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Exploring Maternal and Child Health Among Tribal Communities in India: A Life Course Perspective

Introduction: India experiences high rates of maternal and infant mortality and morbidity, with tribal communities being disproportionately affected. Tribal populations frequently live in unfavorable socio-economic conditions and deficient social health indicators, culminating in adverse health consequences. This investigation studies maternal mortality and morbidity in the context of the life course of tribal women in the Madia-Gond tribe of Maharashtra. Additionally, the research also examines the obstacles barring the utilization of healthcare services during both the pregnancy and postpartum periods of tribal women.

Methods: This qualitative, life-course study utilizes interviews conducted between 2017 and 2019. Data was gathered through 7 healthcare workers and verbal autopsies with relatives of 3 deceased women and 5 infants from the Madia-Gond tribes. Additionally, 68 in-depth interviews and one focus group (n=7) were held with women from these tribes.

Results: The study revealed that tribal women and children experience alarming health disparities, resulting in elevated levels of maternal mortality, due to their limited access to healthcare services. This lack of access stems from factors including extreme poverty, geographical isolation, inadequate nutritional support, and suboptimal healthcare infrastructure. These vulnerable populations encounter challenges when trying to access vital healthcare services, mainly due to strong adherence to ineffective traditional practices, a lack of easily accessible and well-equipped medical facilities, and the constraint of poverty.

Conclusions: It is crucial to take steps to promote the establishment and advancement of government healthcare facilities within rural regions inhabited by tribal communities. Similarly important is the provision of education and awareness initiatives centered around allopathic medicine, particularly targeted towards expectant mothers. The implementation of nutritional support programs stands to play a pivotal role in mitigating high maternal and child mortality and morbidity rates prevalent among tribal populations.