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Assessing the performance of the Public Distribution System in Haryana: A District-Level Study

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Abstract

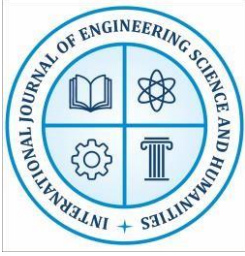
This paper presents an empirical evaluation of food security status in Haryana through the lens of socio-demographic characteristics and Public Distribution System (PDS) outreach. Using a primary sample of 480 households across four districts of Haryana (Charkhi Dadri, Hisar, Nuh, Panchkula), the study explores the effectiveness of ration card distribution, PDS accessibility, and the socio-economic vulnerabilities affecting food sufficiency. The analysis integrates with percentage and frequency distributions, categorized by age, gender, income, caste, and other demographic traits. Findings reveal that while PDS coverage is nearly universal, nearly 20% of households still face hunger and insufficient meals, emphasizing the need for enhanced entitlements and nutritional diversity. The paper concludes with policy suggestions aimed at improving targeting efficiency, household-level adequacy and improve transparency in the delivery of rations etc.

Keywords: Food security, Public Distribution System, Haryana, socio-demographic, ration cards, PDS performance, poverty

1. Introduction

Food security has emerged as a critical area of policy concern in India, particularly given the country's paradox of abundant food production and persistent hunger. As defined by the Food and Agriculture Organization (1996), food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food. In India, food security has been addressed through a series of policy initiatives, primarily the Public Distribution System (PDS), which was institutionalized during the 1940s and strengthened post-Green Revolution. With the enactment of the National Food Security Act (NFSA) in 2013, the focus shifted to rights-based provisioning. Yet, critics such as Kotwal *et al.* (2011) highlight inefficiencies in identification, leakage, and nutritional adequacy. Haryana, though relatively prosperous in agriculture, shows sharp inter-district variations in poverty, literacy, and access to entitlements, making it a valuable case study for micro-assessment.

Food security remains a pressing concern for India, particularly among vulnerable and low-income households. As per Dreze and Khera (2013), the Public Distribution System (PDS) has



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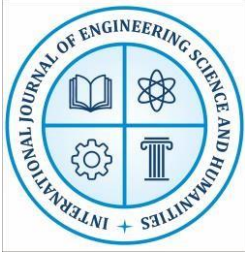
played a critical role in improving food access post the National Food Security Act (NFSA), yet major disparities exist in states like Haryana where development indicators vary regionally. According to Bhuyan & Sahoo (2020), the PDS's ability to reduce food insecurity is undermined by structural inefficiencies and low household-level targeting. In states with agrarian economies, Swaminathan (2020) argues that hidden hunger is prevalent despite administrative coverage. Khera (2011) emphasized that community monitoring and grievance redress mechanisms can bridge this gap.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought food insecurity to the forefront, especially among low-income and vulnerable households in India. Lockdowns, job losses, and migration shocks disrupted livelihoods and access to food, intensifying hunger even among those previously food secure. According to the Global Hunger Index (2022), India ranked 107 out of 121 countries, highlighting the severity of the crisis. During the pandemic, the Government of India launched the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY), under which 80 crore beneficiaries were provided 5 kg of free food grains per person per month in addition to their normal PDS entitlements (Ministry of Consumer Affairs, 2022). This emergency measure significantly helped to prevent large-scale hunger. However, once the scheme ended in December 2022, concerns re-emerged regarding the adequacy of regular PDS provisions. As of 2024, under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), the government continues to supply free food grains to nearly 81.35 crore people, covering about 66% of the population, but gaps in nutritional value, household-level adequacy, and coverage among the most deprived still persist (Press Information Bureau, 2024). In Haryana, where all surveyed households reported possessing ration cards, about 20% still experienced hunger, skipped meals, or lacked dietary diversity, revealing that administrative coverage alone does not guarantee food sufficiency. This study is therefore important as it provides micro-level, district-specific insights into how food security is experienced on the ground and evaluates whether PDS is meeting its intended goals in addressing hunger and vulnerability in Haryana.

2. Literature Review

The Public Distribution System (PDS) has been one of the most important government schemes for reducing hunger and improving food access in India and other developing countries. In countries like Bangladesh, Cambodia and Pakistan, such schemes have also helped bring more girls into school by improving household food security (Ahmed *et al.*, 2009). In India, the PDS has been active for over fifty years. It started as a system for everyone but later became targeted mainly at poor households, especially after 1997. Jha (1992) found that many people who were not poor were also getting these benefits, which meant the support was not reaching the people who needed it the most.

India has become self-sufficient in food production, but many people still suffer from poor nutrition. Studies by Khera (2011) and Radhakrishna & Subbarao (1997) showed that while people



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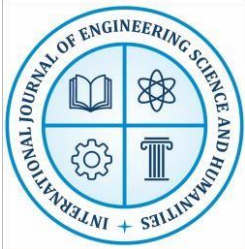
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had access to food, the quality and variety were not enough to meet their nutrition needs. Sharma (2012) pointed out that the PDS worked better in southern states like Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, but it did not perform well in many northern states due to problems like corruption and poor management. Jha *et al.* (2013) also said that although food subsidies are important, their benefits often don't reach the truly poor and the study found that both poor and non-poor people were getting benefits, which made the program less effective. Gulati and Saini (2015) found that leakage rates can approach 40% in some states, significantly lowering the quantity of food that reaches the impoverished. Poor monitoring systems, a lack of accountability, and entrenched interests among intermediaries and Fair Price Shop owners are the causes of corruption and leakage.

Other researchers looked at price and quality issues in the PDS. Ramaswami and Balakrishnan (2002) said that as long as market prices are higher than subsidized prices, people will keep using PDS. But if prices are the same, people may choose better quality food from markets. They also said that the PDS suffers from poor control over prices and food quality. There are also major problems with how the PDS is run. Many studies have found that a large amount of food meant for the poor never reaches them. Jena (2002) said that 36% of wheat, 31% of rice, and 23% of sugar were diverted from the system. Khera (2011) found that 44% of grains were diverted in 2007–08. Mishra (2008) found that only 42% of subsidized grains reached the BPL families. Parikh (1994) and Jena (2002) also said that the cost of transferring one rupee of income to a poor person through PDS was very high more than Rs. 4 had to be spent to achieve this.

Other studies focused on how personal and family characteristics affect food security. Bhuyan & Sahoo (2017) found that people from Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs), those with low education and those working in informal jobs are more likely to suffer from food insecurity even if they are part of the PDS. Similarly, among religion Islam is more food insecure. Gaiha, Jha and Kulkarni (2010) also said that simply having access to subsidized food is not enough unless families also have enough income and knowledge about proper nutrition. In short, while the PDS has helped many people get food at low prices, it has not always reached the neediest. Many poor people are still left out and food shortages continue despite improvements. According to literature macro studies and state-level analyses are abundant, there is a lack of micro-level district-wise assessments that integrate demographic indicators with food insecurity outcomes. This study addresses this gap by focusing on four districts of Haryana using primary household-level data, offering both descriptive and analytical insight into the relationship between PDS provisioning and food insecurity. The objectives of the study given below:

- To analyse the socio-demographic characteristics of PDS beneficiaries.
- To evaluate the status of food security in Haryana.
- To assess the accessibility and adequacy of ration card distribution.



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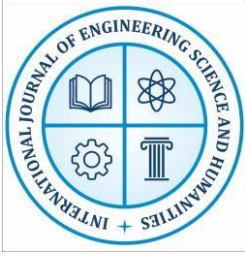
3. Research Methodology

The study used the primary data with the help of structured questionnaire to assess, evaluate and measure the usage of Public Distribution schemes (PDS) among different socio- economic community in the study area. Multistage random sampling which involved various stages of sample selection. In the first stage, the region of Haryana was selected, followed by the four districts all the directions (east, west, north, south) of Haryana on the basis of number of ration card holders. Panchkula from north, Hisar from east, Nuh from south and Charkhi Dadri from west. At second stage two blocks were selected from each district on the basis of largest and smallest population. At third stage one rural and one urban area were selected from each block. Overall, the data was collected from a sample of 480 respondents 30 each from selected rural and urban areas which is presents in table-1.

In view of achieving the formulated objectives, responses of respondents have been recorded various items related to PDS and its unique features, usage, benefits and its impacts on beneficiary well-being. In the analysis section demographic and socio-economic profile of the Below Poverty Line (BPL) households are described along with access and usages of schemes. The data was collected using structured questionnaires and analysed through frequency distributions based on sample and percentage focusing on socio-economic variables, ration card possession, and food insecurity indicators.

Table-1 Selected District, block and village/city, Locality

District	Block	Village/City	Locality	Frequency	Percent
Panchkula	Barwala	Barwala	Rural	30	6.3
		Ramgarh	Urban	30	6.3
	Pinjore	Suketri	Rural	30	6.3
		Chandi mandir	Urban	30	6.3
Charkhi Dadri	Baund Kalan	Baund Kalan	Rural	30	6.3
		Charkhi	Rural	30	6.3
	Charkhi Dadri	Charkhi Dadri	Urban	30	6.3
		Ranila	Rural	30	6.3
Hisar	Hansi-I	Hansi	Urban	30	6.3
		Dhana	Rural	30	6.3
	Hisar-I	Hisar	Urban	30	6.3
		Bhagana	Rural	30	6.3
Nuh	Nuh	Nuh	Urban	30	6.3
		Ghasera	Rural	30	6.3
	Punhana	Punhana	Urban	30	6.3



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		Singar	Rural	30	6.3
Total				480	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

4. Results and Discussion

This section firstly outlines the socio-demographic profile of the surveyed households and the secondly examines ration card possession and classification, providing insights into the extent and targeting efficiency of PDS enrolment and critically evaluates the status of food security in Haryana, which directly addresses main objective of this study.

4.1 Social-Demographic Conditions of the Respondents

The socio-demographic profile of the surveyed households, including district-wise distribution, gender, age, education, occupation, income and other relevant variables that influence food access and welfare participation.

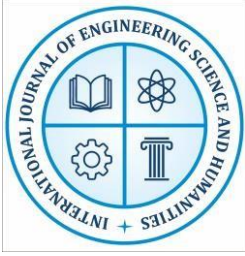
Table-2 Gender and Age of Respondents

Category		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	383	79.8
	Female	97	20.2
	Total	480	100.0
Age	20-30	22	4.6
	31-40	183	38.1
	41-50	195	40.6
	51-60	80	16.7
	Total	480	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table-2 presents the gender and wise classification of the respondents in the study area. The study categorizes gender into two groups: male and female. Among the respondents, a significant majority 383 individuals (79.8%) were male, whereas 97 (20.2%) were female. This male dominance in the respondent pool may be attributed to traditional gender roles in Haryana, where men are often tasked with managing household provisioning, including collecting rations. Additionally, cultural norms and patriarchal structures often limit women's mobility and participation in public interactions, including survey interviews.

Respondents' age distribution reveals that a majority were middle-aged: 38.1% were between 31–40 years, and 40.6% were between 41–50 years. Only 4.6% belonged to the younger age group (20–30), while 16.7% were in the 51–60 category. The prevalence of middle-aged respondents reflects the demographic most actively involved in family welfare and ration collection responsibilities.



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Table-3 Religion and Social Category of Respondents

Category		Frequency	Percent
Religion	Hindu	394	82.1
	Muslim	80	16.7
	Sikh	6	1.3
	Total	480	100.0
Social Category	General	122	25.4
	SC	141	29.4
	BC	217	45.2
	Total	480	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table-3 illustrates the religion-wise and social category wise classification of the respondents in the study area. A significant proportion (82.1%) of respondents identified as Hindu, followed by Muslims (16.7%) and Sikhs (1.3%). This distribution mirrors the demographic structure of Haryana, where Hindus form the majority. Religion plays a contextual role in welfare utilization, as beliefs and socio-political dynamics may influence access and perceptions of entitlement programs. The balanced inclusion of minorities ensures that the study captures any potential religious differentials in the access or perception of PDS.

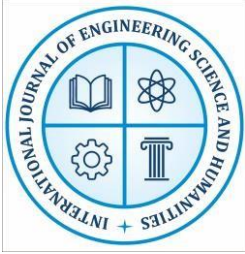
The sample comprises 25.4% from the General category, 29.4% from Scheduled Castes (SC), and 45.2% from Backward Classes (BC). This suggests that the majority of the beneficiaries come from historically disadvantaged groups, consistent with the targeted nature of PDS. The over representation of SC and BC households indicates the program's relevance in addressing socio-economic vulnerabilities arising from caste-based exclusion.

Table-4 Educational Qualification of Respondents

Education	Frequency	Percent
Illiterate	251	52.3
Middle	133	27.7
Secondary	79	16.5
Others	17	3.5
Total	480	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table-4 presents the educational profile of the respondents reveals that a substantial proportion of the surveyed households are marked by low educational attainment. Out of the 480 respondents 52.3% were illiterate, 27.7% had received education up to the middle school level, 16.5% completed secondary education, and only 3.5% fell into the higher secondary, college, or



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vocational education. This educational breakdown indicates that the majority of PDS beneficiaries in the study area possess either no formal education or have studied only up to middle school. The high illiteracy rate is reflective of long-standing socio-economic disadvantages faced by rural and backward communities in Haryana, especially among SCs and BCs, as reported in earlier tables.

Such low levels of formal education can significantly influence beneficiaries' awareness about their entitlements, procedures for updating ration cards, grievance redressal mechanisms, and the broader functioning of PDS. However, the qualitative insights during fieldwork saw that despite low formal education, many respondents demonstrated practical knowledge of ration shop timings, entitlement limits, and complaint channels which indicates the role of social learning and word-of-mouth awareness within communities.

Table-5 Occupation Status of Respondents

		Frequency	Percent
Occupation	Self-employed (Agri)	166	34.6
	Self-employed (non-Agri)	214	44.6
	Private service	53	11.0
	Unemployed	32	6.7
	Others	15	3.1
	Total	480	100.0
Monthly Income	Less than 10k	299	62.3
	11k-20k	179	37.3
	21k-30k	2	.4
	Total	480	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table-5 presents 44.6% of respondents are self-employed in non-agricultural sectors, 34.6% are self-employed in agriculture, 11% are engaged in private services, 6.7% are unemployed, and 3.1% fall under other occupational categories. This distribution highlights a crucial trend in the dominance of informal, self-employed occupations, particularly in non-agricultural sectors such as construction, small retail, manual labour, and transport services. This trend signals a shift away from traditional agrarian livelihoods, reflecting both rural diversification and the limitations of small-scale farming in sustaining livelihoods.

The 6.7% unemployment rate among respondents is concerning. Given the high dependence on PDS observed in this study, this group likely experiences greater food insecurity and is heavily reliant on subsidized rations. The "others" category (3.1%), though small, may include casual or irregular workers, domestic workers, or seasonal labourers - all of whom are particularly vulnerable to shocks and price volatility.



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Table-5 also presents the monthly income distribution of respondents, which is a critical determinant of food access, dietary choices, and dependence on government support systems like the Public Distribution System (PDS). The distribution of the monthly income is as follows: 62.3% of the respondents reported a monthly income of less than ₹10,000, 37.3% earned between ₹11,000 and ₹20,000, and only 0.4% earned ₹21,000 to ₹30,000.

This income structure reveals that a significant majority of respondents almost two-thirds fall under the low-income bracket, with earnings below ₹10,000 per month. This low earning capacity explains the heavy dependence on subsidized food grains provided through the PDS. Most respondents are either self-employed in low-return agricultural or non-agricultural occupations, or are engaged in casual labour or informal service sector jobs. These activities typically offer low and uncertain earnings, lacking employment benefits, leading to financial insecurity and vulnerability to inflationary pressures.

4.2 Ration Card Possession, Classification and Status of Food Security

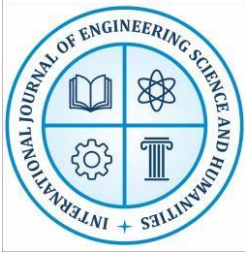
The data reveal that 100% of respondents (N=480) possess ration cards, indicating complete enrolment in the Public Distribution System among the surveyed households. This is a positive reflection of administrative outreach and inclusion mechanisms operational in Haryana.

Table-6 Ration Card types

		Frequency	Percent
Ration Card	Yes	480	100.0
	No	0	0
	Total	480	100
Type of Ration card	APL	3	.6
	BPL	457	95.2
	AAJ	20	4.2
	Total	480	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The distribution of ration card types is as follows: BPL (Below Poverty Line) is 457 households (95.2%), AAJ (Antyodaya Anna Yojana) is 20 households (4.2%) and APL (Above Poverty Line) is 3 households (0.6%). The overwhelming presence of BPL cardholders suggests that the majority of the sampled population belongs to economically vulnerable groups. The representation of AAJ households which is the poorest among the poor indicates that the study captured data from highly food-insecure segments, who are entitled to more generous and targeted entitlements under PDS. The negligible share of APL cardholders underscores the targeted nature of the sample and affirms the intention of the research to evaluate PDS functioning among those most reliant on it.



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This classification is vital because the type of ration card determines the quantity, quality, and price of subsidized food items received. Households with AAY cards receive the most benefits, whereas APL households often face limited entitlements or exclusions depending on state policies.

Table-7 Not Have Enough Food to Eat

Not Have Enough Food to Eat	Frequency	Percent
Yes	94	19.6
No	379	78.9
Don't know	7	1.5
Total	480	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table-7 shows that out of the 480 households surveyed, 94 households (19.6%) reported that there were times when they did not have enough food to eat, while 379 households (78.9%) denied such experience. A small proportion (1.5%) responded with “Don't know.”

This is a serious concern, as nearly one-fifth of the sample experienced outright food insufficiency despite being enrolled in PDS. This indicates that the presence of a ration card or regular receipt of PDS entitlements does not necessarily translate to full food sufficiency. Factors such as household size, inefficiencies in distribution or limited dietary diversity may contribute to this gap.

Table-8 Household Inability to Afford Meals

Family Unable to afford meals	Frequency	Percent
Yes	93	19.3
No	384	79.7
Don't know	3	0.6
Total	480	100.0

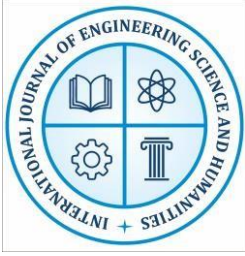
Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table-9 presents nearly 19.3% of households admitted they were unable to afford enough meals for their family, suggesting that food insecurity is not just about access to subsidized food but also household income. This mirrors the income statistics discussed in earlier sections, where over 60% of households earned less than ₹10,000 per month.

Table-9 Limited Dietary Diversity (Ate only a few kinds of foods)

Ate only a few kinds of foods	Frequency	Percent
Yes	92	19.1
No	383	79.5
Don't know	5	1.0
Total	480	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025



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Table-9 presents that 19.1% of households reported that they could only afford a limited variety of food items. This suggests that even with access to basic staples through PDS (primarily wheat and rice), households may not be able to afford pulses, vegetables, dairy or protein sources - leading to micronutrient deficiencies.

Table-10 Skipping a Meal

Your Family Had to Skip a Meal	Frequency	Percent
Yes	69	14.3
No	401	83.2
Don't know	1	.2
Refused	9	1.9
Total	480	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table-10 presents 83.2% respondents said their family not skip food, 0.2% said they don't know and 1.9% refused the question and 14.3% of households admitted they had to skip meals due to insufficient food. Skipping meals is a coping mechanism in households that experience recurring or seasonal food insecurity. It reflects not only economic stress but also inadequacy of ration quantity in relation to family size.

Table-11 Eating Less than Needed (Family Ate Less)

Family Ate Less	Frequency	Percent
Yes	89	18.5
No	378	78.4
Don't know	4	.8
Refused	9	1.9
Total	480	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table-11 shows 78.4% of respondents said their family not eat less food, 0.8% said they don't know and 1.9% refused the question and 18.5% of respondents reported that their families had to eat less than they felt they should. This is another indicator of undernourishment and signals that quantity of PDS food grains is not meeting actual household requirements.

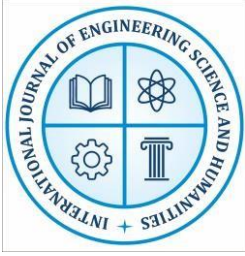


Table-12 Household Running Out of Food

Household Running Out of Food	Frequency	Percent
Yes	62	12.9
No	375	77.8
Don't know	9	1.9
Refused	34	7.1
Total	480	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table-12 presents 77.8% respondents said no their family not ran out of food, 1.9% said they don't know and 7.1% refused the question and 12.9% of respondents ran out of food before they could replenish it. This temporal mismatch between consumption and supply highlights either irregular PDS distribution cycles or inadequate stock at home.

Table-13 Hungry but Did Not Eat

Household Were Hungry but Did Not Eat	Frequency	Percent
Yes	62	12.9
No	359	74.5
Don't know	14	2.9
Refused	45	9.3
Total	480	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

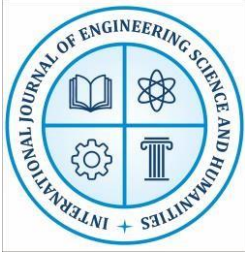
Table-13 presents 77.8% respondents said no their family don't experienced hunger, 2.9% said they don't know and 9.3% refused the question and again, 12.9% of households reported that they experienced hunger but did not eat. This stark indicator of severe food insecurity points to both physical and psychological deprivation, where even emotional barriers such as shame or reluctance to ask for help come into play.

Table-14 Without Eating for A Whole Day

Without Eating for A Whole Day	Frequency	Percent
Yes	58	12.0
No	306	63.5
Don't know	23	4.8
Refused	93	19.3
Total	480	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table-14 presents 63.5% respondents said no their family not live without eating whole day, 4.8% said they don't know and 19.3% refused the question and 12% of households reported having gone an entire day without eating. This represents the most extreme form of food insecurity



and requires urgent policy attention. Going without food for an entire day, especially among children or the elderly, can have long-lasting effects on health, learning, and work capacity.

Table-15 Entitlement of PDS Items Regularly

Entitlement of PDS items regularly	Frequency	Percent
Yes	480	100.0
Total	480	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table-15 presents all 480 respondents (100%) reported receiving their entitlements regularly. This is a highly encouraging finding that suggests a well-functioning PDS network in the sampled regions. However, this regularity of receipt must be weighed against other indicators such as adequacy, nutritional balance, and satisfaction levels. This reflects positively on the impact of PDS reforms such as digitized ration cards, electronic Point of Sale machines, and direct monitoring systems introduced in Haryana post-2014.

5. Conclusion

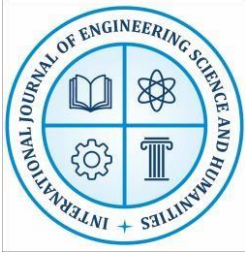
This study offers a nuanced micro-level evaluation of the Public Distribution System (PDS) and food security status in Haryana by analysing primary data collected from 480 households across four districts. While administrative outreach appears effective—evidenced by 100% ration card possession and regular receipt of PDS entitlements—significant gaps persist in achieving comprehensive food security. Approximately one-fifth of the households reported experiences of food insufficiency, such as skipping meals, eating less than required, and lack of dietary diversity, despite being enrolled in the PDS. These outcomes point to the inadequacy of existing entitlements in addressing both caloric and nutritional needs.

The findings reveal that food insecurity is closely associated with socio-demographic variables such as low education levels, caste-based marginalization, informal employment and low household income. A majority of the respondents belong to economically vulnerable groups—primarily BPL and AAY households—many of whom rely heavily on subsidized food grains for survival. Despite technological improvements and regular delivery mechanisms, the PDS in Haryana has yet to fully overcome structural challenges related to adequacy, nutritional diversity and targeting precision.

6. Policy Recommendations

In light of the empirical evidence, the following policy recommendations are proposed to strengthen the PDS and ensure more equitable and sustainable food security outcomes:

1. Enhance Nutritional Adequacy of PDS Entitlement: There is an urgent need to diversify the food basket beyond cereals to include pulses, oils, fortified foods and regionally appropriate vegetables. Nutritional supplementation should particularly target vulnerable populations such as children, women and the elderly.



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2. Strengthen Targeting Mechanisms: Policy should move towards household-level dynamic targeting, factoring in family size, income fluctuations, and seasonal vulnerabilities. Integration of PDS records with socio-economic databases (e.g., SECC, Aadhaar) can improve accuracy and inclusion.

3. Improve Awareness and Grievance Redressal: Low levels of formal education among beneficiaries call for targeted awareness campaigns in local languages. Clear communication of entitlements, complaint mechanisms and procedural guidance is essential for empowering users and reducing misinformation.

4. Integrate Livelihood and Nutrition Security: To address income-linked food insecurity, PDS efforts should be complemented by livelihood promotion schemes (e.g., MGNREGS, NRLM). Encouraging homestead farming and community gardens can further augment nutritional access at the household level.

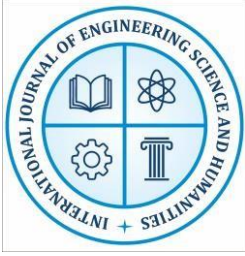
5. Institutionalise Food Security Audits: District-level food security audits and independent third-party evaluations should be made routine to monitor progress and identify regional disparities. These audits can guide state-level realignment of resources and policy focus.

6. Leverage Technology for Monitoring and Efficiency: Expanding the use of digital tools such as GPS tracking, biometric authentication and real-time dashboards can reduce leakages and improve transparency in the delivery of rations.

By addressing the multifaceted nature of food insecurity—spanning access, adequacy, and affordability—these policy directions aim to enhance the effectiveness of the PDS in Haryana. Ensuring equitable and nutritionally sufficient food access is not merely an administrative challenge but a socio-economic imperative that underpins human development and public health outcomes.

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