



## Psychosocial challenges faced by tribal adolescent girls in rural Odisha

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### Abstract

The aim of this article is to highlight the psychosocial constraints pertaining to tribal adolescent girls in rural Odisha, India. These girls face lots of challenges that keep them from achieving their full potential and living healthy happy lives despite their cultural backgrounds. Some of the stripped, highlighted in the study includes, lack of education and employment opportunities, early marriage and female genital distortion, gender-based violence, cultural rejection and stigmatization. As highlight on life experiences of these girls using qualitative and quantitative research method, such study seeks to call for intervention measures in fostering the psychosocial wellbeing of these girls.

**Keywords:** Tribal adolescent girls, psychosocial challenges, rural odisha, early marriage

### Introduction

Tribal population in Odisha is estimated to be around 22% of the total state population and their social systems and cultural practices are unique. Female adolescents in such communities experience different psychosocial issues that contribute to poor health status and social statuses. It is thus important to address these challenges as crucial virtues of identifying and formulating sound policies and programmes for the health improvement of these groups.

Tribal population of India has a distinctive position in the Indian society. The area is Odisha that locates a great number of tribes, each of which has its peculiarity in terms of costumes and norms. Of these, the lives and growth patterns of adolescent girls are most at risk in several ways. With this context, an attempt is made in this article to throw the spotlight on the psychosocial realities of the tribal adolescent girls living in the rural areas of Odisha and the need for a corresponding intervention on the part of the society.

Tribal culture of Odisha accommodation about 62 tribes among which 13 are falling under Particular Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) of Odisha each of which forms a colourful part of Odisha. These community people mostly stay in the rural areas depend on farming and products from forest. Culture in their daily lifestyle is embraced through practicing traditions and observing culture values and this has got its shortages especially to the girls. The tribal people of Odisha constitute roughly one-fourth population of the total population of the state. Among them, the adolescent girls; those aged between 10 and 19 years, form a very important group owing to their large frequencies. It is especially important to comprehend their problems in order to prevent a repetition of them in the future and contribute towards the development of the policies and programs. Adolescence is an important time in the developmental continuum. For the girls, it is a stage of sensual, psychological and community development. Their nurturing has to be encouraged because such individuals are important for their future as well as that of their families and communities.

### Research objectives

1. To identify the psychosocial challenged faced by tribal adolescent girls in rural Odisha
2. To analyse the impact of challenges on their mental health and overall well-being
3. To recommend strategies to intervention and support

### Research questions

1. What are the primary barriers to education for tribal girls in rural Odisha?
2. How do educational barriers promote feelings of depression or anxiety among tribal adolescent girls?
3. What kind of educational initiatives can effectively help tribal adolescent girls to continue their studies?

### Challenges faced by adolescent girls in rural Odisha

Education is a right that is protected under Article 21(a) of Indian Constitution, however, many tribal girls in Odisha are locked out of school and cannot go to school. However the efforts put in place by the government in order to increase the enrolment of children in school, the enrolment of tribal girl is still seen to be very low. Studies suggest that less than half of indigenous girls can attend school. Most fail to complete their educational needs because of lack of or inadequate funds, necessity to work to support a family among other reasons.

The reasons for low enrolment are multifaceted & discussed hereunder:

1. Most families fail to afford basic necessities; therefore, education remains unimportant to them.
2. In most cases girl child is forced to do other upbringing work like washing dishes, preparing food or taking care of the younger children.
3. In some of the cultures, it is taken that girl child doesn't require education because they are going to get married earlier.
4. Prenuptial marriage is a usual practice among many of the tribes across the country. The girls as young as 15 years are forced to get married which has very many repercussions on their lives.

Data revealed about the tribal girls, of which 65% of them claimed to have been pin downed into marriage before the age of 18. This not only impacts their education but also bars the children from attaining personal and professional development. After getting married most girls drop out of school completely creating a cycle of poverty for themselves. They also end up experiencing early pregnancy and early motherhood, which compounds their anaemic health. This is the reason that tribal girls suffer from gender-based violence from their companion or some other person. This violence of course can be in the form of physical, emotional as well as sexual abuse. According to the Global Report of Thomson Reuters Foundation in April 2018 <sup>[1]</sup>, about 50% of the respondents done survey expressed that they have been subjected to violence. This violence happens most of the times in the home or community and can be by people within the familiar circle.

### How to approach for change

#### 1. Community-Based programs

Education facility shall be done through community-based educations to help the girls achieve their education goals. The efforts made through such programs which also include offering of cash and urging the families to invest on education can go a long way.

#### 2. Role of Government and NGOs

Interaction in the government–NGO dimension must always be considered. Such organizations can therefore collaborate and develop a synergy that will spread awareness and fund the cause supporting girl education.

#### 3. Awareness Campaigns

Awareness for early marriage can change the attitudes of the community towards the vice. Community members going for awareness over education for girls with leaders can bring the change.

#### 4. Support services of mental health

The creation of safe forums that girls can use to discuss those issues encourages the latter to seek assistance. Information sharing by appropriately trained persons on support groups can be very useful to such girls.

#### 5. Collaboration with the mental health bodies

Partnership with mental health organizations provides the best solutions for rural communities to integrate expertise and equipment. There is need for local leaders to undertake education forums that will encourage them to effectively handle mental health related complications so as to ensure that the society is not dragged back by this vice.

The issues faced by the tribal adolescent girls in rural Odisha are multifaceted and are connected with cultural and economic issues. Indeed, responding to these challenges calls for immediate intervention from governments, NGOs and community heads. It is in the aspect of education, campaigning against early marriage, and mental health support the future of these girls can be made better. Educating them does not only help improve on their lives; it also helps towards making better health and improved social returns for everyone.

### Legal framework

#### 1. Preventing of Child Marriage Act, 2008 <sup>[2]</sup>

This law has given the legal age for marriage for girls below 18 years and boys below 21 years. Enhances practices designed at preventing early marriage through effecting some sort of punishment on people involved in arranging child marriages.

#### 2. Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 <sup>[3]</sup>

Shelters women from physical, emotional or sexual violence by intimate partners or relatives. Provides court means to address violence on girls from tribal families or within their communities.

#### 3. Juvenile Justice Care and protection of Children Act, 2015 <sup>[4]</sup>

Elaborates care and treatment of juvenile delinquents and children who require the consideration of a court of law and their rehabilitation. Makes sure that needy girls such as those being abused are well taken care off and given a second chance.

#### 4. The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 <sup>[5]</sup>

Aims at protecting women from sexual harassment at their workplace and the law provides for remedies. As targeting workplaces, it increases awareness of SH and promotes general discussions on the safety of girls and woman.

#### 5. The Scheduled Castes and Schedule Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 <sup>[6]</sup>

Prevents Discrimination and Violence against the SCs & STs. It is a movie depicting problems of tribal people, guaranteeing them legal rights which would minimize violence against tribal girls.

#### 6. National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001 <sup>[7]</sup>

Designed to improve the position of women in every aspect of life. Enables development of programme and policy interventions targeting the identified needs of tribal girls for gender justice.

#### 7. Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS)

An exercise that is part of measures undertaken by the government of this country to build stronger child protection in India. Serves vulnerable children and indigenous adolescent girls, and reunites them with their families and tribes safely.

### Conclusion

The ordeal that tribal adolescent girls undergo in the rural area of Odisha is a real and complicated. The different challenges faced by these girls include education barrier, early marriage, gender-based violence, and mental health challenges. All of these are issues that impact their lives and their welfare; many of these issues result in unfavourable consequences for their future. Education has to be made more approachable because this is quite possibly the most important facet of the human experience. Tribal girls cannot attend school because of lack of funds and traditions that give the girls some chores to do at home. Early marriage

reduces their schooling, keeping them in Generations of poverty and denial of opportunities. As if that was not enough, the female population suffers through gender-based violence which affects their physical wellbeing and mental state. Unfortunately, social prejudices interfering with mental states do not allow them to seek treatment.

For these problems, one requires specific measures. In this type of programs, parents are able to get some cash to support the children education and also end up realizing the importance of taking girls to school. Awareness campaigns make the society change the existing perception about early marriage. Mental health services are also required especially when girls have a place to express themselves that can go a long way. In equal regard, understanding, and practice of laws that protect such girls should also be enhanced at ground level. Will also enable the communities to explain these laws and ensure that they get the necessary assistance. Therefore, psychosocial needs of the tribal adolescent girls in the context of rural Odisha calls for attention. Education, fighting early marriages, increasing people's awareness of mental health issues are the measures that will support these girls. Together it is possible to assist them to shape better lives and foster positive change towards their societies.

### **References**

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7. National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001.
8. Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS)