

Psychological and Social Wellbeing of Kadar Tribes in Thrissur District

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Abstract

This study explores the psychological and social well-being of the Kadar tribes, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) in South India and examines how these dimensions influence their overall quality of life. A descriptive and cross-sectional research design was adopted, focusing on selected Kadar settlements in the Thrissur district of Kerala. Using purposive sampling, data were collected from 326 respondents representing diverse age groups, genders and socio-economic backgrounds. A structured interview schedule was used to gather information on demographic profiles, psychological well-being and social well-being. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in the local language with support from trained field investigators and community facilitators. The findings reveal that 68.7% of participants reported low psychological well-being and 60.1% reported low social well-being. Significant associations were observed between well-being and factors such as gender, age and educational level. Statistical analyses including 'Z'-test, Chi-square and ANOVA confirmed that psychological and social well-being significantly influence the overall quality of life. Key contributing factors to reduced well-being include poverty, limited education, inadequate healthcare access and social marginalization. The study emphasizes the urgent need for culturally sensitive mental health services, inclusive development initiatives and targeted policy interventions to enhance the well-being and quality of life among the Kadar tribe.

Keywords: Vulnerable Tribal Group, Social well-being, Psychological wellbeing, Kadar settlements, Social marginalization and Healthcare access

1. INTRODUCTION

The Kadar are an indigenous Scheduled Tribe primarily inhabiting the forested regions of Kerala (Annamalai Hills, Thrissur, Palakkad) and Tamil Nadu (Coimbatore, Annamalai Tiger Reserve). Traditionally hunter-gatherers, they have a deep connection with nature, relying on forest resources like honey, herbs and wild produce (Khamo, 2024). While some maintain their forest-based lifestyle, many have migrated to plains due to modernization. Recognized as a Scheduled Tribe in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, the Kadar are known for their sustainable coexistence with nature (Doery et al. 2023). Historically, the Kadar played a vital role in forest-based trade, gathering honey, wax, sago, arrowroot, cardamom, ginger and umbrella sticks to exchange with merchants from the plains. Some Paraiyar community members claim that the Kadar are a subgroup of their own, traditionally responsible for forest stewardship and wildlife protection (Noronha et al. 2024). In the broader context of Thrissur district, the

total population was recorded at 3,121,200 according to the 2011 Census. Among this, Scheduled Tribes, which include the Kadar, comprised 9,430 individuals. The Kadar are an indigenous tribal community primarily residing in the forests of Kerala and Tamil Nadu (Roy & Roy 2024). Within Kerala, they are predominantly found in the districts of Thrissur and Palakkad. As of recent estimates, the Kadar population across 21 settlements totals approximately 2,266 individuals within 686 families. Notably, nine of these settlements are located in Thrissur district, with the remaining six in Palakkad district (Bhoi & Acharya 2024). The Kadar tribe of Kerala leads a unique and traditional lifestyle that is deeply intertwined with the forests of the Anamalai Hills in the Western Ghats. As a semi-nomadic and forest-dwelling community, the Kadar people have historically depended on the natural resources of the forest for their livelihood (Subudhi, Biswal & Pathak 2024). Their occupation is primarily centered around food gathering, fishing and hunting, with a focus on sustainable practices that ensure their survival while maintaining the balance of the ecosystem (Devarapalli et al. 2023).

The psychological and social well-being of the Kadar tribe is closely tied to their traditional lifestyle, cultural identity and economic stability (Verma et al. 2022). As a forest-dwelling community, the Kadar people have historically maintained a harmonious relationship with nature, which has played a crucial role in their mental and emotional resilience (Kumar, 2020). Their communal living, shared responsibilities and deep-rooted traditions have provided them with a strong sense of belonging and security, reducing stress and social isolation. Rituals, storytelling and music have historically served as natural coping mechanisms, helping them deal with life's uncertainties (Bairagi et al. 2024 and Subramanyam, 2020). However, with modernization, forced displacement and loss of traditional lands, the psychological health of the Kadar people has been significantly impacted. Many have been relocated from their ancestral forest habitats to government settlements, where they experience identity crises, anxiety and a loss of self-sufficiency (Rao, 2019). Economic instability, discrimination and lack of access to quality education and healthcare further contribute to mental distress, depression and emotional insecurity, particularly among younger generations who struggle to adapt to mainstream society while maintaining their cultural identity (Subramanyam & Rao 2022 and Tigga, 2024). Socially, the Kadar community faces numerous challenges in integrating with the modern world while preserving their traditions. Historically, they lived in close-knit tribal groups, where decisions were made collectively and everyone had a role in sustaining the community (Subramanyam, 2021). However, with increasing interaction with non-tribal populations, they often encounter social exclusion, cultural stigma and economic exploitation. Many Kadar individuals are now engaged in daily wage labor, construction work and plantation jobs, leading to financial instability and a decline in their self-sufficient lifestyle (Verma et al. 2022 and Rao, 2019). Limited literacy rates and language barriers make it difficult for them to access better employment opportunities, further pushing them to the margins of society. While government welfare programs, NGOs and self-help groups have made efforts to improve their education, employment and healthcare access, a lack of awareness and deep-rooted socio-economic barriers continue to hinder their social mobility and well-being (Khamo, 2024; Roy & Roy, 2024 and Tigga, 2024). A holistic approach that includes mental health support, economic empowerment, infrastructure development and cultural preservation will be key to improving the overall well-being and quality of life of the Kadar tribe in Kerala. At this juncture the present study was conducted to assess the influence of psychological and social wellbeing towards the quality of life of Kadar Tribes at Thrissur District, Kerala.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study adopted a descriptive and cross-sectional research design to assess the influence of psychological and social well-being on the quality of life among the Kadar tribe in Thrissur district, Kerala. The study was conducted across selected Kadar settlements in the Thrissur district, which is home to a significant portion of the Kadar tribal population. A purposive sampling method was employed to select respondents from various Kadar settlements. A total of 326 participants was included in the study, ensuring representation from different age groups, genders and socio-economic backgrounds. Primary data was collected using a structured interview schedule comprising both closed and open-ended questions. The questionnaire included three major sections such as demographic and socio-economic profile of the respondents, psychological well-being scale and social well-being indicators. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in the local language with the help of trained field investigators and community facilitators. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly followed during the data collection process. The collected data was coded and analyzed using statistical software (e.g., SPSS or Excel). Descriptive statistics such as mean, percentage and frequency were used to summarize the data. 'Z'-test, Chi-square test and ANOVA analyses were applied to examine the relationship between psychological and social well-being and the overall quality of life.

2.1 Objectives of the study

1. To find out the level of psychological and social wellbeing of Kadar Tribes.
2. To assess the how does psychological and social wellbeing influence the quality of life of Kadar Tribes.

2.2 Hypotheses

1. There is a significant difference in the perception of psychological well-being between male and female respondents among the Kadar Tribes.
2. There is a significant variance among the perception of social well-being among different age groups of the Kadar Tribes.
3. There is a significant variance among the perception of psychological wellbeing among the Kadar Tribe respondents across different educational qualification levels.
4. There is a significant association between quality of life with regard to psychological wellbeing and social wellbeing among the Kadar Tribes.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Socio-demographic profile of the Kadar tribes

The demographic and socio-economic profile of the Kadar tribe in the study reveals several key insights. The largest age group among respondents is 41–50 years (34.4%), followed by those aged 21–30 (22.1%). Females constitute a majority (71.8%) of participants and most respondents are married (76.1%). In terms of education, while 32.8% have completed primary education, 23.8% have no formal education and only a small percentage have attained higher education. Occupationally, the majority are engaged in fishing/gathering (95.1%), with many also involved as Adivasi Vana Social Servants (73.6%) and under the MGNREGA scheme (65.6%). However, only a small number hold formal jobs such as government or healthcare roles. Financially, 92% of families earn less than Rs. 15,000 monthly, indicating significant economic hardship. Socio-economically, 97.2% of the community falls under the "poor" category, reflecting widespread poverty, low income and limited access to basic services and resources.

3.2 Perception towards the Psychological wellbeing

Table No: 1 Respondents’ perception towards psychological wellbeing

S. No.	Perception towards Psychological wellbeing	No. of Respondents (N=326)			
		Low	%	High	%
1.	Autonomy	211	64.7	115	35.3
2.	Environmental mastery	175	53.7	151	46.3
3.	Personal growth	241	73.9	85	26.1
4.	Positive relationship with others	194	59.5	132	40.5
5.	Purpose in life	195	59.8	131	40.2
6.	Self-acceptance	268	82.2	58	17.8
7.	Overall level of Psychological Wellbeing	224	68.7	102	31.3

Table 1 reveals that a significant portion of the Kadar tribe experiences low psychological well-being. Over half of the respondents reported low levels in key areas such as autonomy (64.7%), personal growth (73.9%), self-acceptance (82.2%) and purpose in life (59.8%). Overall, 68.7% of participants demonstrated low psychological well-being, while only 31.3% reported high well-being. This indicates widespread psychological challenges within the community, likely stemming from cultural displacement, limited access to mental health care, poverty and socio-economic stress. The findings highlight the urgent need for targeted mental health programs, community-building initiatives and culturally sensitive support systems to improve psychological resilience and overall well-being among the Kadar tribe (Subudhi, Biswal & Pathak 2024).

3.3 Perception towards the Social wellbeing

Table No: 2 Respondents’ perception towards Social wellbeing

S. No.	Perception towards Social wellbeing	No. of Respondents (N=326)			
		Low	%	High	%
1.	Social integration	215	66.0	111	34.0
2.	Social acceptance	215	66.0	111	34.0
3.	Social contribution	205	62.9	121	37.1
4.	Self-actualization	214	65.6	112	34.4
5.	Social coherence	207	63.5	119	36.5
6.	Overall level of Social Wellbeing	196	60.1	130	39.9

Table 2 highlights that a majority of the Kadar tribe experiences low social well-being. Around two-thirds of respondents reported low levels of social integration (66%), acceptance (66%), contribution (62.9%),

self-actualization (65.6%) and coherence (63.5%). Overall, 60.1% of the community demonstrated low social well-being, while 39.9% reported high well-being. These findings indicate widespread feelings of social exclusion and disconnection, likely due to cultural, economic and infrastructural barriers. Contributing factors include poverty, limited education, social marginalization and restricted access to resources and opportunities. To enhance social well-being, initiatives should aim to build inclusive community spaces, promote participation in social and cultural activities and strengthen support systems through targeted policies and outreach programs (Noronha et al. 2024 and Bairagi et al. (2024).

3.4 Hypotheses Testing

Table No: 3 ‘Z’ Test between the gender of the respondents and perception towards the psychological wellbeing of Kadar Tribes

S. No	Gender	Sample size (n=326)	\bar{X}	S.D.	Statistical Inference
1.	Autonomy				Z = 0.158
	Male	92	8.6413	1.51608	0.875>0.05
	Female	234	8.6752	1.83120	Not Significant
2.	Environmental Mastery				Z =1.207
	Male	92	8.0652	2.03164	0.228>0.05
	Female	234	8.3761	2.11565	Not Significant
3.	Personal Growth				Z =0.970
	Male	92	8.0978	1.29292	0.333>0.05
	Female	234	7.9402	1.33163	Not Significant
4.	Positive Relations with Others				Z = 4.270
	Male	92	8.5761	1.74931	0.000<0.01
	Female	234	7.4530	2.27128	Highly Significant
5.	Purpose in Life				Z = 2.128
	Male	92	9.3804	1.48873	0.034<0.05
	Female	234	8.9188	1.85927	Significant
6.	Self-acceptance				Z = 0.495
	Male	92	7.5870	1.60461	0.621>0.05
	Female	234	7.4872	1.65275	Not Significant
7.	Overall level of psychological wellbeing				Z =2.490
	Male	92	50.3478	3.74000	0.013<0.05
	Female	234	48.8504	5.26865	Significant

H_a =There is a significant difference in the perception of psychological well-being between male and female respondents among the Kadar Tribes.

H_1 =There is no significant difference in the perception of psychological well-being between male and female respondents among the Kadar Tribes.

Table 3 reveals significant gender-based differences among respondents in certain dimensions of psychological well-being, such as positive relations with others and purpose in life. However, no significant gender differences were found in other dimensions, including autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth and self-acceptance. Additionally, a significant difference was observed between gender and the overall level of psychological well-being ($Z=2.490$, $p<0.05$), indicating that gender influences the psychological well-being of the Kadar Tribes. The mean score (50.34) suggests that male respondents exhibit a higher level of psychological well-being compared to their female counterparts. Hence, research hypothesis accepted.

Table No: 4 One way Analysis of Variance among age of the respondents and perception towards social wellbeing of Kadar Tribes

S. No	Source	SS	Df	MS	\bar{X}	Statistical Inference
1	Social Integration				G1= 19.8276	F= 1.411 0.230>0.05 Not Significant
	Between Groups	45.634	4	11.409	G2= 20.5139	
	Within Groups	2594.688	321	8.083	G3= 19.5373	
					G4= 20.3214	
					G5= 20.4783	
2	Social Acceptance				G1= 19.4483	F= 6.338 0.000<0.01 Highly Significant
	Between Groups	241.506	4	60.377	G2= 21.1806	
	Within Groups	3057.687	321	9.526	G3= 22.7164	
					G4= 21.6250	
					G5= 21.0000	
3	Social Contribution				G1= 17.4828	F= 2.849 0.057<0.05 Significant
	Between Groups	36.165	4	9.041	G2= 17.5417	
	Within Groups	3419.762	321	10.653	G3= 17.0746	
					G4= 16.8929	
					G5= 16.5652	
4	Self-Actualization				G1= 18.2069	F= 4.419 0.000<0.01 Highly Significant
	Between Groups	113.238	4	28.310	G2= 19.5972	
	Within Groups	6403.314	321	19.948	G3= 19.7313	
					G4= 20.1518	
					G5= 18.9130	
5	Social Coherence				G1= 16.4828	F= 2.728 0.029<0.05 Significant
	Between Groups	95.526	4	23.882	G2= 17.8333	
	Within Groups	2810.121	321	8.754	G3= 18.3881	
					G4= 18.2589	
					G5= 18.4783	
6	Overall level of Social Wellbeing					F= 3.549

	Between Groups	913.481	4	228.370	G1=	91.4483	0.008<0.01 Highly Significant
	Within Groups	20658.044	321	64.355	G2=	96.6667	
					G3=	97.4478	
					G4=	97.8500	
					G5=	95.4348	

G1= Upto 20 years, G2= 21-30 years, G3= 31-40 Years, G4= 41-50 years, G5= Above 51 years

H_a=There is a significant variance among the perception of social well-being among different age groups of the Kadar Tribes.

H₂=There is no significant variance among the perception of social well-being among different age groups of the Kadar Tribes.

The results presented in Table 4 highlight a highly significant variance among the age of the respondents and their perception of social well-being among the Kadar Tribes. The analysis reveals that age influences various dimensions of social well-being, including social acceptance, social contribution, self-actualization and social coherence. The highly significant variance in overall social well-being (F=3.549, p=0.008) confirms that age plays a critical role in shaping how individuals perceive their social well-being. The mean score of 97.85 for the 41-50 age group indicates that this group reports the highest level of social well-being. Hence, research hypothesis accepted. The findings from the above table support the research hypothesis that age significantly influences social well-being among the Kadar Tribes, particularly in dimensions such as social acceptance, contribution, self-actualization and coherence. The 41-50 age group exhibits the highest level of social well-being, likely due to their established roles, contributions and deeper connections to the community. These insights underscore the importance of considering age-specific factors in interventions aimed at enhancing social well-being. By addressing the unique needs of different age groups, policymakers and community leaders can foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for all members of the Kadar Tribes.

Table No: 5 One way Analysis of Variance among educational qualification of the respondents and perception towards psychological wellbeing of Kadar Tribes

S. No	Source	SS	Df	MS	\bar{X}				Statistical Inference
1	Autonomy				G1=	8.7143	G4=	8.6667	F= 0.752
	Between Groups	11.508	5	2.302	G2=	8.7757	G5=	9.2857	0.585>0.05
	Within Groups	979.048	320	3.060	G3=	8.4091	G6=	7.6667	Not Significant
2	Environmental Mastery				G1=	8.5844	G4=	7.7727	F= 2.213
	Between Groups	47.626	5	9.525	G2=	8.6075	G5=	8.1429	0.053<0.05
	Within Groups	1377.269	320	4.304	G3=	8.0303	G6=	6.6667	Significant
3	Personal Growth				G1=	8.1169	G4=	7.9394	F= 1.163
	Between Groups	10.118	5	2.024	G2=	8.0935	G5=	8.2857	0.327>0.05
	Within Groups	556.806	320	1.740	G3=	7.6970	G6=	7.3333	Not Significant

4	Positive Relations with Others				G1=	7.7273	G4=	7.3636	F= 4.112 0.001<0.01
	Between Groups	94.411	5	18.882	G2=	8.4673	G5=	7.5714	Highly Significant
	Within Groups	1469.335	320	4.592	G3=	7.1970	G6=	6.0000	
5	Purpose in Life				G1=	9.1818	G4=	8.6364	F= 1.136 0.341>0.05
	Between Groups	17.813	5	3.563	G2=	9.1028	G5=	8.5714	Not Significant
	Within Groups	1003.402	320	3.136	G3=	9.2727	G6=	9.0000	
6	Self-acceptance								F= 2.327 0.043<0.05
	Between Groups	30.576	5	6.115	G1=	7.8961	G4=	7.0000	Significant
	Within Groups	840.847	320	2.628	G2=	7.4766	G5=	7.4286	
					G3=	7.6364	G6=	8.0000	
7	Overall level of psychological wellbeing				G1=	50.2208	G4=	47.3788	F= 5.335 0.000<0.01
	Between Groups	607.017	5	121.403	G2=	50.5234	G5=	51.2857	Highly Significant
	Within Groups	7281.685	320	22.755	G3=	48.2424	G6=	44.6667	

G1= No formal Education, G2= Primary level, G3= Secondary level, G4= Higher Secondary, G5= Undergraduate, G6= Professional Education

H_a= There is a significant variance among the perception of psychological wellbeing among the Kadar Tribe respondents across different educational qualification levels.

H₃=There is a significant variance among the perception of psychological wellbeing among the Kadar Tribe respondents across different educational qualification levels.

The findings presented in Table 5 indicate that educational qualification plays a significant role in shaping the psychological wellbeing of Kadar Tribes, with some dimensions showing a marked difference based on educational background such as environmental mastery, positive relations with others and self-acceptance. However, the study finds no significant variance between educational qualification and certain other dimensions of psychological wellbeing, such as autonomy, personal growth and purpose in life. Another important result is the highly significant variance found between educational qualification and the overall level of psychological wellbeing (F = 5.335, p = 0.000 < 0.01). This means that overall, education has a substantial influence on the psychological wellbeing of Kadar Tribe members. Hence, research hypothesis accepted.

Table No: 6 Goodman and Kruskal’s Gamma Test Association between quality of life with regard to psychological and social wellbeing among Kadar Tribes

S.No.		Overall level quality of life		Gama Value	Asymp. Std. Error ^a	Approx. T ^b	Approx. Sig.	Statistical Inference
		Low	High					
1	Psychological wellbeing							
	Low	111	113	.511	.063	27.596	.000	P<0.01

								Highly Significant
	High	82	20					
	Total	193	133					
2	Social Wellbeing							
	Low	116	80	.635	.053	8.414	.000	P<0.01 Highly Significant
	High	77	53					
	Total	193	133					

H_a= There is a significant association between quality of life with regard to psychological wellbeing and social wellbeing among the Kadar Tribes.

H₄= There is no significant association between quality of life with regard to psychological wellbeing and social wellbeing among the Kadar Tribes.

The findings presented in Table 6 indicate a strong and significant association between the overall levels of psychological and social wellbeing of the respondents and their overall quality of life among the Kadar Tribes. Specifically, the reported statistics ($T_b = 27.596, p = 0.000 < 0.01$ for psychological wellbeing and $T_b = 8.414, p = 0.000 < 0.01$ for social wellbeing) suggest that both psychological and social wellbeing significantly influence the quality of life of the respondents. These results are statistically highly significant, reinforcing the idea that these dimensions of wellbeing are crucial to overall life satisfaction and quality. Therefore, the research hypothesis is supported, indicating that psychological and social wellbeing play pivotal roles in shaping the quality of life in this population.

4. SUGGESTIONS

Improving the psychological and social well-being and quality of life of the Kadar tribes (a particularly vulnerable tribal group in South India, primarily in Kerala and Tamil Nadu) involves a culturally sensitive, community-based and sustainable approach. Here are some suggestions across different domains:

Psychological Well-being

1. Culturally Sensitive Mental Health Services:

- Mobile mental health clinics with tribal language translators.
- Training local youth as community mental health workers.
- Use of art, storytelling and traditional healing in therapy.

2. Stress Reduction & Coping Skills:

- Workshops on emotional regulation, self-esteem and stress management.
- Integrate practices like yoga and mindfulness (tailored to their lifestyle).

3. Reducing Stigma:

- Awareness campaigns around mental health using local leaders and folk media.
- Normalizing seeking help through community conversations.

Social Well-being

1. Community Empowerment:

- Encourage community-led initiatives for education, health and conservation.

- Form women's self-help groups and youth collectives.
 - 2. **Preservation of Cultural Identity:**
 - Promote traditional knowledge systems, music and rituals in schools and public events.
 - Document and celebrate their language, oral traditions and crafts.
 - 3. **Education & Inclusion:**
 - Bridge schools with tribal-friendly teachers and flexible timings.
 - Vocational training aligned with their environment (e.g., eco-tourism, forest produce processing).
- Quality of Life**
1. **Health & Nutrition:**
 - Nutrition programs based on traditional diets and local foods.
 - Better access to clean water, sanitation and maternal care.
 2. **Livelihood Support:**
 - Sustainable livelihood options (like honey collection, forest produce processing, eco-tourism).
 - Link to government schemes and market networks without exploitation.
 3. **Infrastructure Development:**
 - Improve transport, housing, electricity and digital access without disrupting natural habitats.
 - Use green technologies (solar, rainwater harvesting, etc.).

5. CONCLUSION

Enhancing the psychological and social well-being and overall quality of life of the Kadar tribes requires a holistic, inclusive and culturally respectful approach. By integrating traditional knowledge with modern services, empowering local communities and ensuring access to basic rights and resources, it is possible to create sustainable improvements in their lives. True development must prioritize not just economic growth, but also emotional health, social dignity, cultural preservation and environmental harmony. With community participation at the core, meaningful change can be both achievable and enduring for the Kadar tribes.

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