

Original Article

Social Status and Living Conditions of Rural Households in Kinnaur District of Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract: Based on primary data collected from 78 households in Kinnaur district, the study revealed that a majority of the sampled households, i.e., 82.05 per cent, belonged to the Scheduled Tribe and the remaining 17.95 per cent to the Scheduled Caste categories. More than two-thirds of the sampled households lived in joint families. About three-fourths (74.12 per cent) of the family members of the sampled households were found to be literate, and the remaining 25.88 per cent were illiterate. Most of them had attained education up to the senior secondary level. More than half of the family members, i.e., 51.49 per cent, were classified under the earning dependent category, followed by the earning (38.81 per cent) and dependent (9.70 per cent) categories. As far as the housing conditions are concerned, a large majority of the households, i.e., 83.33 per cent, had semi-pucca houses to live in. Almost all the households had the basic amenities, such as electricity and bathrooms/toilets. The study also highlights the prevalent use of LPG and firewood as the primary sources of fuel in the sampled households. This comprehensive analysis will help to understand the challenges and difficulties faced by the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and the Scheduled Tribes (STs) in the Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh.

Keywords: Basic Amenities, Himachal Pradesh, Kinnaur, Social Status, Living Conditions.

I. INTRODUCTION

Based on factors including earnings, schooling, and profession, socio-economic status is a comprehensive evaluation of a person's job experience as well as their family's standing in society and the economy. (Salgotra, 2017). Traditional socio-economic status measures included occupation, education, and income (Shavers, 2007). Social status as a reward for activities contributing to human capital development could potentially correct the suboptimal investment in education and occupation choices, where individuals often neglect the long-term impact on future generations (Fershtman et al., 1996). The term "socio-economic position," which includes ideas with various historical and interdisciplinary roots, refers to the social and economic elements that affect the positions that people or groups occupy within a society's framework. (Galobardes et al., 1979).

The population of India was 1.21 billion in 2011. The percentage of the rural population was 68.84, and the remaining, i.e., 31.16 per cent was the urban population. The level of urbanisation increased from 27.81 per cent to 31.16 per cent during the period from 2001 to 2011. As a result of this, the rural population declined from 72.19 percent to 68.84 percent during the same period (Census of India, 2011). Most of India's poor live in rural areas and belong to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Gang et al., 2008). In India, 104 million individuals belonged to Tribal Communities, which constituted 8.6 percent of the nation's overall population (Census of India, 2011). In backward regions, a large number of people were not able to access basic services and amenities because of disproportionate socio-economic development and large-scale regional disparities.

Therefore, the assessment of the quality of life was necessary for enhancing the living conditions of households through various family and social-oriented schemes and programs (Das et al., 2021). Poor people were frequently deficient in key capabilities; they might have had inadequate income, education, poor health, felt powerless, lacked political freedoms, and had less access to basic amenities. A major objective of Indian developmental planning was the provision of basic utilities, including power, cooking fuel, sewage systems, and piped water for all. In addition to being a key indicator of a household's socioeconomic status, having access to basic amenities like clean, safe drinking water and sanitary facilities is also an inherent human right (Rana, 2018). The nation's tribal population has poor health, mostly as a result of social impoverishment and vulnerability. The tribals in the past were usually forest dwellers, and their livelihoods depended to a great extent on the food-gathering economy. Notably, women within these communities bore a substantial burden, traversing considerable distances to procure wood and fodder, in addition to harvesting fruits, roots, tubers, lac, gums, and leaves for both personal consumption and commercial purposes (Punam, 2021).



According to the 2011 Indian Census, the population of Himachal Pradesh was 6864602, and there were 1483280 households in the state. Out of the total population, 89.97 per cent of the population lives in rural areas, and the remaining 10.03 per cent lives in urban areas. Out of the total population of the state, 25.19 per cent belonged to the Scheduled Castes (SCs), 13.52 per cent to the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and 5.71 per cent to the Scheduled Tribes (STs). The Scheduled Tribes (STs) population is mainly concentrated in five scheduled areas of Himachal Pradesh, viz. Kinnaur, Lahaul-Spiti, Pangi, Bharmour, and the Sub-Division of Chamba district. In rural areas, almost 90 per cent of the population depends on agriculture and horticulture.

The agricultural structure makes up more than two-thirds, i.e., 68.28 per cent with marginal holdings, followed by small holding (18.87 per cent), semi-medium holding (9.94 per cent), and medium holding (3.11 per cent) categories. Only 0.3 per cent were large farmers (Sharma, 2016). In Kinnaur districts, people are mostly dependent on the availability of biotic and natural resources due to the reduction in the amount of usable forest and agricultural land (Sharma and Minhas, 1993). The Kinnaur people enjoyed meat and ate wheat, ogla, phapra, barley, and pulses such as peas, black peas, beans, mash, and Masur. In the district, alcohol consumption is fairly widespread.

However, thanks to excellent transportation infrastructure, the majority of foods have become easily accessible in the area. Natural resources have not yet been completely used (Khimta, 2020). The majority of houses across all tribal communities in Kinnaur district were pucca houses, and their condition was good. Most of the houses were made of concrete and had an ongoing supply of LPG fuel (Mehta, 2016). In the present study, an attempt has been made to examine the social status and living conditions of rural households in the Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh.

II. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The present study, related to the year 2023, was based on primary data collected from the Kinnaur district in the northwestern Himalayan region of Himachal Pradesh. A multistage random sampling technique was used to select households in the study area. Kinnaur district comprises three community development blocks. In the first stage, one village from each community development block of the districts was randomly selected. Thus, three villages, Poonag, Talangi, and Spillow, were selected from the Nichar, Kalpa, and Pooh community development blocks, respectively. In the next stage, a caste-wise complete list of the households in the selected villages was prepared, and 20 per cent of the total households from each caste and each village were selected. Thus, a total of 78 households were selected for the present study (Table 1).

Table 1: Sampled Households in Kinnaur District

Community Development Block	Selected Village	Total Households			Selected Households (20 per cent of total households)		
		SC Households	ST Households	Total Households	SC Households	ST Households	Total Households
Nichar	Poonag	26	98	124	5	20	25
Kalpa	Talangi	8	82	90	2	16	18
Pooh	Spillow	35	142	177	7	28	35
Total		69	322	391	14	64	78

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The total number of family members in these sampled households was 371. Using a carefully thought-out questionnaire, the sampled households provided the necessary primary data. The mean values and percentages have been used to analyse the data. Bar diagrams and pie charts were used to present the results of the study.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The most significant elements influencing livelihoods are socioeconomic ones since they have an impact on people's income, knowledge, and skill levels, all of which have an impact on their way of life. Individuals' lifestyles vary depending on their income bracket, and this is reflected in the variations in their purchasing power across the population. (Islam and Mustaqim, 2014). The social status and living conditions of rural households have been analysed under the following headings:

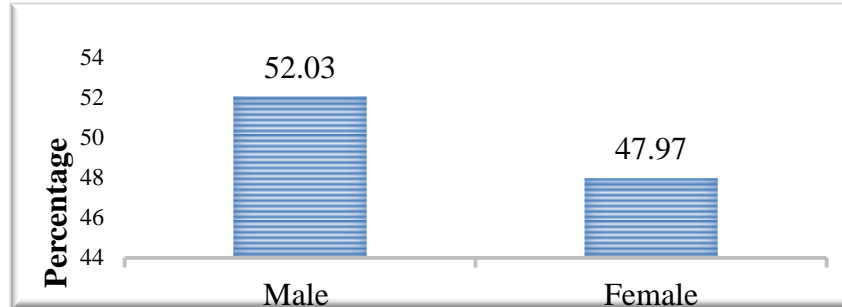
A) Gender Composition:

Table 2 shows that out of the total 371 family members in the sampled households, 193 were male, and the remaining 178 were female. The percentages of males and females were 52.03 and 47.97, respectively. This means that the sex ratio of the sampled population was 922, which is far lower than that of the state (972).

Table 2: Gender Composition of Sampled Population

Gender	Numbers	Percentage
Male	193	52.03
Female	178	47.97
Total	371	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2023

**Figure 1: Gender Composition of Sampled Population**

Note: Based on Table 2

B) Marital Status:

The data in Table 3 and Figure 2 provide information regarding the marital status of the sampled population in the Kinnaur district. The table shows that the majority of the family members, i.e., 61.72 per cent were married, while 35.04 per cent were unmarried and 3.24 per cent were widows.

**Figure 2: Marital Status of Sampled Population**

Note: Based on Table 3

C) Family Structure:

Table 3: Marital Status of Sampled Population

Marital Status	Numbers	Percentage
Married	229	61.72
Unmarried	130	35.04
Widow	12	3.24
Total	371	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 4 and Figure 3 reveal the type of family of the respondents in Kinnaur district. The table revealed that more than two-thirds, i.e., 67.95 per cent of the respondents, were living in a joint family, and 32.05 per cent had a nuclear family system.

Table 4: Type of Family of Sampled Households

Type of Family	Numbers	Percentage
Nuclear	25	32.05
Joint	53	67.95
Total	78	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2023

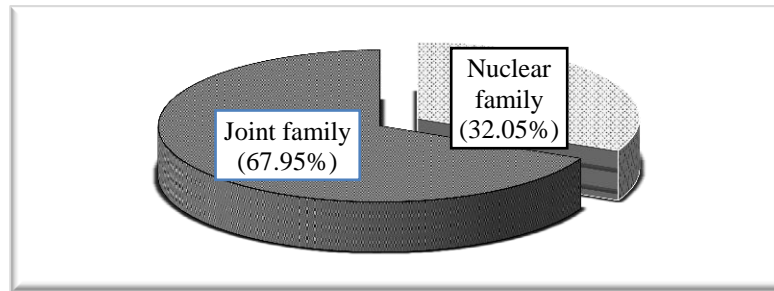


Figure 3: Type of Family of Sampled Households

D) Economic Status:

Table 5 and Figure 4 reveal that out of the 371 family members, 191 were classified under the earning dependent category, 144 were categorised under the earning category, and the remaining 36 fell into the dependent category. The percentages of earning category, earning dependent category, and dependent category were 51.49, 38.81, and 9.70, respectively. It is pertinent to mention here that those having earnings greater than their consumption expenditure have been considered earning members. However, those with earnings less than their consumption expenditure have been identified as earning dependents. Finally, those who earn nothing have been treated as dependents.

Table 5: Economic Status of Sampled Population

Economic Status	Numbers	Percentage
Earning	144	38.81
Earning Dependent	191	51.49
Dependent	36	9.70
Total	371	100.00

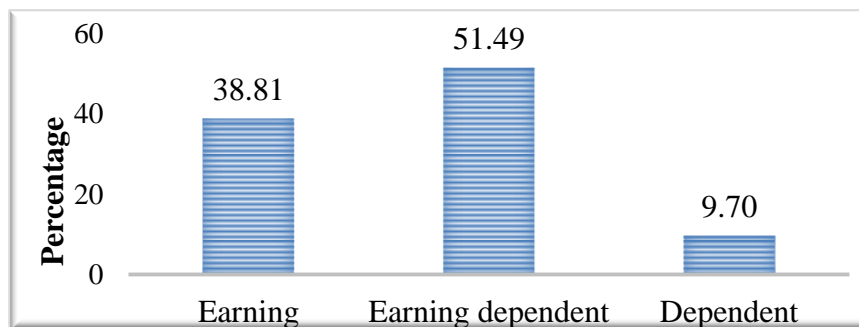


Figure 4: Economic Status of Sampled Population

Note: Based on Table 5

E) Age-wise Distribution:

The data in Table 6 illustrate the distribution of the sampled population across various age groups. The age group of 30 to 45 years comprised the largest proportion, with 116 individuals accounting for 31.30 per cent of the total sampled population. This was followed by 77 individuals who belonged to the age group of 15 to 30 years, representing 20.75 per cent of the sampled population. As many as 63 individuals (16.97 per cent) were in the age group of 60 years old and above. The less than 15-year-old age group had 60 individuals, making up 16.17 per cent of the total population. Another 55 (14.81 per cent) individuals belonged to the age group of 45 to 60 years.

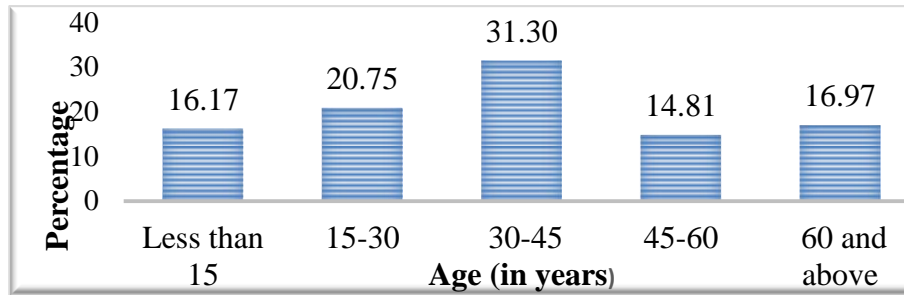


Figure 5: Age-wise Distribution of Sampled Population

Note: Based on Table 6

Figure 5 depicts that the highest proportion of the family members belonged to the age group of 30 to 45 years, followed by the age groups of 15 to 30 years, 60 years and above, 15 to 30 years, less than 15 years, and 45 to 60 years.

F) Educational Status:

Table 7 and Figure 6 show the education status of the family members of the sampled households in Kinnaur district. The table revealed that slightly more than one-fourth, i.e., 25.88 per cent of the family members, was found illiterate. Among the literate, the highest percentage, i.e., 28.30 per cent, were educated up to senior secondary level. This was followed by 11.32 per cent of family members who were graduates. Another 9.17 per cent of the family members were educated up to the middle level, and 8.62 per cent had professional degrees. As many as 7.81 per cent of the family members had matriculation qualifications, and 6.75 per cent were educated up to the primary level. A small proportion of the family members (2.15 per cent) completed a post-graduate degree.

Table 7: Educational Status of Sampled Population

Education Level	Numbers	Percentage
Illiterate	96	25.88
Primary	25	6.75
Middle	34	9.17
Matric	29	7.81
Senior Secondary	105	28.30
Graduate	42	11.32
Post-graduate	8	2.15
Professional Degree	32	8.62
Total	371	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2023

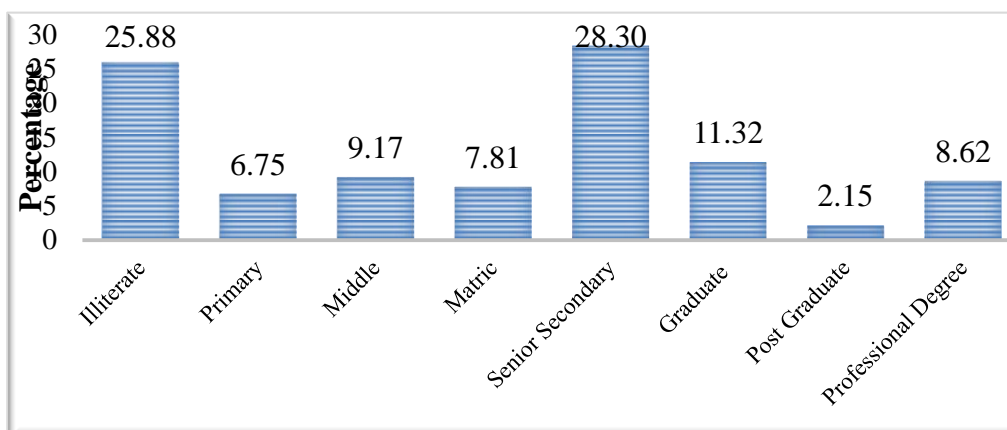


Figure 6: Educational Status of Sampled Population

Note: Based on Table 7

G) Working Status:

Table 8 revealed that 28.85 per cent of the family members were engaged in their household work. A significant portion, 28.30 per cent of the sampled population, were farmers, indicating a reliance on agriculture. More than one-fourth (25.60 per cent) of the family members were students, 7.81 per cent were in government jobs, 4.85 per cent were employed in the private sector, and 2.97 per cent were running their own businesses or were self-employed. The remaining 1.62 per cent of the sampled population were labourers.

Table 8: Working Status of Sampled Population

Description	Number	Percentage
Agriculture	105	28.30
Household works	107	28.85
Government Job	29	7.81
Labour	6	1.62
Private Job	18	4.85
Own Business/ self-employed	11	2.97
Study	95	25.60
Total	371	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The information regarding types of houses, their conditions, and the facilities available is presented in Table 9. The table showed that out of the total respondents, a large majority (83.33 per cent) resided in semi-pucca houses, while 12.83 per cent had pucca houses to live in and the remaining 3.84 per cent inhabited kutcha houses. The conditions of the houses were classified into good, average, and dilapidated categories. Out of the total, 61 sampled households, equivalent to 78.20 per cent, were found to be in good condition. Meanwhile, 16 sampled households, representing 20.52 per cent, were deemed to be in average condition. Only one sampled household, constituting 1.28 per cent, was found to be in dilapidated condition. The study revealed that out of the 78 sampled households, 75 (96.15 per cent) had kitchen facilities, while only 3 (3.84 per cent) lacked this facility. All 78 sampled households were electrified.

Furthermore, 77 sampled households, accounting for 98.71 per cent of the total, had access to toilet facilities. This achievement can be attributed to initiatives like the Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen), launched by the government to make rural areas open defecation-free. Additionally, the average number of rooms available in a sampled household was 3.05. These findings shed light on the positive housing and amenity conditions in the surveyed area, with a substantial majority having kitchens, access to basic facilities, and universal electrification.

Table 9: Housing Type, Condition, and Facilities

Type of House	Numbers	Percentage
Kutcha	3	3.84
Semi-pucca	65	83.33
Pucca	10	12.83
Total	78	100.00
Condition of house		
Good	61	78.20
Average	16	20.52
Dilapidated	1	1.28
Total	78	100.00
Percentage of houses with kitchen facilities	75	96.15
Percentage of houses having access to a bathroom/toilet	77	98.71
House electrified	78	100.00
Average number of rooms per household	3.05	

Source: Field Survey, 2023

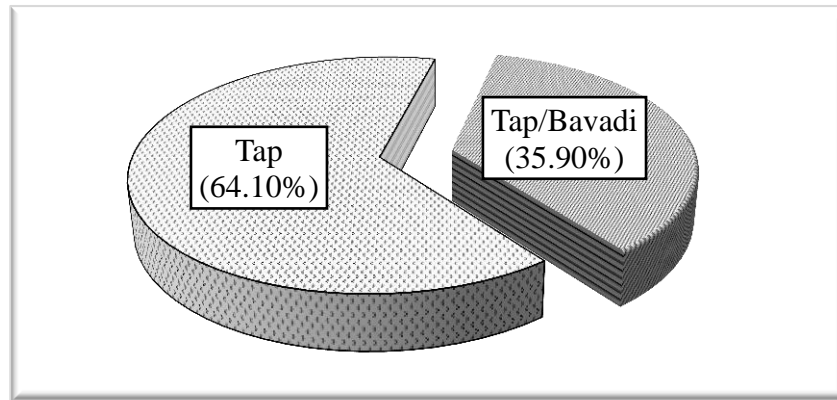
H) Water Sources:

Table 10 and Figure 7 show the distribution of sources of potable water among the sampled households. Out of 78 sampled households, slightly less than two-thirds (64.10 per cent) obtained potable water solely from the tab. The remaining 35.90 per cent obtained potable water either from the tab or from Bavadi.

Table 10: Source of Potable Water

Source of Potable Water	Numbers	Percentage
Tap	50	64.10
Tap/Bavadi	28	35.90
Total	78	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2023

**Figure 7: Source of Potable Water**

I) Sources for Fuel:

Table 11 shows that a large majority of the households, i.e., 74 (94.88 per cent), used both LPG and firewood for their fuel needs. The table also indicates that out of the total 78 sampled households, 76 have LPG facilities. This is because of initiatives like Ujjwala Yojna and Grihini Suvidha Yojna, which have proven to be a boon for women in the state.

Table 11: Source of Fuel

Source of Potable Water	Numbers	Percentage
Firewood	2	2.56
LPG	2	2.56
LPG/Firewood	74	94.88
Total	78	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The table further revealed that only two sampled households, accounting for 2.56 per cent, exclusively used LPG. In contrast, an equivalent number of sampled households relied on firewood as a source of fuel.

IV. CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The policy implications arising out of the results of this study are described as follows:

- It has been found from the field survey that the sex ratio of the sampled population (922) was less than that of the state level (972). Therefore, the situation demands strict execution of the law.
- The study has revealed that there are still many illiterate people. Therefore, the central and state governments should develop and implement targeted literacy programmes to reduce the number of illiterate individuals. Focusing on basic literacy skills will empower individuals and improve overall educational outcomes. The governments should also focus on improving educational opportunities, especially at the primary and middle school levels. Promote awareness about the importance of education, targeting illiterate or less-educated individuals.
- It has been observed that a very large majority of sampled households, i.e., 83.33 per cent, have semi-pucca houses to live in. Therefore, the central and state governments should promote the development of affordable housing with a focus on improving living conditions, especially for those who live in semi-pucca and kutchra houses. Policies addressing the quality of housing infrastructure can contribute to creating a safer and healthier living environment for the residents of the Kinnaur district.

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