

Topic: Multidimensional Poverty estimates of ten socio-religious groups in India

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Theoretical foundation

India's social structure is deeply intertwined with of caste and religion, significantly contributing to of multidimensional deprivation (Mistri, 2014). Highlighting the role of social identity in India, studies have identified the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) as particularly vulnerable across various facets, including, education, health (Maity, 2017; Datta, 2024), housing (Ghosh et al., 2022), and overall quality of life (SenthilKumar et al., 2024). Studies have documented persistent inequalities in educational attainment (Gaiha, 2007; Rajadurai, 2023), life expectancy (Maity, 2017; Kumari & Mohanty, 2020), child mortality (Maity, 2017; Bora et al., 2019), maternal and reproductive health (Sanneving et al., 2013; Kumar & Gupta, 2015), and living conditions for SCs and STs.

Studies with the focus on intersection of caste and religion also have demonstrated significant disparities in multiple domains. For instance, Gupta and Sudarsanan (2022) demonstrated that SC individuals identifying as Hindus had lower life expectancy compared to non-SC Hindus, while Chatterjee et al. (2023) reported that Hindu children from ST backgrounds experienced a higher burden of stunting compared to Muslim ST children. These findings illustrate how caste and tribe, even within the same religious group, lead to different outcomes, pointing to the critical need to address inequality at this intersection.

India has experienced a secular decline in multidimensional poverty level, from 25% in 2015 to 15% in 2021 (). However, according to the global MPI estimates, 5 out of every 6 multidimensionally poor people in India belonged to Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), or Other Backward Class (OBC) households in 2015-16; specifically, more than half of ST households experienced multidimensional poverty (UNDP & OPHI., 2021). Among religious groups, Muslims had the highest incidence of multidimensional poverty, followed by Hindus, while Christians had the lowest (Alkire et al., 2021). These patterns of deprivation emphasize the role of caste and religion as key determinants of poverty.

However, despite the significant evidence on caste and religious disparities, there is a gap in understanding the precise distribution of multidimensional poverty across subgroups that combine caste and religion. This study aims to fill that gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of multidimensional poverty across ten socio-religious groups by combining caste/tribe and religion. By offering a detailed and decomposed estimation, the research will

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contribute to the ongoing discourse on social inequities and provide a nuanced understanding of how caste and religion together influence multidimensional poverty in India.

Data

This chapter utilizes the data from fifth round of the National Family and Health Survey (NFHS-5), conducted in 2019-21 under the aegis of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Using a two-stage stratified sampling approach, NFHS-5 collected information from 636,699 households and 2,843,917 individuals. The surveys provide valuable information on various demographic and health indicators, using four questionnaires: household, women, men, and clinical anthropometric and biometric, at the national and sub-national levels. We estimated the multidimensional poverty across ten socio-religious groups; namely, SC Christian, ST Christian, SC Hindu, ST Muslim, ST Hindu, SC Muslim, and non-SC/ST Christian, Hindu, and Muslim groups

Methods

The study utilizes the OPHI & UNDP provided multidimensional poverty measurement framework utilizing 10 indicators in three dimensions (Education, Health, and Standard of Living). The Multidimensional poverty was estimated using Alkire-Foster methodology, which employs a dual cut-off counting approach to categorize individuals as either multidimensionally poor or non-poor (Alkire et al., 2015). There are 3 multidimensional poverty estimates,

Incidence of Poverty (H): It is the proportion of the multidimensionally poor individuals to the total population and can be denoted as:

$$H = \frac{q}{n} \dots \dots \dots (1)$$

Where q is the number of individuals living in multidimensional poverty and n is the total population.

Intensity of Poverty (A): It is the weighted average deprivation score of all the multidimensionally poor individuals and can be denoted as:

$$A = \frac{\sum_1^q c}{q} \dots \dots \dots (2)$$

Where c is the deprivation score experienced by the multidimensionally poor.

Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI): It is the product of incidence of poverty and intensity of poverty and can be denoted as;

$$MPI = H * A \dots \dots \dots (3)$$

Each dimension was assigned an equal weight of 0.33, and each indicator was given an equal weight within the dimensions.

Expected Results

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409Fig 1 (a-b) shows that the highest multidimensional poverty level among STs (32%), followed by SCs (20%) among the social groups. Among religious groups and one in five Muslims were multidimensionally poor followed by Hindus (16%) and Christian (11%). When combining the caste/tribe and religious groups, the highest incidence was among the STAI, with every one in three STs identified as Muslims were multidimensionally poor and 10% were vulnerable to become multidimensionally poor, with an MPI score of 0.139. The SCAH exhibited 29% multidimensional poverty level followed by STAH (25%) and STAC (24%) (Table 1). The highest multidimensional poverty incidence among STAI (42%), STAH (42%), and SCAI (40%) population living in the eastern region. Additionally, 31% SCAH in the eastern regions and 21% in the central region were multidimensionally poor (Table 2).

Further Scope

The preliminary estimates reveal significant multidimensional poverty inequalities across socio-religious groups, underscoring the need for further investigation into how the intersection of caste and religion contributes to socio-economic disadvantage. Notably, the eastern region of India displays the highest levels of multidimensional poverty among several socio-religious groups, including STAI, STAH, and SCAI. This regional variation highlights the necessity for targeted regional strategies.

The study emphasizes the critical importance of incorporating both caste and religious affiliations into poverty alleviation programs. Developing subgroup-specific, tailored policies will address the distinct and unique challenges faced by different socio-religious groups, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of poverty reduction efforts and contributing to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 1 (SDG 1).

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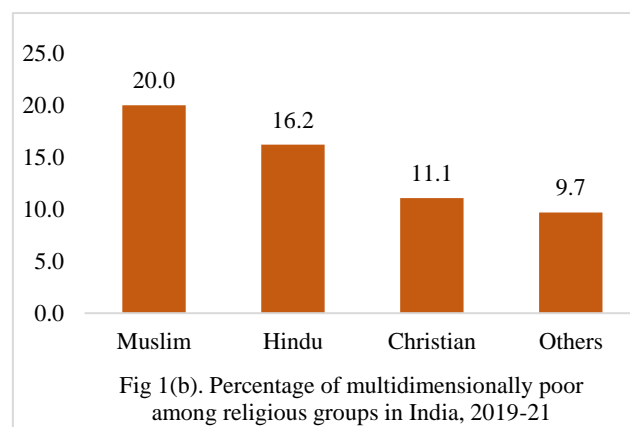
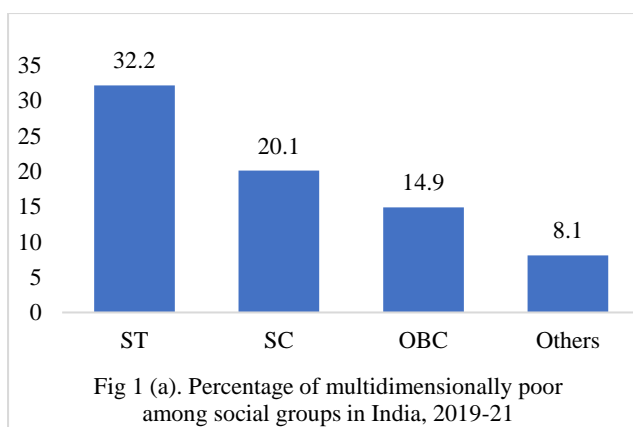


Table 1. Multidimensional poverty estimates of ten socio-religious groups in India, 2019-21

Socio-religious Groups	Headcount ratio	Intensity of Poverty	Multidimensional Poverty Index	Severe multidimensional poverty	Vulnerable to multidimensional poverty	Population Share (%)
SCAC	8.79	40.92	0.034	1.83	15.42	0.35
STAC	23.61	42.39	0.101	7	19.65	5.88
SCAI	28.66	43.43	0.123	9.12	21.54	0.48
STAI	25.08	42.20	0.109	8.09	21.54	0.62
SCAH	20.95	42.27	0.087	5.93	21.39	17.35
STAH	33.01	43.22	0.139	9.63	23.06	10.59
NSCSTAC	3.09	41.22	0.012	0.57	7.58	0.97
NSCSTAI	19.6	43.13	0.081	5.84	19.06	11.68
NSCSTAH	11.78	40.54	0.046	2.5	17.31	47.14
Others	9.67	41.74	0.037	2.29	14.96	4.94
Overall	16.4	42.00	0.069	4.25	18.69	100

Table 2. Percentage of multidimensional poor among socio-religious groups across six geographical regions of India, 2019-21

Socioreligious Groups	North	Central	East	Northeast	West	South
SCAC	9.39	11.32	27.73	14.52	3.58	7.38
STAC	21.4	25.76	34.94	18.94	20.62	15.86
SCAI	14.64	37.88	40.31	25.3	7.09	9.84
STAI	18.03	35.21	42.47	28.9	7.39	9.74
SCAH	13.34	27.04	31.05	16.92	9.43	7.34
STAH	30.42	37.54	42	16.35	30.35	16.24
NSCSTAC	6.18	5.63	7.91	30.01	0.68	1.39
NSCSTAI	13.27	25.48	26.64	29.38	7.2	3.29
NSCSTAH	6.65	16.24	18.52	13.53	7.01	4.37
Others	4.11	16.49	39.72	14.49	6.85	5.48

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