates, high sex ratios, infant mortality rates, and increased life expectancy. However, it is noticeable that Kerala's further development and health-related MDGs cannot be achieved without considering social conditions.

Kerala has also initiated health policies and invested heavily in social networks, governance, planning, and quality care at all levels. All of these efforts have influenced children's health, well-being, and education enormously. Kerala has been a pioneer in promoting policies and programs for the empowerment of children from disadvantaged sections and women in India. All these are provided by legislation and

policies of the government regarding social security, improvement of health services, nutrition, educational services, and governmental provision. Noted from the 3rd National Health Survey, Kerala stands at the top with the heading 'Delivery', since every delivery takes place under health facilities. The state also has the lowest infant mortality and stunted children below five years of age. The institutions also maintain the highest academic excellence in the country. This is a notion developed from the wide economic theory developed by economists like Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum.

The capabilities approach underlines the value of measuring well-being in terms of current capabilities and the freedom of people to have meaningful lives. Children can grow in all dimensions, including education, health, nutrition, social welfare, protection from exploitation and violence, participation in cultural activities, sports, health conditions,

and information and technology. Dr. Amartya Sen, in 1980, argued that "capital development can be attained through multiple approaches, including enhancing access to services such as education and health care, among others." A wide range of interventions and methodologies is available to enhance the skills and competencies of children. These include underlying principles of community development. It is health and welfare care aiming to improve the lives and well-being of individuals and communities while pursuing determinants of health, equity, and community involvement. Health services can serve as a powerful avenue through which children and their families can gain access to resources that empower children to overcome difficulties and realize their full potential. This is one critical area that professionals should work toward enhancing both people's health and well-being and communities. Active community involvement can be channeled to these programs so that it directs attention to specific needs and challenges these children face in Kerala, such as discovering and developing their skills. Child Talent Welfare aims to provide a supportive atmosphere that aids children in developing, learning, and growing.

Review of Literature

The research titled "Promoting Child Health through Community Health Work in Kerala" by Thomas S and Rajan I. (2015) considers the role of community health workers in promoting child health outcomes within the Kerala region. The study emphasizes an all-round developmental view of children's physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development. Moreover, it presents how interventions-educative health, counseling, and support systems, can be beneficial for promoting children's capabilities for growth. This text further establishes the need for cooperation between families, schools, and clinical services to promote a healthy environment for children. Empowering Children in Kerala: Community Health Action is about the program for the empowerment of children in Kerala from the local health perspective. This study examines the empowerment framework of Amartya Sen, focusing on children's engagement in decision-making activities related to their health and well-being. It establishes how community health workers are important in safeguarding children by defending their rights, providing information to them, equipping them, and encouraging their participation in care and mental health services. Kumar, A. and Nair, S. The article titled (2018) 'Children in Kerala: The role of social welfare' lays the essence of the importance of dealing with community health from the perspective of both community health and psychosocial requirements in the context of Kerala. It discussed mental health problems of children related to anxiety, depression, and trauma while explaining the techniques provided by community health workers to consult, aid, and refer people to appropriate services. This review highlights the importance of early detection and intervention to support positive child mental health outcomes. Collaboration and partnership in community health initiatives for children: Kerala (2019) provides necessary insights into community health initiatives for children, as it focuses on how collaboration among social workers, families, educational institutions, health facilities, and governmental organizations is essential for providing all-rounded services for children. This research considers successful collaborations and outlines key factors that make for effective partnerships, such as the stimulation of effective communication, collaboration, and common goals. Nair, S. and Thomas, A. (2020) ^[15] discussed

the challenges and opportunities of working with community health workers while working with children in Kerala. Resource shortages, cultural issues, and the need for knowledge and understanding were found as key challenges. Another area of discussion concerning the article involves the scope for improvement, including the integration of technology in service delivery, increased preventive measures, strengthened partnerships with stakeholders, and the need for continuous improvement and feedback for performance.

Objectives

- To understand the major Interventions of Community Health Social Work for enhancing Child Capabilities.
- To realize the outcome of child capability enhancement in Kerala.
- To learn the Challenges Faced by Community Health Social Workers.
- To understand the Future Prospects of Community Health Social Work in Child Development.

Practices in Community Health Social Work

Community health work is a niche area of social work that seeks to contribute to improved health conditions in communities by participating in decision-making processes concerning health, advocating for health equality, and implementing prevention initiatives that strengthen individual, family, and community health capabilities. Involvement between different stakeholders, healthcare providers, community-based organizations, and policymakers is seen as essential in designing and implementing interventions targeted at reducing the social, economic, and environmental determinants that influence health (Mapp, SC, and Hutchinson, AM - 2016). The community health initiatives in Kerala focus on child empowerment, mainly through the promotion of their health, development, and rights. The main practices aimed at helping the children of Kerala include:

- **Early Childhood Development:** In the state of Kerala, community health workers are doing their level best to achieve this goal because it focuses on the physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development initiatives that help in early childhood development. Collaborative work is undertaken with doctors, teachers, and parents for details on child development, parenting support, and improvement in services for early childhood.
- **Health and Nutrition:** Community health workers play a significant role in addressing issues of malnutrition in children and promoting growth and development. Their interventions include working together with families, community organizations, and healthcare providers to educate parents on the importance of proper nutrition, breastfeeding, and proper feeding habits. They also ensure that children have access to basic health care services, which include vaccinations and routine checks.
- **Child Protection and Advocacy:** Kerala State Community Health Workers advocate children's rights and protection. They collaborate with child protection agencies, law enforcement, and other stakeholders in preventing and responding to cases of mistreatment, neglect, and abuse of children. Some of their duties include sensitizing people on the rights of children, counseling, and providing support services for those at risk, as well as ensuring that the children get good quality education and vocational training opportunities. They interact with schools, government departments, and civil

society organizations to ensure that the child has a chance to be educated in a child-friendly environment. They also advocate other projects channeled into developing children's skills, such as vocational training or non-academic engagements.

- **Child Mental Health and Well-being** Community health workers in Kerala provide children with counseling, guidance, and referral services for emotionally or behaviorally distressed children. Collaboration with schools and other agencies to reinforce sound mental health promotion, prevent bullying, and build protection of children.
- **Participation and Empowerment of Children:** In Kerala, social workers engage children in the decision-making processes that impact their lives. They support the engagement of children by advocating for youth leadership, creating spaces for children to voice their thoughts, and advocating for children's rights within family, community, and school environments. Further, they strive to strengthen child protection mechanisms to allow the disclosure of maltreatment or access to services when needed. Preparation should take place for such concerns, especially with child health. These experts work together with local agencies, community members, and parents to design and implement plans meant for the protection, health, and development of children. These programs will focus on preventing problems like sending children to work and into marriage, and increasing the access of disadvantaged children to education and health services.

Public Health Social Work Interventions that Promote Capability Building among Children

Capability building regarding public health social work interventions for community health workers has much to play in building capabilities with various interventions and strategies that can be applied to children. These include services, among others,

Health service and support: Community health workers should educate the children and their families on many issues related to health education, such as nutrition, hygiene, and disease prevention, as well as promote healthy attitudes and lifestyles in the community. In particular, some of the interventions that a community health worker might use to support children through education and support are:

- **Health Education:** Community health workers should carry out workshops for the education of children on a wide array of subjects, ranging from nutrition and hygiene to physical activity. Such workshops will enable children to expand their knowledge and understanding of health-related subjects through activities and visual aids, along with relevant information responsive to their age. Some children or youth are trained to educate others about healthy behavior and health. Such interventions can support positive changes in behavior and health promotion in children. These services can be interactive activities, competitions, or performances that promote children's learning on health-related issues and healthy behaviors. And the skills in the use of medical information. These services include education, educational material, and resources for enhancing children's health literacy. Activities, discussions, and projects. These organizations promote healthy behaviors, leadership, and peer support in children.
- **Connecting Children to Services:** Community health

workers will connect children and families to the community services and assets that support their health and well-being. This includes connecting families with doctors, health services, and other supporting agencies.

- **Health Care Access:** Community workers will ensure access to health care for children and families. They can connect families with doctors, clinics, and hospitals for regular check-ups, immunizations, and appropriate care. They are uniquely designed to meet an expansive scope of needs, including housing, food security, income support, and other essential services that will bring children's and parents' full well-being and development. Social workers can assist parents make coordination in coordinating education; provide counseling if a need exists; and even liaise with special education programs where necessary. Community health workers connect families to prevention and early intervention services to prevent problems from getting worse. This will promote the health of children, as well as reduce violence. Families can be mobilized readily with coordination or resource provision, such as coordination with emergency services, temporary shelter, or a direct link to disaster relief organizations.
- **Community Engagement:** Involvement in community organizations and services is another strategy that a social worker needs to embrace. Social workers facilitate partnerships with local resources to build support for families and children. They enable children and their families to advocate for themselves, and they empower them with information about what can help them succeed. Advocates for the rights of health for children are community health workers. They offer support, services, and information so they can understand how to navigate this process and access what should be of service to them. Community health workers advocate to remove physical problems and influence the adoption of policies that promote healthy child development. The primary actors involved in such activities are mental health professionals and community health workers. They provide mental health services, counseling, and treatment for cases affected by mental health disorders and their families.

Community health workers have also been involved in community outreach and advocacy to further help eliminate the stigma of mental health problems and promote access to mental health services. They understand that emotional health is as important for the children as it is for their caregivers and often helps families gain access to a damaged brain. They can link families up with counseling services, support groups, or mental health professionals. Some ways of engaging in effective parenting education, healthy families, and connecting families with community resources and support services can facilitate mental health and well-being. The service mainly educates communities, offers them community support, and acts as a link between the community and statutory health services. Responsibilities may include health education, disease prevention, maternal and child health promotion, health screening, and assistance in obtaining medical resources.

Outcome of Child Capability Development in Kerala

Support for Children's Outcomes based on the idea: Investment in children's development is an essential step towards a prosperous and thriving future for our society. Social Development in the state of Kerala is manifestly

renowned through high literacy rates, better health indicators, and gender equality. However, there are challenges in the state that need support for children.

- a) **Human Capital Development:** Human capital investment in the region. Human capital is basically about the knowledge, skill sets, health, and other resources possessed by people, which can be used to help the business as well as human development. Kerala invests in its future workforce and citizens by developing the health, education, and overall well-being of children. By enabling children, Kerala can gain a skilled and productive workforce that nurtures innovation, entrepreneurship, and sustainable development. Investment in the support of children in Kerala is greatly meaningful for human capital development. The investment in education, health, intellectual development, innovation, justice, and security laid for a skilled, healthy, well, and productive workforce leading to economic growth, prosperity, and stability in this region.
- b) **Breaking the Cycle of Poverty:** Supporting children from economically disadvantaged groups helps break the cycle of poverty. People can help overcome the obstacles and limitations associated with poverty by investing in the education, health, and overall development of children. Quid pro can help children overcome obstacles, and greater chances can be pursued with quality education, healthcare, nutrition, and more. This reduces inequality and promotes social cohesion, enabling the children to come out from the limitations of poverty and build a better future for themselves and the next generations.
- c) **Sustainable Development:** Development of children's potential and children's conformity to the principles of sustainable development. Through investment in education, health, and general well-being, Kerala ensures that future students have knowledge, skills, and abilities that ensure protection for the social as well as economic environment. This places the country on a promising road to sustainable growth and prosperity. We nurture an equitable society dedicated to human capital development, connectivity, long-term thinking, awareness of environmental protection, and cooperation to help create a sustainable, sustainable, and integrated society that can support the present and future generations.
- d) **Social cohesion and Inclusion:** To enhance the capacity of children in Kerala to foster social cohesion and inclusion. Investment in poor and disadvantaged children from minority, ethnic, or economically disadvantaged families can help reduce inequality and advance justice in Kerala. It is about a more inclusive society in which each child gets an equal opportunity to grow and take part in the advances of the state.
- e) **Health and Well-being:** Improving capacities among children in Kerala directly influences their health and well-being. Improved access to healthcare, nutrition, sanitation, and the environment makes children healthy, stronger, and consequently better prepared. It helps in decreasing the burden of disease, improving the quality of life, and providing long-term reductions in healthcare costs.

One of the Indian states that has put in place various community-based practices for the enhancement of child development is Kerala. The interferences are considered to

enhance and uplift the well-being of children in the state.

Kerala, a state in India, has implemented a few community-based practices as an intervention for improved child development. These interferences work towards child welfare and development in the state. Here are some poignant examples of successful community-based interventions for child development in Kerala:

- **ICDS Early Childhood Development Centre:** ICDS Early Childhood Development Centres are the heartlands for underprivileged children. Hence, these focus on children concerning interactive learning experiences, nutrition, and healthcare with the concept of keeping it as psychological and physical development.
- **National Health Mission:** The NHM immunization program in Kerala has increased vaccination coverage. This has curbed bacterial resistance and improved the general health of children. Another major aim is to improve the quality of care provided by the nursing staff at all levels by strengthening the capacity of various health professionals.
- **Our Responsibility for Children (ORC):** ORC is a well-established Integrated Child Protection Programme (ICP) initiative in Kerala. 'Our Responsibility to Children' campaign is solely targeted at creating awareness regarding the very essence of children's rights and care. It empowers the communities to participate and contribute towards ushering in measures that favor children. ORC identifies and assesses differences and other disabilities in children and integrates them into the essence of life through life skills training, positive thinking, prevention of risks, and promoting guidance and good parenting. ORC managed eventualities such as behavioral, emotional, academic, health, and psychological issues in the children in the study.

Thus, this program addressing child care facilitates the democratization of the services in the community, wherein all children will achieve better development outcomes.

Evidence-based interventions have a considerable role in malnutrition in Kerala. Priorities' nutrition interventions underpin additional resources; Monitoring and surveillance of nutrition play dynamic roles in governance articulated with international recognition responses to empower people to help in solving local problems, providing a formal and informal space for community participation, and building platforms.

Child Protection: The Community Health Social Work program works with law enforcement agencies, civil society organizations, and communities toward creating a safe and protective environment for children. In a child abuse, neglect, or material exploitation situation, Child Protection Services under the ICPS are taking successful steps. These interventions ensure the well-being and safety of needy children by providing them with support, rehabilitation, and legal services. Some interventions include raising access to and effectiveness of child protection services, awareness of children's rights, status, and protection issues in India, and promotion and protection of children from harm, exposure, and abuse.

Community outcomes are being improved in Kerala through effective initiatives. Thus, they would serve as valuable insights for informing policy and practice. Yet further challenges still exist, including funding and support for NGOs, or efforts to combine capacity building and community education on drinking water. The question of the sustainability of these approaches needs further investigation,

while there are additional areas of invitational research that continue to present themselves.

Challenges Faced by Community Health Social Workers

- a) **Limited Resources:** Community health social workers in Kerala often ratio the constraints of their profession with factors like poor funding and personnel scarcity, as well as access to basic supplies and equipment (Prasad, 2018) ^[20]. Such limitations obstruct their efforts to provide comprehensive services and interventions in promoting child capabilities.
- b) **High Workload:** Community health social workers in Kerala may face an immense workload owing to large populations and diversity in issues they address. The demand for their services often exceeds their available capacity, leading to challenges in managing caseloads effectively and delivering service interventions in a timely way (Thomas & Manoj, 2021) ^[25].
- c) **Lack of Awareness and Stigma:** There may be a degree of unawareness and ignorance concerning the role and importance played by community health social workers among the community members, which may, unfortunately, lead to misinterpretation, stigma, and the refusal to ask for help or allow social work services, mostly in the context of mental health (Raju *et al.*, 2018) ^[23].
- d) **Cultural and Linguistic Barriers:** Kerala is a politically, culturally, and linguistically diverse state. Community health social workers have to face challenges in communicating and understanding people owing to language barriers and cultural differences. This may impair their ability to provide culturally sensitive and contextually appropriate services (Krishnan & Mathew, 2020) ^[7].
- e) **Limited Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** The collaboration among different stakeholders, like other health professionals, educators, and child protection agencies, is perceived as relevant to comprehensive child capability enhancement. Community health social Workers in Kerala may find it challenging to develop and/or maintain effective collaborations among several professional organizations, affecting coordination and the continuum of care (Kuriakose & Chacko, 2021) ^[10].
- f) **Geographical Accessibility:** Kerala has urban and rural areas, with community health social workers facing challenges in reaching remote and marginalized communities. Limited transportation infrastructure, difficult terrain, and geographical dispersion can hinder their ability to provide services and interventions to children and families in need (Nair & George, 2019) ^[14].

Future Prospects of Community Health Social Work in Child Development

- a) **Raising Awareness and Taking Part:** This requires raising the awareness of all stakeholders about the need for community health in the support of child development and health. Integration of the work of social workers into health services, schools, and community organizations would be increased, thus giving them the recognition and proper clearance for optimal coordination, resource allocation, morale, and support for community health workers (Kumar and Singh, 2020) ^[9].
- b) **Holistic Approaches:** Child development opportunities in community health social work will be oriented toward addressing other facets of a child's life using a holistic

approach. Social work mostly adopts a strengths-based perspective and looks at the ecological perspective, whereby the methods implemented must consider the individual needs of the child within the larger influence of family, community, and societal factors (Prasad, 2018) ^[20].

- c) **Technological Standardization:** Technology in the culture of a healthy society should be embraced. Thanks to telemedicine and mobile applications, access to remote counseling, outreach, and provision of services is now efficient, safe, and professional, especially in resource-poor and troublesome areas (Thomas & Manoj, 2021) ^[25]. In addition, technology aids in data collection, tracking, and evaluating programs' ability to support child development.
- d) **Evidence-informed Practice:** These prospects for community health social work in child development mean that there will continue to be a focus on evidence-informed practice. More than before, the social worker continues to rely on research and evaluation to determine interventions and ensure effectiveness. It entails the identification of evidence and discussion of leading programs and interventions that show positive outcomes for child development (Kuriakose & Chacko, 2021) ^[10].
- e) **Advocacy and Policy Development:** Community health workers can offer support for policies and programs influencing child development. They can participate in policy development, implementation, and evaluation at local, regional, and national levels. Areas such as child protection, child development, mental health, and education are further innovations for building support for children (Raju *et al.*, 2018) ^[23].
- f) **Professional Development and Capacity Building:** The future of public health depends on continued professional development and capacity building in child development. Training, workshops, and conferences can help enhance the knowledge base and skills of social workers so that they can respond to emerging problems and implement new practices (Krishnan and Mathew, 2020) ^[7].

Conclusion

Community health practices in Kerala lead to the development of a culture that works to support children's causes. Social workers in Kerala used various partnership and collaboration schemes to promote the health, development, and rights of children. Community health workers run programs for early childhood development, such as providing support to parents, training early intervention services, identifying childhood health issues, nutrition education, immunization requirements, and provision of medical care. Health, community culture, child protection, and advocacy around all these form the core of community health in Kerala. Social workers, in coordination with different stakeholders, report child abuse and urge responses. Messages to raise awareness of children's rights are sent across, as are counseling and support services to children at risk, to ensure an appropriate response and appropriate services. Education and skill development form the priority of social workers in Kerala. They strive for a child-friendly learning environment, ensuring quality education and necessary measures to inculcate the skills and talents in children. The children's well-being and development are the focus. Communication with, providing support to schools, creating a healthy atmosphere, and being here are field strategies. The key things in which he/she can help in the participation of the

child in the decision for which attitude is being created. Capitalize on addressing issues of child health (developing areas such as prevention of child labor, child protection, promotion of child education, and healthcare access) with the aid of others. In conclusion, the health community leadership of Kerala subscribes to children's empowerment. Social workers in Kerala work to create a positive environment for every child to develop, succeed, and reach their full potential by ensuring that children's needs are met, their rights are respected, and that they receive necessary support and resources.

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