

Development and mental well being in a tribal village in rural West Bengal: A preliminary study

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Background

While strides have indeed been made in advancing development, the path to progress remains strewn with hurdles for tribal communities. Over the years, development initiatives and government interventions have ushered in positive changes in their lives. Nevertheless, enduring economic vulnerabilities and limited technological access persist as stark realities.

Government welfare schemes, such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and housing grants, have played pivotal roles in elevating tribal communities by creating avenues for employment, fostering infrastructure development, and enhancing living conditions.

However, developmental interventions have at times faced challenges in implementation and have led to disparities in the distribution of benefits. Education and healthcare accessibility remain uneven, particularly in remote areas grappling with limited resources and infrastructure.

Despite the existence of initiatives like the MGNREGA, barriers such as administrative complexities, inadequate awareness, and limited accessibility to information impede the effective utilization of these programs. As a result, a considerable segment of the tribal population still struggles to reap the benefits intended for their upliftment.

Limited economic diversification poses another formidable challenge. Dependence on traditional livelihoods like subsistence agriculture and handicrafts, though deeply rooted in their heritage, can expose tribal communities to vulnerability during economic fluctuations. Shifting to alternative livelihoods that are both sustainable and market-oriented remains a complex undertaking, requiring tailored interventions that respect their cultural values.

The digital divide poses an additional layer of challenges. While technological advancements have brought connectivity to many parts of India, remote tribal villages still grapple with limited or no access to the internet and digital resources. This divide hampers their ability to harness the benefits of e-governance, online education, and market access. Initiatives to introduce technology into these communities are essential, enabling them to navigate and thrive in the modern world.

Aim

- To study recent technological advancements and progress in these rural communities
- To assess the effectiveness of government initiatives and identify areas requiring further attention
- To assess general psychological distress using the Self Report Questionnaire (SRQ) 201
- To assess knowledge regarding government welfare scheme targeted at these tribal areas.

Methods

From the total population of 200 families, 50 were selected by random allocation. The heads of the selected families, or the next elder person in their absence, were interviewed using a semi structured proforma, followed by administration of Self Report Questionnaire (SRQ) 20. Language used was Hindi/Bengali.

Results

Out of the 50 families interviewed, a significant proportion of females reported somatic symptoms (domains of poor appetite, shaky hands, poor digestion, uncomfortable feelings in stomach in SRQ 20). A small proportion of females showed depressive/anxiety symptoms (domains of poor sleep, nervous or worried, trouble thinking clearly, crying more than usual, difficulty in enjoying daily activities, tiredness in SRQ 20). Males did not report any significant dysfunction. The families interviewed had access to mobile phones and internet but with poor connectivity, leading to suboptimal use of these resources. However, they had access to clean water and electricity. Families had knowledge about the housing grants from the government, but not aware of other employment schemes like MGNREGA and Food for work program.

Conclusion

Tribal communities have made substantial strides in economic development, yet challenges persist in ensuring equitable access to government welfare programs. The findings from my research largely prove this, providing insights into both the progress made in uplifting rural communities and the substantial tasks and areas of improvement that lie ahead. Additionally,

the gender based differences in psychological distress is indicative of biased gender roles and further limitation of use of newer technologies and resources, highlighting the digital divide.

The documented advancements in road infrastructure, electrification, technology access, and housing grants are noteworthy. However, the prevalent reliance on subsistence agriculture and resultant income limitations underlines financial constraints.

References

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