

Research Paper

## Psychological Parameters of School Drop Out of Tribal Girl Students in Jhargram District of West Bengal

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### ABSTRACT

School dropout among tribal girl students in Jhargram district, West Bengal, a predominantly tribal region in the Jangalmahal area, remains a persistent challenge with deep-seated psychological barriers and socio-economic hardships despite educational initiatives. While economic and infrastructural factors have been nuanced critically, the psychological parameters influencing dropout have received meager scholarly attention. Psychological parameters have critical contributions to disengagement from formal education. Key primary psychological factors include lack of motivation, low self-esteem and lesser interest in studies, leading to perceptions that education is unnecessary and holds little value for their future. Tribal girls face feelings of devaluation, helplessness, and diminished aspirations brewing out of cultural conflicts between mainstream school values and traditional indigenous identity. Fear and trauma from harsh teaching methods like corporal punishment, induce anxiety and school aversion. Limited parent-child interaction, discriminatory practices within families, such as preferential treatment for boy children, and absence of role models further erode confidence and resilience. Protective and positive parental engagement and participation in extracurricular activities and culturally attuned interventions are essential to reignite motivation, enhance psychological empowerment, build self-efficacy and overcome these invisible barriers for sustained educational pursuits.

**Keywords:** Tribal Girls, School Dropout, Psychological Parameters, Jhargram District, Emotional Well-Being, Cultural Conflict

India is a vast and culturally diverse country that is home to numerous tribal communities who have maintained distinct identities for centuries. These communities are commonly referred to as Adivasis, a term that denotes indigenous or autochthonous people and emphasizes their status as the original inhabitants of the land (Xaxa, 2005). The term tribe originates from the Roman word *tribus* and has been widely used to describe indigenous communities across different parts of the world, including India (Beteille, 1998). In India, tribal communities represent an important component of the country's social and cultural structure. Tribes in India possess unique social, cultural, and economic characteristics that distinguish them from the mainstream population. These differences are reflected in their traditional dress, food habits, language, customs, and house-building techniques (Rath, 2006). Most tribal communities are concentrated in remote and underdeveloped areas such as

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Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, and the North-Eastern states (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2022). Many of these groups live in forest and hill regions, which has allowed them to remain relatively isolated and preserve their traditional way of life and cultural identity.

Several scholars have attempted to define the concept of tribes. Dubey described tribes as territorial communities living in relative isolation in forests and hills, developing their own distinct social systems and traditions. D. G. Mandelbaum viewed tribes as social units larger than local communities where families share a strong sense of belonging. B. K. Roy Burman emphasized demographic indicators such as population size, while D. N. Majumdar defined tribes as groups of families sharing a common name, territory, language, and customary laws. These definitions highlight the strong cultural and social bonds within tribal societies.

In West Bengal, many tribal communities reside in the Jungle Mahal region. Among them, the Munda, Santal, Oraon, Bhumij, Shabar, and Birhor are prominent. Even when different tribes live in the same geographical area, they usually maintain their separate cultural identities. Social interactions and marriages generally occur within the same tribe, reinforcing strong intra-tribal unity and cultural continuity (Ambasht, 1970; Kundu, 1986; Arora, 2001). While this helps preserve traditions, it also shapes their interaction with modern institutions such as formal education. Education remains one of the major challenges for tribal communities. In many tribal regions of West Bengal, literacy rates remain significantly lower than the state average. Studies have consistently highlighted the educational disadvantages faced by tribal populations. For instance, Daripa (2017) examined literacy patterns in Purulia district and found that tribal literacy stood at 53.68 percent compared to the overall literacy rate of 65.38 percent, with tribal women showing an even lower literacy rate of 39.54 percent. The study identified factors such as early marriage, rigid gender roles, poverty, and the remoteness of tribal settlements as major barriers to education. It also emphasized that the social undervaluation of girls' education further intensifies educational disparities.

Similarly, Maji (2016) analyzed trends in literacy, enrolment, and gender parity among tribal women between 1991 and 2011 and found that despite several government schemes, the literacy gap between tribal and non-tribal populations remains significant. Tribal girls often face multiple barriers including poverty, poor educational infrastructure, negative parental attitudes toward education, and the neglect of local language needs in school instruction. As a result, dropout rates increase sharply at the secondary level, indicating the urgent need for inclusive and gender-sensitive educational reforms.

In the context of the Jungle Mahal region, several studies have examined the educational challenges faced by tribal communities. Chowdhury et al. (2017) investigated the high dropout rates among tribal students in Jhargram district and identified factors such as poverty, long distances to schools, inadequate infrastructure, and socio-cultural barriers as major contributors to school discontinuation. The study emphasized the need for targeted interventions, community engagement, and policy measures to improve school retention and educational outcomes.

Further research by Ahamed and Nanda (2018) explored the educational experiences of students in Jhargram from an ethnographic perspective. Their study highlighted the influence of socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors on learning outcomes. The researchers noted that limited access to quality schools, economic hardship, and cultural differences often hinder the academic participation of tribal students. They also stressed the importance of

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community participation and culturally sensitive educational practices to enhance learning opportunities in the region.

More recently, Kisku and Nanda (2023) examined the socio-cultural, economic, and educational status of the Santal tribe in Paschim Medinipur and Jhargram districts. Their study revealed persistent inequalities in education along with broader socio-economic challenges faced by the community. The findings emphasized the need for targeted development strategies that address educational barriers while respecting the socio-cultural context of tribal societies.

Despite government initiatives such as the Midday Meal Scheme, Ashram schools, scholarships, and the Right to Education Act, improvements in tribal education have been relatively slow. A major reason is the lack of adequate educational infrastructure, including well-equipped schools, trained teachers, and appropriate learning materials. Schools are often located far from tribal settlements, and poor transportation facilities make it difficult for children to attend regularly.

Tribal children also face socio-economic and cultural barriers to education. Many are first-generation learners whose parents have little or no formal education, making it difficult for them to receive academic support at home (Bandyopadhyay & Subrahmanian, 2008). Financial hardship often forces children to assist with household work or contribute to family income, leading to irregular attendance or school dropout. Language barriers further complicate the situation, as many tribal children speak their own mother tongue at home while the medium of instruction in schools is a different language.

Girls' education faces even greater challenges. In many tribal communities, traditional gender roles expect girls to remain at home and help with domestic work. Early marriage is still practiced in some areas, forcing many girls to discontinue their studies at a young age. Even when girls attend school, factors such as safety concerns, long travel distances, lack of sanitation facilities, and the absence of female teachers discourage them from continuing their education. Families with limited financial resources often prioritize boys' education, widening the gender gap in literacy and educational attainment.

Therefore, improving tribal education requires better infrastructure, culturally sensitive policies, community participation, and special attention to promoting girls' education. In this context, the present study focuses on tribal girl students in the Jhargram district of West Bengal. The study aims to identify the factors responsible for the educational challenges faced by tribal girl students and to assess the psychological parameters related to school dropout among tribal girl students in Jhargram district.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What socio-cultural, economic, institutional, and geographic factors contribute to educational challenges faced by tribal girl students?
2. Which key psychological factors contribute to school dropout among tribal girl students in Jhargram District?

### Research Gap

Many studies in West Bengal have examined school dropout among tribal students, focusing mainly on socio-economic conditions, poverty, and lack of educational facilities. However,

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limited research has explored the psychological parameters influencing dropout among tribal girl students, particularly in the specific context of Jhargram District. Therefore, a focused study on these psychological and educational factors is necessary.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The present study seeks to understand the educational status of tribal girl students at the elementary level through a qualitative lens. Qualitative research is appropriate for exploring complex social phenomena that are embedded in culture, context, and human experience (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

#### **Research design**

The present study adopts a descriptive research design to examine the psychological parameters associated with school dropout among tribal girl students in the Jhargram district of West Bengal. This design is appropriate for understanding the psychological and social factors that influence students' decisions to discontinue their education. It focuses on identifying and describing variables such as motivation, self-esteem, academic anxiety, family support, and attitudes toward schooling. The descriptive approach allows the researcher to analyze these psychological aspects within the socio-cultural context of tribal communities. Through this design, the study aims to present a clear picture of the psychological conditions contributing to school dropout among tribal girls.

#### **Study area**

This study was conducted in Jhargram Districts of West Bengal's Jangalmahal region, which is largely tribal-dominated and marked by poverty, remoteness, and low female literacy.

#### **Population and sampling technique of the study**

The population of the present study comprises the Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities of West Bengal, with particular focus on the tribal-dominated district of Jhargram. This district is recognized as one of the educationally disadvantaged regions where a significant proportion of the population belongs to tribal communities. It covers those who have dropped out before completing their education. By considering these groups, the study aims to understand the psychological parameters influencing school dropout among tribal girl students in the socio-cultural context of Jhargram district of West Bengal.

A group of participants was selected through purposive and stratified sampling techniques to ensure proper representation of tribal communities in the district. As the research focuses on psychological factors related to school dropout among tribal girls, purposive sampling was used to include respondents who are directly related to the issue, particularly tribal girl students who have discontinued their studies. This method is appropriate for qualitative and exploratory studies because it focuses on selecting information-rich cases. Such sampling helps the researcher gain deeper insights into the psychological conditions and experiences influencing school dropout among tribal girl students in Jhargram district.

#### **Sources and data collection technique**

The study utilizes both primary and secondary sources of data to achieve its research objectives. Primary data refers to first-hand information collected directly from participants. It is gathered through techniques such as interviews, questionnaires, surveys, observations,

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tests, and assessments. These methods help the researcher obtain direct insights into the psychological factors related to school dropout among tribal girl students. Secondary data, on the other hand, consists of information that has already been collected for other purposes but is used in the present research. Common sources include government reports, academic journals, books, and research articles. Although secondary data saves time and resources, its reliability, relevance, and suitability must be carefully examined before use.

For the present study, primary data were mainly collected through structured interviews, questionnaires, and observation methods. Interviews were conducted with tribal girl students who had dropped out of school to explore psychological aspects such as motivation, self-esteem, anxiety, and attitudes toward education. In addition, interactions with teachers and parents were carried out to understand the broader social and educational context influencing dropout. These data collection techniques helped the researcher gather detailed and meaningful information about the psychological conditions contributing to school dropout among tribal girl students in Jhargram district of West Bengal.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

- The study focuses only on tribal girl students who have dropped out of school.
- The geographical area of the study is limited to Jhargram district of West Bengal, which may limit the generalization of the findings to other districts or states.
- Male students and students from other social groups are not included in the study.
- The study mainly follows a qualitative research approach.
- It emphasizes understanding psychological factors related to school dropout rather than conducting large-scale statistical analysis.
- Language and dialect differences among tribal communities created some challenges during data collection.

## **ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION**

Tribal girl students face numerous educational challenges arising from economic, socio-cultural, and infrastructural conditions within their communities. Economic hardship is one of the major factors, as many tribal families live in poverty and depend on every member to support household survival. Girls are often required to assist with domestic chores, agricultural work, and caring for younger siblings, which limits their regular school attendance. Socio-cultural beliefs also influence educational participation. In many tribal communities, traditional gender roles prioritize boys' education, while girls are expected to manage household responsibilities and prepare for early marriage, discouraging families from continuing their education beyond the primary level. Another challenge is the gap between the formal education system and tribal culture. The language of instruction, curriculum, and teaching methods often fail to reflect the cultural background and indigenous knowledge of tribal communities, making schooling less meaningful for students. Geographical isolation further intensifies these problems, as many tribal villages are located far from schools, requiring long travel through forests, hilly terrain, or poorly connected roads. This raises safety concerns for adolescent girls and discourages parents from sending them to school. In addition, many schools lack adequate infrastructure, including proper classrooms, sanitation facilities, sufficient teachers, and female teaching staff. Together, these factors create significant barriers that limit educational opportunities for tribal girl students and contribute to high dropout rates and lower educational attainment.

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The issue of school dropout among tribal girl students in Jhargram district is not only influenced by socio economic and cultural factors but is also closely associated with several psychological dimensions that shape students' attitudes, emotions, and motivation toward education. Girls growing up in economically disadvantaged and socially restrictive environments often develop feelings of insecurity, low confidence, and limited aspirations regarding their educational future. Family expectations, early marriage pressures, and gender-based discrimination may gradually weaken their belief in the value of continuing education. In addition, repeated academic difficulties, language barriers, and lack of supportive learning environments can negatively affect their psychological well-being. When students perceive school as an unfamiliar or discouraging space, their level of engagement and motivation declines. Many tribal girls also experience emotional stress due to balancing domestic responsibilities with school work, which further reduces their academic interest. The absence of female teachers or mentors can limit opportunities for emotional support and guidance during adolescence, a critical stage for identity development and self-confidence. As a result, psychological factors play a crucial role in influencing whether tribal girls remain in school or eventually withdraw from the education system. Understanding these psychological parameters is therefore essential for designing supportive educational interventions that encourage retention and promote positive learning experiences for tribal girls.

### **Psychological parameters associated with school dropout.**

- Low self-confidence and self-esteem: Continuous social marginalization and academic struggles may reduce students' belief in their abilities.
- Lack of academic motivation: Limited encouragement from family and community can decrease interest in education.
- Low educational aspirations: Many girls perceive limited opportunities for higher education or employment.
- Fear and insecurity: Concerns about safety, social judgement, or school environment may create anxiety.
- Stress due to domestic responsibilities: Balancing household work with studies creates mental pressure.
- Feelings of social exclusion: Language differences and cultural gaps may make tribal students feel isolated in school.
- Lack of role models: Absence of female teachers or successful community figures can reduce inspiration to pursue education.
- Internalized gender norms: Beliefs that girls should prioritize family roles over education influence attitudes toward schooling.

The study adopts a qualitative research approach and uses the case study method in accordance with the research objectives. The investigation was conducted among tribal girl students in the Jhargram district of West Bengal to explore the various educational and psychological factors responsible for school dropout. The qualitative case study approach allows for an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences, personal circumstances, and socio-cultural realities that influence the educational participation of tribal girls. By examining individual cases, the study seeks to capture the complex interaction of family background, economic conditions, institutional support, and cultural practices that shape their educational trajectories. This method provides rich and contextual insights that help explain not only why tribal girls discontinue schooling but also how different social and structural factors combine to create barriers to continued education.

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The case studies reveal several significant factors contributing to school dropout among tribal girls. One major factor is the lack of parental awareness regarding the importance of education. In many cases, parents with little or no formal education tend to undervalue schooling and prefer their daughters to assist with household responsibilities, agricultural work, or the care of younger siblings. Economic hardship is another crucial issue, as many tribal families live under conditions of poverty where every family member is expected to contribute to the household. In such circumstances, girls' education often becomes a lower priority. Early marriage also emerged as an important cause of school discontinuation. In some communities, cultural traditions and financial pressures lead parents to arrange marriages for their daughters at a young age, which immediately interrupts their education and limits their future opportunities. Infrastructural challenges further contribute to the dropout problem. In several cases, the absence of nearby upper primary or secondary schools forces students to travel long distances through difficult terrain. Without safe transportation or hostel facilities, parents become reluctant to allow their daughters to continue their education. The shortage of teachers in many tribal schools also affects students' learning experiences. Limited teaching staff, frequent teacher absenteeism, and the lack of female teachers reduce students' motivation and confidence, leading some to gradually lose interest in schooling. Language barriers between the tribal mother tongue spoken at home and the Bengali or English medium of instruction in schools also create learning difficulties. When classroom teaching does not accommodate local languages, students often struggle to understand lessons, which results in poor academic performance and discouragement.

Another important issue highlighted by the case studies is the lack of proper guidance and mentorship. Many tribal students are first-generation learners whose parents are unable to provide academic support or educational guidance. In the absence of supportive teachers, mentors, or role models, students often lose confidence in their ability to succeed in school. However, some cases also demonstrate that timely counselling and encouragement from teachers or para-teachers can positively influence educational continuity. When educators engage with families, explain the benefits of schooling, and provide academic support such as remedial teaching, it can help students return to school and continue their education. Overall, these case studies demonstrate that school dropout among tribal girl students is not caused by a single factor but results from the combined influence of economic hardship, socio-cultural expectations, institutional limitations, and geographical isolation. Understanding these interconnected challenges is essential for developing effective educational policies and interventions that support the retention and empowerment of tribal girls in the education system.

### **Interpretation**

The findings of the study indicate that the educational challenges faced by tribal girl students in Jhargram district arise from a combination of economic, socio-cultural, infrastructural, and psychological factors. Poverty remains one of the most significant barriers, as many tribal families depend on girls to assist with household chores, agricultural activities, and sibling care. These responsibilities often interfere with regular school attendance and eventually lead to school dropout. Cultural beliefs and traditional gender roles further contribute to the problem, as families frequently prioritize boys' education while girls are expected to prepare for domestic responsibilities and early marriage.

In addition, geographical isolation and poor infrastructure create further obstacles to continued education. Many schools are located far from tribal villages, and the lack of

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transportation or hostel facilities makes it difficult and sometimes unsafe for girls to attend school regularly. The shortage of teachers, especially female teachers, and the absence of adequate school facilities also reduce students' motivation and engagement in learning. The study also highlights the importance of psychological factors in influencing school dropout. Low self-confidence, lack of academic motivation, limited educational aspirations, and feelings of social exclusion often discourage tribal girls from continuing their education. Language barriers and lack of guidance from teachers or family members can further weaken their confidence and interest in schooling.

The case studies confirm that dropout is rarely caused by a single factor but rather by the combined influence of family conditions, social norms, and institutional limitations. Therefore, improving educational opportunities for tribal girls requires comprehensive strategies that address economic support, infrastructure development, community awareness, and psychological support systems.

### CONCLUSION

The present study examines the factors responsible for educational challenges and school dropout among tribal girl students in Jhargram district, West Bengal. The findings show that the problem is complex and influenced by a combination of economic, socio-cultural, infrastructural, and psychological factors. Economic hardship is a major barrier, as many tribal families live in poverty and depend on girls to assist with domestic work, agricultural labour, and the care of younger siblings, which limits their regular school attendance. Socio-cultural beliefs and traditional gender norms also affect girls' education, as boys' education is often prioritized while girls are expected to manage household responsibilities and marry early. Geographical isolation and poor educational infrastructure further intensify the problem, as many tribal villages are far from schools and lack safe transportation, hostel facilities, adequate classrooms, and sufficient teachers, particularly female teachers. Psychological factors such as low self-confidence, limited educational aspirations, lack of motivation, and feelings of exclusion due to language barriers and cultural differences also contribute to dropout. The study concludes that school dropout among tribal girls results from multiple interconnected challenges; however, counselling, teacher support, community awareness, and effective implementation of educational schemes can help reduce dropout rates and improve educational opportunities for tribal girls.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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