

Self-rated psychological health of married women living in slums and its determinants: A mixed method study in deprived communities of Uttarakhand, India

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Introduction: Urban slum inhabitants' lives are often dictated by crowded living quarters, leaking roofs, and poor sanitation, which render them vulnerable to infectious disease. These circumstances make it impossible to consider slum dwellers' mental health. Despite the growing focus on mental health in India, the mental health of women, particularly those who live in slums, remains a neglected public health priority.

Objective: to assess the mental health of women living in slums and explore the social determinants associated with it.

Methodology: This cross sectional study was conducted using mixed method design. A multistage cluster random sampling was applied to select the study areas. The mental health of women aged 18-50 years was assessed quantitatively using the SRQ (self-reported questionnaire) tool and was analysed using SPSS version 25. Qualitative exploration was done through in-depth interviews with 15 participants and was analyzed using content analysis.

Result: A total of 250 women consented to participate in the study. The median age of the participants was 40 years (± 8.9 SD). Majority were Hindu (89.6%), educated up to primary level (42.40%), Housewives (76.4%). Using a cut off of 10/20, 21.6% (n=54) were found as probable case for Common mental disorders (CMD). Among these, 68% (n=37) reported having suicidal ideation. Somatic symptoms of Feeling tired (X² Value =9.368; p value =0.02) and poor sleep (X² Value =10.451; p value =0.01) were found to be significantly associated with high SRQ scores. Binary Logistic regression showed that the odds of mental illness was two times higher among those women whose family monthly income was less than Rupees 10,000 (OR:2.315; 95% CI: 0.687- 7.086). Qualitative findings suggest that the mental health of married women living in slums are shaped by the basic adversities such as compromised living conditions, food insecurity, low income of husband, financial dependency on spouse, future insecurity for children, lack of social support and intimate partner violence. However, women view these factors as an inescapable ill fate.

Conclusion: Women in slums are more likely to suffer from mental illness, thus improved career options or skill development initiatives could help them become self-sufficient and thus, improve their social and economic status. Furthermore, better policies against domestic violence must be enacted.

Biography

Dr. Santosh Kumar is MBBS, MD in community and family medicine. He is currently serving as associate professor in community and family medicine department of AIIMS Rishikesh, Uttarakhand, India. He has extensively worked towards improving primary healthcare for rural and vulnerable section of Uttarakhand. He has published various research papers and books on community level prevention of dengue and COVID-19.