

Knowledge, Attitude and Utility about Government Schemes among Tribal Gypsies from Tamil Nadu

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Abstract Objectives: The Government of India and the Tamil Nadu state government have launched various welfare schemes to improve the living conditions of marginalized tribal communities, focusing on areas like healthcare, education, financial inclusion, livelihood support and social security. However, tribal gypsies in Tamil Nadu face significant challenges in accessing these services due to issues such as geographical isolation, limited awareness, language barriers and cultural differences. The aim of the present study is to assess and evaluate the knowledge, attitude and utility about government schemes among tribals in Tamil Nadu. **Methods:** The study was conducted in a tribal pocket near Tindivanam, Tamil Nadu in June 2022. The sample size was calculated to be 550 and a pilot -validated questionnaire was used to collect the data. The results were analyzed by SPSS 25.0 version software. **Results:** In the study there were about 14.36% of the population who were not aware about the schemes, 10.19% did not care about the schemes, 68.18% no one was there to guide them, 7.27% officers were not accessible. **Conclusion:** Contrary to government claims, more than 90% of tribals in Tamil Nadu lack about various tribal schemes in India.

Key Words Schemes, Government, Indian tribals, Tribal oral health, Innovation

INTRODUCTION

Background

Tribal communities in India, especially those in remote or marginalized areas, face significant socio-economic challenges. Among the most vulnerable are the tribal gypsies or nomadic tribes, who lead migratory lifestyles and are often excluded from mainstream development due to their lack of permanent settlement, limited access to education and healthcare and mobility [1]. In Tamil Nadu, these nomadic tribes traditionally engage in activities such as hunting, gathering, cattle rearing and artisan work [2].

While the Government of India and the Tamil Nadu state government have launched several welfare schemes to improve the living conditions of these communities focusing on healthcare, education, financial inclusion, livelihood support and social security tribal gypsies face significant barriers to accessing these services. Challenges such as geographical isolation, limited awareness, language differences and cultural barriers hinder their participation in these programs [3].

Indian Government has been introducing a number of schemes destined to tribals of India from time to time. The Pradhan Mantri Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojana (PMVKY) has been introduced by the Indian government's Ministry of Tribal Affairs to promote the welfare of tribal people [4]. The goal of PMVKY is the comprehensive development of tribal areas and communities throughout the nation, with an emphasis on integrated village development and capacity building via interventions in convergence in livelihood and education [5].

It includes every tribe member and every region in the nation having a tribe population. The State/UT Governments are given financial support under this system in accordance with their suggestions for the development of tribal people in key development areas including health, education, housing and livelihood [6]. The mission is to enhance the socioeconomic status the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) by offering all families belonging to PVTGs and habitations with essential amenities like secure housing, hygienic clean water, better access to nutrition,

healthcare and education, connectivity for roads and telecoms and chances for sustainable livelihood [7,8].

Rationale and Knowledge Gap

There are many schemes available in India to improve their quality of life. In the Ministry of Tribal Affairs' Annual Plan, Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojana (VKY) was identified as a Central Sector Scheme, with an initial budget of Rs. 100.00 Crore for 2014-15. The Ministry formally began implementation on October 28, 2014 [9].

In general, the VKY was a procedure that sought to provide indigenous people with an entire sense of Using an outcome-based approach, while addressing the crucial gaps in the housing, Agriculture and irrigation, drinking water, health and sanitation, electricity and livelihood [10]. Education, skill building, sports, games and cultural heritage preservation are a few examples [11]. Through the necessary institutional mechanisms and resource convergence. It would ensure the tribal people received all desired goods and services through a number of Central and State Government schemes and initiatives that the relevant Tribes oversee [12,13].

Separate funding allocations under VKY have been abandoned since 2016-17 and it has been envisioned that the TSP would be used to fulfill the fund requirement under the VKY plan, funding for Scheduled Tribe Components (STC) are now used [14]. The funding for Scheduled Tribe Components (STC) are now used. The TSP serves industry sectors. development by the provision of a specified amount of money [15].

It has been discovered that the availability of boarding and lodging options contributes to a greater rate of school enrollment. Promoting and expanding educational opportunities for Scheduled Tribe students, especially PGTs, is the aim of this programme. Ashram Schools offer residential education in a learning atmosphere that is favourable to learning [16]. This is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme on a cost sharing basis between the Centre and the States [17]. But a lot of these schemes go unutilised. This scheme is called Ekalavya Model Residential Schools. Several government schemes aim to improve the livelihoods of tribal communities, including initiatives like Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana (focused on harvesting forest products), the Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship Programme (providing fellowships for higher education and research), the National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation (offering financial assistance for self-employment and entrepreneurship) and the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (providing free housing). These schemes aim on uplifting the livelihood and socio economic status of the tribal people [18].

However, research indicates that lack of awareness is a major barrier preventing tribal gypsies from benefitting from these programs. Many individuals are unaware of their

eligibility for various schemes, such as Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, PM Awas Yojana, or Ayushman Bharat, largely due to the absence of accessible information channels like local community centers or digital platforms [19].

The effectiveness of these schemes in improving the lives of tribal gypsies depends on how well they are designed to address the specific needs of nomadic communities. Programs like PDS (Public Distribution System), MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) and health insurance schemes can provide significant benefits, but they often fail to reach tribal gypsies because of their transient lifestyles and lack of fixed infrastructure [20]. Moreover, the documentation required to access these benefits, such as Aadhaar cards, bank accounts and proof of residence, presents a major hurdle for individuals without permanent addresses or official records [21].

On the other hand, programs that engage directly with communities, such as tribal welfare camps, health outreach initiatives and livelihood programs, can have a more immediate impact on the lives of tribal gypsies. However, the sustain ability of these efforts is often hampered by logistical challenges and inadequate follow-up. Additionally, issues like discrimination or social exclusion may further hinder their participation in these schemes [22,23].

Aim and Objectives

Therefore The purpose of this study was to determine the Narikuravar tribal people in Tamil Nadu's level of knowledge, attitude and usefulness about government programmes. The objectives of this study include assessing the knowledge about tribal schemes, assessing their attitude and their utility about these schemes through a pilot validated questionnaire.

METHODS

This cross-sectional study was done among gypsies or narikuravars in a tribal settlement in Tindivanam of Villupuram district in Tamil Nadu. Tindivanam pocket was selected as the pocket was located very far from the city or town bounds. The study was conducted by the department of Public Health Dentistry in the month of June 2022. The inclusion criteria included any adult living in the settlement, belongs to the Narikuravar community, above 18 years old and is willing to participate in the study. The participants who did not know to read and write in Tamil (the local language), those who were not willing to participate and those who were bed ridden were excluded in the study.

A pre validated questionnaire which was face validated, construct, content and criterion validated with reliability of cronbach's alpha = 0.90 through a pilot study was used to collect information about tribal schemes and its usage. The study participants were asked to give informed consent in the written form and the anonymity of the partipants were maintained. The data collection was done in the form of door to door survey with a team of 10 investigators who were pertained for a week with a kappa value of 0.89.

The sample for the study was collected by snow ball sampling because of the lack of accessibility and communication gap with this vulnerable tribe. The data collection was done as a door to door survey.

The questionnaire comprised two parts. The demographic information, which included age, sex, marital status, employment, education and kind of ID card used, was in the first part. The second section consisted of 8 questions which were closed ended questionnaire. There were 3 questions about assessing the knowledge of the govt schemes, 3 questions assessed the attitude of the people about such schemes and 2 questions assessed the utility of the tribal government schemes.

Version 25.0 of the statistical programme SPSS was used to examine the data. The results were explained using descriptive statistics in the form of mean, SD, frequency, percentages, bar graphs and charts.

RESULTS

The study was conducted among 550 tribal populations. There were 63.4% females and 36.4% males present in the study (Figure 1). The mean age of the participants was 48 17.75. Table 1 delineates the descriptive attributes of the study participants. Both men and women participated in the study were predominantly illiterates or have only studied till primary school (62.5% and 82.57%, respectively). With respect to the economical dependency, males were more independent than females (78%). Both males and females were into their familial occupation rather than other occupations. More than half of them had Aadhar cards, which was followed by Voter ID and ration card.

Figure 2 shows the response to the question if they have heard specific tribal schemes like Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojana, Eklavya school or Rajiv Gandhi Fellowship for ST Students.

Table 1: Descriptive characteristics of the population

Variables	Males (200)	Females (350)
Education level		
Illiterate/Primary	125	289
Middle school	44	56
High school and above	31	5
Type of family		
Nuclear	154	285
Extended	46	65
Marital status		
Unmarried/widowed/Separated/ divorced	36	55
Married	164	295
Economic dependency		
Dependent	10	304
Partially dependent	34	44
Independent	156	2
Occupation		
Familial	138	324
Others	62	26
Type of ID cards		
Nil	94	136
Aadhar	98	167
Ration card	2	34
Voter ID	6	13

83.61% had no awareness about any schemes and 9.84% had awareness about 1 of the 3 schemes asked in the question. They were being asked about the popularity of the scheme and it was revealed that their primary source of knowledge was from health workers, T.V. and radio (Table 2). It was also revealed that 96.72% participants were not using any of the schemes (Figure 3). When asked about their attitude towards the schemes, most of the participants (73.6%) answered it was useless followed by 17.2% who answered they don't know about the schemes. Only 1% answered the schemes were very helpful (Figure 4). When the reasons for not utilizing the schemes were questioned, 56.45% tribals told

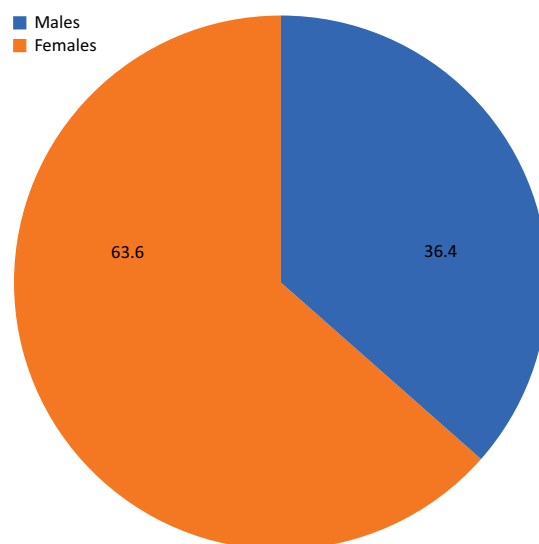


Figure 1: Gender distribution of the study participants

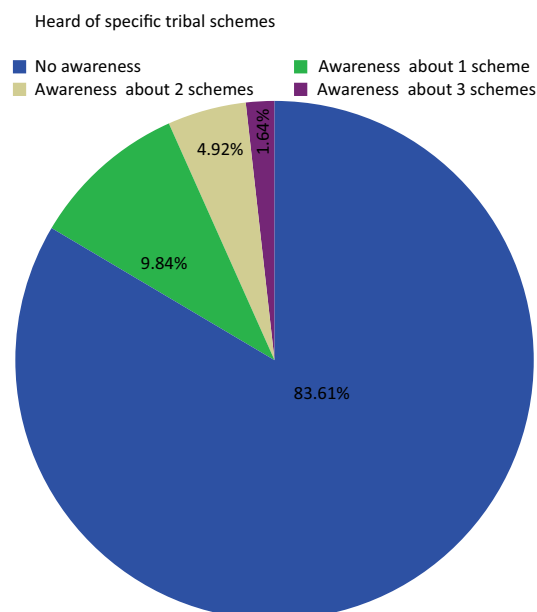


Figure 2: Knowledge about specific tribal schemes

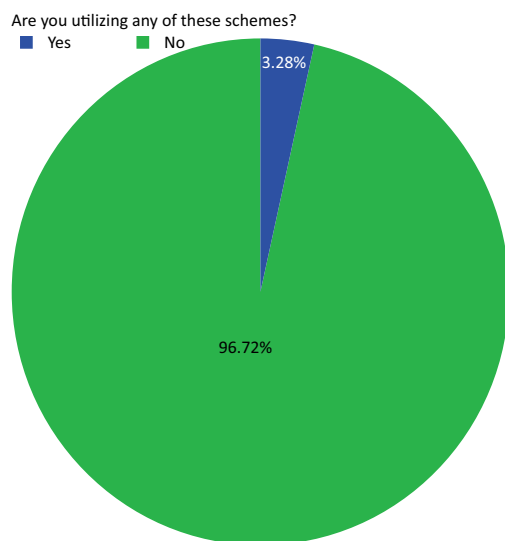


Figure 3: Utilization of schemes

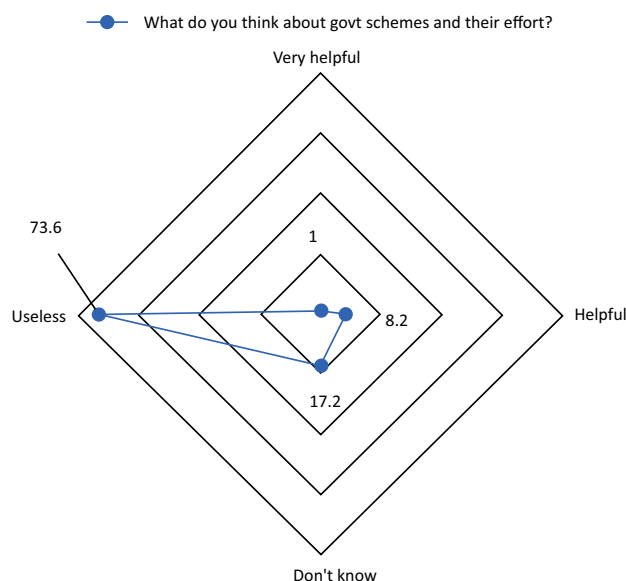


Figure 4: Attitude about government schemes and their effort

Table 2: Primary source of Knowledge

Variables	Males(200)	Females (350)
Primary source of knowledge of scheme		
Nil	158	236
Friends/Neighbours	23	89
TV/Radio	1	5
Health workers	18	20
Do you know anyone utilising these schemes		
Yes	11	2
No	189	348

that they did not have anyone to guide them, 22.58% did not care about the schemes and expressed their dissatisfaction towards the government.

Some tribals reported that they were not aware (16.14%) and some reported the govt officials are not accessible (4.84%) (Figure 5).

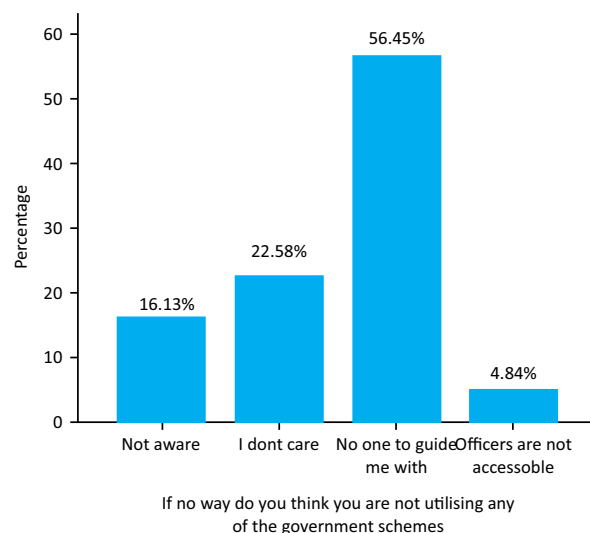


Figure 5: Reasons for not utilizing the govt schemes

DISCUSSION

Key Findings

The study revealed that Regarding awareness of specific tribal welfare schemes, such as the Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojana, Eklavya school and Rajiv Gandhi Fellowship for ST Students, most participants were unaware of these schemes. A small portion had heard of at least one of the schemes. The primary sources of information about these schemes were health workers, television and radio. Most participants reported not utilizing them. The general attitude towards the schemes was largely negative, with the majority considering them unhelpful and a small number stating they were not familiar with them. Only a few participants found the schemes beneficial.

Strengths and Limitations

The strength of the study was that it included a vulnerable difficult to access population. Also this topic has never been published or studied to the authors' knowledge. The limitations of the study included that the study was only done on one tribal pocket of Tamil Nadu. Also this study was designed to be cross sectional questionnaire type and did not involve any qualitative elements.

Comparison with Similar Researches

For any plan to be successful, primary stakeholders must be aware of the entitlements under the scheme. Present study consisted of 0.1% utilization of government schemes in Tamil Nadu. In similar findings 4% utilization of government schemes in Odisha [24]. Contradictory findings consisted of 57% utilization of government schemes in Telangan [25]. According to the the present study, around 16.13% of the population were not aware of the scheme, 22.58% were not ready to care about the scheme, 56.4% of the population had no one to guide them and 4.84% of the population did not had accessible of the officers. 96. 2% of the population did not

used the government schemes. Similarly, in Jammu and Kashmir, tribals had difficulties in utilizing the schemes [26]

Rural development can only be effective if it coexists with the advancement of humankind, entrepreneurship, financial strength, the creation of jobs and infrastructure. Self-employment has emerged as a vital instrument in the fight against poverty as the northeastern states were unable to accommodate the hiring of all job seekers in formal sector positions [27].

Explanation of the Key Findings

Barriers to Utilisation of Schemes: Tribal gypsy communities often face significant barriers in accessing government schemes due to their geographical isolation, language barriers, lack of awareness, absence of local intermediaries and cultural mistrust of authorities. Many live in remote areas, making it difficult for government officials and NGOs to reach them with information about welfare schemes. Language differences further hinder communication, as tribal gypsies often speak dialects not understood by most government workers. Even when information is available, a lack of communication channels and limited access to media leaves them unaware of government programs [28,29].

The absence of local intermediaries, such as trusted community leaders who understand bureaucratic processes, makes it harder for these communities to navigate government systems. Additionally, a historical mistrust of government institutions due to past marginalization and neglect leads to reluctance in engaging with government schemes, further excluding them from opportunities meant to improve their lives [30].

Cultural Beliefs and Practices Regarding Government Interaction

Tribal gypsies' mistrust of government institutions stems from a long history of marginalization and exclusion, leading them to view the government as unresponsive or corrupt. They often prefer informal support systems, relying on local leaders or elders for guidance rather than engaging with unfamiliar government processes. The complexity of bureaucratic procedures and documentation further deters participation, as these systems seem alien and overly complicated. Many tribal communities also make decisions collectively and without the support of influential leaders, individuals may hesitate to access government schemes. Additionally, the nomadic lifestyle of these communities, which values mobility and independence, often clashes with the structured nature of government programs that require fixed addresses and permanent settlements [31].

Participants's Access to Technology and Digital Literacy Impact on Scheme Access

Tribal gypsy communities often face limited access to technology, including smartphones, computers and reliable internet, which restricts their ability to explore online

government schemes. Even when technology is available, digital literacy gaps hinder their ability to navigate websites, complete applications, or use government apps. Many rely on offline sources like word of mouth or local health workers, which may not provide timely or accurate information. Even among those with technology, digital inequality persists due to factors like unstable electricity, high data costs, or inadequate devices. Despite government initiatives like PMGDISHA for digital literacy, these programs often fail to reach tribal gypsies, leaving them excluded from digital welfare schemes [32-35].

Implications and Action needed

Education is fundamental to societal development and human capital growth. This study is valuable in addressing the educational challenges in utilising the tribal schemes by tribal populations in Tamil Nadu. Since education plays a crucial role in raising awareness about government schemes and their benefits, strengthening the educational framework for tribal communities can enhance their participation and access to these programs.

CONCLUSION

Contrary to government claims, more than 90% of tribals in Tamil Nadu are aware about the government schemes in India. The results indicate that a significant portion of tribal communities are not utilizing these programs, mainly due to perceiving them as ineffective or lacking proper guidance. Furthermore, there is a notable lack of awareness about the existence of these schemes, exacerbating the issue.

This underscores a critical gap in the accessibility and communication of governmental support systems aimed at tribal communities. Merely introducing schemes is insufficient if they remain unknown or perceived as irrelevant by their intended beneficiaries. While there was lack of awareness to these initiatives, cultural beliefs and digital literacy were noted as barriers, it is important overcome these barriers by increasing awareness and educate the tribals to utilise these schemes.

It is crucial for policymakers to reassess the effectiveness of existing schemes like Van Bandhu Kalyan Yojana, EMRS, Tribal sub plan, Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), Integrated Tribal Development Projects (ITDP), etc ensuring they meet the needs and realities of tribal communities. Additionally, proactive measures are needed to enhance awareness and accessibility, empowering tribal populations to make effective use of these resources. Addressing this necessitates various interventions, including improved outreach, better communication channels and targeted educational initiatives.

Ethical Statement

Ethical clearance was obtained from Institutional ethics committee, Saveetha University with the number SRB/SDC/UG-2110/22/PHD/093.

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