



Common Breastfeeding Practices among the Ho Tribal Married Women: A Case Study of West Singhbhum District

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ABSTRACT

The present study is an attempt to address the issues and concerns of the Ho tribe's married women. The Study was conducted in rural areas of the West Singhbhum district, a district in Jharkhand with the highest concentration of the Ho tribe. The study is based primarily on the evidence collected from the field with the use of a semi-structured interview schedule. It is found that the Ho tribe is one of the marginalised groups in the area and is living a poor life. Most of them live in kuchcha houses and do not own any agricultural land, and most of them do not even have access to drinking water or electricity. Ox and chickens are the most common livestock that Ho tribe households have at their households. The education level is alarming among the Ho women; half of them have not entered school, and the majority of those who have entered school studied at the primary level. Breastfeeding practises are unique in the Ho tribe, where they use traditional knowledge and learn from senior women in the tribe about different foods and feeding systems. There is a need for group-specific social policies to be implemented in the country so marginalised groups like Ho can benefit from such policies and schemes.

Keywords: Marginalised Groups, Ho Tribe, Traditional Knowledge and Breastfeeding.

Context of the Study

The fact that tribal groups sell wild edibles in addition to using them for self-sufficiency is also an intriguing finding. Wild edibles are frequently sold by tribal women seasonally at weekly markets. Throughout the year, the 'Ho' tribes eat a variety of wild green vegetables depending on what is in season, but before their festival (Porob), they are not allowed to eat certain plant items such fruits, leafy vegetables, roots, or tubers. So they may eat after the festival's (porob) revelry (Horo & Topno, 2015; Singhal, Ghosh & Bhat, 2021). These fascinating observations were made by the author, namely that the "Ho" tribes consumed wild edible plants. They related their eating habits and patterns to their beliefs, and as a result, the plants thrived during the period of prohibition (Shekhar, & Joglekar, 2017; Jangir, & RajNat, 2022). As a result, they had knowledge of plant conservation, which the present finding explores and preserves. The "Ho" tribe utilises wild plant species for a variety of purposes, including food and medicinal. They eat a lot of wild green vegetables, but the younger generation is not aware of this; it has only been found among the elders. The amount of excessive anthropogenic activity, improper documentation, and absence of practises must be reduced, and this traditional knowledge must be passed down among these indigenous people from generation to generation (Kumari & Kshatriya, 2018; Shil, & Jangir, 2021). The rise of the modernised culture has had a significant impact on the socio-culture of their heritage today. These people are assimilating many forms of modern culture and way of life from sources other than their own heritage (Dubey & Soy, 2021).

Study Area:

The district of West Singhbhum is located in Jharkhand's southern region. The district encompasses 21° 58' and 23° 36' of latitude in the north and 85° 0' and 86° 54' of longitude in the east. The district has a total size of 5351.41 square kilometres and is located at a height of 244 metres above sea level. The 'Ho' tribe, which lives amidst the diverse flora and fauna, benefits from the majority of the tribals in this territory.

Socio-Economic Profile of the Respondents

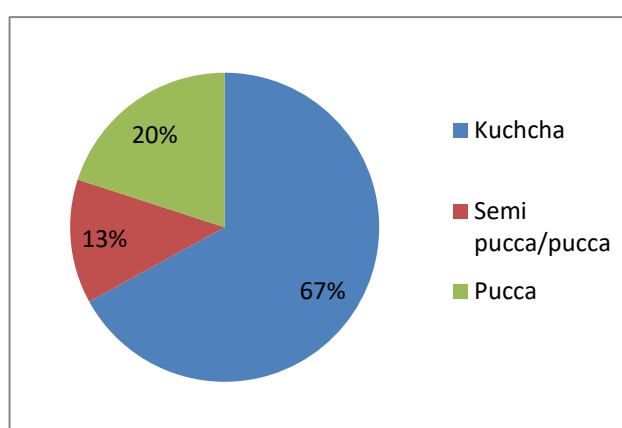
Housing characteristics have close association with the health and wellbeing of a family. Table presents the housing characteristics in the study area. The study found that 44 percent of household fetch water from the public borewell, 39 percent from public wells, 9 percent had their own well and only 5 percent of the households had access to tap water. It was also found that 68 percent of the households have access to electricity with the rest lighting their homes with kerosene lamps. Availability of sanitation facilities are reliable indicators of good health. The study found that only 6 percent of surveyed household had toilets, which meant that open defecation was rampant in the study area. West Singhbhum district is a densely forested area. Nearly 70 percent households used wood as cooking fuel. Only 25 percent of the households had an LPG connection.

Table 1.1: Type of housing and household characteristics of the study

S. No.	Indicator	Respondent (%)
1.	Type of family	
	Nuclear family	71
	Joint family	29
2.	Source of drinking water	
	Public Hand pump	93
	Other sources	7
3.	Use of Treated water	
	Yes	7
	No	93
4.	Electricity	
	Yes	84
	No	16
5.	Toilet facility	
	Yes	13
	No	87
6.	LPG energy for cooking	
	Yes	18
	No	82
7.	Agriculture lands ownership	
	Yes	93
	No	7
8.	Number of rooms	
	>2	52
	3 to 4	35
	5 +	13

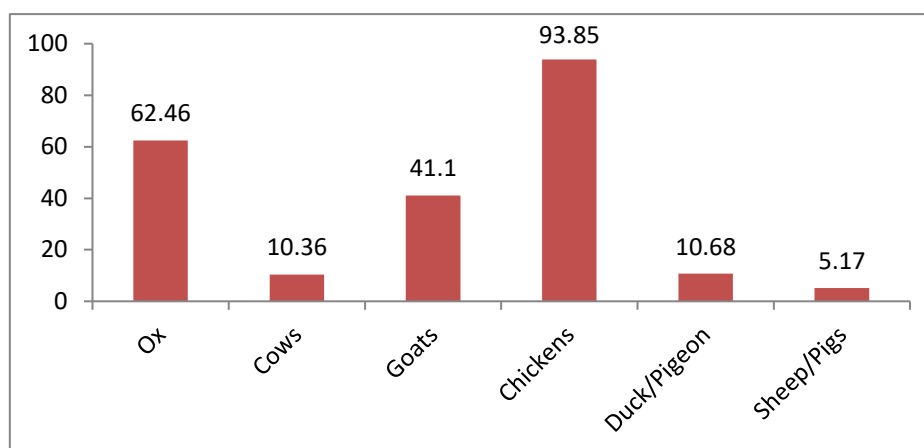
The above table illustrate the housing and household characteristics of the respondents interviewed in the study. The majority of them (71%) live in nuclear family. Almost all of them (93%) use public hand pump as drinking water. A significant number of households do not have toilet facilities and also do not own agricultural land. It shows the poverty status within the Ho tribe.

Fig 1.1: Structure of House among Ho Households in Study Area (N= 309)



The above drawn figure illustrate the housing structure of the Ho households. According to the figure, 67% households are kuchcha whereas only 20% households are pucca in nature.

Fig 1.2: Status of Livestock at Ho Households



The study also found that most households were dependent on livestock animals. This is evident from above mentioned figure where More than half (62.46%) of the households own Ox; 10.36% and 41.1% the household respectively have cows and goats. Nearly 94 percent of households keep poultry, and 5 percent of the surveyed household owned pigs.

The household's purchasing power is determined by the possession of a ration card. The study shows the availability of the ration card and its type among households. It is seen that only 13 percent did not have ration cards at the time of the survey. The study found that 68.7 percent of the households held Below Poverty Line (BPL) ration cards, and 23.6 percent of households had Antyodaya cards. Only 7.8 percent of households hold APL cards. Nearly 92 percent of the household had an Adhar card, and significantly, 79.7 percent had a Bank or Post Office account. But only 7.3 percent of the households were covered by any kind of insurance.

Agriculture is the dominant occupation with 57 percent of the respondents being engaged in it followed by agriculture labourer (24 percent) and employment in the government and private sector (14 percent of the sample). Four percent of the respondents mentioned as others as their occupation. Around 60 percent of the families were nuclear with the remaining being joint.

Table 1.2: Current age and level of education among the Ho tribe

S. No.	Indicator	Respondent (%)
1.	Current age	
	16-20 Years	20.39
	20-24 Years	18.77
	25-29 Years	36.89
	30 Years & above	23.95
2.	Education	
	No schooling	54.05
	Up to Primary level	18.12
	Up to Secondary level	11.00
	Up to senior secondary level	14.24
	More than senior secondary	2.59

Table presents the socio-demographic profile of the respondents. Nearly 41 percent of respondents belonged to the age group of 18–25 years, 43 percent to the 26–30 years age groups, 12 percent were aged 31–35 years, and the remaining 2.9 percent were aged 36–40 years. The mean age of the respondents was 27.04 years. It was found that over a fourth (28 percent) of the respondents were illiterate. About 18 percent had completed primary schooling, 38 percent had studied up to secondary level, and only 15 percent had completed higher secondary education and higher. The mean years and median years of schooling are 5.89 years and 7 years respectively.

Social participation

The study shows that the respondents attended Akara in the last year. A little less than half (44.2 percent) had visited the Gram Panchayat office for any work during the last year. About 39 percent of the respondents said that they were members of various organisations, such as those for youth organisations, political parties, or self-help groups. Sixty-five percent of the participants said that they gained certain advantages from their association with these

organisations. Participation in social events is important to people living in rural areas. Thus, 89.9 percent of the respondents said that they participate in social functions in their village, such as marriages, community dances, festivals, etc. In the tribal villages, or Tolas (meaning small village), they also celebrate Mage, Baha, Hero, Jhomnama, and other festivals collectively, gathering in Akara to sing and dance.

Child Feeding Practices among the Ho Women in West Singhbhum District

Table 1.3: Infant and child feeding practices among the Ho women (N=309).

S. No.	Parameters of Infant and Child Feeding	Respondent (%)
1.	Ever breastfed	
	Currently breastfeeding	65
	Stopped breastfeeding	35
2.	Pre-lacteal feed given	
	Given	31
	Not given	69
3.	Type of pre-lacteal feed given	
	Cow milk	35
	Honey	23
	Jaggery powder and water	14
	Others	28
4.	Reasons to give pre-lacteal feed	
	Due to insufficient milk	43
	It is good for health	17
	It is substitute for colostrum	20
	Its is advised by senior family members	20
5.	Colostrum fed	
	Yes	67
	No	33
6.	Initiation of breastfeeding	
	Within 2 hour	29
	Within 6 hours	42
	Within one day	18
	After one day	11

The different baby and toddler feeding practises used by tribal mothers are displayed in Table above. 35 percent of currently married mothers quit breastfeeding their kid, compared to 65 percent of those who were still doing so. Pre-lacteal feeding (PLF), which involves giving artificial feed to a newborn, was thought to help the infant properly suckle breast milk while fending off hunger. The PLF was traditionally carried out by the father or other senior family members. Other causes of PLF included a lack of breast milk and the notion that prelacteal feed might replace colostrum. Breastfeeding started within two hour after birth for 29% of currently married women and within six hours for 42% of them. Only 18 percent of moms who are currently married started nursing their newborn within 24 hours. The case studies show that pre-lacteal feed was given to women who gave birth at home in the company of family members. Additionally, there was a knowledge gap on the detrimental effects of pre-lacteal feeding. 33 percent of presently married women discard colostrum while nursing their new baby, compared to 67 percent of currently married women who feed it to the baby. However, a small percentage of women were unaware of the appearance or sensation of colostrum, which led them to give their baby plain water or honey instead.

Discussion and Conclusion

The socio-economic profiles of the respondents and their households were presented in this article. Overall, it is seen that their socio-economic status was poor. Nearly 80% of the surveyed households did not have toilet facilities, which is unacceptable because of their adverse effect on health. About 28% of the surveyed men were illiterate, which significantly contributes to their backwardness and vulnerability. About 75% of the respondents are engaged in agriculture and agricultural labour. Often, tribal communities are engaged in the collection of forest products such as Rice beer, mahua, etc. They also hunt and fish to meet their basic needs.

Most of the families held livestock. Tribal communities are dependent on livestock for various needs and use them in supportive roles. Most villages had electricity, but the use of LPG as cooking fuel was low. One of the main reasons is the easy availability of fuel wood from the forests. Another reason is the inability to pay for LPG. Although most households had bank accounts, only 7 percent of households were covered by any kind of insurance. The study area also fared poorly in terms of sanitation and safe drinking water.

Only 6 percent of the households were found to have toilet facilities. There does not appear to be much change from the findings of the 2011 census, which found that only 10 percent of households in West Singhbhum district had access to toilet facilities.

It was also seen that there was insufficient insurance coverage. Social or community insurance services were also reported to have less coverage. Most of the surveyed household heads or respondents were not aware of insurance and its benefits. This may have further marginalised the tribes because of the out-of-pocket expenditure for illness and hospitalisation. Raising awareness about public health utilisation is an essential component of the protection of the health of tribal communities. This includes educating the men on the importance of insurance at both individual and community levels.

Nearly one-fourth of the respondents reported having love marriages. The tribal girls and boys choose their partners whenever they meet at social functions, festivals, and Local Markets. They have complete freedom from family and community to choose their life partners, and the community accepts the relationship once both families agree. The newlywed couple has to offer dinner and some money to the community. Informal discussions and observations during fieldwork indicated that community participation in marriages, as well as other social events, was good. The people enjoy dancing, playing drums, and eating together.

Participation in local governance is a matter of concern as it seems to be limited to Gramsabha meetings only. However, it was also observed that the tribal men are increasingly involved in the decision-making process in the Gram Panchayat for village development. It is important to note that only a few of the respondents were exposed to any kind of media. Lack of media exposure deprives people of information related to health issues, particularly those related to maternal health.

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