

State's youngest get the least funding

• [Divya Gandhi](#)



Children aged 0-6 years represent most critical period when foundations of health are laid: study

In a State where malnutrition has brought sharp focus on the plight of young children, this is another cause for concern. Children between 0-6 years appear to be at the bottom of the State's priority list for funding, receiving just 9 per cent of public expenditure, although they constitute a third of the total population of children in Karnataka.

In all major sectors — whether education, nutrition or health care — the investment has been poor for this age group, says an analysis of Karnataka's budget and expenditure figures for 2001-2014 by the Centre for Budget and Policy Studies and UNICEF.

Expenditure has been particularly low (almost zero) for legal and institutional provisions, such as juvenile justice measures, children's court, Child Line and child labour assistance, says the report, which will be officially released on Thursday.

"Low expenditure for 0-6 year olds is worrying given that this is the age that determines not only child survival rates but also their future quality of life as adults. Research has clearly revealed that children's cognitive development and educational performance in later years is largely dependent on their pre-school training, and adult's health also draws significantly from their nutrition and health status as an infant and a baby."

The poorest households appear to have "very limited access" to health or nutrition, or education services, especially for 0-6 year olds. While Karnataka's total public spending on children has increased significantly over the decade — from Rs. 382,500 lakh in 2001-02 to Rs. 2,581,233 lakh in 2013-14 — these figures are "less remarkable" in relative terms to price rise.

The study looked at five "core" criteria: education (including sports, hostels, libraries, teacher education), health (services for mothers, prevention of diseases, access to safe drinking water and sanitation); nutrition and food security (midday meals, anganwadis); institutional care (orphanages, counselling and support services) and legal and institutional provisions (State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, juvenile justice measures, children's court, Child Line, child labour assistance).

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