

Reproductive Health of Tribes in Himachal Pradesh: Retrospect and Prospects

Suresh Sharma

Abstract

The tribal groups of India have often been found to be the most marginalised social groups. This could owe to their specific practices, ill-reach of various government benefits, various biological and social dimensions, etc. The objective of the study is to appraise the broad status of reproductive and maternal health of tribal women in Himachal Pradesh. The study was carried out in the district of Lahaul & Spiti and Chamba of Himachal Pradesh. The data was collected by trained investigators via focus group discussions in 2017. A total of 10 FGDs were conducted in each district. In Lahaul & Spiti, the study villages were Udaipur, Kangchaja, Keylog, Shishu. In Chamba District, tribal women of Lakkadmandi and Bharmour village were studied. The study groups belonged to majorly 5 tribal communities; Gaddi, Lahaulas, Bhots/Bodhs, Khampa and Gujjars. The primary field observations are also supplemented with secondary data for tribal women in the districts from the rounds of DLHS and NFHS. The maternal and reproductive health status of the women has considerably improved. The demand supply gap in availing the health services by these women has narrowed but significant accessibility constraints still prevail. Non-availability of medical personnel as well as drugs and difficulty in reaching the health facilities were reported as major barriers to health seeking in the district. The awareness with respect to RTI/STI has increased and treatment seeking is also motivated. Less than 20 percent of the women in each district use only unhygienic mediums during menstruation. Menstrual hygiene in the district needs improvement. Family Planning services indicate elevated acceptability. The most adopted method of in both the districts continues to be female sterilisation. Use of modern methods of contraception has also increased considerably. Recent estimates from NFHS-4 reveal that 91 percent of the tribal women in the two districts availed ANC Services. Service delivery with respect to maternal and reproductive health needs to be improved in both the districts. The tribal women are educated and well aware and thus have begun to make informed choices. With the supply side of healthcare delivery lagging behind, the demand will not be met. Menstrual hygiene and RTI/STI treatment seeking among tribal women is a matter of concern in the districts.