

A Study on Mental Health, Psychological Support and Life Satisfaction for Tribal Community in Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu

Manikandan A.^{1,*}, Rithika S.², Shahina A.²

Abstract

This research investigates the mental health challenges, psychological support systems, and overall life satisfaction among tribal communities in the Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu. These indigenous groups, including the Todas, Kotas, Irulas, and Kurumbas, are undergoing significant social transitions due to modernization, environmental change, and cultural shifts: factors that increasingly influence their mental well-being. The primary objectives of this study are to assess the prevalence of mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, evaluate the availability and effectiveness of psychological support systems, and identify key factors impacting life satisfaction within these communities. A quantitative research design was employed, using structured surveys administered to a sample of 60 participants drawn from various tribal groups. The data collected were analyzed using SPSS software, which helped in identifying statistical patterns, correlations, and critical influences on mental health outcomes. The findings indicate a high prevalence of mental health challenges, particularly feelings of sadness, moderate stress, and emotional exhaustion. Despite the presence of traditional support systems, formal psychological services remain largely inaccessible, leading many individuals to rely on familial, spiritual, and community-based practices. While these traditional methods offer some relief, they may not fully address the complexities of modern psychological distress. The study concludes with key recommendations, including the integration of traditional and modern mental health practices, improved access to culturally sensitive mental health services, and the development of community-driven interventions aimed at enhancing life satisfaction and holistic well-being among tribal populations in the Nilgiris.

Keywords: Mental health, tribal, life satisfaction, psychological support structures, mental well-being, anxiety and depression

*Author for Correspondence

Manikandan A.
E-mail: manigdr662002@gmail.com

¹Research Scholar, Department of Commerce, Nilgiri College of Arts and Science, Thaloor, Tamil Nadu, India

²Student, Department of Commerce, Nilgiri College of Arts and Science, Thaloor, Tamil Nadu, India

Received Date: June 18, 2025

Accepted Date: August 30, 2025

Published Date: September 13, 2025

Citation: Manikandan A., Rithika S., Shahina A. A Study on Mental Health, Psychological Support and Life Satisfaction for Tribal Community in Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu. International Journal of Community Health Nursing and Practices. 2025; 3(2): 41–45p.

INTRODUCTION

The Nilgiris, a picturesque region in Tamil Nadu, is home to several indigenous tribal communities, including the Todas, Kotas, Irulas, and Kurumbas. These communities possess rich cultural traditions deeply rooted in nature. However, they also face persistent socioeconomic challenges that adversely affect their physical and mental well-being. Within the scope of community health nursing, addressing the mental health needs of these marginalized groups becomes a critical component of promoting holistic and equitable healthcare. Mental health issues among tribal populations often remain unrecognized and untreated due to geographical

isolation, limited mental health literacy, inadequate access to services, and persistent stigma. These factors contribute to rising incidences of stress, anxiety, depression, and other psychosocial issues, particularly among younger community members who are navigating the pressures of modernization and shifting cultural identities.

While traditional coping mechanisms such as spiritual practices and close-knit family networks provide some psychological support, they are often insufficient in managing the complexities of modern mental health challenges. Community health nurses play a vital role in bridging this gap by delivering culturally competent, preventive, and promotive mental health care that is accessible and community-centered.

Life satisfaction in tribal communities is closely tied to determinants of health such as income stability, access to quality healthcare, education, and preservation of cultural identity. However, with increasing exposure to external influences, traditional ways of life are being disrupted, leading to a loss of community cohesion and a decline in perceived well-being.

This study aims to explore the mental health status, psychological support systems, and life satisfaction among the tribal populations of the Nilgiris through the lens of community health nursing. It identifies key service delivery gaps and proposes culturally sensitive interventions to promote mental well-being and improve quality of life. The findings are intended to inform nursing practices, community outreach programs, and public health policies that are inclusive and respectful of tribal cultural values.

OBJECTIVES

1. Assess the mental health status of tribal communities in the Nilgiris.
2. Examine the psychological support systems available to these populations.
3. Evaluate life satisfaction and overall well-being.
4. Identify barriers to accessing mental health services.
5. Analyze the role of cultural identity and community cohesion in mental health.
6. Provide recommendations for improving mental health support and life satisfaction.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Khamo highlighted that mental health challenges in Nilgiris' tribal populations, such as the Kurumbas and Irulas, are exacerbated by social isolation, economic issues, and erosion of traditional practices [1].

Traditional support mechanisms often include spiritual and community-based practices. Meredith *et al.* discussed how indigenous communities rely on traditional healers and spiritual leaders for emotional support, emphasizing the need to preserve these practices in modern mental health strategies [2].

Der Tambile *et al.* found that life satisfaction among rural tribal populations is closely tied to socioeconomic stability and access to education and healthcare. Cultural preservation was identified as a significant determinant of well-being [3].

Shepherd *et al.* emphasized that strong community networks, cultural identity, and a connection to the land enhance life satisfaction. However, Dwivedi noted that modernization and external pressures have weakened traditional support systems, making younger generations more susceptible to stress and mental health issues [4, 5].

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Tribal communities in the Nilgiris face mental health challenges, including anxiety, depression, and substance abuse, compounded by economic struggles, cultural erosion, and limited access to mental health care. These issues often go untreated due to stigma and a lack of appropriate support systems.

Life satisfaction, influenced by cultural identity and social cohesion, is further undermined by displacement and restricted opportunities. This study aims to explore mental health status, support mechanisms, and life satisfaction, identifying barriers and proposing solutions to improve overall well-being in these communities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data Collection Methods

1. Questionnaire Method

- A structured questionnaire covered topics like socioeconomic conditions, cultural practices, healthcare access, and mental health.
- Questions were designed to be simple and comprehensible for participants.
- Responses were gathered from 60 individuals belonging to the Kurumbas, Irulas, Todas, and Kotas tribes.

2. Interview Method

- Semi-structured interviews captured qualitative data, focusing on experiences with traditional practices, social challenges, and community networks.
- These interviews provided contextual insights to complement the survey data.

Data Analysis

- SPSS software was used for data analysis.
- Descriptive statistics summarized data, while inferential statistics explored correlations between variables like socioeconomic stability and mental health.
- Qualitative data were categorized into themes for further interpretation.

FINDINGS

The present study aimed to explore the mental health status, psychological support systems, and life satisfaction among tribal youth in the Nilgiris region of Tamil Nadu. The findings shed light on key aspects affecting the well-being of this population and underscore the importance of culturally sensitive, community-based mental health interventions.

Demographic Profile

The participants represented a balanced demographic group in terms of age and gender. The most common age group among respondents was 21–23 years, comprising 33.3% of the sample population. This indicates that the study largely reflects the experiences and mental health challenges of young adults, a demographic particularly vulnerable to psychological stressors due to educational, social, and economic transitions. Furthermore, the study maintained equal gender representation, with 50% male and 50% female participants, ensuring a balanced perspective on gender-related mental health concerns [6].

Mental Health Indicators

The study identified significant levels of psychological distress among the participants. Approximately 33.3% of respondents reported frequent feelings of sadness, suggesting a high prevalence of depressive symptoms within the community. This emotional state may be linked to various contributing factors such as limited opportunities, cultural displacement, and academic dissatisfaction.

Additionally, 33.3% of participants reported experiencing moderate levels of stress. This finding reflects the growing mental burden faced by tribal youth, who are often caught between preserving traditional values and adapting to the demands of modern life. The stress could stem from factors such as academic pressure, uncertainty about career prospects, and a lack of support systems tailored to their cultural context [7].

Physical and Emotional Exhaustion

A notable portion of the respondents (26.7%) indicated that they "sometimes" feel physically and emotionally exhausted. This intermittent exhaustion, while not constant, is significant as it may signal early signs of burnout or mental fatigue. In the context of community health, this calls for greater attention to early intervention strategies and stress management programs among tribal youth.

Cultural Engagement and Access to Services

When asked about cultural engagement and access to healthcare or psychological support services, 30% of respondents gave 'neutral' responses, indicating a level of detachment or ambiguity. This neutrality may reflect either inconsistent access to services or uncertainty about the relevance and effectiveness of the services currently available. This ambiguity highlights the need for better communication, outreach, and culturally relevant health education initiatives within these communities [8].

Academic Dissatisfaction

One of the most striking findings was the high level of dissatisfaction related to academics, reported by 48.3% of participants. This dissatisfaction could be attributed to various factors including language barriers, lack of academic support, socioeconomic constraints, and a curriculum that may not align with the lived experiences or aspirations of tribal youth. Academic dissatisfaction can significantly impact both self-esteem and long-term life satisfaction [9].

Life Satisfaction and Self-Confidence

When asked about their overall life satisfaction and confidence levels, most respondents described their feelings as 'neutral' or 'sometimes'. This suggests that while participants are not overwhelmingly dissatisfied, they also do not experience strong positive emotions regarding their life trajectory or personal development. This moderate outlook on life points to an unmet potential in terms of psychological well-being and calls for targeted community health interventions focused on empowerment, resilience-building, and self-efficacy [10].

SUGGESTIONS

- Develop stress management workshops for frequent stress sufferers.
- Offer mental health counseling and concentration techniques.
- Foster cultural engagement through events and activities.
- Strengthen community cohesion to reduce isolation.
- Improve access to psychological support and services.
- Introduce goal-setting and confidence-building workshops.
- Address dissatisfaction in academics through targeted initiatives.

CONCLUSION

The findings highlight significant challenges, including moderate stress, dissatisfaction, and mixed feelings about support systems. By implementing targeted interventions, such as mental health programs, community activities, and academic support, overall well-being and life satisfaction can be significantly improved for these tribal communities.

REFERENCES

1. Vevolu Khamo. Mental health research among tribal population in India. *Int J Multidiscip Res*. 2024 Mar–Apr; 6(2): 1–7.
2. Meredith C, McKerchar C, Lacey C. Indigenous approaches to perinatal mental health: a systematic review with critical interpretive synthesis. *Arch Womens Ment Health*. 2023 Jun; 26(3): 275–293. doi: 10.1007/s00737-023-01310-7. Epub 2023 Mar 31. PMID: 37002367; PMCID: PMC10191969.
3. Der Tambile E, Ramachandran VS, Rajendrakumar S, et al. Rural livelihoods sustainability in South Asia and Africa: a systematic review with bibliometric analysis. *Discov Sustain*. 2024; 5: 410. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43621-024-00651-2>.

4. Shepherd SM, Delgado RH, Sherwood J, et al. The impact of indigenous cultural identity and cultural engagement on violent offending. *BMC Public Health*. 2018; 18: 50. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-017-4603-2>
5. Digant Dwivedi. The impact of modernization on tribal identity and culture. *Int J Trends Emerg Res Dev*. 2025; 3(1): 13–17.
6. World Health Organization. Depression and other common mental disorders: Global health estimates. [Online]. Available from: <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/254610/W?sequence=1>.
7. Murthy RS, National mental health survey of India 2015-2016. *Indian J Psychiatry*. 2017; 59(1): 21–6.
8. Saxena N, Kumar D, Das A, Connecting the unconnected: The way forward for public health to reach the unreached tribal communities in India. *Curr Sci*. 2021; 120(1): 24–26.
9. Devarapalli SVSK, Kallakuri S, Salam A, Maulik PK. Mental health research on scheduled tribes in India. *Indian J Psychiatry*. 2020 Nov–Dec; 62(6): 617–630. doi: 10.4103/psychiatry.IndianJPsychiatry_136_19. Epub 2020 Dec 12. PMID: 33896966; PMCID: PMC8052874.
10. George Institute for Global Health. (2017). Roundtable Meeting on Mental Health of Scheduled Tribe Populations. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.georgeinstitute.org.in/projects/areas/mental-health-of-scheduled-tribepopulations-in-india>