

## HEALTH COMMUNICATION RESEARCH APPROACH ON TRIBAL HEALTH OUTCOMES: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF TRIBAL STUDIES

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### Abstract

The new world again realised the importance of communication during COVID-19 due to high restrictions on social interactions and physical contact. Historically communication helped humans to socialise with fellow humans. Nowadays the field of communication got many branches namely, Development communication, Health communication, Political communication, Risk Communication etc... During the time of COVID-19, the significance of health communication increased drastically because all the efforts to prevent the spread of the pandemic made possible through effective use of the different communication channels. The concept of health communication is any communication efforts which help to the betterment of the current health status of a community that can be considered health communication. So basically health communication helps a community to achieve better health status. Hence our mainstream society systematically uses the concept for better health status. Further academic scholars started to study how the tribal population uses or explores the health communication area to better their health status. Therefore the present paper indented to study how health communication research is conducted among the tribal population. The present research paper has two objectives (1) To examine the role of communication in the health of the tribal population. (2) To explore the health communication patterns of tribes. Hence, this study performed a systematic literature review using specific online databases. The online search was conducted using precise keywords.

**Keywords:** Health Communication, Community Health, Tribal Health, Systematic Review And Health Outcomes.

### Introduction

Society at large cannot survive without communication. Any social setup should have a proper communication system to sustain it. This is the simple act to share ideas or information from one to another. Human society would have adopted different modes of communication technology and It wouldn't be the same in mainstream society and any indigenous society, for example, the tribal population would have their communication techniques (Rosengren, 2000). According to United Nations estimates (2013) there are over 370 million tribal people in the world. It shows the tribal or indigenous population in the world is large enough to get academic attention. Tribal people have their communication

ways and methods other than mainstream society. Penetration of traditional communication networks is prevalent among tribal communities. The communication methods help the tribal communities to maintain social connections among other tribal groups with the comfort level (Mahananda, 2015). Communication networks play a significant role in living their life in a meaningful manner. The few tribal groups' communication networks are connected with mainstream society and media. Therefore the tribal groups live with some traits of modernity as they maintain contact with mainstream society. This will spread among them through interpersonal communications and group communications. The tribal community's communication networks are both horizontal and vertical (Namdeo& Mishra, 2005). The flow of communication is identified in both ways. For example, communication within the family or among friends is horizontal. But vertical communication also takes place among them. Most of the tribal communities follow the system of village leaders. So, the communication that comes from the village leader is vertical. The hierarchy of communication is there in them.

Then the media exposure of tribal communities also makes sense. Tribal populations mostly do not have exposure to all the so-called mass media. Folk media and radio are the two primary media for them. Television, print media and new media are the least accessible media platforms among tribes. Because of different reasons like cost, literacy rate and reach. But the communications through folk media are strong like any other method, because of their beliefs and customs (Subramanyam& Mohan, 2006). Folk media like dance and tribal plays are enough to spread some messages. Their beliefs and lifestyle also reflect these media. The other one is radio, which also has a substantial role among tribes because it reaches a vast population. This is a medium that plays a significant role between mainstream societies and tribal societies. Anyone can handle a radio and it is economically viable as well. This is one of the mass media which is extensively used in tribal settlements (Wilbricht, 2019). "Broadcast radio today reaches a staggering 99% of the Indian population. Rural India relies on it overwhelmingly for information. It also remains the most inexpensive and portable medium: A radio set can be purchased at 50 rupees, which makes it cheaper than a mobile phone or a television" (The Hindu, 2018).

The health system gives prior concern for any society. So the tribal communities also have specific health systems to address health-related issues. Same in any other case, there is also the difference between mainstream society and tribal society. While mainstream society maintains a modern health system to secure the well-being condition of the population, the tribal society holds its traditional health system to tackle their day-to-day health needs (Kumar, Et. al, 2020). Governments from each area try to combine the tribal population with the modern health system, where they can get better health facilities as well as better scientific knowledge on their day-to-day health issues. According to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2013), 65% of tribal women in the 15-49 years age group suffer from anaemia. The

rate of institutional delivery is the lowest among tribal women (70.1%). IMR for the ST population in 2014 was 44.4%. Children under-five Mortality Rate was 57.2 per 1000 live births. Among the total deaths due to Malaria, 50% of deaths are from the Tribal population. The prevalence of underweight is almost one and a half times in tribal children than in mainstream society. As this is the situation substantial treatment is required. Again the question arises here about the traditional medicine system prevails among them. They are having a stock of knowledge of traditional medicines which they make from trees, grass, leaves, and so on. Among them, there is a strong belief in these traditional health methods other than modern medicine. Which method would be apt for them is a problem which is needed to be addressed.

Health communication can be defined as any communication which could help to improve the health condition of certain individuals or communities. Health communication has a substantial role among tribal populations. The tribal communities are also acquiring health-related information through different communication channels which could be media, interpersonal communication and group communication. Governmental health mechanism also works among tribes through communication. Further health communication happens through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and media campaigns. More or less these health communications are also explored by tribal communities. The traditional health information exchange happens from one generation to another through interpersonal communications. They learn the traditional medical methods throughout their lived experiences.

After going through the existing body of literature it is clear that few studies only happened in the field of communication on tribal health. Plenty of studies are available on the general public and health communication. Particularly Indian communication scholars couldn't explore the tribal communities with the concept of health communication. This population is marginalized from mainstream society as well as from the communication discourse as far as tribal health is concerned. There is a significant gap visible when the three keywords are taken into account. These are "Communication" "Health" and "Tribes". The tribal population is mostly left with sociology and anthropology and some extend to economics. Other social sciences also have substantial relevance among them. That is why this study is going with communication discourse into the tribal populations.

### **Statement of Problem**

The present review paper conducted a systematic literature review to consolidate and assess the peer-reviewed research papers that focus on the health communication of the tribal population. In the modern era, health become an important social determinant to measure the well-being of a particular community. When the communication field started to contribute to the developmental process the scholars realised its importance in the field of public health

and started to work on health communication. Then onwards mainstream society particularly developed societies in the world explored many health communication studies. Whereas the global south started to explore it in the recent past onwards. Hence studies in the tribal settlements very rarely happened as far as health communication is concerned. Many scholars in the field of Anthropology had/is studied tribal populations. Still, there are few studies from the field of health communication and the present study exclusively focused on how health communication research is conducted among the tribal population. Through a systematic literature review, it could be possible to reveal how the research approach is framed here to conduct a study in the field and what communication interventions are used to study the health outcomes of the tribal population.

### **The rationale of the study**

The relevance of the present study is how the new world is looking at public health and its importance, particularly after COVID-19's arrival. Due to the health emergencies in the recent past, all around the world governments realised the significance of public health. Worldwide academicians started to give priority to the health field despite their academic disciplines. Communication scholars also conduct research in the same field in the name of the health communication branch. The existing studies and reports state the situation of the tribal population as far as health is concerned worldwide. The tribal population is marginalised in all aspects, especially in health and well-being. Hence it is relevant to conduct a study among academic research works while giving importance to health, communication and tribal population. This study is an effort to know how the field of communication tried to have an academic lens on tribal health. In other words how communication discourse helps the tribal population to uplift their health status. While health became an important social component social sciences have a significant role in health particularly communication discourse has its own space in it.

### **Research Objectives**

- To examine the role of communication in the health of the tribal population
- To explore the health communication patterns of tribes

### **Research Questions**

- What is the role of communication in the health of the tribal population
- What are the modes of communication is used by tribes to enhance their health condition?
- Which mode of communication could be most effective to communicate health-related information among tribes?

## Methods

### Systematic Literature Review

Broadly the paramount source of information of the study is secondary. As the study adopted a systematic literature review method, research articles collected from different databases are the main source of data. A systematic literature review method was used to find better answers to the formulated research objectives and questions. Because the systematic literature review method includes identifying, selecting, and critically review to relevant research articles, to collect and analyse data from the research articles. The method has been chosen for this study because it helps the researcher to integrate academic literature accurately and systematically in the field of health communication. The study has taken only research articles which are written in the English language. Online databases are the main source of research articles where the internet played a great role. The study used three databases Jstor, Taylor&Francis Online and Springer. All these three databases are subscribed to by Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi and the researchers used their E-resources ID to log in to the databases which provided greater access to the content of the databases. All the collected materials went through a systematic literature review process. The PRISMA flow chart method gives a clear picture of inclusion and exclusion criteria. Different databases are shown and it flows different steps to get the final sample size which is 25 research articles.

### Search Terms

To have adequate literature the researcher used different databases namely Jstor, Taylor & Francis Online and Springer. These are well-established databases in interdisciplinary fields. To get a broad view of existing knowledge the researcher used different types of keywords related to Health, Communication and Tribe. To cover these three main areas the following Boolean search action was conducted which helped the researcher to broaden, limit or define the search on the mentioned databases.

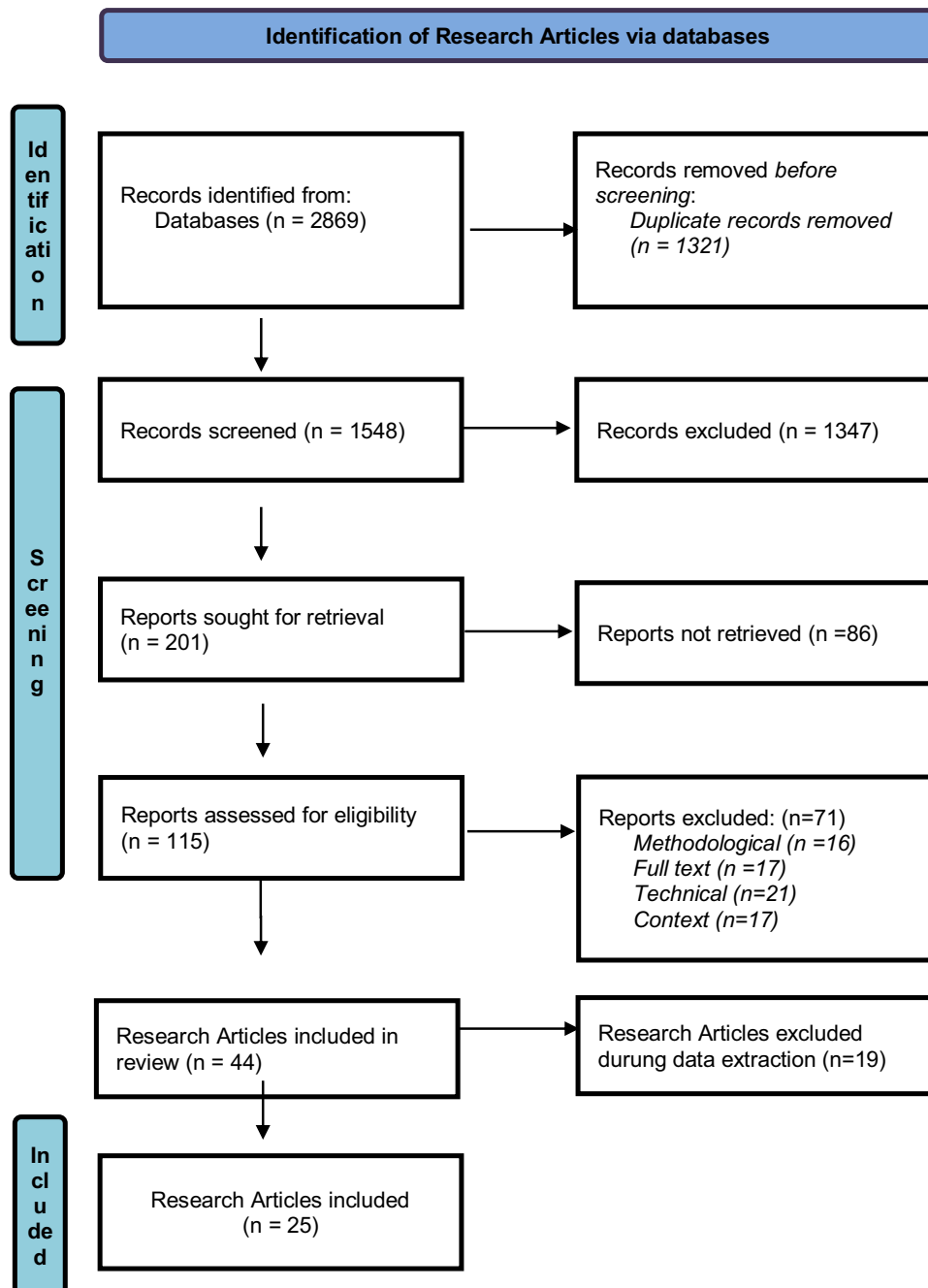
"Health communication AND tribe OR Tribal OR Indigenous", " Tribal health AND Communication", "Communication AND tribe", "Health OR Communication AND tribe ", "Community Health AND Communication Patterns of tribes", "Communication for better health AND indigenous population", "Role of Communication on Health Pattern AND Tribes", "Tribal Health AND Communication Interventions", "Health Communication Interventions AND Tribal Population".

### Selection Criteria

The study included only research articles rather than books, monographs, newspaper reports, etc... To select appropriate research articles, the researcher used some criteria. All research articles which are used in this systematic literature review are in the English language, because of the feasibility and availability of literature. The study took articles from the year

2000 to 2022. It does have a long period because there are no major changes taking place in the study population. All the articles included in this paper are peer review research articles and the selected articles have exclusively dealt with health, communication and tribal population.

**Fig. 1 – Prisma Flow Chart**



### **PRISMA Flowchart**

For a systematic literature review, it is good to make a systematic PRISMA flowchart. Here the researcher has used seven databases namely Jstor, Taylor & Francis Online and Springer to get research articles. From these databases, 2869 research articles have been found. Out of this many, 1321 were duplicated, which means 1548 different research articles were screened. After title screening, 201 articles were sought to be retrieved, but after the abstract and keywords screening 86 articles were not retrieved and in this stage, the researcher used some keywords also to exclude irrelevant articles. Finally, 115 reports were assessed for eligibility. Then certain codes were given to each retrieved article (for example, if the retrieved article is related to Tribe, Health and Communication then the file code would be THC 1). Then 71 articles were excluded due to different reasons like methodological reasons, the full text was not available, the context of the article not matching the present paper and other technical reasons. Further, in the stage of data extraction again 19 articles were excluded. Finally, after different rigorous levels of inclusion and exclusion criteria, 25 research articles were selected for the study.

### **Results**

#### **Analysis**

All the included articles are related to the role of communication in the health of the tribal population. The review considered three core elements of the topics. Tribe, health and communication were the elements. Those terms played a great role in the inclusion and exclusion criteria of articles. All of the included articles have talked about all of these terms.

#### **Study type and focused area**

Table 1 provides an overview of the study type and focused area of included literature in this systematic review paper. To clarify, a review must cover all of the scientific literature in a field that is defined by the author, while a theoretical analysis only includes references to those works that are necessary for the analysis. Included articles used different methodological designs to conduct the studies. The results indicate that the survey method, secondary data analysis, grounded theory, mixed method, qualitative narrative analysis, experimental method and quasi-experimental method have been used in different articles. All included articles have diversity in the case of the methodological part.

The basic selection criteria of the included research articles remain the same (must deal with three main fields, Health, Communication and Tribe). The 'disease-based' studies mainly discuss or understand a particular disease through communication research which penetrated the tribal population. Secondly, some studies have the characteristics of 'information seeking behaviour' which means, the studies concentrated on what is their behavioural pattern to seek health-related information disseminated through different modes of communication. Finally, there are studies which discussed or took as main concentration on the concept of 'health as a



whole' which means the studies were dealing with health issues while considering health as a whole. They were not particular about some diseases or a disease. These studies mainly focused on tribal health through communication discourse.

Secondly, the *table-1* provides an overview of how the research articles were thematically related to the methodological framework of the studies. It indicates that communication studies are done in this field mostly by using the survey method and within the survey method, disease-focused studies or health as a whole phenomena-focused study are more prevalent in the field. The survey method has been used in information-seeking behaviour studies as well. The mixed method was also used in disease-based studies. The disease-based studies are not only in these two methods but also in the Secondary data analysis method and Qualitative narrative analysis method. Other than the survey method, the quasi-experimental method also was used to study the health-related information-seeking behaviour of the tribal population. The systematic review method, grounded theory method and experimental method were the three other methods used to conduct a study on the health as a whole of the tribal population through a communication perspective.

### **Interpretation**

While reviewing the included research articles, one thing is visible the health communication field has to explore more and more tribal populations. The research trend in this field is very clear that the survey method is dominating over any other research method. Disease-based studies on tribal populations and health have whole phenomena have an equal proposition in survey method whereas health information seeking behaviour kind of studies were having least number in the survey method. Therefore, the research dimension visible in this field is more supportive of the survey method. In the same way, when we take an overall framework of the studies also it is clear that disease-based studies and health as whole phenomena kind of studies were dominating in this field despite methodological relation.

Secondly, the conceptual based trend is also visible in this field. The communication strategy is one of the leading conceptual positions and it includes all the patterns of communication such as interpersonal communication, group communication, mass media communication and traditional media communications

**Interpersonal communication;** findings of the reviewed papers show the role of interpersonal communication in the health of the tribal population. Interpersonal communication is very effective, though it is not cost-effective, as compared to mass communication. Further, often it takes place in an environment which is very conducive so tribals interact with their friends, neighbours and relatives at any time according to their convenience. Hence, interpersonal communication helps take decisions while mass communication helps create awareness among people as quickly as possible. The fact that



even in the modern era of communication, tribals tend to believe in interpersonal communication as they have limited access to mass media which are also formal and one-way. This confirms the observation that when the access to mass media by rural people is limited and their education levels are low, interpersonal communication becomes more effective. Most of the tribal settlements in India are located in remote and rural areas so the infrastructure condition would not be that good enough to have other electronic modes of communication facilities. In this case, interpersonal communication is a good way to communicate health-related information.

**Group communication;** is another prominent mode of communication among tribes. Most of these communications are vertical, and most of the time come from “OoruMooppan” (village leader). Each tribal settlement has a village leader to govern them. In the case of health, if some disease affects the majority of the population, then the village leader calls for a meeting to give health awareness to his/her people. At this point group communication will take place and it is vertical communication whereas interpersonal communication takes place horizontally.

**Mass media and traditional media;** the tribal population lives in isolation for centuries, and modern mass communication technologies could not enter their areas. Hence, modern communication modes have no meaning to the tribes in any manner. However, from these modes radio has somewhat better access to tribal people. The radio has a wide reach to any part of the country and it is comparatively cheap in the sense of cost. As the population is in deep poverty the usage of the television is far from their access. Educational backwardness keeps them away from the newspaper also. After all, they mainly depend upon traditional media to disseminate health-related messages, because it has popularity among them and it provides their own cultural and language messages.

Socio-economic elements which affect health communication; according to Ford & Yep (2003), Marginalization can be defined as the mix of social, structural, cultural, economic, and political processes employing which a group is ignored, trivialized, considered invisible and unheard, and/or perceived as the deficient “other” (in Basu& Dutta, 2007). These elements are responsible for their marginalization and this has a substantial contribution to tribal health backwardness. Dutta-Bergman (2004) pointed out that such marginalization is played out both structurally and through communication processes (Basu& Dutta, 2007).

**Need for region-specific communication strategy;** as it is clear that the tribal population is entirely different from the mainland and the heterogeneity of tribals, there is an urgent need for region-specific communication strategies. Even though the living condition remains more or less the same but culture, language, religious concepts and geographical conditions differ from tribe to tribe. From these, language is the main obstacle to the flow of health awareness.

Most of the medical and science terminologies are very tough to make them understand. The health care system lacks people who can handle tribal languages. If the authority can find people from their community to handle health-related information, that would be a better solution.

### **Conclusion**

The study found that communication has a substantial role in public health in general and tribal health in particular. The study reveals that the tribal health condition needs a major structural change so that it could be better. All the modes of communication do not have the same effect on the tribal population in the case of health. It found that interpersonal communication is working effectively among tribes as far as health is concerned. Group communication, radio communication and traditional media communication play a somewhat better role among the tribal population. Television and print media have remained the least explored media by tribal populations, because of the less viability of these media. Then the study found that different languages for different tribal settlements also make it difficult to communicate health-related information from the mainland to the tribal population. Most of the time healthcare professionals are not able to understand their real issues because of the language barrier.

### **Recommendations for Future Studies**

The following points are some hints for future studies which could contribute more new knowledge to the field of study;

- Studies are needed among Indian tribes while taking health communication as a primary concept.
- Communication scholars should study the tribal population from a communication perspective to uplift their living conditions. The population is not only for another field of study.
- Primary data-based studies are not much available in the field of health communication and tribes in India. So that any study which collects data from the tribal settlements from a communication perspective would help to contribute to the existing knowledge.
- action research can be done among the tribal population to have recommendations to the government, on what kind of communication strategies should be adopted by the government and nongovernment officials to uplift the tribes.

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