

# Desire For Children Among Scheduled Tribes In Attappady Tribal Settlements Of Palakkad District In Kerala

R. Prasannalal, K. Ajeesh Kumar

**Abstract:** The desire for children among scheduled tribes in Attappady tribal settlements of Palakkad district in Kerala has been analysed by using data taken from a maternal and child health survey conducted in the Attappady tribal settlements of Palakkad district in Kerala during 2017-2018. Out of the total of five hundred and two (502) women in the age group 14-44 surveyed, three hundred and fifty four (354) currently married women were specifically taken for current analysis. The Objectives of present study are to analyse the desire for children and to analyse the determinants of desire for children among scheduled tribes in the above settlements area. Percentage distributions, cross tabulations and chi-square tests were used to analyse the desire for children and its variations with respect to different background variables. Around one third of currently married women had virtually no desire for having another child in future; but among those who desired, majority had the opinion of having another child within two year period of time. The demographic variables such as age, age at marriage, number of living children, number of living sons and number of living daughters were significantly associated with desire for children; more specifically age of women, age of husbands and age at marriage. Community wise differentials were also evident as far as desire for children is concerned. Literacy and educational levels of women and their husbands had also played an important role in determining the desire for children in study area. The decision making capacities of women and working status of both women and their husbands had also played their part in determining the desire for children.

**Keywords:** Desire for children, Scheduled Tribes, Currently married women.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Desire for children is considered as one of the important measures of fertility preference in any population<sup>1,2</sup>. Undoubtedly, fertility preference occupies an important position in determining the overall fertility levels and behaviours of any population<sup>3,4</sup>; and the state of Kerala in India is of no exception. In spite of lower fertility rates and comparatively higher age at marriage prevailing in Kerala<sup>5</sup>, the researcher hypothesis that there exists significant variations between different religions, castes, tribes and other ethnic groups with respect to desire for children, ideal family size and fertility preferences. Despite the long interventions by government and other organizations, the overall conditions of Tribals (Adivasis) in Kerala are at despair. The recent data from different sources suggest that the fertility rates has been comparatively high, age at marriage has been low and the infant and child mortality rates has been very high among the tribals in Kerala<sup>5</sup>. In this context, an attempt has been made to analyse the desire for children among scheduled tribes in Attappady tribal settlements of Palakkad district in Kerala.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

- 1) To analyse the desire for children, and
- 2) To analyse the determinants of desire for children

## 3. DATA AND METHODS

The data has been taken from a maternal and child health survey conducted by researcher in the Attappady tribal settlements of Palakkad district in Kerala during 2017-2018. A total of five hundred and two (502) women in the age group 14-44 from the above settlements were taken as sample for the survey. Initially for present analysis, only currently married women were considered; and they were four hundred and nineteen (419) in numbers. Subsequently, the currently married women were filtered by excluding those women who had said that, they cannot become pregnant and those women who had not decided their fertility preferences or unsure about the time of future birth, at the time of survey; and they were sixty five (65) in numbers. Therefore, the crux of analysis comprises the remaining three hundred and fifty four (354) currently married women only. Based on the objectives, the desire for children was taken as dependent variable. The selected independent variables were classified into demographic, social, economic, occupation, current working status, and decision makings. Cross tabulations and chi-square tests were used to analyse the variations of desire for children with each independent variable.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Currently married women by desire for children and fecundity For initial analysis, four hundred and nineteen (419) currently married women aged 14-44 were taken out of the five hundred and two (502) sample women selected for the survey. The above currently married women were asked about their desire for children and fecundity, and classified according to Table I.

**Table I:** Distribution of currently married women by desire for children and fecundity

Desire for Children/Fecundity	Number	Percentage
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Want another Soon	107	25.5
Want another Later	112	26.7
Want No More	135	32.2
Can't Get Pregnant	19	4.5
Undecided/Unsure	46	11.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>419</b>	<b>100</b>

It is quite apparent from Table I that only a meagre percent of currently married women had said that, either they cannot become pregnant (4.5 percent) or who had not decided their fertility preferences or unsure about the time of future birth (Eleven percent), at the time of survey. Therefore, for the more specific analysis, those two categories of women were excluded. That means sixty five (65) women out of four hundred and nineteen (419) currently married women were excluded for further specific kind of analysis. As a result, only three hundred and fifty four (354) currently married women were selected for further analysis and classified by their desire for children as shown in Table II.

**4.1 Currently married women by desire for children**

**Table II: Distribution of currently married women by desire for children**

Desire for Children	Number	Percentage
Want Another Soon <sup>1</sup>	107	38.1
Want Another Later <sup>2</sup>	112	30.3
Want no more	135	31.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>100</b>

<sup>1</sup> Wants next birth within two years

<sup>2</sup> Wants to delay next birth for two or more years

Around thirty two percent of currently married women in the sample had virtually no desire for having another child in future. At the same time, around thirty eight percent of them had said that they want another child within two years whereas around thirty percent had said that they want to delay their next birth for two or more years. The distribution of desire for children by selected background variables were discussed separately in the coming section.

**4.2 Desire for children by demographic variables**

It is clear from the Table III that, the desire for children was significantly varying with respect to age. As expected, the proportion of women, who did not want any more children, was increasing as the age increases. A reverse trend had been seen for those women who want another child soon. But, one third of women in the age group 40-44 had said that they want another child later in their life. Mixed results were seen while explaining with respect to the age of husbands. The proportion, who wants another child soon, was more or less similar for the husband's age groups 26-30, 31-35 and 36-40. Also, half of women with their husbands in the age group 31-35 had said that they do not want any more children in future.

**Table III: Distribution of desire for children by selected demographic variables**

Demographic Variables	Desire for Children			Total
	Soon	Later	No More	
Age				

(Women)***				
14-19	3(50.0)	3(50.0)	0(0.0)	6(100)
20-24	41(42.3)	44(45.4)	12(12.4)	97(100)
25-29	40(26.5)	47(31.1)	64(42.4)	151(100)
30-34	14(22.2)	11(17.5)	38(60.3)	63(100)
35-39	9(29.0)	5(16.1)	17(54.8)	31(100)
40-44	0(0.0)	2(33.3)	4(66.7)	6(100)
<b>Total</b>	<b>107(30.2)</b>	<b>112(31.6)</b>	<b>135(38.1)</b>	<b>354(100)</b>
Age (Husband)***				
21-25	17(38.6)	20(45.5)	7(15.9)	44(100)
26-30	45(30.8)	56(38.4)	45(30.8)	146(100)
31-35	22(25.6)	21(24.4)	43(50.0)	86(100)
36-40	21(32.3)	12(18.5)	32(49.2)	65(100)
41-45	1(10.0)	2(20.0)	7(70.0)	10(100)
46-50	1(33.3)	1(33.3)	1(33.3)	3(100)
<b>Total</b>	<b>107(30.2)</b>	<b>112(31.6)</b>	<b>135(38.1)</b>	<b>354(100)</b>
Age at Marriage (Women)***				
14-17	16(21.3)	14(18.7)	45(60.0)	75(100)
18-22	73(30.3)	85(35.3)	83(34.4)	241(100)
23-27	16(50.0)	9(28.1)	7(21.9)	32(100)
28-30	1(33.3)	2(66.7)	0(0.0)	3(100)
31 & Above	1(33.3)	2(66.7)	0(0.0)	3(100)
<b>Total</b>	<b>107(30.2)</b>	<b>112(31.6)</b>	<b>135(30.2)</b>	<b>354(100)</b>
Age at Marriage (Husband)***				
15-18	3(13.0)	5(21.7)	15(65.2)	23(100)
19-21	27(24.8)	26(23.9)	56(51.4)	109(100)
22-25	44(31.9)	49(35.5)	45(32.6)	138(100)
26-30	26(41.9)	19(30.6)	17(27.4)	62(100)
31-35	7(36.8)	12(63.2)	0(0.0)	19(100)
36-40	0(0.0)	1(33.3)	2(66.7)	3(100)
<b>Total</b>	<b>107(30.2)</b>	<b>112(31.6)</b>	<b>135(30.2)</b>	<b>354(100)</b>
No. of Living children***				
0	64(100.0)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	64(100)
1	34(34.0)	66(66.0)	0(0.0)	100(100)
2	9(9.3)	33(34.0)	55(56.7)	97(100)
3	0(0.0)	10(14.7)	58(85.3)	68(100)
4	0(0.0)	3(15.8)	16(84.2)	19(100)
5	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	5(100.0)	5(100)
6	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	1(100.0)	1(100)
<b>Total</b>	<b>107(30.2)</b>	<b>112(31.6)</b>	<b>135(38.1)</b>	<b>354(100)</b>
No. of Living Sons***				
0	82(56.2)	36(24.7)	28(19.2)	146(100)
1	22(16.8)	63(48.1)	46(35.1)	131(100)
2	3(5.4)	10(17.9)	43(76.8)	56(100)
3	0(0.0)	3(15.0)	17(85.0)	20(100)
5	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	1(100.0)	1(100)
<b>Total</b>	<b>107(30.2)</b>	<b>112(31.6)</b>	<b>135(38.1)</b>	<b>354(100)</b>
No. of Living Daughters***				
0	88(53.0)	56(33.7)	22(13.3)	166(100)
1	15(14.3)	35(33.3)	55(52.4)	105(100)
2	4(5.9)	19(27.9)	45(66.2)	68(100)
3	0(0.0)	2(18.2)	9(81.8)	11(100)
4	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	3(100)	3(100)
5	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	1(100)	1(100)
<b>Total</b>	<b>107(30.2)</b>	<b>112(31.6)</b>	<b>135(38.1)</b>	<b>354(100)</b>

\*\*\* p<0.001 level of significance

Also, the proportion of women who want another child soon was initially increasing and then decreasing as their age at marriage increasing. A more or less similar pattern had been seen with their husband's age at marriage also. More strikingly, fifty percent of women who married between 23-27 age group had said that they want another child soon. Also, sixty percent of women who married between 14-17 age group had opined that they do not want any more children in future; and sixty five percent of women with their husbands married between 15-18 age group had said that they do not want any more children in future. The proportion of women, who wanted next child soon, was decreasing with the increase in number of living children; and the pattern had been more or less similar in case of number of

living sons and number of living daughters. An obvious reverse trend had been seen with the women, who did not want any more children in future, with respect to number of living children, number of living sons and number of living daughters. Also, two third of women with one living child said that they want another child in later period of time.

**4.3 Desire for children by social variables**

Around one third of women each among Irula and Muduga community had said that they want another child soon; but at the same time only twenty percent of women among Kurumba had preferred another child soon. It has to be noted that fifty six percent of women among Kurumba community had opined that they want another child in later period of time; and forty two percent of women among Irula community had said that, they do not want any more children in future, at the time of survey. Educational classification of women and their husbands gave some interesting results with regard to their desire for children. Around sixty two percent of women with primary education had said that, they do not want any more children in future, at the time of survey; and fifty percent of women with upper primary education had said that, they do not want any more children in future.

**Table IV: Distribution of desire for children by selected social variables**

Social variables	Desire for children			Total
	Soon	Later	No more	
<b>Sub Caste**</b>				
Kurumba	8(19.5)	23(56.1)	10(24.4)	41(100)
Irula	75(30.4)	69(27.9)	103(41.7)	247(100)
Muduga	21(33.3)	20(31.7)	22(34.9)	63(100)
Others	3(100.0)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	3(100)
<b>Total</b>	<b>107(30.2)</b>	<b>112(31.6)</b>	<b>135(38.1)</b>	<b>354(100)</b>
<b>Education (Women)***</b>				
Not attended	29(37.7)	21(27.3)	27(35.1)	77(100)
Primary	15(28.8)	5(9.6)	32(61.5)	52(100)
Upper Primary	9(18.0)	16(32.0)	25(50.0)	50(100)
Secondary	29(28.2)	42(40.8)	32(31.1)	103(100)
Higher	14(31.1)	17(37.8)	14(31.1)	45(100)
Secondary				
BA/BSc/BCom	2(22.2)	4(44.4)	3(33.3)	9(100)
MA/MSc/MCom	1(100.0)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	1(100)
Professional courses	8(47.1)	7(41.2)	2(11.8)	17(100)
<b>Total</b>	<b>107(30.2)</b>	<b>112(31.6)</b>	<b>135(38.1)</b>	<b>354(100)</b>
<b>Education (Husband)<sup>ns</sup></b>				
Not attended	20(23.8)	26(31.0)	38(45.2)	84(100)
Primary	17(32.7)	15(28.8)	20(38.5)	52(100)
Upper Primary	26(30.6)	22(25.9)	37(43.5)	85(100)
Secondary	28(31.5)	31(34.8)	30(33.7)	89(100)
Higher	7(28.0)	10(40.0)	8(32.0)	25(100)
Secondary				
BA/BSc/BCom	6(50.0)	4(33.3)	2(16.7)	12(100)
MA/MSc/MCom	0(0.0)	2(100.0)	0(0.0)	2(100)
BTech/MTech	0(0.0)	1(100.0)	0(0.0)	1(100)
Professional courses	3(75.0)	1(25.0)	0(0.0)	4(100)
<b>Total</b>	<b>107(30.2)</b>	<b>112(31.6)</b>	<b>135(38.1)</b>	<b>354(100)</b>
<b>Literacy (Women)<sup>ns</sup></b>				
Not literate	37(33.3)	26(23.4)	48(43.2)	111(100)
Literate	70(28.8)	86(35.4)	87(35.8)	243(100)
<b>Total</b>	<b>107(30.2)</b>	<b>112(31.6)</b>	<b>135(38.1)</b>	<b>354(100)</b>
<b>Literacy (Husband)<sup>ns</sup></b>				
Not literate	37(27.2)	44(32.4)	55(40.4)	136(100)
Literate	70(32.1)	68(31.2)	80(36.7)	218(100)
<b>Total</b>	<b>107(30.2)</b>	<b>112(31.6)</b>	<b>135(38.1)</b>	<b>354(100)</b>

\*\*\* p≤0.001 level of significance, \*\* p≤0.01 level of significance, <sup>ns</sup> not significant

Around forty five percent of women whose husbands have no formal education had opined that, they do not want any more children in future; and forty four percent of women whose husbands have upper primary education had said that, they do not want any more children in future, at the time of survey. When forty three percent of illiterate women opined at the time of survey that they do not want any more children in future but thirty six percent of literate women had opined the same. Moreover, around forty percent of women whose husbands were illiterates had said that they do not want any more children in future whereas around thirty seven percent of women whose husbands were literates had said that they do not want any more children in future.

**4.4 Desire for children by decision makings**

When forty four percent of respondents with complete say on husband's earning opined that they do not want any more children in future; while the corresponding proportion relating to decision about healthcare, decision about household purchases and decision about visiting families or relatives were around fifty five percent, forty nine percent and fifty seven percent respectively.

**Table V: Distribution of desire for children by selected decision makings variables**

Decision makings Variables	Desire for Children			Total
	Soon	Later	No more	
<b>Usage of Husband Earnings<sup>ns</sup></b>				
Respondent	14(29.2)	13(27.1)	21(43.8)	48(100)
Husband	29(29.6)	30(30.6)	39(39.8)	98(100)
Respondent & Husband jointly	64(30.9)	69(33.3)	74(35.7)	207(100)
Someone else	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	1(100.0)	1(100)
<b>Total</b>	<b>107(30.2)</b>	<b>112(31.6)</b>	<b>135(38.1)</b>	<b>354(100)</b>
<b>Decisions about healthcare*</b>				
Respondent	11(23.4)	10(21.3)	26(55.3)	47(100)
Husband	23(33.3)	22(31.9)	24(34.8)	69(100)
Respondent & Husband jointly	73(31.1)	77(32.8)	85(36.2)	235(100)
Someone else	0(0.0)	3(100.0)	0(0.0)	3(100)
<b>Total</b>	<b>107(30.2)</b>	<b>112(31.6)</b>	<b>135(38.1)</b>	<b>354(100)</b>
<b>Decision about household purchase<sup>ns</sup></b>				
Respondent	17(30.9)	11(20.0)	27(49.1)	55(100)
Husband	21(30.0)	23(32.9)	26(37.1)	70(100)
Respondent & Husband jointly	68(30.4)	75(33.5)	81(36.2)	224(100)
Someone else	1(20.0)	3(60.0)	1(20.0)	5(100)
<b>Total</b>	<b>107(30.2)</b>	<b>112(31.6)</b>	<b>135(38.1)</b>	<b>354(100)</b>
<b>Decision about visits your family/relatives<sup>ns</sup></b>				
Respondent	11(25.0)	8(18.2)	25(56.8)	44(100)
Husband	22(32.8)	21(31.3)	24(35.8)	67(100)
Respondent & Husband jointly	74(30.7)	82(34.0)	85(35.3)	241(100)
Someone else	0(0.0)	1(50.0)	1(50.0)	2(100)
<b>Total</b>	<b>107(30.2)</b>	<b>112(31.6)</b>	<b>135(38.1)</b>	<b>354(100)</b>

\* p≤0.05 level of significance, <sup>ns</sup> not significant

**4.5 Desire for children by working status**

The proportion of women, who want another child at a later period of time, was quite high among non-working category

when compared to working category; but a reverse trend had seen with the proportion of women, who do not want any more children in future. Those who want another child soon, the proportion was slightly higher among working category of women. Also, around forty eight percent of seasonal workers had opined that they do not want any more children in future; and thirty five percent of them had said that they want another child soon.

**Table VI: Distribution of desire for children by selected working status variables**

Working Status Variables	Desire for Children			Total
	Soon	Later	No more	
<b>Working status (Women) ***</b>				
Not working	43(25.7)	69(41.3)	55(32.9)	167(100)
Working	64(34.2)	43(23.0)	81(42.8)	188(100)
Total	107(30.2)	112(31.6)	135(38.1)	354(100)
<b>Working status (Men)<sup>ns</sup></b>				
Not working	2(50.0)	1(25.0)	1(25.0)	4(100)
Working	105(30.0)	111(31.7)	134(38.3)	350(100)
Total	107(30.2)	112(31.6)	135(38.1)	354(100)
<b>Seasonality of work (Women) ***</b>				
All the year	5(23.8)	12(57.1)	4(19.0)	21(100)
Seasonal	54(35.3)	26(17.0)	73(47.7)	153(100)
Occasional	5(35.7)	5(35.7)	4(28.6)	14(100)
Total	64(34.0)	43(22.9)	81(43.1)	188(100)
<b>Seasonality of work (Men)<sup>ns</sup></b>				
All the year	40(29.0)	46(33.3)	52(37.7)	138(100)
Seasonal	14(25.0)	22(39.3)	20(35.7)	56(100)
Occasional	51(32.9)	43(27.7)	61(39.4)	155(100)
Total	105(30.1)	111(31.8)	133(38.1)	349(100)

\*\*\*  $p \leq 0.001$  level of significance, <sup>ns</sup> not significant

## SUMMARY

The desire for children among scheduled tribes in Attappady tribal settlements of Palakkad district in Kerala has been analysed by using data taken from a maternal and child health survey conducted in the Attappady tribal settlements of Palakkad district in Kerala during 2017-18. Out of the total of five hundred and two (502) women in the age group 14-44 surveyed, three hundred and fifty four (354) currently married women were specifically taken for current analysis. The initial results suggest that around one third of currently married women had virtually no desire for having another child in future; but among those who desired, majority had the opinion of having another child within two year period of time. All the demographic variables selected were significantly associated with desire for children; more specifically age of women, age of husbands and age at marriage. Community wise differentials were also evident as far as desire for children is concerned. The major communities like Irula, Muduga and Kurumba had different proportions of desire for children. Moreover, literacy and educational levels of women and their husbands had played an important role in determining the desire for children in study area. The decision making capacities of women and working status of both women and their husbands had also played their part in determining the desire for children.

**Conflict of Interest: Nil**

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