

## Infant Mortality Among Scheduled Tribes in Central India: A Concern

The sheer versatility in population, language, religion, belief, culture and level of socio-economic development in India remains a major constraint for infant mortality rate [1]. Scheduled Tribes (ST) constitute 8.6% of the Indian population [2], which remain neglected with respect to antenatal care. National Family Health Survey showed that one-third of all pregnant women from ST community in India did not receive any antenatal care during pregnancy, and only 17.6% were aware of benefits of consuming iron and folic acid supplements. Majority of the deliveries (73.2%) are conducted at home with assistance by midwife; their lack of proper training and low frequency of postnatal check-ups (68.6%) pose serious threat to the health of new-borns [3]. Indian states of Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and Rajasthan constitute 70% of total tribal population [4]; and contribute significantly to infant mortality (**Table I**) [2,4].

Tribes are heterogeneous group and some of them are socially at par with upper sections of society while some have primitive means of livelihood. Their culture, ritual and traditional beliefs sometimes act as hindrance in utilization of Maternal and Child Health (MCH) facilities. Traditional practices like discarding of colostrum and treatment of umbilical stump with indigenous substances [5] result in high neonatal mortality. Under-utilization of pre- and post-delivery care facilities is also attributed to lack of awareness and non-accessibility to health posts in tribal areas. [5]. The need is to understand disparity among the various subgroups and develop strategies/policies accordingly. Tribe-specific facilities are required to bridge the gap. A sustainable model for new-born survival, and utilizing trained health workers from within the tribal community is required for tackling infant mortality.

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**TABLE I** INFANT MORTALITY RATE ACCORDING TO TYPE OF RESIDENCE AND GENDER IN TRIBAL DOMINANT STATES OF CENTRAL INDIA

State	Infant Mortality Rate (per thousand live births)		
	Total	Rural	Urban
India	40	44	27
India (ST)	84	85	61
Madhya Pradesh	54	57	37
Madhya Pradesh (ST)	110	111	84
Odisha	51	53	38
Odisha (ST)	92	93	75
Rajasthan	47	51	30
Rajasthan (ST)	100	101	71
Chhattisgarh	46	47	38
Chhattisgarh (ST)	95	97	69
Jharkhand	37	38	27
Jharkhand (ST)	77	79	57
Maharashtra	24	29	16
Maharashtra (ST)	66	68	47
Gujarat	36	43	22
Gujarat (ST)	61	63	52

ST: scheduled tribe.

Available from: [http://censusindia.gov.in/vital\\_statistics/SRS\\_Bulletins/SRS%20Bulletin%20-September%202014.pdf](http://censusindia.gov.in/vital_statistics/SRS_Bulletins/SRS%20Bulletin%20-September%202014.pdf). Accessed October 02, 2015.

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