

## **A STUDY ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN IDUKKI DISTRICT, KERALA**

**N. Kavitha**

Reg. No.20112151032001, Ph.D. Research Scholar, PG Department and Research Centre in Economics, Pope's College (Autonomous), Sawyerpuram-628251.

**Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli – 627 012, Tamil Nadu, India**

**Dr. R. Selvakumar**

Associate Professor & Head, PG Department and Research Centre in Economics, Pope's College (Autonomous), Sawyerpuram-628251.

**Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli– 627 012, Tamil Nadu, India**

### **Abstract**

The study conducted in Idukki district, Kerala, delves into the socio-economic status of tribal women. Through an analysis of various factors, this study aims to shed light on the unique challenges and opportunities faced by these women in a predominantly rural and tribal area. The study begins by examining the demographic makeup of Idukki district, providing insights into the total number of inhabitants and the percentage of tribal communities. From there, it delves into the socio-economic factors that have a significant impact on the lives of tribal women, such as education, employment, and health. The study also takes into account the cultural and traditional practices that shape the lives of these women. Through a thorough examination of existing data and surveys, this study highlights the disparities between tribal women in terms of access to education and employment opportunities. It also brings attention to the challenges faced by these women in accessing quality healthcare and basic amenities. Furthermore, this study looks into the role of government policies and initiatives in addressing the socio-economic issues faced by tribal women in Idukki district. This study provides a comprehensive overview of the socio-economic status of tribal women in Idukki district, shedding light on the unique challenges and opportunities present in their lives. The findings of this study can serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, organizations, and individuals looking to understand and support the empowerment of tribal communities in Kerala.

**Keywords:** Tribal Women, Socio-Economic Status, Indigenous Identity, Cultural Traditions, Economic Disparities, Marginalized Communities.

## Introduction

India's tribal population, comprising diverse ethnic groups with unique languages and traditions, constitutes a significant segment of the country's demographic landscape. Despite this, tribal communities, including women, continue to grapple with socio-economic disparities rooted in historical marginalization, geographic isolation, and insufficient representation. Consequently, an exploration of the socio-economic status of tribal women provides a lens through which to analyze the broader issues of gender inequality and socio-economic development within India's tribal belt. The scholars such as Baxi (2008) have highlighted the importance of recognizing the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status in understanding the challenges faced by tribal women. Additionally, the works of Rao (2012) and Kabeer (2005) provide theoretical frameworks that elucidate the nuanced dynamics of gender and development in the Indian context, offering valuable insights into the specific challenges encountered by tribal women.

Furthermore, empirical studies such as Mahapatro and Raut (2016) and Desai and Dubey (2012) contribute to our understanding of the socio-economic conditions of tribal women in India by analyzing factors such as education, employment, and healthcare access. These studies form a critical foundation for comprehending the lived experiences of tribal women and informing evidence-based policy interventions. As we embark on this inquiry, it is essential to approach the socio-economic status of tribal women in India with a sensitivity to cultural diversity and historical legacies. By synthesizing existing scholarship and empirical evidence, this study aims to contribute to the discourse on gender equity and social development, advocating for tailored strategies that empower tribal women and foster sustainable progress within India's tribal communities.

The tribal population, often residing in remote and geographically challenging areas, has historically confronted socio-economic disparities. Tribal women, in particular, confront a myriad of issues ranging from limited access to education and healthcare to restricted economic opportunities. Addressing these challenges necessitates a comprehensive examination of the intricate interplay between cultural traditions, societal structures, and economic factors that shape the lives of tribal women. The work of Sen (2001) emphasizes the importance of considering the agency of women in understanding socio-economic disparities. Additionally, the frameworks proposed by Chakraborty (2010) and Govindasamy and Malhotra (1996)

provide insights into the unique challenges faced by women in marginalized communities and offer a foundation for examining the socio-economic status of tribal women.

Furthermore, studies like Beteille (2002) and Shah (2005) underscore the significance of cultural context in shaping the socio-economic dynamics of tribal communities. This study incorporates these perspectives to ensure a nuanced understanding of the socio-economic status of tribal women, acknowledging the influence of both structural factors and cultural nuances. As we embark on this journey of exploration, it is imperative to recognize the complexity inherent in the lives of tribal women and appreciate the need for a holistic and context-specific approach to address their socio-economic challenges. Through a rigorous examination of existing literature and empirical data, this study aspires to contribute to the discourse surrounding the empowerment of tribal women and inform policies that foster sustainable development within these communities.

### **Review of Literature**

Numerous scholarly works contribute to our understanding of the socio-economic status of tribal women in India, shedding light on the multifaceted challenges they encounter. Baxi's (2008) exploration of the legal-ethical implications of women in the forest underscores the intersectionality of gender and indigenous rights, emphasizing the need for nuanced approaches to address the unique challenges faced by tribal women. Rao's (2012) examination of gender, caste, and class dynamics in India provides a theoretical framework for comprehending the layered experiences of tribal women within the broader social context. The article argues that an intersectional perspective is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic disparities that affect tribal communities, particularly women.

Kabeer's (2005) critical analysis of gender equality and women's empowerment offers insights into the policy dimensions of addressing socio-economic imbalances. The paper emphasizes the importance of considering the socio-cultural context and power dynamics in interventions aimed at improving the status of tribal women, advocating for strategies that go beyond mere economic indicators.

Turning to empirical studies, Mahapatro and Raut's (2016) overview of the socio-economic status of tribal women in India delves into specific indicators such as education, employment, and healthcare access. The study provides a comprehensive snapshot of the challenges and opportunities faced by tribal women, offering valuable data for evidence-based policy formulation.

In a different vein, Desai and Dubey's (2012) exploration of caste dynamics in 21st century India is relevant for understanding the intersection of caste and tribal identity. The article highlights the need to recognize and address social hierarchies that intersect with gender, further complicating the socio-economic landscape for tribal women. Bhowmick's (2014) examination of tribal women's participation in micro-enterprises highlights the economic agency of these women within their communities. The study underscores the potential for economic empowerment as a means to uplift the socio-economic status of tribal women.

Sinha and Mukherjee's (2017) research delves into the health disparities experienced by tribal women, emphasizing the need for targeted healthcare interventions. The study sheds light on the intersection of gender and health, revealing how cultural factors and limited access to healthcare facilities contribute to the vulnerability of tribal women. Gupta and Sharma (2019) explore the impact of education on the socio-economic mobility of tribal women. Their study underscores the transformative potential of education in breaking the cycle of poverty and enhancing the overall well-being of tribal women, emphasizing the need for increased educational opportunities. Furthermore, Ahmed and Nongbri's (2015) investigation into the role of traditional governance structures in shaping the socio-economic status of tribal women provides a unique perspective. The study underscores the importance of acknowledging and integrating traditional systems into development policies to ensure their effectiveness and cultural sensitivity. In a critical examination of policy frameworks, Reddy and Kapoor's (2016) analysis of government initiatives aimed at tribal development provides insights into the gaps and challenges in implementation. The study emphasizes the importance of a participatory approach that includes the perspectives of tribal women to ensure the success of development programs.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- To study the socio-economic status of tribal women in Idukki district, Kerala.
- To identify the health status and healthcare accessibility of tribal women in Idukki district, Kerala.

### **Methodology**

This research employs a cross-sectional study design with a sample size of 651 tribal women in Idukki District, Kerala. Primary data were collected through structured interviews

covering key socio-economic indicators such as education, employment, healthcare access, household income, and cultural factors. Trained interviewers, familiar with the local context, will administer the interviews in a private and culturally sensitive setting. The data were analyzed using statistical software, incorporating descriptive and inferential statistics. Ethical considerations include obtaining informed consent, ensuring participant confidentiality, and following established ethical principles. The study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the socio-economic status of tribal women in Idukki, contributing valuable insights for targeted policy interventions and development initiatives.

## Result and Discussion

The culmination of our study on the socio-economic status of tribal women in Idukki District, Kerala, presents an opportune moment to delve into the outcomes and engage in a comprehensive discussion. This research, grounded in both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, sought to capture the multifaceted aspects of the socio-economic landscape for tribal women in Idukki. As we navigate through the results, we will uncover patterns related to education, healthcare access, employment opportunities, and cultural factors that contribute to shaping the socio-economic fabric of their lives.

Figure 1: Distribution of the Respondents by Age

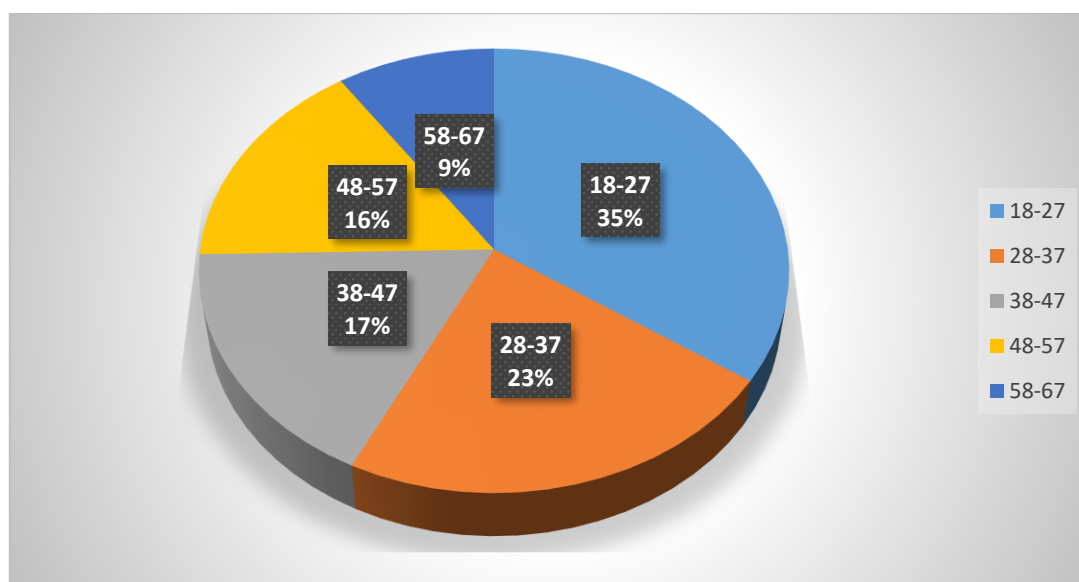


Figure 1 presents the distribution of respondents based on age. The majority of participants fall within the age range of 18-27, constituting 35% of the total respondents. Following closely, the age group of 28-37 comprises 23%, indicating a relatively balanced distribution across these early adulthood age brackets. As age increases, there is a gradual

decrease in the percentage of respondents, with 38-47 accounting for 17%, 48-57 for 16%, and 58-67 for 9% of the total sample. This distribution provides a clear picture of the age diversity within the study, enabling researchers to consider potential variations in socio-economic experiences across different life stages among tribal women in Idukki District, Kerala.

Figure 2: Distribution of the Respondents by Occupation

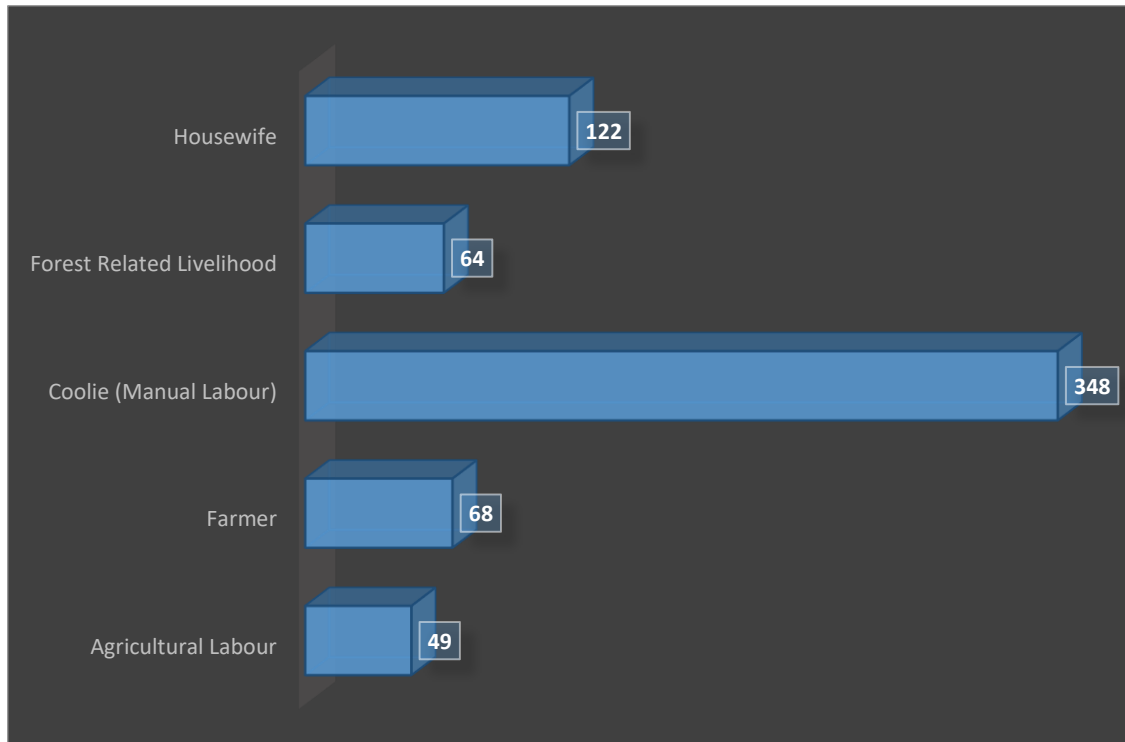


Figure 2 outlines the occupational distribution of the respondents in Idukki District, Kerala. The largest segment, constituting 53.5% of the respondents, is engaged in manual labor as Coolies. This suggests a significant reliance on physically demanding tasks as a primary source of livelihood within the studied population. Farmers make up 10.4% of the sample, highlighting the presence of agriculture as a notable occupation. Additionally, Forest Related Livelihood accounts for 9.8%, indicating a reliance on activities associated with the local forest ecosystem. Housewives represent 18.7% of the respondents, underlining the multifaceted roles and responsibilities undertaken by tribal women, including both domestic and economic contributions. Lastly, Agricultural Laborers make up 7.5%, contributing to the overall occupational diversity observed within the studied demographic.

Figure 3: Distribution of the Respondents by Marital Status

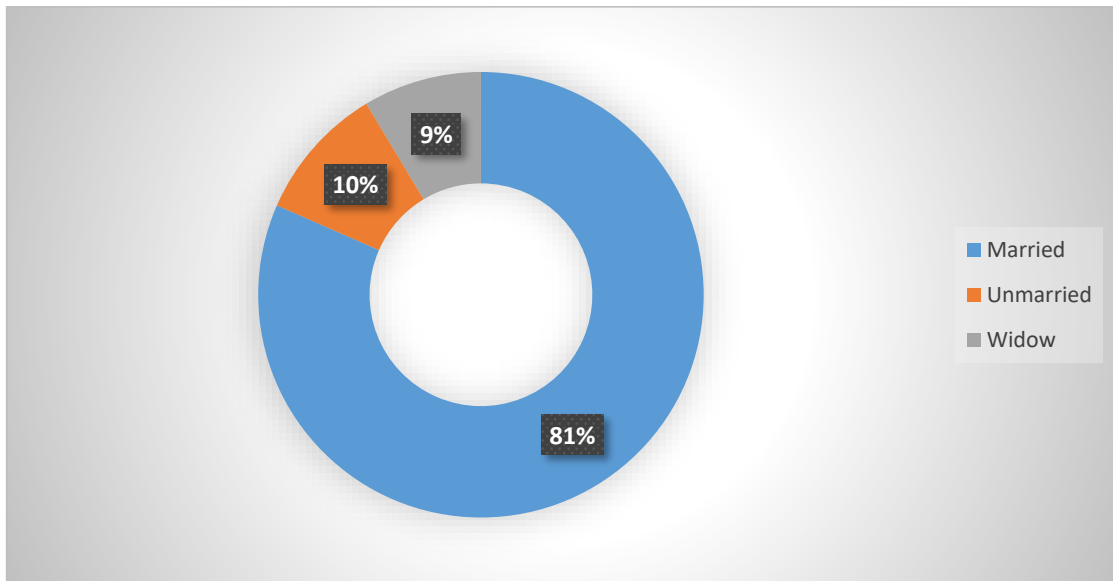


Figure 3 presents the marital status distribution among the respondents. The majority of tribal women in Idukki District, Kerala, are married, constituting 81.6% of the total respondents. This emphasizes the significance of marital status as a key demographic characteristic within the studied population. Unmarried individuals make up 9.8%, while widows account for 8.6% of the sample. The distribution underscores the importance of considering marital status in the analysis of socio-economic factors, as it can influence various aspects of women's lives, including access to resources, support networks, and economic opportunities.

Figure 4: Distribution of the Respondents by Type of Family

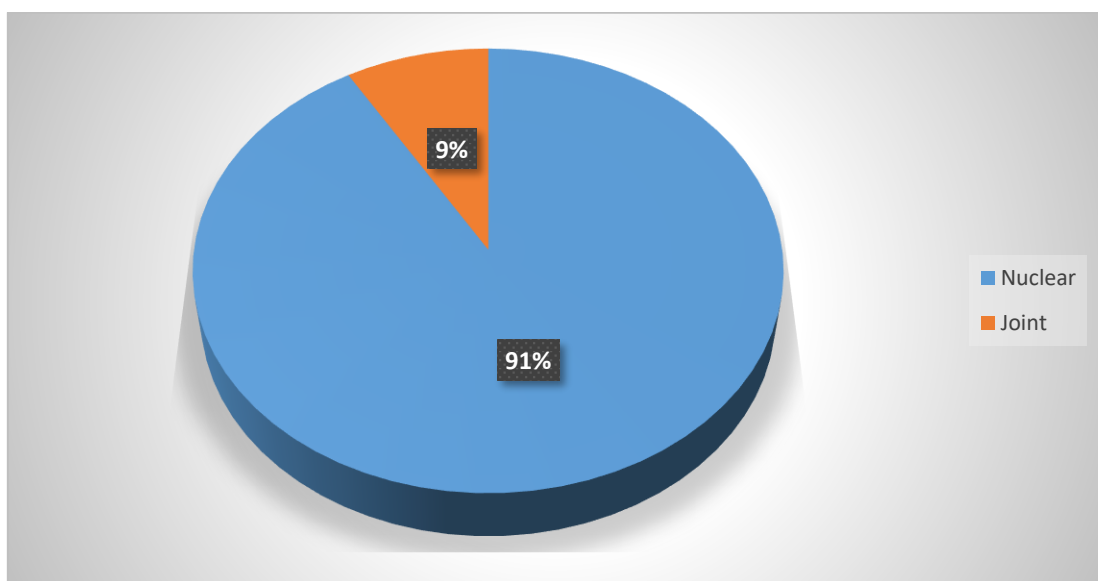


Figure 4 provides insight into the composition of families among the respondents, distinguishing between nuclear and joint family structures. The predominant family type is nuclear, representing 91.4% of the total respondents. This suggests that the majority of tribal women in the study from Idukki District, Kerala, belong to nuclear families, characterized by a more independent household structure. On the other hand, joint families, where extended family members live together, constitute a smaller proportion at 8.6%. This distribution reflects the prevailing family dynamics within the studied population, highlighting the prevalence of nuclear family setups among tribal women in the region.

Figure 5: Distribution of the Respondents by Health Status

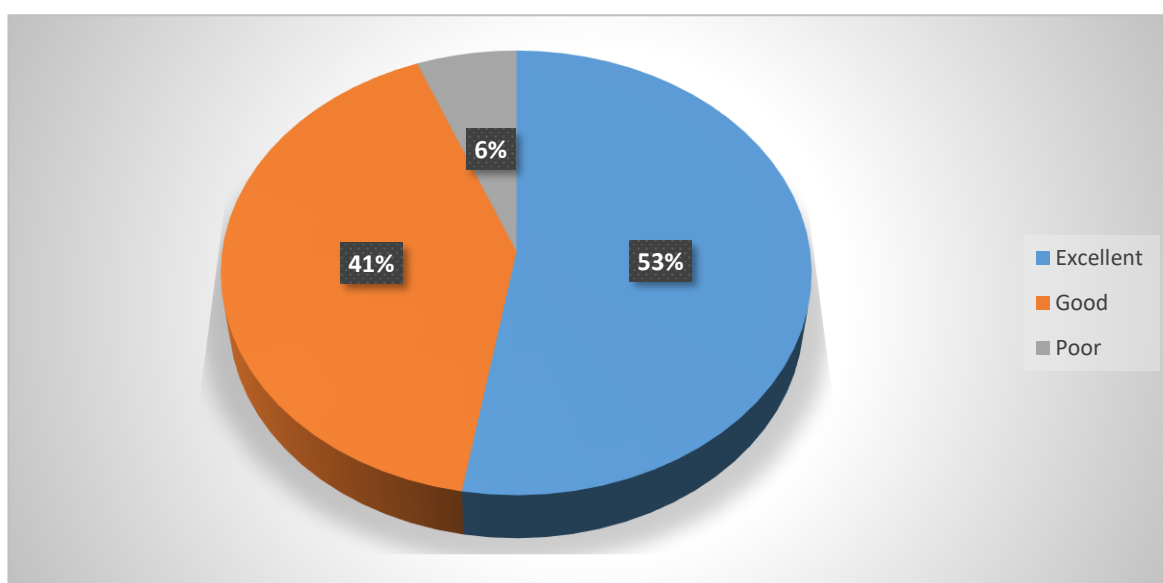


Figure 5 illustrates the self-reported health status of the respondents, providing an overview of their perceived well-being. A significant majority, comprising 52.7% of the total respondents, reported their health status as "Excellent." This suggests a prevalent positive perception of health among tribal women in Idukki District, Kerala. Additionally, 41.3% of the respondents rated their health as "Good," indicating a generally favorable health condition within the studied population. A smaller proportion, constituting 6.0%, reported their health status as "Poor," underscoring the existence of a segment facing health challenges.



Figure 6: Distribution of the Respondents by Access to Healthcare Services

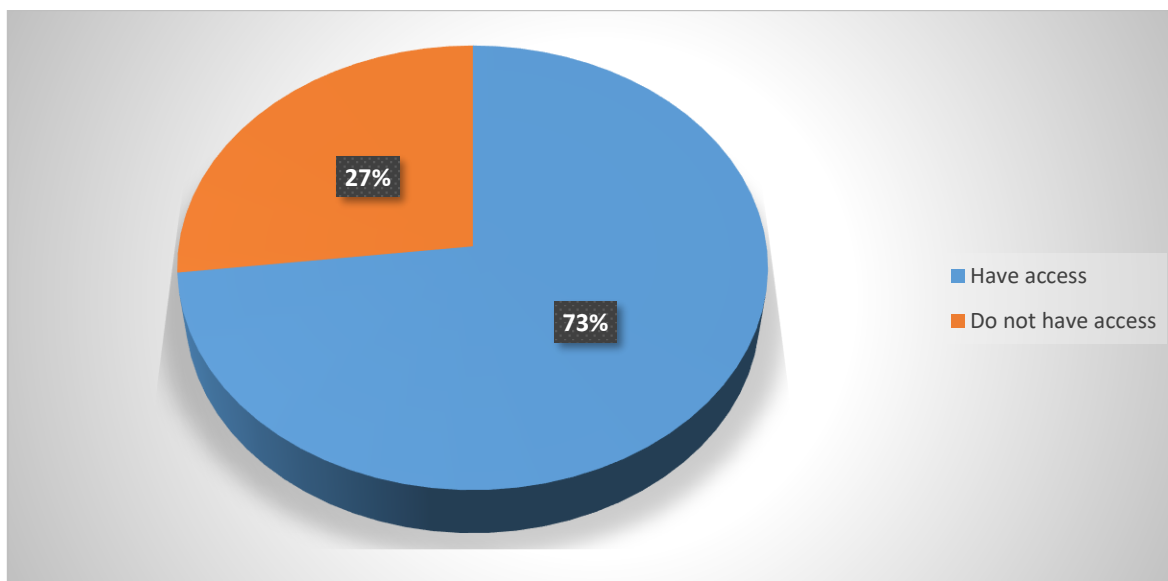


Figure 5 delineates the respondents' access to healthcare services, providing a snapshot of the healthcare landscape within the studied population. The majority, representing 73.1% of the respondents, reported having access to healthcare services. This indicates a relatively favorable situation where a significant portion of tribal women in the study area, can avail themselves of essential healthcare resources. On the other hand, 26.9% of the respondents reported not having access to healthcare services, signaling potential barriers or challenges in reaching medical facilities. This distribution emphasizes the importance of understanding healthcare accessibility, as it influences the overall health and well-being of the tribal women in the region.

## Conclusion

The socio-economic profile of tribal women in Idukki District reveals several noteworthy trends and patterns. The majority of respondents fall within the age range of 18-27, indicating a significant representation of young women. Occupationally, a substantial proportion engages in manual labor as Coolies, underscoring the physically demanding nature of their primary economic activities. The marital status distribution reflects a predominantly married population, highlighting the importance of considering family structures in the analysis of socio-economic factors. Furthermore, the prevalence of nuclear families among the respondents suggests a distinct household structure, which may have implications for resource distribution and support networks. The self-reported health status indicates a generally positive

perception of health, with the majority describing it as "Excellent" or "Good." However, the presence of a segment reporting "Poor" health status emphasizes the need for targeted healthcare interventions. The data also indicates that a significant percentage of respondents have access to healthcare services, reflecting a positive aspect of the socio-economic landscape. Nonetheless, the existence of a portion without access suggests potential disparities or challenges in healthcare accessibility that warrant further investigation.

The socio-economic status of tribal women in Idukki District is characterized by a diverse range of ages, occupations, marital statuses, and family structures. While positive indicators such as perceived health status and access to healthcare services are notable, there are areas, such as occupational patterns and healthcare accessibility, that merit focused attention for the development of targeted interventions and policies. Understanding these nuances is essential for formulating comprehensive strategies that address the unique challenges faced by tribal women, contributing to their overall well-being and sustainable socio-economic empowerment.

## References

- Ahmed, F., & Nongbri, P. (2015). Traditional governance and the socio-economic status of tribal women: A study from Northeast India. *South Asian Journal of Human Resources Management*, 2(1), 61-75.
- Baxi, P. (2008). Women in the Forest: Some Legal–Ethical Implications. *Development and Change*, 39(2), 275–297.
- Beteille, A. (2002). *Antinomies of society: Essays on ideologies and institutions*. Oxford University Press.
- Bhowmick, P. K. (2014). Tribal women in micro-enterprises: A case study from India. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 15(2), 30-42.
- Chakraborty, S. (2010). Women in tribal societies: Challenges and opportunities. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 45(40), 60-67.
- Desai, S., & Dubey, A. (2012). Caste in 21st Century India: Competing Narratives. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 47(6), 38-49.
- Desai, S., & Dubey, A. (2012). Caste in 21st Century India: Competing Narratives. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 47(6), 38-49.

- Govindasamy, P., & Malhotra, A. (1996). Women's position and family planning in Egypt. *Studies in Family Planning*, 27(6), 328-340.
- Gupta, A., & Sharma, S. (2019). Education and socio-economic mobility among tribal women in India. *Journal of Social Inclusion Studies*, 5(1), 55-69.
- Kabeer, N. (2005). Gender equality and women's empowerment: A critical analysis of the third Millennium Development Goal 1. *Gender & Development*, 13(1), 13-24.
- Mahapatro, M., & Raut, L. K. (2016). Socio-economic status of tribal women in India: An overview. *Asian Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 5(2), 129-142.
- Rao, V. (2012). Gender, Caste, and Class: International Perspectives. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 19(1), 83–95.
- Reddy, B. M., & Kapoor, P. (2016). Tribal development in India: An analysis of policies and programs. *Journal of Social and Economic Development*, 18(2), 225-244.
- Sen, A. (2001). The many faces of gender inequality. *New Republic*, 226(17), 35-39.
- Shah, A. M. (2005). *The politics of cultural practice: Thinking through theatre in an Indian village*. Oxford University Press.
- Sinha, S., & Mukherjee, S. (2017). Maternal health among tribal women in India: An exploration of the role of cultural factors. *Global Journal of Medicine and Public Health*, 6(6), 1-7.