

EXAMINING SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND JUVENILE DELIQUENCY WHILE DEVELOPING CULTURALLY TAILORED INTERVENTIONS FOR JAATIKARAN SEMI-NOMADIC TRIBES CHILDREN & YOUTH IN TIRUVALLUR DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU

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ABSTRACT

India shares a complex and enduring relationship with its mobile communities, often shaped by colonial stigmatization that labelled certain groups as 'criminals by birth' due to their nomadic lifestyles. In Tamil Nadu, only three communities - Jaatikaran or Sattai Adikiravar, Narikuravars, and Boomboom Maattukarar - have been officially recognized as nomadic tribes, despite the presence of approximately 68 denotified communities in the state.

Within the Jaatikaran community, pervasive poverty is a defining characteristic. This economic deprivation, coupled with a dearth of opportunities for personal growth, leads most of the youth and children towards engaging in delinquent activities as a means of survival or escape. Like many other communities, peer pressure plays a significant role in shaping the behavior of the youth and children in this community. When peer groups encourage delinquent activities, it contributes to the proliferation of issues such as alcoholism, drug addiction, theft, minor crimes, and anti-social behaviour among the Jaatikaran community.

Efforts are underway, led by the researcher through the Jeevan Center (YWAM- a non profit organisation), to address delinquent behaviors within the Jaatikaran tribe in Alamathy village. These initiatives include raising awareness about access to education, vocational training, and community engagement, as well as implementing culturally sensitive interventions. These endeavors are instrumental in preventing and addressing issues related to substance abuse and juvenile delinquency. This article seeks to explore the life experiences and socio- economic, cultural and environmental factors which is contributing to substance abuse and delinquent behaviours among the marginalized Jaatikaran community, also known as saatai adikiravar, residing in the ABC Colony of Alamathy village near Redhills in Tiruvallur district."

INTRODUCTION

Jaatikaran semi-nomadic populations in Tiruvallur have unique socio-cultural and economic traits that is very different them from the other settled populations. This research aims to understand the prevalence and root causes of substance abuse and juvenile delinquency within this unique communities, with a focus on developing customized interventions.

Over the past seven decades, a clan known as the Sholagas has travelled and moved three different states, engaging in the practice of self-flagellation with Saattai, a whip that was made of tightly wound jute fiber, in order to elicit sympathy and get

money for their daily living.

The custom of this community whipping themselves for livelihood is relatively recent, dating back only a century. Research studies from the anthropology department at Madras University reveals that this group is an offshoot of the Sholaga tribe, who were displaced from the hills in southern Karnataka following the Forest Act of 1878, which essentially forced them out of their own land. The department was tasked with establishing the tribal affiliation of this Jaatikaran community, as well as similar groups in Madurai and other parts of Tiruvallur. However, the government has refused to

acknowledge their Sholaga heritage due to a lack of documentation. Consequently, none of the Jaatikaran community possess scheduled tribe community certificates, which denies them access to education in the schools after 10th grade and employment reservations in the government and most of the private sector.

When the aforementioned act prohibited practices like shifting cultivation and hunting in the forests, approximately one thousand Sholaga families were displaced. Some relocated to Andhra Pradesh, and some others got settled in Madurai and in Tiruvallur district. In this unfamiliar environment, they resorted to begging as their means of livelihood. It's worth noting that no community or clan actively encourages or engages in begging, but for the Jaatikaran community, it has become a necessity for their survival of daily living.

Nomadic communities

The communities which is characterized by their lifestyle of moving from one place to another rather than residing in a fixed location for their livelihood is referred to as Nomadic or semi-nomadic communities. South Asia is known to have the world's largest population of nomadic people, with nomadic communities and Denotified tribes accounting for approximately 10% of India's total population. In 2003, the National Commission for De-notified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (NCDNT) was established, and it was subsequently reconstituted in 2005. Under the leadership of Balkrishna Sidram Renke, the NCDNT estimated the population of these communities to be around 10.74 crores based on the 2001 Census.

In 2014, a new Commission was formed with the purpose of preparing a state-wise list of these communities. This Commission presented its report in 2018, identifying a total of 1,262 communities as denitrified, nomadic, and semi-nomadic. The first conference of the Tamil Nadu Nomads Federation took

place in 2010 at the Gandhi Museum, Chennai. It highlighted how a group of tribespeople had been neglected by both the government and society for a long time. The different nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes were doing their cultural performances, showcasing their traditional clothing and tools, by whipping themselves with Jaatiwar, and dancing with melam.

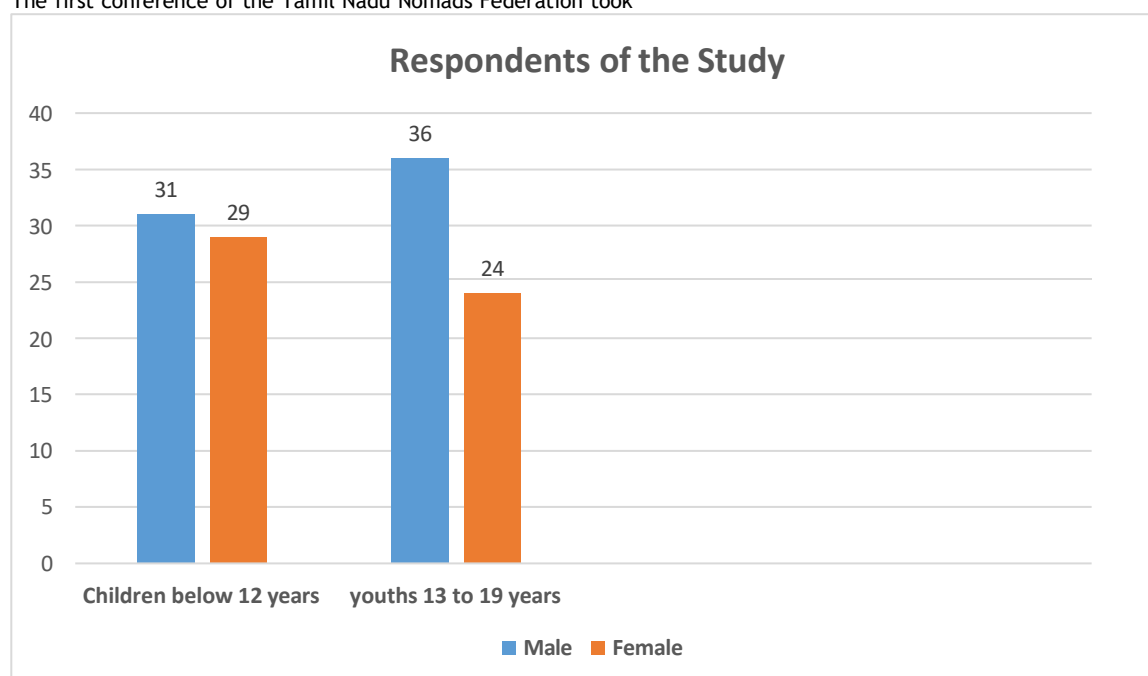
The District Collector, C. Kamaraj, emphasized that education is crucial to help these tribes overcome their hardships. R. Maheswari, the secretary of The Empowerment Centre of Nomads and Tribes (TENT) in Madurai, shared her own experiences of suffering and humiliation during her younger years.

The nomadic tribes made several demands, including the establishment of a welfare board, issuing community certificates, providing 5% reservation for them in education and jobs. They also asked for mobile voter ID and ration cards to account for their mobile lifestyle. Another demand was to conduct a survey and officially recognize them as a Nomadic Tribe (NT) in government records.

Sample and population

The researcher employed a purposive sampling approach to select participants from the Jaatikaran semi-nomadic communities. The study focused on a population of 140 Jaatikaran families, consisting of approximately 350 children and 90 youths, residing in the ABC Colony within the village of Alamathy, Tiruvallur district.

To ensure diversity, the researcher had selected a sample size of 100 respondents. This sample included 50 children, both male and female, within the age group of 8 to 12 years. Additionally, the researcher purposefully selected 50 youths as sample from the community, encompassing both male and female individuals within the age group of 13 to 19 years.



The figure shows the sample that was taken for the study, in order to find out the prevalence of Substance use and delinquent behaviour among male or female or among the children or youth.

Data Collection Tool and Sources of Data

Primary data was collected through structured interviews, focus group discussions with formal and informal group discussions, and surveys with the children and youth in the Jaatikaran community in Alamathy village, Tiruvallur district. Also the data was collected from the Clan Leader Mr.Maari, and the elders of the community through formal and informal interviews. Secondary data from government reports, articles, journals and academic literature was also utilized.

Findings and Discussions

The study reveals that addressing juvenile delinquency and

substance abuse among Jaatikaran youth and children needs a holistic approach that considers their unique cultural context and challenges. By implementing culturally sensitive programs, providing economic opportunities, and promoting education and awareness, it is possible to help these young individuals build better futures and break the cycle of delinquency and substance abuse within their community. Some of the major findings of this research study are as follows:

Prevalence of Substance Abuse

The research findings indicated a notably high incidence of substance abuse within youth and teenage children of the Jaatikaran communities, predominantly involving the consumption of alcohol and tobacco products. Key drivers identified were economic instability and heightened levels of stress among the young adults. Whereas peer pressure and wrong parental modelling was the key factor among the young

teenage children involving in substance use. They use various tobacco products like Beedi, Gutka, Paan, Beer and various other forms of sniffs and tobacco products. Sometimes they get access to illicit drugs like Ganja as well. Alcohol consumption is one of the very common substance that the young and adult youths are used, which is all very addictive and leads them to anti-social behaviour.

Table -I shows Various substance usage among Children and Youth

Category of children and youth	Most common substance used	Percent
Children between the age of 8 to 12 years	Paan, Beedi	22
Children between the age 13 to 15 years	Gutka, Paan, Beedi, Beer	36
Youths between the age of 15 to 19 years	Alcohol, Beer, Gutka, Paan, Beedi and Sniffs.	42
Total		100

The table shows us that majority of teens and youths are involved in substance usage as an addiction, which leads them to delinquent behaviour.

Study reveals that Substance abuse is being one of the way for youths and the individuals in the community to cope with the stresses and challenges of their nomadic lifestyle, discrimination, and economic hardships. It provides a temporary escape from reality.

Peer pressure and social influences within the community encouraging substance abuse among the children and youth, which is making it appear socially acceptable.

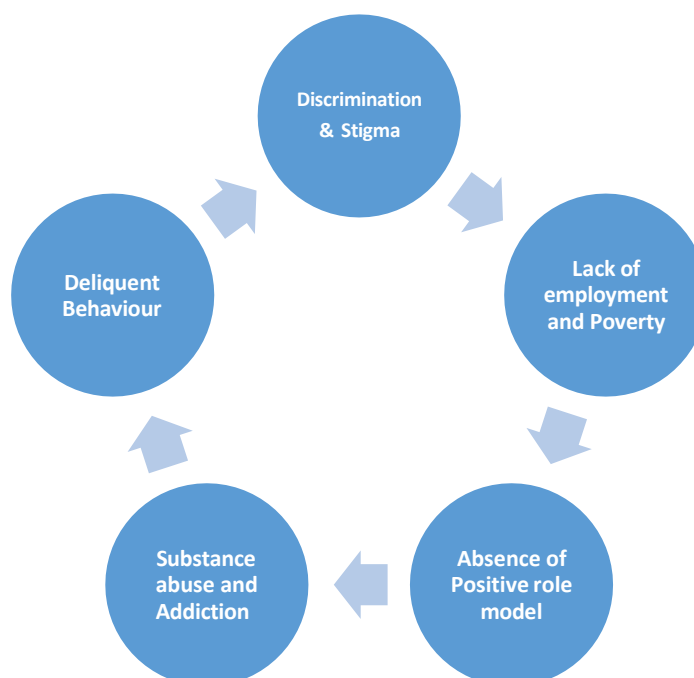
Patterns of Juvenile Delinquency

Research study reveals that various manifestations of juvenile

delinquency were identified, encompassing minor theft from shops and local houses, skipping school and engaging in destructive behaviour.

The absence of positive role models within their Jaatikaran community, access to mentors who can guide them in a right way, and absence of inspiring youth and the children for good behaviour and various opportunities and employment are being a contributing factor to delinquent behavior among children and youth. Family stability and dynamics also play a role in delinquency. The absence of parental figures and the most common dysfunctional family situations are leading children and youth seeking belonging and identity outside the family structure, sometimes in delinquent groups.

Figure- 2 Shows the pattern of Causal factors of Juvenile Delinquency



The figure shows us that Discrimination and stigma made them not to go to school, leads to illiteracy, which automatically leaves them without Job and Money, and since there is positive mentors or role models, they are led into Alcoholism, substance use and this addiction leads them to delinquent and anti- social behaviour among the children and the youth. The study also shows that the juvenile delinquency and substance use is high

among the male, when compared to female of this Jaatikaran community.

Like common in many other communities, peer pressure are being a significant influence on the behaviour of Jaatikaran children and youth. If peer groups encourage delinquent activities, it leads to higher engagement in such anti-behaviours. Limited access to education and a notable absence of community support is also a contributing factor of delinquent behaviour in this community.

Addressing these patterns of juvenile delinquency within this community requires a comprehensive approach. Interventions should consider their unique cultural context and engage community leaders and members to develop tailored solutions.

Influence of Culture

The study reveals that Jaatikaran community has its own set of cultural norms and values that does not align with the legal and social norms of the broader population in the society. The traditional customs and practices of the Jaatikaran community influence delinquent behavior by whipping themselves in the public, oozing blood out of their body to get coins in their basket, using kids for begging by performing unpleasing activities, which is all anti-social behaviour which is not accepted by the mainstream society, whereas it is acceptable for the Jaatikaran community for their livelihood. People of this community says that this is the only way, our forefathers taught us for survival and thus they believe as cultural value.

This leads to conflict and misunderstanding, potentially encouraging delinquent behavior. Cultural elements, including traditional norms and practices, exerted a substantial influence on shaping behaviours and attitudes regarding substance abuse and delinquent activities.

Challenges in Healthcare Access and Rehabilitation services

The Jaatikaran or Sattai Adikiravar communities face significant hurdles in accessing healthcare services, including vital mental health support, which compounds their existing challenges. Due to their limited education, poverty, and mobile lifestyle, they receive healthcare services only during emergencies, often

Table -II shows the Educational Qualification of the respondents

Education Levels of Children and youths	Children between 8 to 12 years	Children between 13 to 19 years	Percent
Never gone to school	9	27	36
Gone till 5 th standard	32	18	50
Gone till 8 th standard	8	4	12
Gone till 9 th standard	1	-	1
Bachelor degree	-	1	1
Total	50	50	100

The above table shows us the educational qualification of the respondents of our study, which reveals us the majority have gone only to primary school. The study also highlights various other factors contributing to the high dropout rates among these children. These include the physical distance between the schools and their community, the necessity for children to accompany their parents in their work, often in child labour roles to support their families, girls being required to stay at home to care for younger siblings, and instances of child marriage within the community and also due to the stigma and discrimination.

As this Jaatikaran community doesn't have community certificate, the few children who wanted to study are also not able to avail education after 10th standard. So most of these children doing nothing, along with their peers involving in substance abuse and anti-social behaviour. Government has to take immediate action for this children to avail continued education.

Many semi-nomadic individuals even in other area of the state have limited access to education, which hinders their prospects for better livelihoods. Due to the lack of educational

needed to make small payments from their limited incomes, placing a heavier financial burden on them. It also resulting in lack of health awareness contribute to a deficit in health literacy within the community. Furthermore, the broader society's discrimination and stigmatization of this community leads to reluctance about seeking healthcare services, as the fear of judgement or unfair treatment.

Moreover, the Jaatikaran community leans mostly on traditional healing practices and is often hesitant to embrace modern medical treatments, particularly among the adult and elderly population. This reluctance postpones essential healthcare interventions. As a result, the importance of preventive care and early intervention is often not fully comprehended by its members.

In the case of health concerns like substance abuse or mental health challenges, the absence of rehabilitation services tailored to the specific needs of the Jaatikaran community obstructs recovery and the process of reintegration into society.

Lack of Educational Opportunities

According to the researcher's findings, it is noted that virtually no one in this Jaatikaran or Sattai Adikiravar community has completed their education, with the exception of a single individual, Ponniamma, who is currently pursuing a college degree and happens to be the daughter of the community's leader. The study reveals that a significant proportion of the children in this community have dropped out of school, primarily citing discrimination as a key factor for their discontinuation. Discrimination is pervasive, encompassing their caste status, occupation, dietary practices, language, and academic performance. Furthermore, the community's negative stigma as being perceived as potential criminals amplifies this discrimination within the school environment, leading to a lack of friendship with children from other communities and fostering a sense of isolation.

opportunities, the children and the youth in this community are more susceptible to substance abuse and delinquent behaviour.

Interventions for Jaatikaran Youth and Children

It's essential that a culturally sensitive interventions is developed that respect and honour the Jaatikaran cultural heritage.

Awareness and Education: Raising awareness within the Jaatikaran community about the risks of delinquency and substance abuse is crucial. It's important to engage community leaders and elders in these efforts, as they hold significant influence. Education programs should be designed to cater to their unique lifestyle while fostering skills and opportunities for their youth.

Community Certification: This community is actively advocating to obtain a community certificate from the government, which would enable them to access the various benefits and support programs intended for marginalized communities. Securing this certificate represents a significant achievement, especially for the educational prospects of their children, allowing them to pursue free education beyond the

10th standard. It is imperative for the government to promptly take the required actions to facilitate the acquisition of the community certificate.

This step is not only vital for the future of the children and youth but also for the overall well-being and sustenance of the entire community.

Economic Empowerment: To tackle delinquency, economic empowerment initiatives can provide alternative sources of income for Jaatikaran youth. Vocational training and livelihood programs will help divert their energy into more constructive paths.

Access to Healthcare: Health services should be made accessible to address substance abuse issues. This should include rehabilitation programs, counselling, and mental health support.

Legal Support: Collaborations with legal authorities can ensure that the justice system treats Jaatikaran youth and children fairly and provides rehabilitation opportunities rather than punitive measures.

Gender Equality: Efforts should be made to promote gender equality within the Jaatikaran community, enabling both girls and boys to access education and opportunities, which can reduce the risk of delinquency.

Peer Mentorship: Encouraging positive peer influence and mentorship programs within the community will redirect youth and children towards pro-social behavior and away from substance abuse.

Limitations of the Study

- Researcher had picked respondents to participate in the study might not represent all the different Jaatikaran youth and children in the area.
- Respondents in the study might not have told the truth about their involvement in bad activities because they were afraid of getting in trouble. This means we might not know the real number of people doing these things.
- Researcher had trouble communicating and understanding each other because we speak differently and have different customs. This could have made some answers less accurate.
- Researcher only looked at things at one point in time, like taking a single picture. And not sure how things changed over time.
- Respondents told us about their own behavior. Sometimes the children and the youths don't want to admit to doing bad things, so they might not tell the truth about it.

Scope of the Study

The study provides valuable insights into the dynamics of substance abuse and juvenile delinquency among the Jaatikaran community children and youth in ABC colony, Alamathy village, Tiruvallur district. These findings can inform targeted interventions for this specific population. The researcher explored the role of cultural factors in shaping behaviours, which can be applied to design culturally sensitive interventions for similar communities.

The study offers a foundation for policy recommendations in Tiruvallur and potentially other regions with Jaatikaran semi-nomadic populations, highlighting the importance of improving access to education, healthcare, and economic stability. Findings on the prevalence and contributing factors of substance abuse and delinquency can inform the development of preventive strategies, including awareness campaigns, vocational training, and mental health services tailored to the needs of semi-nomadic youth and children.

The research emphasizes the significance of involving the community in the design and implementation of interventions, recognizing their unique challenges and cultural context.

This study can serve as a basis for future, more extensive research examining a wider range of semi-nomadic communities in Tiruvallur and beyond. Longitudinal studies can explore the trends and efficacy of interventions over time.

CONCLUSION

Substance abuse and juvenile delinquency among semi-nomadic

communities in ABC colony, Alamathy village, Tiruvallur are complex issues rooted in economic disparities, cultural influences, and limited access to essential services. To address these challenges, it's essential to adopt a culturally sensitive approach. Programs and interventions aimed at reducing delinquent behavior and substance abuse among Jaatikaran children and youth should take into account their unique cultural context, including the need for culturally relevant education, support systems, and economic opportunities.

Promoting awareness and understanding between the Jaatikaran community and the wider society can also help bridge the gap and reduce the risk factors associated with delinquent behavior and substance abuse. The intervention programs should include access to education, vocational training, mentorship programs, and substance abuse prevention and treatment services. Collaboration between government agencies, non-profit organizations, and the Jaatikaran community is essential to address these challenges effectively and promote positive outcomes for their youth and children.

This research journal provides a foundation for community-based interventions and underscores the importance of approaching these problems with cultural sensitivity to the unique context and needs of these communities.

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