

Habits and Reproductive Performance in a Food Gathering Tribe of Andhra Pradesh, India

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INTRODUCTION

Reproductive success having direct bearing with genetic structure of a population is seen influenced by a variety of factors – cultural, social and biological. There exist reports on consanguinity and reproductive performance (Rao and Inbaraj, 1977; Reddy and Malhotra, 1990; Lateef et al., 1997) but not on habits like smoking, alcoholism and tobacco chewing in relation to reproductive performance. It was stated that the mobility of the sperm, sperm count are affected by addiction to alcoholism and smoking, thereby leading to infertility (Able, 1982; Garn, 1988; Ramesh Babu, 2002). Among the women the effect of alcoholism will be in the form of reproductive wastage – still births / abortions (Priyamvada, 2000). Hence the present paper endeavours to ascertain the association of smoking, alcoholism and tobacco chewing, either single or in combination, with fertility and mortality in a food gathering tribe viz., the Chenchu from Andhra Pradesh.

The Chenchu number about 28,297 (ITDA Report) form 0.89% of the total tribal population of the State of Andhra Pradesh. They are mainly concentrated in the districts of Kurnool, Mehboob-nagar and Prakasam. The name 'Chenchu' signify various explanations—ecological (people living under 'Chunchu'), cultural (fond of eating the 'Chenchu', a kind of rat). The manual of Administration of Madras Presidency (1983) refer the name Chunchu to the people of wandering—'Chenchu'. In Physical features, the people are medium in stature with dolicho-cephalic head, slightly blunt noses, dark to black brown in skin colour. They show Proto-Alustraloid element (Thurston, 1901). Their social structure reveals sub-groups such as jungle Chenchu, Krishna Chenchu, Telugu Chenchu and Bontha Chenchu which in turn have endogamous 'Kulams'. These kulams form into marriageable (Bammarudula Varasa) and non-marriageable (Annadammula Varasa) groups that regulate marriage alliance (Gangadharam, 1990). They prefer and practice

consanguineous marriage which account 57% with a predominance of First Cousin type. They discourage uncle-niece marriages. The sero-genetic suggest an ethnic affiliation between the Yanadi and the Chenchu (Reddy et al., 1982)

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Relevant data on fertility, and mortality and habit like smoking, alcoholism and tobacco chewing were collected from 247 Chenchu couples using Schedule-Interview methods during January, 1993. About 12 villages were selected from Kurnool, and Prakasam districts for the present study. The villages are (1) Nallaguntla Gudem, (2) Peddamanthala, (3) D Ssudekulapadu, (4) Korraprolu, (5) Chintala, (6) Kotturu, (7) Chilakalacharla Gudem (8) Panuka-madugu, (9) Bandhan Bavi, (10) Naguluti Gudem, (11) Marripala and (12) Byrluti Gudem. In the analysis of data, the statistical measures – mean, standard deviations, standard error and t-test were used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 records the distribution of husband or wife or both habituated to alcoholism, tobacco chewing and smoking. Among the husbands, about 72% are alcoholic and 70% are only smokers in total sample. There are about 56% of husbands who are habituated to both alcohol and

Table 1: Alcoholism, tobacco chewing and smoking among the Chenchu

Habit	Husband (208)	Wife (246)	Both (454)
Alcoholism	149 (71.63)	45 (18.29)	33 (7.27)
Tobacco chewing	21 (10.10)	70 (28.46)	13 (2.86)
Smoking	146 (70.19)	-	-
Alcoholism + smoking	116 (55.77)	-	-
Alcoholism + Tobacco chewing	17 (8.17)	23 (9.35)	4 (0.88)
Tobacco chewing + Alcoholism	7 (3.37)	-	-

Table 2: Reproductive performance in relation to habits

S.No.	Variables	Alcoholism		Tobacco Chewing	
		Wife	Both*	Wife	Both*
1.	Pregnancies	6.75 ± 0.36 ¹	4.67 ± 0.41 ³	4.98 ± 0.29 ²	4.69 ± 0.74 ⁴
2.	Live Birth	6.50 ± 0.42 ⁵	4.52 ± 0.43 ⁷	4.79 ± 0.30 ⁶	4.62 ± 0.77 ⁸
3.	Still Births	—	0.66 ± 0.04	0.08 ± 0.03	—
4.	Abortions	0.25 ± 0.13 ⁹	0.12 ± 0.06 ¹¹	0.12 ± 0.04 ¹⁰	0.08 ± 0.07 ¹²

* Includes husband and wife

t – test values

1 x 2 = 3.833** 5 x 6 = 3.29 ** 9 x 10 = 0.9

3 x 4 = -0.02 7 x 8 = -0.11 11 x 12 = 0.44

** Significant at 5% level.

smoking, which is greater than the other combinations. In wives, only 18% are alcoholic but 25% are tobacco chewers while 9% are both alcoholic and tobacco chewers. None of the women under study are smokers. When husband and wife together considered, an excess of alcoholism (7%) is found over tobacco chewing (3%). Yet their frequency for both alcoholic and tobacco chewing is meagre (0.88%).

The fertility trend in terms of pregnancies and live births as well pregnancy wastage i.e., still births and abortions is presented in table 2. The impact of habits in wife and couple as a unit are only considered here due to certain limitations. The mean number of live births (6.50 ± 0.42) and pregnancies (6.75 ± 0.36) are higher when wife alone habituated to alcoholism than for both the categories (4.52 ± 0.43 and 4.67 ± 0.43 respectively). A similar trend is noted for tobacco chewing also. However, the impact seems to be slightly different in alcoholism (where an increase of 4% for pregnancies and 3% for live births) and tobacco chewing (wherein 4% increase in the pregnancies and 1.5% increase in both categories). Strikingly, the pregnancy wastage show almost 50% of decrease from abortions to still births. In the present study no case of still births have been observed where women practice alcoholism and cases of both husband and wife are tobacco chewers. From this present study it is observed that prolonged practice of certain habits like either alcoholism or tobacco chewing or the both during reproductive life—span of male and female influence their reproductive success. The present report suggests the dearth of undertaking such relationship studies in demography on more number of tribal and non-tribal groups.

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KEY WORDS Habits. Reproduction. Chenchu. Tribe.

ABSTRACT Fertility, mortality and habits like smoking, tobacco chewing and alcoholism are studied for 247 couples of Chenchu Tribe of Andhra Pradesh. An increase in Reproductive Wastage i.e., Still Births and Abortions and decrease in fertility are evident indicating the dearth of much data on other populations on this line.

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