



ALCOHOLISM AND SUBSTANCE USE AMONG THE PATHARI TRIBAL WOMEN: A CASE STUDY BASED ON SONBHADRA DISTRICT

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Abstract

This research paper is based on a sociological investigation of alcoholism among the women of Pathari tribe of Sonbhadra district. The study analyses factors such as social structure, cultural practices, and economic marginalization that contribute to the usage of alcohol and other substance. Factors such as social exclusion, gender inequality and cultural disconnect were found to be the major causes of increased substance use and addiction. The study emphasises that preventive measures, community participation and culturally appropriate interventions are essential to effectively address the problem of alcohol addiction, especially among tribal women, to create an alcohol-free society. For this study Qualitative and quantitative research methods have been used to understand women's social role, traditional livelihoods, and limitations of access to health care.

Keyword: *Alcoholism, Substance use, Alcohol, Pathari, Tribal Women, Tribal ritual, Social Exclusion, Marginalisation.*

Introduction

Substance use and alcohol addiction among the Pathari tribal women particularly of Sonbhadra district is rising as a complex sociological problem, that is in a large scale affected by the factors such as social structure, cultural traditions, practices and economic marginalization. The focus of this study is to make a detailed analysis of the causes, effects and preventive measures to reduce alcohol consumption among these women. **Mishra, K. (2015)** in his book "Tribal women: Today and tomorrow" has mentioned that the social status of tribal women is heterogeneous; it differs regionally and among the tribes as well. Even though many development schemes are being implemented for the tribal women, they are still facing oppression, exploitation and discrimination in every field. Traditional beliefs, customs and

social roles play an important role in the social structure of tribal society. Changes in the traditional roles of women, the impact of urbanization and modernity have caused social instability, resulting in increasing tendency of alcohol consumption use. In some tribal communities, substance use has been a part of cultural rituals, but in the contemporary context the nature of these practices has changed, due to which uncontrolled use of these substances has become a serious social problem. Cultural disintegration and erosion of traditional values have further complicated this problem. Pathari tribal women are so unaware of the education system and the preventive measures. Also, they are deprived of education due to financial problems and economic marginalisation. This is resulting to the bad health of these women because of overuse of alcohol, knowingly or unknowingly. Women hesitate to access support and treatment services due to social stigma and gender-based inequality. Community participation, public awareness programmes and culturally appropriate interventions are needed to address this problem.

In India's tribal communities, the use of certain substances has traditionally been an integral part of religious rituals and social ceremonies (**Choudhary, 2020**). However, in the modern era, these traditions have been transformed due to the effects of structural reconfiguration and market capitalism. This transition has transformed alcohol consumption among tribal women from a traditional practice to a coping mechanism form social stress.

According to **Narayan (2016)**, the use of traditional beverages such as toddy and mahua was part of their cultural expression in tribal communities of Jharkhand, Odisha and Chhattisgarh. However, forced displacement and relative deprivation of economic resources has transformed it into a form of psychological escapism. Mukherjee (2018) has shown that social stigma and limited access to rehabilitation services further complicate the problem, making rehabilitation facilities almost unaffordable for tribal women.

This paper provides a detailed understanding on the nature of women using alcohol in daily basis or occasionally and give suggestions through which this problem can be mitigated by strengthening social support mechanisms, empowering women and increasing their access to health services. This paper attempts to understand the complexities of Alcoholism and Substance among tribal women of Sonbhadra district, so that effective strategies can be developed to address this serious social problem.

Literature review

1. Sharma, Hari Kesh. (1996) has considered various aspects related to alcohol use and abuse in his article "Substance Use & Misuse". His study analyses the causes of alcohol abuse

that is happening against women, its effects and measures to avoid drug abuse. The author has tried to understand and explain the physical and socio-psychological effects of alcohol abuse. In addition to this, from a sociological perspective, it has been extracted out that drug abuse causes not only personal issues but also social problems and it needs an effective intervention to solve it.

The article also mentions that alcohol abuse is a serious social issue, which should be solved not only from a medical point of view, but also from a socially, economically and culturally. This study makes it clear that an effective solution to this problem is possible only through collective efforts and raising awareness in the society.

2. “Women and Drug Abuse: The Problem in India” titled study was done by United Nations Regional Office for South Asia (UNIDCP) with Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India and released in 2002 on Extent, Pattern and Trends of Drug Abuse in India which comprehensively analyses the problem of drug abuse and alcohol addiction among women in India. The study focuses on drug abuse trends, its social and psychological causes, and its wider impacts. The book discusses the health, social and family complications arising from drug use, especially in the context of women. It also highlights the need for effective strategies, prevention programmes and policy-making to address this problem.
3. Devarapalli, S. V. Siddhardh Kumar; Kallakuri, Sudha; Salam, Abdul; Maulik, Pallab K. (n.d.). did a study on “Mental Health Research on Scheduled Tribes in India.” This study presents an in-depth analysis of the mental health of scheduled tribes in India. The study found that the increasing problems of mental disorders is high in these tribal communities, primarily due to social inequality, cultural distortion and economic marginalization. Lack of mental health services, stigma around mental illnesses and lack of public awareness further push these problems. This study suggests that specialized interventions and holistic policy approaches are needed in the context of mental health of Scheduled Tribes to promote mental well-being in these communities.
4. In their study “Substance Use in Women: Current Status and Future Directions.” Lal, Rakesh; Deb, Koushik Sinha; Kedia, Swati (2015). analyses the social structural causes, impacts and attendant problems of substance use among women. It establishes that substance abuse among women is particularly affected by socio-economic inequalities, mental health disorders and family pressures. The article highlights the need for gender-

specific policies, social reconstruction efforts and mental health interventions for the future.

5. A Paper published in 'The National Medical Journal of India' titled as 'Community Perspectives on Alcohol Use Among a Tribal Population in Rural Southern India' analyses the socio-structural perspective of alcohol use among tribal communities in rural southern India. The researchers attempted to understand alcohol use in the context of cultural practices, group identity and social relations. It was found that alcohol consumption is linked to social mobility and traditional rituals in tribal communities, but its excessive consumption leads to social disruption, health crisis and family imbalance. The article also showed that community empowerment, cultural reconstruction and social intervention are needed to effectively control alcohol consumption patterns.
6. Bacon, K. Margaret. (1976). In his article "Alcohol Use in Tribal Societies," analyzes the structural, cultural, and historical dimensions of alcohol consumption in tribal societies. The researcher links alcohol use to the social status quo, cultural customs, and collective identity of tribal communities, and explains how external forces such as colonialism, industrialization, and modernity have been instrumental in bringing about changes in these practices. Bacon focuses deeply on the social disruption, health inequalities, and family breakdown that alcohol abuse causes. The study argues that social reconstruction, institutional intervention, and cultural reinvention are needed to effectively control alcohol consumption problems.
7. A study conducted by Sadat, Jose, Jeeji, Mercy, Ragesh, and Arensman (2021) analyzed the prevalence and determinants of alcohol, tobacco, and betel nut consumption in tribal communities of South India. This cross-sectional study surveyed 2,186 tribal Haushalts, which found that the rate of current alcohol consumption was 17.2%, tobacco consumption rate was 18.8%, and daily betel nut consumption rate was 47.6%. Male gender, increasing age, Paniya tribal status, and employed status were found to be significant risk factors for substance use.

The available literature on alcohol addiction among tribal women in Sonbhadra district particularly is limited and scattered. Although some studies have explored and examined the alcohol addiction trends and its socio-economic impacts in tribal communities, there is a clear lack of in-depth research on women's personal experiences, their socio-cultural environment, their quitting habits, and the multidimensional causes of alcohol addiction, its impacts and prevention strategies. Along with this, the available quantitative statistical data lack gender-

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based analysis, which poses a major obstacle to targeted interventions and policy formulation for women. Hence, an in-depth, inclusive and gender-sensitive research is necessary to explain the trends, underlying causes and consequential effects of alcoholism and substance among tribal women of Sonbhadra district to develop effective policy frameworks and robust rehabilitation programmes.

Research objectives

1. Analyse the structural causes of substance abuse among Pathari tribal women: Analyse the interrelationships of social, cultural and mental health factors with substance use among tribal women, which influence their personality and community experiences.
2. Examine gender-specific social impacts: Develop a deeper understanding of the negative gender-based consequences of substance abuse on tribal women, such as social stigma, mental health pathology, and family disruption.
3. Sociologically analyse the effects of alcohol use in cultural structures: Analyse the wider impacts of alcohol use in tribal societies by situating it within the context of cultural rituals, social role construction and collective identity.
4. Evaluate accessibility of health services and policy frameworks: Review the accessibility, affordability and policy frameworks of health services in substance abuse prevention and treatment for tribal women.
5. Developing social propositions of innovative policy interventions: To provide theoretical guidelines for designing and practical implementation of gender-sensitive, inclusive and functional policy interventions to control substance abuse among tribal women of Pathari tribe.

This study focuses on the problem of alcohol addiction among Pathari tribal women of Sonbhadra district. As the literature available on this subject in the region and Pathari tribe is limited, it is necessary to study in detail the experiences of women, their socio-cultural context and the causes, consequences and preventive measures of substance abuse and alcohol addiction.

Methodology

This study adopts mixed method approach of sample selection that is both quantitative and qualitative to analyse the Alcoholism and Substance pattern among tribal women through their socio-economic context, cultural structures and community dynamics. The research used methods such as field observation, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGD).

The research area was restricted to tribal dominated areas of Sonbhadra district in order to study the social dynamics of alcoholism and substance in a holistic manner in this particular context. Purposive Sampling method was preferred for sample selection to target women who are directly or indirectly affected by this social problem. For primary data collection, in-depth interviews were conducted with 50 tribal women from Pathari tribe who either used alcohol regularly or used them occasionally. In addition, discussions were established with community leaders, health experts and social workers to gain multi-dimensional insights.

Secondary sources included critical analysis of relevant government reports, research compiled by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and sociological studies. The aim of this research was to gain a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural background of alcohol abuse, the effects of structural restructuring and community interactions.

Data Analysis

The collected data was analysed using Content Analysis to understand alcoholism in the context of socio-cultural sequences, economic marginalisation and community fragmentation. This research revealed that the initial form of substance use among tribal women was linked to cultural rituals, but in the modern context it has emerged as a survival mechanism.

The interviews concluded that circumstances such as economic crisis, employment insecurity and disintegration of family structures are pushing women towards alcohol addiction. Cultural instability and erosion of traditional values have further complicated this problem. According to Weber's (1922) social action theory, changes in social contexts affect the decision-making process of an individual, which was clearly seen in this research.

Additionally, focus group discussions revealed that women are not able to avail institutional treatment options due to limited access to government rehabilitation facilities and social stigma. Family support, community participation and institutional intervention are essential to overcome drug addiction.

Further, the analysis also found that in communities where social cohesion is high, alcoholism was relatively less. The erosion of social structures has increased the tendency of depression, self-consciousness and self-devaluation among women, making them more vulnerable to substance addiction.

According to sociologist Durkheim (1897), social cohesion and community support play an important role in controlling the behavior of an individual. This research also concluded that in communities where there is a strong structure of community support and social control, the tendency of substance use was relatively less.

Data Interpretation

A comprehensive analysis of the collected data was done to understand the tendency of alcohol addiction from a multidimensional perspective. It was evident that most women were turning to alcoholism due to economic oppression, social exclusion and mental health problems. Traditionally, the use of locally available intoxicants such as mahua and toddy was restricted to cultural events, but today it has become a means of psychological escapism.

Women who participated in the research described substance use as a means of coping with family discord, gender violence, social and economic stress. Many women described it as a response to the insecurity arising from the erosion of social identity and the disintegration of traditional community structures.

Most of the women admitted that alcohol consumption is a part of their daily life activity. However, in their cultural festival, it is mandatory to consume it and they are not against it but like it. They also accepted that over consumption of it sometimes leads to chaos and violence, but they are scared of societal humiliation and denies to visit rehabilitation centres. Apart from this, most of them are not even aware of rehabilitation centres. The focus group discussions also revealed that community support and empowerment programmes are needed to bring women out of this vicious circle. According to Karl (1995), gender equality and economic self-reliance significantly influence women's social decisions.

Findings of the Research

The Sonbhadra region of Uttar Pradesh is rich in tribal population with mostly Baiga, Bhuiya, Kharwar, Gond, Panika etc. However, Pathari tribe is one of the tribes with lowest populations residing in that region. Through the interviews, observation and focus group discussion only on the Pathari tribal women, it is clear that substance use was very high among the tribal women population, showcasing strong socio-cultural and traditional belief. Most of the women has accepted the fact that alcohol consumption is a basic need for their life. They find it normal and teaches their young generation to consume alcohol during the traditional rituals and practices as a traditional beverage. Most of the women working for their livelihood consume alcohol after work to remove tiredness and stress. They find it helpful. However, they are unaware of the consequences of substance use that how it can affect their health and public behaviour. Women between the age of 21-25 are educated and believes that substance use should be stopped in the name of traditional rituals. This finding generates major policy implications, including the need to awareness about substance use interventions among the young age tribal women.

Sociological analysis

From a sociological perspective, the increasing use of substance among Pathari tribal women can be seen in the complexity of social structure, cultural change, and economic restructuring. Traditionally, the social role of women in tribal societies has been comparatively more autonomous, but neo-colonial influence, capitalist market structure, and modern economic system have limited their traditional socio-economic autonomy. Due to the increasing economic dependence of women, they are adopting alcohol as a coping mechanism to face family and institutional pressures.

The influence of neo-liberal policies and market capitalism has led to social instability in tribal societies, due to which fragmentation of community relations is being seen. The disintegration of traditional social structures has weakened the community support systems for women, due to which they have become more marginalized in society.

According to Giddens' structuralism theory, social structures influence individual behaviour and choices. The results of this research show that changing social structures and economic instability in tribal society are pushing women towards alcohol addiction.

Government interventions and rehabilitation schemes are not reaching tribal women effectively. From the perspective of structural sociology, it is necessary to develop specially adapted rehabilitation, mental health counselling and social empowerment programmes for women to enable them to overcome this problem.

Challenges and recommendations

The major challenges revealed in this study are economic insecurity, socio-economic disparities, limited educational and employment opportunities, and weak familial institutions, which structurally marginalize Pathari tribal women. Also, social status, social expectations, gender-based power structures, and cultural fragmentation contribute to alcohol addiction. Considering these challenges, government and non-governmental institutions are recommended to promote community participation and implement targeted programmes for women's empowerment and create awareness. Policymakers should take concrete steps to improve education, skill development, and health services to make these women socially, economically, and culturally strong. Also, preservation of traditional social structures and cultural beliefs along with proper integration of modern interventions—such as psychological counselling and social rehabilitation—are necessary to holistically address the problem of alcohol addiction.

Conclusions

The findings of this research clearly indicate that alcoholism and substance addiction among the Pathari tribal women in Sonbhadra district is a complex social problem that emerges as a result of structural inequalities, economic marginalization, and cultural fragmentation. The results of the study show that weak family institutions, limited educational, employment opportunities, and gender-based power structures add deep complexity to the experiences of these women, increasing social stigma and negative identity conflicts. Based on these findings, it appears necessary that effective policy interventions and women empowerment programmes be implemented immediately to bring about positive change in the lives of tribal women by reducing the inequalities existing in the social structure. Finally, this research establishes from a sociological perspective that alcohol addiction is not just a question of individual behaviour, but it is a complex expression of broader social, economic and cultural structures.

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