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FOOD PATTERN OF IRULAR TRIBE IN PUDUCHERRY: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Irular - a tribal community is living in different parts of Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh and their presence is also found in Puducherry Union Territory since time immemorial. Traditionally their occupation is catching snakes and rats for their livelihood. They are forest dwellers and quite familiar with the forest produces which they barter with the other tribal communities. Since they cannot make living from this occupation, they now often earn from doing coolie works. They are more susceptible to health and nutrition related problems largely due to ignorance, poor socio-economic conditions, inaccessibility to modern health facilities and deep-rooted traditional beliefs and taboos. With this backdrop, to study the food taking pattern and addiction behavior of Irular Tribe, a study

has been conducted in four selected Irular Tribe inhabited areas i.e. Katterikuppam, T.N. Palayam, Irulansandai and Bahoor in Puducherry. This study has adopted descriptive research design method and data have been collected through a household survey schedule in all the 117 tribal households and in addition participant observation method was also carried out to gather the pertinent data.

KEYWORDS: Drug Addiction, Food Pattern, Irular Tribes.

INTRODUCTION :

Health is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. The WHO defines health as “a state of physical, mental and social well-being of an individual and not merely the absence of diseases or infirmity”. The levels and distribution of income, the social and cultural practices and perceptions, the choice of technology with the impact on the occupational and natural environment, influence and are in turn influenced by the physical and mental health status of a society. Several studies (e.g., Basu, A 1990; Basu, S 1990; Kar 1986, 1990; and Rizvi 1986) also reveal that socio-economic factors, socio-cultural variants like nutritional practices (food habits) interrelated with socio-biological norms such as mating pattern, preferential marital alliances, age at marriage etc. have tremendous impact on the fertility, morbidity and mortality pattern. Irular tribes have different health problems owing to the variability in their geographical, socio-economic development and cultural characteristics. Their lifestyles and food habits are different from that of their rural neighbors. They depend on agriculture coolie work and manual labor for their livelihood from which the earning amounts adequate income.

Higher prevalence of under nutrition in tribal population is due to

- Poverty and consequent under nutrition



- Lack of awareness about, access to and utilization of the available nutrition supplementation programmes;
- Social barriers preventing the utilization of available nutrition supplementation programme and services.
- Poor environmental sanitation and lack of safe drinking water, leading to increased morbidity from water-borne infections;
- Environmental conditions that favor vector-borne diseases;
- Lack of access to health care facilities resulting in increased severity and/or duration of illnesses.

The staple food of Irulas is rice, other leaves, roots, tubers collected from the agriculture field. Majority of the Irulas are taking two meals a day. Their night meal is considered to be the best meal as rice and leafy vegetable curry, sometime they will add chili powder, pulses with turmeric condiments used for cooking. There is no special food for the children. Boiling is the only process of cooking. The rice is cooked in water. Moreover, the wild life preservation acts have further curtailed them from hunting the wild animals which is the major source of their protein requirement. They hunt rabbit, wild fowl, gauna, squirrel, tortoise, field rat and wild boar. They occasionally catch fish in the rivers, ponds and also gather snails from the creeks. Keeping these facts and observations in view, an attempt has been made to understand some relevant aspects of food habits, eating patterns, order of serving food and addiction behavior of Irular tribe in Puducherry.

TRIBAL SITUATION IN THE STUDY AREA

The Irular Community inhabits the Union Territory of Puducherry since time immemorial. They are forest dwellers and depend on forest resources for their livelihood. Moreover, they are socially, economically and environmentally disadvantaged comparing to other social groups mainly due to ignorance, illiteracy and non-accessibility of infrastructure facilities etc.

METHODOLOGY

The present report aims to study the food taking pattern and addiction behavior of Irular tribe in Puducherry, four villages of tribal hamlets i.e. Katterikuppam, T.N. Palayam, Irulansandai and Bahoor in Puducherry which have different socio-demographic backgrounds. Census method was adopted and the data was collected through a household survey in all the 117 tribal households along with participant observation method. Descriptive design was adopted as the researcher would be describing the factors affecting the physical well-being of Irular tribe.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Eating Pattern among Irular

Table-1 shows the food habits of the tribes by village wise. The table shows that out of 117 households 73.5% households are consuming food two times per a day, and it is followed by 23.94% households are eating food three times per day. Out of that rest them fall in single digit 2.56% only 3 households are consuming once in a day. In Katterikuppam village tribe 63.04% households are have two meals a day, and 36.96% households are dine three meals a day. In T.N. Palayam village tribes 83.33% households are eating food two times per day and 11.11% households are consuming thrice in a day and 5.56% only two households are dining one meal a day. In Bahoor village tribes 60% households are have three meals a day and it is closely followed 40% households are eating food two times per day respectively.

Table 1: Eating Pattern of Meals in the Study Area

S.No.	Meals	Katterikuppam	T.N. Palayam	Irulansandai	Bahoor	Total
1.	Ones	-	2(5.56)	1(4)	-	3(2.56)
2.	Twice	29(63.04)	30(83.33)	23(92)	4(40)	86(73.50)
3.	Thrice	17(36.96)	4(11.11)	1(4)	6(60)	28(23.94)
	Total	46(100)	36(100)	25(100)	10(100)	117(100)

Note: The figure in the parenthesis denotes the percentage to the total.

Eating Pattern of Green Leaves, Vegetables and Pulses

Table-2 shows the distribution of village-wise eating pattern of the green leafy vegetables, vegetables and pulses consumed by the Irular Tribe. Out of the total 117 households 81 (69.23%) households are consuming green leafy vegetables and vegetables two times per week, and 20 (17.09%) households are eating green leafy vegetables and vegetables Three or more times per week, and 16 (13.68%) households are consuming green leafy vegetables and vegetables once in a week respectively. Among Katterikuppam village tribes 39 (84.78%) households are taking green leafy vegetables and vegetables two times per day and 3 (6.52%) are eating green leaves and vegetables three or more times and one times per week respectively. In T.N. Palayam village tribes 20 (55.56%) households are eating green leaves and vegetables two times per week and 7 (19.44%) households are eating green leaves and vegetables Three or more times in a week and only one time in a week respectively. The tribes in Irulansandai 12 (48%) households are eating green leaves and vegetables two times and one time in a week respectively. The Bahoor village Irular tribes 10 (100%) households are consuming green leaves and vegetables two times per week.

Table-2 shows the order of consuming pulses in a week by village-wise. In all the households, out of 117 households, 63 households are consuming pulses in weekly two times, 36 households are consuming pulses in weekly three times, 13 households, and 5 households are taken pulses in weekly one time and four times respectively. In village-wise study reveals Katterikuppam village 23 (50%) tribals households and closely followed by 16 (34.78%) households are consuming pulses in a weekly three times and two times respectively. In T.N. Palayam village 24 (52.17%) households are consuming pulses in a weekly two times and 5 (13.89%) households are consuming pulses in a weekly one times and three times respectively. In Irulansandai village 19 (76%) households are taking pulses in weekly two times, 12% households are taking pulses in weekly ones and three times respectively. In Bahoor village 5 (50%) households are taking pulses three times in a week and 1 (10%) households are taking pulses weekly two times and one time respectively.

Table 2: Eating Pattern of the Green Leaves, Vegetables, and Pulses in the Field Area

S.No.	Green Leaves/ Vegetables	Katterikuppam	T.N.Palayam	Irulansandai	Bahoor	Total
1	Once	3(6.52)	7(19.44)	6(24)	-	16(13.68)
2	Twice	39(84.78)	20(55.56)	12(48)	10(100)	81(69.23)
3	Thrice or More	4(8.70)	9(25)	7(28)	-	20(17.09)
Total		46(100)	36(100)	25(100)	10(100)	117(100)
	Pulses	Katterikuppam	T.N.Palayam	Irulansandai	Bahoor	Total
1	One day	3(6.52)	7(19.44)	3(12)	-	13(11.11)
2	Two days	16(34.78)	24(52.17)	19(76)	4(40)	63(53.85)
3	Three Days	23(50)	5(13.89)	3(12)	5(50)	36(30.77)
4	Four Days	4(8.70)	-	-	1(10)	5(4.27)
Total		46(100)	36(100)	25(100)	10(100)	117(100)

Note: The figure in the parenthesis denotes the percentage to the total

Intake of Meat, Fish and Milk

Table-3 shows about the distribution intake of meat, fish and milk consumed weekly in days. Out of 117 households 83 households are consuming meat and fish once in a week, 28 households are consuming weekly two times and 6 are taken three or more times respectively. Out of 117 households, 94 (80.34%) households are never taken milk weekly ones also and 23 (19.66%) households are drink milk once or more times in weekly.

Table 3: Frequency of Eating Meat, Fish and Milk by the Irular Tribes in the Study Area

S.No.	Meat/Fish	Katterikuppam	T.N. Palayam	Irulansandai	Bahoor	Total
1	Once	39(84.78)	21(58.33)	16(64)	7(70)	83(70.94)
2	Twice	6(13.04)	11(30.56)	8(32)	3(30)	28(23.94)
3	Thrice or More	1(2.17)	4(11.11)	1(4)	-	6(5.13)
Total		46(100)	36(100)	25(100)	10(100)	117(100)
S.No.	Milk	Katterikuppam	T.N. Palayam	Irulansandai	Bahoor	Total
1	Never	33(71.74)	33(91.67)	21(84)	7(70)	94(80.34)
2	Once or More	13(28.26)	3(8.33)	4(16)	3(30)	23(19.66)
Total		46(100)	36(100)	25(100)	10(100)	117(100)

Note: The figure in the parenthesis denotes the percentage to the total

Special food given and Avoided to the pregnant women of Irular

When the Irular women are pregnant they do not follow any special food. But at the same time for the first three months of pregnancy they use to avoid eating fruits like papaya, grapes, palm fruit, jackfruit, and tubers like tapioca, sweet potato palm jaggery. After three months of pregnancy they use to start eat their regular foods like others. But now-a-days the young generations do not used to follow this kind of abstinence over food. They believe that these above said fruits and tubers are highly heat/cold generating foods thereby the fetus may be get aborted.

DISCUSSION

Irular peoples are both vegetarian and non-vegetarian. Their daily food is vegetarian and in festivals, functions, and on arrival of guests or once in a week, they prepare non- vegetarian food in which includes fish, chicken etc. Vegetarian food includes rice, kezhvaragu kuzhu, sambar, rasam, pulikuzhambu, lemon rice, tamarind rice etc. The food patterns various from area to area. Out of 117 households 73.5% are consuming food two times per day, and it is followed by 23.94% households are eating food three times a day. Among the villages T.N. Palayam and Irulansandai village 5.56% and 4% households are consuming once in a day.

Among the villages 69.23% households are consuming green leafy vegetables two times per week and 17.09% households are eating green leafy vegetables and vegetable three or more times per week and 13.68% households are consuming green leafy vegetables and vegetables once in a week. Majority of the Irular households are eating green leafy vegetables and vegetables two times per week. Out of 117 households 83 households are consuming meat and fish once in a week. Only six households are taken meat and fish three or more times. Out of 117 households, 80.34% households are never taken milk weekly ones also and 19.66% households are drink milk once or more times in weekly. Among the villages 51 males and females are chewing tobacco, followed by 43 males were addicted in smoking, 39 persons are addicted in drinking alcohol, and 32 males are using paan.

SUGGESTION FOR INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT OF IRULAR TRIBE

- The tribes, though different in their ecological and culture setting was found to suffer from almost all the deficiency diseases. This was due to the lack of a balanced diet in their consumption pattern. Though the natural resources were available in abundance in the tribal area, tribes did not know the nutritive value of it. So, awareness should be created among the tribes on the nutritive value of the local food resources.
- Strengthening of Anganwadi center through the proper motivation among the Irular tribal population to accept the services of ICDS.
- Maternal malnutrition was quite common among the tribal women posing serious health problems and it is the

root cause of birth of low birth weight babies. So, it is suggested to extend the I.C.D.S programmes to all the villages.

- Awareness needs to be created regarding adverse effects of excessive intake of alcohol and use of tobacco/drugs. Nutritional and health education should be imparted in the tribal/local dialect using properly audio-visual aids.

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