



INSECURITY AMONG IRULAR TRIBAL WOMEN

Social Science

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ABSTRACT

The tribals in India constitute 8.08 % of the total population. Irulars are a tribal community who live in Southern India mainly in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Generally, Irular women were highly exploited and are inhumanly treated, cheated and terrorized by the rich people and surrounding landlords. Among the total population above 90% of female make significant contribution to the family income. Although they contribute 90% to their family income a sense of insecurity was seen in them. The reason of insecurity needed to be explored upon and hence the paper with this objective in mind. The insecurity scale was standardized to study the level of insecurity of the Irular women. It was found that there was a significant relationship between age at marriage and insecurity feeling.

KEYWORDS

Tribals, Irula women, Insecurity Feeling

INTRODUCTION:

India is home to a large number of tribes with population of about 70 million and currently there are over 706 scheduled tribes in India according to census of India 2011 and are found in almost all the states of country. In terms of geographical distribution about 55% of tribals live in central India, 28% in west, 12% in North-East India, 4% in South India and 1% elsewhere. Each tribal community is rich in their culture, folk tales, folk songs and folk stories. Tribals constitute 8.6%, respectively, of India's population (according to the 2011 census).

The tribals in India constitute 8.08 per cent of the total population. (Singh, et.al, 1996: 16) The main demographic characteristics of tribals in India are – in some state and Union Territories they constitute an overwhelming majority; e.g. Mizoram (94.75%). Lakshadweep (93.15%), Nagaland (87.75%) and Meghalaya (85.53%). The States of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Bihar, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal account for 13 per cent of the total tribal population (Planning Commission, 2004).

Irulars are a tribal community who live in southern India, mainly in Kanchipuram, Nilgiris and Villupuram districts of Tamilnadu. Ethnically they belong to negritos race and their language is Irula which is a mix of Tamil and Kannada. These tribes are behest with problems of land alienation, displacement and political disempowerment, harassment, basic rights violated, bonded labourers. One of the tribes present in various parts of India. Their main occupation was snake and rat catching and at present they also work as laborers do fishing. These groups have been traditionally economically and socially marginalized, illiterate, lacking of income earning skills and were in general not accepted by the larger society. The term Irular is derived from the word Irul, meaning black or dark. Irulars are one of the most backward tribes who are facing innumerable challenges. The name Irular bear a reference to the dark jungles they live in.

Irulars are classified into various subgroups based on linguistic and social variations. These are Malenadu Irular, Kasaba, Vettakkara Irular, Urali Irular and Villiyian. The first four subgroups share similar ethnic and linguistic features but with slight variations, and are mostly found in Nilgiris and so referred to as Nilgiri Irulars. Villiyians (villu meaning bow - a reference to hunter) are ethnically and linguistically different. They speak Tamil dialect, and are also referred to as bambukaran (snakeman). They are the one found in Chengalpetu region.

Every clan among the Irular has its own chief called Naatamkar, who also doubles up as medicine man and priest. Irulars are known for their expertise in snake bite treatment and used powdered mixture of eight types of plants for snake bite. The bark of the tree (Kuruvi or Kodachaali) is given to the bitten person to chew if the patient gets sweet taste then it is identified as poisonous bite while if it tastes bitter then it is non poisonous.

Generally Irular women were highly exploited and are inhumanly

treated, cheated and terrorized by the rich people and surrounding landlords. They are ignorant and illiterate; unable to avail the basic facilities provided for their benefit from various resources. But women have to take care of the family because most of the males are dependent on alcohol (Illicit liquor) and do not bother about their family responsibilities. Irular women have to lead their life by collecting forest produces and working in farm lands. Mostly in tribal areas women share abundant responsibilities and perform multiple duties in running the family and maintaining house hold, attending to farm labours, tending domestic animals and poultry birds. But to discharge all these activities she is an unpaid servant to man whose labour is measured in economic terms. In agriculture tribal women perform a number of significant roles. They participate in harvesting, weeding, planting, seeding, manuring and storage of grains. They also help in rearing of livestock, poultry keeping; besides they manage the house and bring up their children. Irular women living in poverty have the least access to power to shape the policies of poverty.

Tribal women, in general, have higher labor force participation. Among the tribal population, above 90% of females make significant contributions to the family income. In many tribal societies, "a woman is considered an economic asset and considerable value is placed on a hard-working, industrious and dutiful wife," (Chaudhuri, 1978).

Much of the infant and child rearing is done by adult females, which also includes the elderly extended family members in their homes. Older siblings of both sexes play an important role in the care of their younger brothers and sisters.

Tribal women, in general, play an important role in all economic, social and cultural activities (Mithra.A., 2007). They also have a much higher work participation rate than non-tribal women. The women flocks are an interesting blend of strong and brave but still subtle in taking decisions. Mostly women head the families. Although they head families major decisions are taken by the men. Working with the women was a challenge for me. The women were very strong in their decision making. Decisions regarding marriage, fertility, and divorce on the women's part are severely constrained.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Bindu (2005) in her study found that Irular were an endogamous tribe innature. Average family size of Irular is 3.15, the female sex ratio is 1000:966. 8.37% of the irulars were aged above 60 years. 64% of the Irula men 56% of irula women in Kerala were literates.

The study by Ebenezer (2007) from Bharadhidhasan University, Trichy, and he studied about the Irula people of Nilgiri. This review is about the Nilgiri Irulas and their life style. This research abstract is relevant to the current study. Most of the areas covered by Ebenezer are about their social life and social contribution. This review gives related unknown information about Nilgiri Irulas. Irulas are one of the largest groups among the tribes in south India.

Santhosh et al(2012) in their study on social life of Irula women of

Chengalpet, Tamil Nadu found that 13% of Irular women completed high school education, 62% of women were illiterate. 61% got married at young age (<20 years), remarriages were common. Among 48% of the respondents age difference between husband and wife is above 10 years. Most of the Irular women engage in agricultural work as coolies. 81% reported that they have habit of savings. 71% saved through self-help groups. Polyandry and polygamy prevailed in Irulars of Chengalpet. 78% of Irular women reported they do not practice divorce.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION INSECURITY FEELING

Insecurity feeling in this present study means the level of security/insecurity felt by the women measured by security-insecurity inventory by Govind Tiwari and Singh (1975). It refers to the prevalence of emotional instability, feeling of rejection, inferiority complex, anxiety, isolation, jealousy, hostility, irritability, inconsistency.

PILOT STUDY

The researcher visited various villages of the Irular community at Kancheepuram district to finalize the setting of the study. The researcher along with the NGO ASSET (Adivasi Social Service Educational Trust) visited the hamlets from where the women were selected for the study. During the visit the researcher interviewed few women to understand their problems. The pilot study enabled the researcher to finalize various important aspects, which was incorporated in the study. The researcher went for pre-testing with 22 Irular married women in order to find the suitability of Interview schedule. These pre-tested respondents were included for the final analysis. Hence the study population covers 252 Irular married women.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study intends to portray the various adjustment problems faced by the Irular women and the causes of these problems, and the feeling of insecurity because of these problems, are also analyzed within the framework of the study.

SAMPLING DESIGN

The Census method was adopted with complete enumeration of all the items, since the research study covers all the 252 married Irular women. The present investigation made use of the entire population and the census method of sampling.

UNIVERSE FOR THE STUDY

The universe for the present study consists of 252 Irular married women from 122 villages of Kancheepuram district Tamil Nadu covered by ASSET (Adivasi Social Service Educational Trust) and NGO working for their cause.

SOURCES OF DATA COLLECTION

The researcher for the present study used the primary sources of information acquired through direct administration of the self-prepared interview schedule and standardized rating scales. Besides secondary sources such as the Planning commission reports, Department of Social welfare and Department of Adi Dravidar and Tribal welfare department records were looked into for details on statistics.

INSTRUMENTS OF DATA COLLECTION

The following self-administered interview schedules and scales were included in the package for the purpose of collecting information for the study. Tamil translated versions of all Interview Schedules were used to collect data.

1. Interview Schedule: A socio-demographic information form constructed for this study.
 - a) Personal details b) Social status c) Health status d) Economic status e) Job status
2. Data collection was done for Security and Insecurity variable with a standardized scale developed by Govind Tiwari and Singh (1975), was used to find out the level of insecurity feelings among the respondents. This inventory was also reduced to 20 questions based on the relevance of the study.

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The above table shows that 38.1 percent of the respondents come under the age group of 18-28 years, 96.8 percent families have the female as the head of the family, 87.3 percent of the respondents are illiterate and the remaining 12.7 percent are literate (highest education is completion of 4th standard).

Absolute majority 70.6 percent of the respondents have 2 children and below and 74.4 percent of the respondents got married below 18 years, the rationale behind this is that the community married their adolescent girls as soon as their reached their puberty. 3.2 percent of the respondents got married below 12 years and 2.3 percent above 18 years. While it was shocking to know that child marriage existed in the community in families although the percentage is less. These findings are similar to the study done by Santhosh Sasirega (2010) where the researcher observed that 68 percent of the respondents in the study are of Chengalpet got married below 16 years of age. This finding also coincides with the finding of Santhosh et al (2012) who reported that 62 percent of women were illiterate and 61 percent got married at young age (< 20 years). Geethanjali (2012) in her study reported that despite the opportunities, special initiatives and case by the government for tribal education, the achievement of tribal women education is not as per expectations due to several factors.

The above table reveals that 27 percent of the respondents were employed and the remaining 73.0 percent were not employed. Majority 63.3 percent of the women were daily wagers and were involved in building construction work, road laying work, agricultural work etc. 17.5 percent of them were fisherwomen and were involved in catching and selling fish and collecting worms for prawn hatchery, 10.3 percent of the women were domestic workers and were involved in housekeeping, gardening, working in neighborhood houses and the remaining 9.1 percent were vendors and were involved in selling fruits, vegetables, grocery items, flowers either in their houses or at market place in their leisure time and which is not on a daily basis. Similar findings are reported in a study by Santhosh Sasirega (2010). The study reported that 60-68 percent of the Irular women are working as coolies and work in agriculture farm and the remaining women were collecting forest produce, are herbalist, construction, brick kiln and some of them were not working anywhere. This also coincides with the findings of Santhosh et al (2012) most of the Irular women engaged in agriculture as coolies.

FINDINGS RELATED TO SECURITY-INSECURITY SCALE:

- There is no statistically significant difference between education status of the respondents with regard to the insecurity feelings of the respondents.
- There is a significant relationship between age at marriage of the respondents and the in-security feelings of the respondents
- There is no significant difference among type of family with regard to in-security feelings of the respondents.
- There is no significant difference among profession of the respondents with regard to in-security feelings of the respondents.
- There is no significant association between monthly income of the respondents and in-security feelings of the respondents
- There is no significant association between spouses Profession and in-security feelings of the respondents

DISCUSSION: PSYCHOLOGICAL MODEL DERIVED FROM THE STUDY ON IRULAR WOMEN

The psychological model derived and depicted indicates the relationship among the five variables, namely, personality, adjustment problems, insecurity feeling, perceived quality of life and life satisfaction. It can be perceived that the Irular woman as a core variable other five variables are drawn into an association with each other. It is understood that the person/woman with neurotic personality has negative relationship with perceived quality of life. It is also observed that adjustment problem has positive relationship with life satisfaction, insecurity feeling and perceived quality of life. The in-security feeling has a positive relationship with perceived quality of life and life satisfaction. Hence it can be observed and concluded that Irular women with neurotic personality faced high adjustment problem high insecurity feeling decreased quality of life and unhappy with their life satisfaction.

The present study investigated five basic and very significant factors that lead to psycho social problem such as adjustment problem, insecurity feeling, perceived quality of life, and life satisfaction. The relationship of these variables among themselves as well as their association with socio-demographic background variables of the respondents was also investigated.

Major findings of the study and conclusions drawn from them indicate that the tribal women have problem in adjustment. Also the women exhibited high level of problems in the physical dimension of quality

of life. Their life satisfaction is also very less and they expressed insecurity feeling because of finance problem.

INTERVENTION IN THE PERSONAL DIMENSION:

The purpose of the intervention is as follows:

- increasing life skills or changing behaviour to increase life options
- promoting independence and inter-dependence
- working with conflicts in relationships
- stabilising or slowing down deterioration and loss of independence
- coping with changed life situations and transitions
- supporting individuals' development to enable them to participate in groups, use local community resources or to move to mainstream services.

INTERVENTION IN THE ECONOMIC DIMENSION

Access to employment for women is a major concern in India. Fruitful employment for tribal women to be planned and implemented based on the available resources and skills. Employment opportunities to be given to these women in such a way that they do not lose their identity as a tribal but still gain economic independence. A major initiative that is needed for changing the current situation is to increase the flow of capital in the lives of tribal women. When she is financially empowered the more is the chance of her overall development and progress and adjustment live, better quality of life, there is life satisfaction and she feels secure. Stable income, choices in saving her earning, spending her money will lead to financial independence and increase her decision making process and also has a positive effect on the choices she makes in her personal life.

INTERVENTION IN THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSION

A women feels or experiences psychological well being if her self esteem is high. She becomes psychologically strong when she has a collective awareness of injustice happening around her. She is said to be psychologically strong when if she possess the potential of mobilisation of entitlement she should receive and fights for it. But what does it mean to possess psychological well being for a tribal woman. She needs acceptance from her family, community elders to take care of the psychological problem. Various factors right from poverty, maintenance of household with meager income, performing multiple duties, bonded labour, educational and potential rights affect their psychological; and social status. This generally affects their mental health status, life, work and domestic life.

The social worker recommends a model of psychosocial support in order to provide a better understanding of the different needs of the Irular women. It is envisaged that the understanding of these needs by the communities, aid agencies, NGO and the government will assist in better meeting them, and so eventually improve the womens psychosocial well-being. The model of Maslow's theory of needs emphasises the importance of balance in acquiring the basic skills needed for survival. The model will have these skills form a wheel comprising five elements, but asserts that none of the five elements would be adequate if provided for without input from the others.

INTERVENTION IN THE SOCIAL DIMENSION

Social empowerment of women will include free movement, lack of discrimination against the daughters at home. It will also include the commitment that the community or family has to educate their daughters. A shift in patriarchal norm is also expected for socially empowering them. The need to educate the daughters can be encouraged by small incentive from the government. Since majority of the respondents remain illiterates, education should be given importance. To increase the female participation at the community level and to give more decision making power it is needed to understand the existing traditional pattern of tribal community in more details which would help in formulation of more effective developmental policies and it will also help to bring out the lacunae lying within present policies. Women empowerment does not signify increasing the numbers of women in decision making position. There should be measures to improve the quality of participation. The quality of participation signifies taking initiatives in new projects, identifying problems and providing suggestion towards effective solution. Tribal population in this study has poor health outcomes, because of inaccessible health care delivery system that does not cater to their needs. The Irular women should have control over her life. She is not allowed to take major decisions their finances, saving their income, spending their income, decision regarding their children's education,

children's marriage, participation in festivals, participating in panchayat meetings, political meetings, and participation in festivals.

CONCLUSION

When women are psychologically empowered, there will be a change in attitude, cognition and behaviour, which most assuredly will lead to a positive change in value orientation, increased patriotic actions, ability to postpone gratification of one's desires, improved Self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-consciousness as well as better psychological well-being which will culminate in a peaceful and developing society.

When women are empowered whole family benefits and these benefits often have effects on the future generation. Empowered women are able to adjust in health, social, work, emotional, psychological dimension. These make a change in her quality of life. Economic and social empowerment increases her security feeling and life satisfaction. This also leads to women with strong personality and their psychological and social status is good.

When a tribal woman is empowered she enjoys psychological well being. Therefore the above said interventions and suggestions can be used as guidelines by a social worker in order to help the tribal women to cope with her problems in the personal, economic, psychological, social and legal dimensions. Interventions can foster psychological well being in the individual.

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