

Anthropological Demographic Portrayal of the Oraon Community of Mudidih Village of the District Purulia, West Bengal

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ABSTRACT: The present study aimed to presents a comprehensive anthropological and demographic portrayal of the *Oraon* community residing in Mudidih village, Purulia district, West Bengal. Using a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative demographic data with ethnographic fieldwork, the research explores population structure, education, marriage patterns, fertility, mortality, and socio-economic conditions. CPro v.6 & STATA 14 software was used for data entry and analyzes of the data respectively. The village, with 203 inhabitants, exhibits a sex ratio of 879 and a predominantly working-age population (72.9%). Nuclear families constitute 60.94% of households and 67.19% live in *kachcha* houses, reflecting limited infrastructural development. The per capita monthly expenditure (₹ 1,184.08) indicates a low-income economy. Educational disparities are prominent—34.38% of females lack formal education compared to 17.19% of males. Access to improved water (37.52%), sanitation (32.85%), and clean fuel (29.69%) remains inadequate. Marital practices follow tribal endogamy and village exogamy, with mean age at marriage was 17.91 years for females and 25.39 years for males. The fertility rate (1.97) and high child mortality (103 per 1,000 live births) reveal health and development challenges. The study underscores the intersection of cultural continuity and socio-economic marginalization within the *Oraon* community. It concludes that targeted interventions in education, healthcare, sanitation, and livelihood programs are crucial to improving living standards while preserving cultural identity. This anthropological demographic inquiry enriches understanding of how traditional tribal systems negotiate change within contemporary rural India.

INTRODUCTION

India is a village centric country with over 68.0% of the population residing in rural areas having diverse nature in terms of geography, culture, and demographics, reflecting the country's heterogeneity (Census of India, 2011). The demographic characteristics of Indian villages—such as, age-sex structure, educational attainments, and working

patterns—play a vital role in shaping the developmental strategy of the nation. Historically, it has been observed that rural India has been the focal point of policy interventions aimed at poverty alleviation, agricultural development, and social development (Dandekar and Rath, 1971). During 1960, the Green Revolution in the 1960s and subsequent rural development programs brought significant changes to village economies but also highlighted disparities in regional development (Singh, 2018).

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More recent efforts, such as the *Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)* and the *Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)*, aim to address socio-economic challenges in rural India (MoRD, 2020). Demographic studies are particularly crucial for understanding the challenges and opportunities within rural settings. For instance, Dreze and Sen (2013) observed rural areas with a higher proportion of young population's present opportunities for skill development. Similarly, Desai and Kulkarni (2008) observed that gender disparities observed in many villages necessitate targeted interventions to focus on female education and workforce participation. This manuscript aims to analyze the demographic details of Indian villages, focusing on population composition, literacy levels, gender dynamics, and occupational patterns. It draws on data from the Census of India (2011), National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO), and relevant academic research to provide a comprehensive understanding of rural demographics.

Anthropological demography integrates principles of population studies and evolutionary ecology (Kaplan and Hill, 1985; Jones, 2009; Joseph, 2004) with ethnographic methods to enhance demographic findings and understanding the demographic phenomenon of a population (Castle, 1995; Bledsoe, 2002; Bernardi, 2003; Kalam, 2021). Sex ratio, marriage pattern, age at first marriage, fertility and mortality, etc are key indicators of population dynamics, are influenced by various factors such as education (Dreze and Murthi, 2001), son preference (Asghar *et al.*, 2014), and migration (Majelantle and Navaneetham, 2013), diseases and immunization (Mondal *et al.*, 2009), as well as family size (Scrimshaw, 1978).

Demographic data, integrating both qualitative and quantitative dimensions, serves as a cornerstone for understanding the socio-cultural dynamics of a population (Bernardi, 2003; Bledsoe, 2000; Roth, 2004; Kalam, 2021). Quantitative metrics, such as the sex ratio, marriage rates, and patterns of village exogamy, offer measurable indicators of population trends, while qualitative data illuminate the cultural, social, and economic underpinnings of these phenomena. For example, the sex ratio, as noted in studies like Bose (2001) and Agnihotri (2000), highlights disparities

potentially shaped by gender preferences, access to healthcare, or migration trends. Qualitative accounts further unpack these disparities, shedding light on ingrained cultural biases or evolving gender roles.

Marriage patterns, including age at marriage and the prevalence of monogamy or polygyny, reflect complex interplays of economic conditions, caste or religious norms, and practices such as dowry or bride price (Caldwell *et al.*, 1989). Similarly, the practice of village exogamy underscores social strategies aimed at preventing inbreeding, building alliances, and adhering to kinship regulations, as discussed in ethnographic analyses by Srinivas (1962) and Dumont (1980). The distance between the birth places of bride and groom (marital distance) reveals insights into village exogamy where factors like habitation, occupation, and ethnicity reduce marital distances (Haandrikman *et al.*, 2018), while higher social or educational status increases marital distance (Coleman and Haskey, 1986).

These combined perspectives not only provide a nuanced understanding of population behavior but also inform efforts to address gender inequalities, promote social justice, and design culturally attuned policies. By anchoring interventions in such comprehensive demographic insights, researchers and policymakers can better resonate with the lived realities of diverse communities. Under these circumstances the present study aims to portray the anthropological and demographical profile of the *Oraon* population of Mudidih village of Purulia district of West Bengal.

MATERIALS & METHOD

Area of the study

The present study has been conducted among the *Oraon* community residing in Mudidih village, situated in the Purulia district of West Bengal, India. Administratively, Mudidih falls under the jurisdiction of the Matha Panchayat. Post Office at Matha Forest and is under the purview of the Baghmundi Police Station (Figure 1). Geographically, Mudidih is located around 52 kilometre distant from the district head quarter (Town) and forms part of the Baghmundi Development Block. This rural settlement lies on the adjacent to the Matha Forest range and adjacent to

the Purulia-Bagmundi road (Figure 2).

The surrounding geographical and administrative context of Mudidih Village was presented in Figure 3. Positioned at the centre, Mudidih village was shown to be bordered by various locations in different directions. To the north, the village is adjacent to the Matha Hills Range, indicating a hilly terrain in that direction. To the south, it is connected to Haridih and Dhanudih villages, which are likely neighbouring rural

settlements. On the west, the village falls under the jurisdiction of Matha Panchayat, towards Bagmundi police station (12.0 km approximately), suggesting its administrative affiliation. To the east, it is linked to Tigermore and Bhuchundi villages, and Purulia town (51.0 km) highlighting further connectivity with nearby settlements. This diagram effectively illustrates Mudidih Village's geographical setting and its relationship with neighbouring locations.

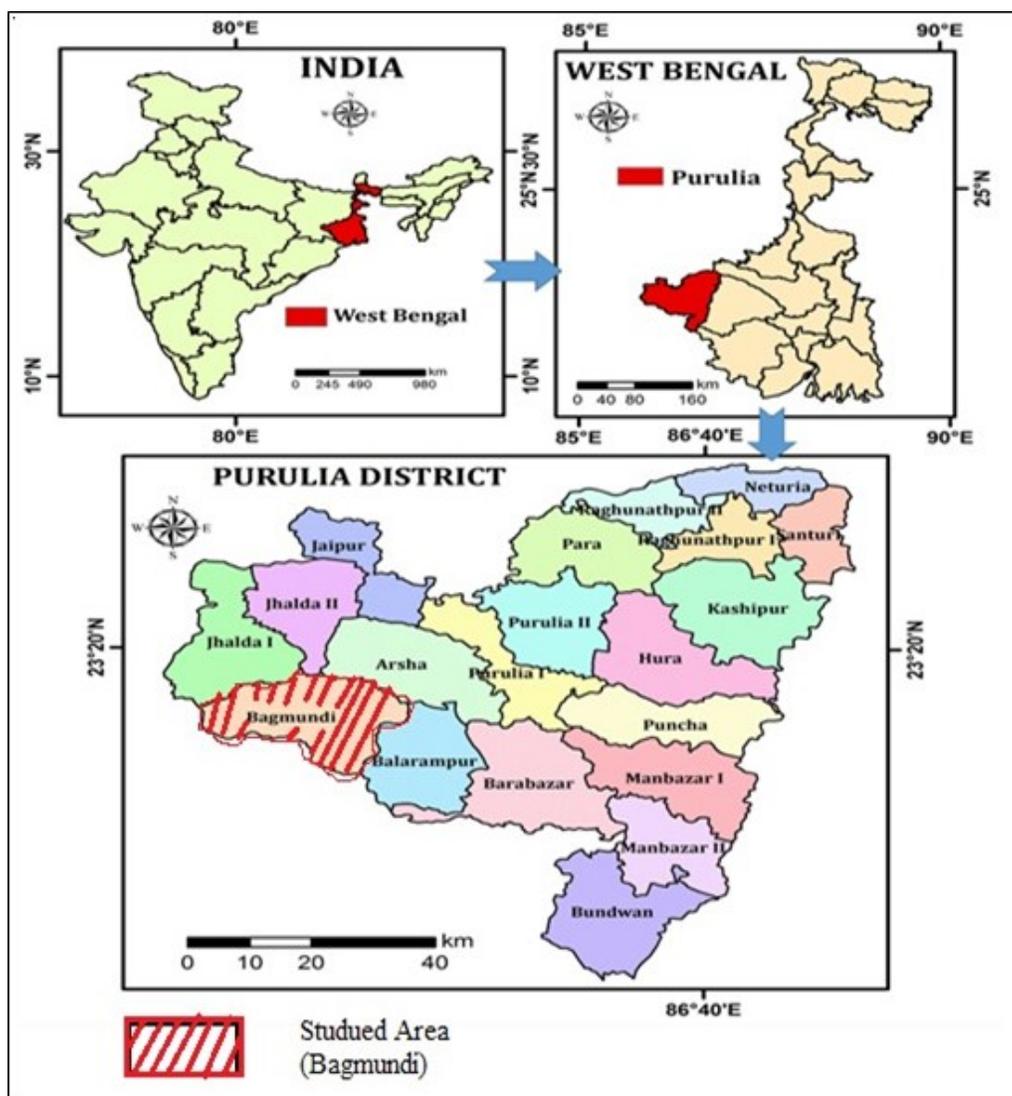


Figure 1: The geographical location of the studied area (Source: Authors)



Figure 2: The Village
(Source: Authors)

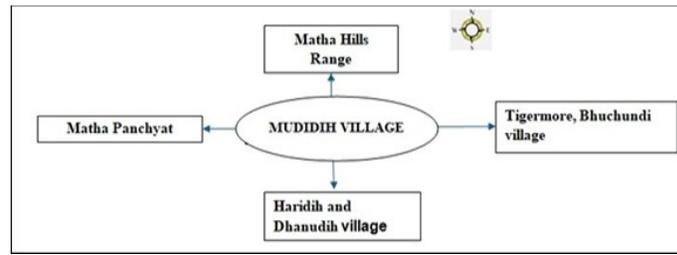


Figure 3: The boundary of the village
(Source: Authors)

History of the village

Mudidih is a village that derives its name from the cultural heritage and traditions of the Oraon tribe, which constitutes the majority of its population. The history of Mudidih is deeply intertwined with the migration and settlement of the Oraon people, who refer to themselves as ‘*Mudi*’ in their native dialect. This name, ‘*Mudi*,’ represents not only their identity but also their connection to the land and their ancestors. The origins of Mudidih can be traced back approximately four generations, based on the accounts passed down through the local community. In the early days of its history, a small group of Oraon individuals ventured to this region, driven by the need to find food and resource-rich land suitable for agriculture and sustainable living. The natural abundance of the area, characterized by jungle fruits, lush greenery, ample water sources, and a favorable climate, made it an attractive destination for these early settlers. As word of the regions advantages spread, more Oraon families began to migrate to Mudidih, fostering gradual population growth.

Initially, the term ‘*Mudi*’ was primarily used to identify the Oraon people, reflecting their unique linguistic and cultural heritage. The connection to their language and customs played a significant role in shaping the community’s identity. As the population increased and the members of the community established deeper roots in the area, the settlement began to formally adopt the name Mudidih. This name not only signifies the village’s beginnings but also embodies the legacy and values of the Oraon ancestors. Their enduring connection to Mudidih serves as a testament to the tribe’s resilience and commitment to preserving their cultural identity within a changing world. The village stands today as a symbol of the Oraon community’s history, traditions, and aspirations for future generations.

Data types and collection techniques

The data covers multiple aspects of the village participants, including their socio-economic, marital, and demographic profiles. Socio-economic information includes participants’ age, sex,

educational attainment, and occupational status, along with details about their spouses. Marital data includes age at marriage, marital distance, and marriage preferences, while demographic information encompasses age at first pregnancy, age at first child delivery, fertility, and mortality records. Socio-demographic profiles, such as age-sex distribution, occupation, and education, were analyzed using frequency distribution. The age-sex composition was determined by calculating the frequency of individuals of each sex across different age groups.

Marital distance was assessed by measuring the distance between the birthplaces of husbands and wives, verified through the genealogical method. Additional information on marriage preferences (affinal or consanguine), the practice of village endogamy or exogamy, and marital distance was gathered through questionnaires and interviews.

Ethnographic fieldwork has been conducted in the village to understand the perspectives of the villagers in their in-situ condition. To minimize recall bias, we took great care in collecting data on participants' current age, age at marriage, and fertility and mortality details. For participants unable to recall specific ages or events, reference points like landmark events or memorable moments of the area were used, with assistance from elderly family members to improve accuracy.

Data entry and analysis

The collected data were initially entered and validated using CSPro (Census and Survey Processing System) version 6, which ensured consistency and quality during the data-entry process. Following validation, the dataset was exported and subsequently imported into STATA 14, where all statistical analyses were performed

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Table 1 show the population of 203 is fairly balanced with 108 males and 95 females. The largest age group is 35-39 (12.81%), while the smallest is 55-59 (1.48%) (Figure 4). Children aged 0-4 comprise 4.43%, and seniors 65+ make up 5.41%, indicating a population dominated by working-age individuals. It was observed that 21.6 % population belongs to 0-14 age group slightly lower compared Indian population

i.e., 25.3% while 72.9 % belongs to 15-64 age group slightly higher compared to national average i.e., 67.8%, Compared to Indian population (Rathore, 2025). The sex ratio of the study population was 879 which were very low compared to the national average for rural areas i.e., 1037 (MoHFW, 2024), and also compared to the tribal's of West Bengal i.e., 999 (Shinde, 2021). Anthropological investigations and observations reveal that a lower number of females in the community historically contributed to its survival, as the community was migrant to this place. Females were often considered a trouble, and the high costs associated with marriage further led to fewer females compared to males.

One female participant, aged 55 year, shared her perspective:

“A higher number of girls might have hindered the survival of our population whereas more males offered us better protection because we migrated to this place. Additionally, the high cost of marriage compelled parents to reconsider having more daughters. Bottom of Form

However, in recent times, the situation is changing, possibly due to government policies and schemes.”

TABLE 1

Age-sex wise distribution of the population

Age Group	Male	Female	Total
0-4	5(4.64)	4(4.21)	9(4.43)
5-9	7(6.48)	9(9.47)	16(7.88)
10-14	13(12.03)	6(6.32)	19(9.36)
15-19	6(5.56)	7(7.37)	13(6.4)
20-24	6(5.56)	11(11.58)	17(8.37)
25-29	10(9.23)	4(4.21)	14(6.89)
30-34	5(4.63)	9(9.47)	14(6.89)
35-39	17(15.74)	9(9.47)	26(12.81)
40-44	6(5.56)	8(8.42)	14(6.89)
45-49	8(7.41)	5(5.26)	13(6.4)
50-54	9(8.83)	7(7.37)	16(7.88)
55-59	1(0.93)	2(2.1)	3(1.48)
60-64	9(8.33)	9(8.33)	18(8.87)
65+	6(5.56)	5(4.63)	11(5.41)
Total	108(100.0)	95(100.0)	203(100.0)

Paranthesis indicates percentage

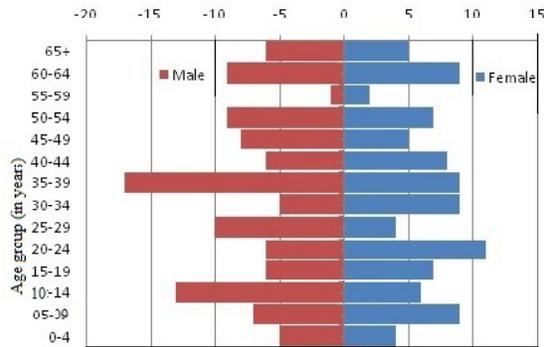


Figure 4: Population pyramid of the studied Mudidih village
(Source: Authors)

Table 2 presents the socio-economic characteristics of households in Mudidih village, based on a sample size of 64 households. The data is organized into categories reflecting family structure, household composition, housing conditions, media usage, liquor consumption, household expenditure, and education levels. The majority of households (60.94%) are nuclear families, while 39.06% follow a joint family structure, showing similar trend with the national rural average (Shaikh, 2016). Indian villages are in a stage to go nuclear. The present study results reveal the similar trend. This suggests a predominant preference for smaller, more independent family units in the village. A significant portion of households (42.19%) consists of 5 to 6 members, with 35.94% having 7 or more members. Only 21.88% of households have 4 or fewer members, indicating a trend towards relatively larger family sizes in the village. In terms of living space, 60.94% of households have 1-2 rooms, while 31.25% have 3-4 rooms, and 7.81% of households have 5 or more rooms, suggesting that most households in the village live in confined spaces with limited room availability. A majority of households (75.0%) experience crowding with a household crowding index of $e^{>2.0}$, indicating a higher density of individuals per room. In contrast, 25.0% of households have a crowding index of less than 2.0. A predominant number of households (67.19%) live in *kachcha* houses (temporary or semi-permanent structures), while 32.81% live in *pucca* houses (permanent structures), highlighting a reliance on less durable housing types. According to National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5) data for 2019-21 reveals that approximately 60.3% of Indian households are

classified as *pucca* houses (IIPS, 2021). The present study shows comparatively lower prevalence of *pucca* houses in the region though the successful implementation of *Pradhan Mantry Abas Yojna* (PMAY). The dependency ratio in the population (37.17%) was also lower compared to the national average (47.5%). Among females, 82.81% do not consume alcohol, while 17.19% report alcohol consumption. Among males, 56.25% do not consume alcohol, while 43.75% engage in alcohol consumption, indicating a higher prevalence of drinking among males. Household expenditure is divided into tertiles, with 34.38% in the first and second tertiles and 31.25% in the third. The average per capita monthly expenditure is ¹ 1,184.08, reflecting economic conditions. As per the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2023-24, the average monthly household expenditure is ¹ 4,122 in rural areas and ¹ 6,996 in urban areas (PIB, 2024). Tribal populations report a much lower per capita monthly expenditure of ¹ 3,106, with rural areas showing the lowest levels (ICPP, 2024). The present study population shows very low percapita expenditure compared to the national average. Educational attainments among females show a considerable gap, with 34.38% of females having no formal education. However, 40.63% have completed secondary education, and 14.06% have attained higher education, highlighting an uneven distribution of educational attainment. Education levels among males show a relatively higher level of attainment. Only 17.19% of males have no education, while 39.06% have secondary education, and 32.81% have higher education, suggesting a greater emphasis on male education in the village. As per the 2011 Census, the overall literacy rate was approximately 73%, with male literacy at 81% and female literacy at 65%. Among the tribal population, male literacy stood at 68.20%, while female literacy was 47.70% (Sadual and Sahoo, 2021). The village does not have proper drinking source of water, around 37.5% of household having improved drinking water source compared to the 95% rural household surveyed in 2021 (IIPS, 2021). This shows a huge gap of in the use of proper drinking water in some parts of rural areas in India and needs proper arrangements. Study shows only 32.8% household had proper sanitation facilities compared to the 69.0% of the total

sample of NFHS-5 survey (IIPS, 2021). The availability of clean cooking fuel in the village was around 30% compared to the 43% in the rural areas in India (IIPS, 2021).

TABLE 2

<i>Socio-economic characteristics of the Mudidih village</i>	
Background characteristics	N=64(%)
Family type	
Joint	25(39.06)
Nuclear	39(60.94)
Household member	
≤4	14(21.88)
5-6	27(42.19)
≥7	23(35.94)
Number of living room	
1-2	39(60.94)
3-4	20(31.25)
5+	5(7.81)
Household crowding index	
<2.0	16(25.00)
≥2.0	48(75.00)
House type	
Kachcha	43(67.19)
Pucca	21(32.81)
Dependency ratio	
Child dependency ratio	29.73
Old dependency ratio	7.43
Total dependency ratio	37.16
Media usage	
No	7(10.94)
Yes	57(89.06)
Liquor consumption Female	
No	53(82.81)
Yes	11(17.19)
Liquor consumption Male	
No	36(56.25)
Yes	28(43.75)
Monthly household expenditure	
Tertile 1	22(34.38)
Tertile 2	22(34.38)
Tertile 3	20(31.25)
Percapita monthly household expenditure	1184.08
Female education	
No education	22(34.38)
Primary	7(10.94)
Secondary	26(40.63)
Higher	9(14.06)
Male education	
No education	11(17.19)
Primary	7(10.94)
Secondary	25(39.06)
Higher	21(32.81)
Drinking water	

Improved	24(37.52)
Local tube well	40(62.48)
Accesses to sanitation	
Yes	21(32.85)
No	43(67.15)
Availability of cooking fuel	
Available	19(29.69)
Not available	45(70.31)

Parenthesis indicate percentage

The table 3 presents the demographic characteristics of the population, focusing on aspects related to the number of siblings of women and their husbands, the age gap between spouses, age at first marriage, marital group, marital distance, and marriage within blood relatives. The majority of women (42.19%) have at least one sibling, followed by 37.50% with 2-4 siblings, and 20.31% having five or more siblings. This distribution reflects a relatively high incidence of smaller sibling groups. In contrast to the women, most husbands (59.38%) have 2-4 siblings, while 25.00% have at least one sibling, and 15.63% have five or more siblings. This shows a larger proportion of husbands coming from moderate-sized families. The majority of couples (50.00%) have an age gap of 6-10 years, followed by 35.94% with an age gap of 5 years or less, and 14.06% with an age gap greater than 10 years. This suggests a tendency for moderate age differences between spouses in the village. The mean age at first marriage for females was 17.91 years (± 3.23 years), while for males it was 25.39 years (± 4.04 years). This highlights a significant gender difference in the age at first marriage, with females typically marrying at a younger age. All respondents (100%) belong to the same marital group, indicating a homogeneous marital practice within the population with no inter-group marriages. However no marriages were found within the same village reflecting village exogamy. Their marriage is strictly clan exogamy and tribe endogamy (Toppo, 2023). No individuals (0%) in the sample reported marrying within blood relatives, indicating that all marriages are outside of the direct familial lineage. The median marital distance is 94.05 km, suggesting that most individuals marry within a relatively short distance from their home village. Figure 5 presents the distribution of marital distance.

TABLE 3

<i>Demographic characteristics of the population</i>	
Women's number of sibling	
≤ 1.0	27(42.19)
2-4	24(37.50)
≤ 5.0	13(20.31)
Husbands number of sibling	
≤ 1.0	16(25.00)
2-4	38(59.38)
≤ 5.0	10(15.63)
Age gap between husband wife	
≤ 5	23(35.94)
6-10	32(50.00)
≤ 10.0	9(14.06)
Mean age at first marriage [Female]	17.91±3.23
Mean age at first marriage [Male]	25.39±4.04
Marital group	
Same group	64(100.0)
Other group	0(0.00)
Marital distance [median]	94.05 km
Marriage with blood relatives	
Yes	0.00
No	64(100.0)

When asking about the tribal endogamous nature of marriage, a female respondent of age 45 said,

'I don't know who started the rumor that we marry within ourselves. I haven't seen any marriages taking place within the village. Yes, we marry within our community, but always outside of blood relations.'

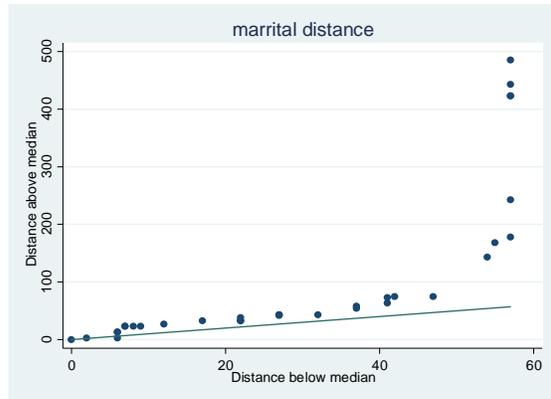


Figure 5: Marital distance among the studied participants (Source: Authors)

The table 4 presents the fertility and mortality patterns observed in the village, providing data on age at first menstruation, fertility status, age at first pregnancy and childbirth, number of pregnancies, live births, fertility rate, and child mortality. The mean age

at first menstruation is 12.36 years (± 1.06), indicating that, on average, girls in the village experience puberty at an early age, which can have implications for fertility patterns and reproductive health. Among the Indian population, the median age at first age of menarche in Indian population ranges from 13.76 year to 14.1 years (Pathak *et al.*, 2014). The mean age at first pregnancy is 19.52 years (± 3.39), suggesting that women in the village tend to experience pregnancy at a relatively young age, often soon after the onset of menstruation. The report notes that 21.2 years was the median age at which women had their first pregnancy. The mean age at first childbirth is 20.43 years (± 4.07), which is consistent with the age at first pregnancy, reflecting early childbearing practices in the village. IIPS (2021) reports reveal that the 21.2 years was the median age at which women had their first pregnancy. The present study population shows slight lower age at first child birth for females. The average number of pregnancies per woman is 3.0 (± 1.35), indicating a moderate level of fertility, with women on average experiencing three pregnancies during their reproductive years. There have been a total of 126 live births recorded in the village, providing a direct measure of fertility within the community. The fertility rate is 1.97, which is calculated based on the number of children born to women of reproductive age. This rate suggests that the village has a relatively moderate fertility level. The mortality rate is 103/1,000 live births compared to 46/1000 in rural India and 42/1000 live birth nationwide (IIPS, 2021), which is a significant indicator of the health conditions affecting children in the village and may reflect factors such as healthcare access and nutritional status.

TABLE 4

<i>Fertility and mortality pattern of the village</i>	
Characteristics	Results
Age at first menstruation	12.36±1.061
Mean age at first pregnancy	19.52±3.39
Mean age at first child delivery	20.43±4.07
Mean number of pregnancy	3.0±1.35
Total number of live birth	126
Fertility rate	1.97
Total death under age 5.0 year	13
Mortality	103.0/1000 LB

*LB= Livebirth

CONCLUSION

The study of *Mudidih* village provides valuable

insights into the anthropological and demographic characteristics of the Oraon community. The population is dominated by working-age individuals, but the sex ratio is notably lower than the national and tribal averages, possibly influenced by historical migration patterns and socio-economic factors. The study highlights disparities in education, with lower female literacy rates, and poor access to essential services such as clean drinking water, sanitation, and cooking fuel. Marriage patterns show a preference for tribal endogamous but village exogamy unions with moderate age gaps between spouses, while fertility rates are moderate but child mortality remains significantly high compared to national figures. The village's economic situation is marked by low per capita expenditure and a high prevalence of nuclear families living in *kachcha* houses, suggesting ongoing socio-economic vulnerabilities.

However, it is assumed that to improve the socio-economic and demographic conditions of Mudidih village, targeted interventions are needed. Improving and bridging the gender gap in education through scholarships and awareness campaigns is essential. Healthcare facilities should be enhanced to reduce child mortality and support maternal health. Investments in clean drinking water, sanitation, and housing infrastructure are crucial for better living conditions. Economic upliftment can be achieved through skill development and livelihood programs. Awareness on family planning and delayed marriage can improve women's health and incorporating modern development initiatives will promote the village's sustainable growth.

Limitations: This study has several limitations. The small sample size may not fully represent the broader Oraon community, and its cross-sectional nature limits tracking long-term trends. Health and nutrition aspects are not extensively covered. Gender-specific issues could have been explored further. The study does not compare Mudidih with other villages, limiting broader contextual insights. Additionally, migration patterns and external socio-economic influences are not thoroughly analyzed. Addressing these limitations in future research could enhance the study's comprehensiveness and policy relevance.

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