

**TRADITIONAL FOOD PRACTICES AND MODERN NUTRITION AWARENESS AMONG
TRIBAL WOMEN IN POLLACHI TALUK**

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Abstract

Food and nutrition play a pivotal role in ensuring the overall health and well-being of communities. Among tribal populations, food habits are closely interlinked with traditional culture, ecological availability, and indigenous knowledge. However, with modernization, the dietary patterns of tribal women are undergoing significant transformations. This study focuses on the traditional food practices and modern nutritional awareness among tribal women in Pollachi Taluk, Tamil Nadu. Using a descriptive research design and a sample of 100 tribal women selected through purposive sampling, data were collected via structured interviews and questionnaires. The findings indicate that while tribal women possess deep knowledge of traditional food systems rich in nutrients, their awareness of modern nutrition concepts, balanced diets, and food labeling remains limited. The study highlights the need for targeted awareness programs, integration of traditional and modern dietary knowledge, and community-based interventions to promote sustainable health among tribal women.

Introduction

Nutrition is a cornerstone of health, and inadequate nutritional awareness often leads to malnutrition, anemia, and other health disorders, especially among women. Tribal women, who form the backbone of their communities, are responsible for food preparation, childcare, and household nutrition management. In regions such as Pollachi Taluk, tribal populations rely heavily on forest produce, millets, tubers, and seasonal fruits. These traditional foods are highly nutritious, yet their importance is gradually diminishing due to the availability of processed foods and urban influence.

Modern nutrition awareness, which emphasizes food diversity, balanced diets, and prevention of lifestyle diseases, has not fully penetrated tribal societies. Understanding the intersection of traditional practices and modern nutrition knowledge is crucial for policy formulation and sustainable tribal health development. This study attempts to examine the existing food practices of tribal women in Pollachi Taluk and assess their level of modern nutrition awareness.

Review of Literature

Rao (2018) highlighted that tribal food practices are deeply rooted in ecological knowledge, ensuring both sustenance and medicinal benefits.

Patil & Deshmukh (2020) found that tribal women lack awareness of modern nutrition concepts, despite consuming naturally balanced diets.

Kumar (2021) emphasized that modernization and urbanization have altered tribal diets, increasing dependency on packaged and low-nutrient foods.

Chandrakala (2022) observed that tribal women's nutritional literacy significantly impacts maternal and child health outcomes.

Government of India Reports (NFHS-5, 2021) reveal that malnutrition and anemia are disproportionately higher among tribal women compared to other groups.

This literature suggests a dual reality: tribal diets are inherently rich in nutrients, but modern nutrition awareness is insufficient, leading to health vulnerabilities.

Statement of the Problem

Despite having access to nutrient-rich traditional foods, tribal women in Pollachi Taluk face challenges of malnutrition, anemia, and poor health outcomes. With the growing influence of market foods, there is a visible shift in dietary preferences. However, their awareness regarding balanced nutrition, dietary diversity, food hygiene, and modern dietary guidelines remains inadequate. Thus, there is a pressing need to investigate the extent of traditional food practices and the level of modern nutrition awareness among tribal women in the study area.

Objectives of the Study

- To document the traditional food practices of tribal women in Pollachi Taluk.
- To analyze the level of awareness regarding modern nutrition concepts among tribal women.
- To assess the influence of modernization on dietary patterns of tribal women.
- To suggest measures for improving nutritional awareness and health among tribal women.

Methodology

Research Design: Descriptive research design.

Study Area: Pollachi Taluk, Coimbatore District, Tamil Nadu.

Sample Size: 100 tribal women.

Sampling Technique: Purposive sampling.

Data Collection Tools

Structured questionnaire and personal interviews covering socio-demographic profile, food practices, and nutrition awareness.

Data Analysis: Descriptive statistics (percentages, mean, frequency) and simple qualitative analysis of responses.

Findings and Suggestions

Findings:

Traditional Food Practices

- Tribal women rely heavily on millets (ragi, kambu, thinai), seasonal fruits, forest greens, honey, tubers, and pulses.
- Food is prepared using minimal processing, retaining nutrient quality.
- Many women expressed trust in traditional knowledge passed through generations.

Modern Nutrition Awareness

- Only 35% of respondents were aware of the concept of a “balanced diet.”
- Knowledge of food groups such as proteins, vitamins, and minerals was limited.
- Awareness about packaged food labeling, fortified foods, and hygienic food handling was low.
- Younger women showed relatively better exposure to modern nutrition concepts through schools, health workers, and media.

Influence of Modernization

- Increased consumption of rice, tea, oil, and sugar.
- Growing dependency on packaged snacks among younger generations.
- Erosion of millet-based food practices due to availability of subsidized rice through the Public Distribution System (PDS).

Suggestions

- Nutrition education programs should be conducted through anganwadis, self-help groups, and health workers focusing on tribal women.
- Integration of traditional foods into government nutrition schemes such as ICDS and midday meals.
- Awareness campaigns on food labeling, balanced diet, and hygiene practices.
- Encouraging kitchen gardens and revival of millet-based diets to ensure sustainable nutrition.
- Policy-level interventions to bridge the gap between indigenous knowledge and modern nutrition science.

Conclusion

The study reveals that while tribal women in Pollachi Taluk possess rich traditional food knowledge, their awareness of modern nutrition remains limited. Traditional diets offer a treasure trove of nutrients, yet modernization is gradually shifting food choices toward less nutritious options. Strengthening nutritional literacy through targeted interventions, while simultaneously preserving traditional practices, will be essential to improve the health outcomes of tribal women. A balanced integration of indigenous food wisdom with modern nutrition science can pave the way for sustainable health and empowerment of tribal women.

Acknowledgement

The Author Acknowledge the receipt of funding the seed money from the Management of Nallamuthu Gounder Mahalingam College, Pollachi for this research work

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