

Ethno-demographic Profile of Karbis of Karbi Anglong District, Assam, Northeast India

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ABSTRACT: Currently, the tribal population in India comprises about 8.60% of the total population of India. The tribal populations in India inhabit the widely varying socio-economic background, ecological and geo-climatic niches. Various factors, including occupational, geographical and environmental factors are found to have a profound impact on the livelihoods of the people of the area and so as the socio-cultural and demographic characteristics. Considering these facts the present study was carried out among 1629 (774 males; 885 females) adult Karbi; a scheduled tribal population of Karbi Anglong district of Assam, Northeast India, for the demographic and socio-economic characteristics. They are mainly distributed in the Karbi Anglong district and also sparsely in various pockets of Assam and other parts of north-eastern States. In the present paper an attempt has been made to discuss the ethno-demographic characteristic of the Karbis with a focus on their demographic measures of age-sex structure, sex ratio, literacy rate and occupational structure.

INTRODUCTION

The tribal population in India comprises about 8.60% of the total population of India (Census, 2011). Northeast India is culturally diverse, composed of numerous ethno-cultural groups coexisting within a larger, predominant culture, creating a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society. The demographic study helps to understand the population structure and composition, and ongoing phenomenon, including the population growth and demographic transition. The population growth and several demographic variables with environmental, geo-climatic, biological and socio-cultural may be affecting the population composition. The study of the interplay of various demographic and/or population trends like population size and composition (e.g., age/sex), family types,

literacy rate, physical activity, occupational and economic factors at micro level provides a glimpse of important aspects of the population. It is reported that several demographic factors including educational status has great influence on health and survival by enhancing the knowledge and skills, contraceptive use, nutrition, prevention and disease treatment (McCrary and Royer, 2011; Güne^o, 2013). Several studies have revealed that economic factors, such as household income and occupation are negatively associated with the population growth (Adhikari, 2010). The objectives of the present study are to study several socio-economic and demographic variables include age-sex distribution, sex ratio, dependency ratio, marital status, occupation, family income and economic activity of the Karbi tribal population of Karbi Anglong, Assam, Northeast India.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present cross-sectional study was carried out among 1629 (774 male; 885 female) adult Karbi; a scheduled tribe population of Karbi Anglong district of Assam. The major ethnic groups of the district are Karbis, Bodos, Dimasas, Hmars, Garos, Rengmas Nagas, Tiwas, Man (Tai speaking), besides, a large number of non-tribal's group-namely Assamese, Bengali and Hindi-speaking ethnic groups are living together. Currently, the Karbi Anglong district supports a population of 9,56,313 out of which 490,167 are males and 466,149 are females representing a decadal growth of 17.58% during the last decade 2001-2011 (Census, 2011). The Karbis are one of the indigenous tribal inhabitants of Karbi Anglong, a hill district in the state of Assam in north-east India. Ethnically, they belong to the Mongoloid group and linguistically they belong to the Tibeto-Burman group and are sub-grouped as Mikir (Gordon, 2005). A total of 10 Karbi dominated villages under the area of Langsomepi block of Karbi Anglong were covered. The villages were included on the basis of homogeneity, easy accessibility and identical subject strengths. Data were collected during the period from July to December, 2012.

The household survey method was used to collect the data of the present study. The households were also identified using simple random sampling method. A pre-structured questionnaire was used to collect the socio-economic and demographic data. The structured interview method was also adopted for interviewing head and/or family members in order to collect the necessary information. Data on the socio-demographic characteristics include ethnicity, age, sex, family size, marital status, types of marriage, occupation and monthly family income were collected. Special care was taken to collect data on socioeconomic and demographic variables include occupation, household income, religion, age at marriage, awareness and adoption of family planning methods. Verbal consents were obtained before starting the interview after making them understand the purpose and benefit of the present study. The interviews were conducted in isolation in order to maintain privacy. The income groups were categories according to the percentile distribution of incomes were classified in three different economic groups as follows:

- 1) Higher income group (HIG) (>75th percentile) = Rupees >1250.00
- 2) Middle income group (MIG) (50th to 75th percentile) = Rupees 450.00 –1250.00
- 3) Low Income group (LIG) (< 50th percentile) = Rupees. <450.00

Statistical Analysis: The data were analysed using the Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS, version, 16.0). Chi-square analysis (χ^2) was also done to assess the difference between the demographic variables within and between variables. A p-value was observed to be <0.05 and <0.01 was considered statistically significant.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The age-sex composition is the generally considered to be an effect of the past trends in fertility, mortality and migration which influences in turn the current level of births, deaths and migration rates in the population. The age-sex specific distribution of the population among the Karbi tribal population is presented in Table 1. The results show that 32.17%, 61.51% and 6.32% of the total population belongs to the age-groups of 0-14 years, 15-59 years and e' 60 years, respectively. The age specific population distribution was found to be higher to that of India's i.e. 30.90% (0-14 years) but lower 7.50% (50+ years) in the same age interval (Sample Registration System, 2010). According to Sundbarg's classification of population, a population is considered to be progressive when the compositions of the total population are 40%, 50% and 10% in the age groups 0-14, 15-49 and 50+ years, respectively. The population is referred to as stationary if these frequencies are 33%, 50% and 17%, respectively; while the frequencies of 20%, 50% and 30%, respectively, are the characteristics of the regressive population (Khongsdier 2005). Thus, according to Sundbarg's classification of population on the basis of three age-group distribution, the Karbis populations may be categorized as progressive types.

The results showed that the total population distribution was 1629 individuals, and out of which 774 are males and 855 are females. Thus, the overall sex-ratio is 1143 females per 1000 males, which is higher than the sex-ratio of 1:1, though the difference

TABLE 1
Age-sex specific distribution of the Karbi sample population of Langsomepi block

| Age-groups (in years) | Male Abs. | Male (%) | Total male (%) | Female Abs. | Female (%) | Total female (%) | Total population | Total (%) population | Sex-ratio |
|-----------------------|-----------|----------|----------------|-------------|------------|------------------|------------------|----------------------|-----------|
| (0-14) | 249 | 32.2 | 15.28 | 275 | 32.2 | 16.9 | 524 | 32.2 | 1104 |
| (15-59) | 482 | 62.3 | 29.6 | 520 | 60.8 | 31.9 | 1002 | 61.5 | 1078 |
| (≥ 60+) | 43 | 5.5 | 2.6 | 60 | 7.0 | 3.7 | 103 | 6.3 | 1395 |
| Total | 774 | 100.0 | 47.5 | 855 | 100.0 | 52.5 | 1629 | 100.0 | 1143 |

was observed to be statistically not significant ($\chi^2 = 8.86$, d.f., 4, $p > 0.05$). In the age-group 0–14 years, there are 249 males and 275 females with a sex-ratio of 1104 females per 1000 males. In the age-group of 15-59 years, there are 482 males and 520 females with a sex-ratio of 1078 females per 1000 males. In the age-group of 60+ years, there are 43 males and 60 females with sex-ratio 1395 females per 1000 males. This indicates that the mortality rate is higher in males than females. The sex-ratio of females over males also shows highest in this age-group.

TABLE 2
Comparison of sex-ratio of the Karbis of Karbi Anglong with others

| | Sex-ratio | Source |
|--------------------|-----------|--------------------------------|
| India | 943 | Census of India, 2011 |
| Assam | 958 | Census of India, 2011 |
| Karbi Anglong | 956 | District Census Handbook, 2014 |
| Present population | 1143 | Present study |

The sex-ratio (females per thousand males) measures the balance between males and females in human population. The sex-ratio of the presently studied population is found to be 1143. The sex-ratio of the population under study is found to be higher than the sex-ratio of India (943), Assam (958) (Census of India, 2011), Karbi Anglong (956) (Census of India, 2011) (see Table 2). Among the Karbis, the higher sex-ratio is supported by the absence of any practice like female infanticide and better social status of women is given in their society. The tendency of desiring to have a male child also low in this region. The highest sex-ratios are observed in the state of Kerala 1058 females per 1000 males and lower in Haryana 861 females per 1000 males (Census of India, 2011).

TABLE 3
The dependency ratio among Karbi individuals in Langsomepi block

| Sex | Age-groups in years | | | Dependency ratio | | Total |
|--------|---------------------|-------|-----|------------------|---------|-------|
| | 0-14 | 15-59 | 60+ | Young-age | Old-age | |
| Male | 249 | 482 | 43 | 51.7 | 8.9 | 60.6 |
| Female | 275 | 520 | 60 | 52.8 | 11.5 | 64.4 |
| Total | 524 | 1002 | 103 | 52.3 | 10.3 | 62.6 |

The dependency ratio measures the impact of age composition on the livelihood activity of the population. It is estimated in reference to the proportion of the young age (0-14) years and old age (60+) years in the total population, and the proportion of the population at productive ages. The young age dependency ratio, the old age dependency ratio and the total dependency ratio are shown in the Table 3. The young age dependency ratio between females (52.80) was observed to be slightly higher than males (51.70). The old age dependency ratios for males, females and total population are observed to be 8.9, 11.5 and 10.3, respectively. The total dependency ratio of the population has been found to be 62.69 out of which the total dependency ratio for males (60.60) was found to be slightly lower than females (64.40). (Young or Old age dependency ratio has been obtained by calculating the number of young or old age cohort

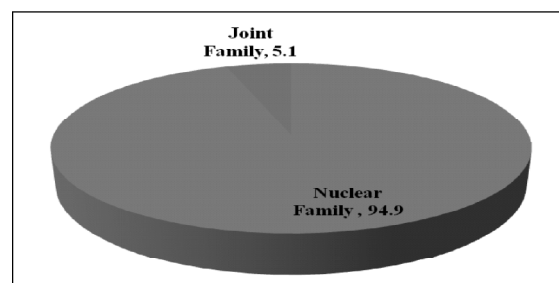


Figure 1: Distribution of family types among the Karbis of Langsomepi block

divided by the productive age cohort multiply by 100)

The Karbis maintain both traditional joint family and the nuclear families. The father is responsible for the needs of the family, whereas the mother is to look after the need of the house and her children. However, in present days, Karbis have the traditional nuclear family system. The present study (Figure 1) reveals higher percentage of the nuclear family (94.90%) than the joint family (5.10%).

In a country like India, the literacy rate (Table 4) is generally considered to be the main foundation for the social and economic growth of the population. The total literacy rate of the present population studied is found to be 71.33%. The sex specific literacy rate was observed to be higher among males (77.26%) than females (63.73%) (Table 4). It is observed that the literacy rate is lower than that of Karbi Anglong district (73.52%) (Census, 2011), Assam (72.20%) and India (73%) (Census, 2011).

TABLE 4
Percentage comparison of literacy rate of Karbis of Langsomepi block with others

| | Male | Female | Total | Source |
|------------------------|-------|--------|-------|--------------------------------|
| India | 80.9 | 64.6 | 73.00 | Census of India, 2011 |
| Assam | 77.8 | 66.3 | 72.20 | Census of India, 2011 |
| Karbi Anglong district | 82.12 | 64.62 | 73.52 | District Census Handbook, 2014 |
| Langsomepi block | 77.26 | 63.73 | 71.33 | Present study |

TABLE 5A
The distribution of marital status among Karbi males of Langsomepi block

| Age-groups (in years) | Married individuals | | | Unmarried individuals | | | Widower/ divorcee / separated individuals | | | Total | |
|--------------------------|---------------------|-------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-------|-------------------------|--|-----|-------------------------|-------|-------|
| | Abs. | % | % age to total males | Abs. | % | % age to total males | Abs. | % | % age to total males | Abs. | % |
| 0-4 | – | – | – | 86 | 19.20 | 11.11 | – | – | – | 86 | 11.11 |
| 5-9 | – | – | – | 63 | 14.06 | 8.14 | – | – | – | 63 | 8.14 |
| 10-14 | – | – | – | 100 | 22.32 | 12.92 | – | – | – | 100 | 12.92 |
| 15-19 | 1 | 0.32 | 0.13 | 88 | 19.64 | 11.37 | – | – | – | 89 | 11.50 |
| 20-24 | 32 | 10.16 | 4.13 | 62 | 13.84 | 8.01 | – | – | – | 94 | 12.14 |
| 25-29 | 50 | 15.87 | 6.46 | 30 | 6.70 | 3.88 | – | – | – | 80 | 10.34 |
| 30-34 | 37 | 11.75 | 4.78 | 16 | 3.57 | 2.08 | – | – | – | 53 | 6.85 |
| 35-39 | 49 | 15.56 | 6.33 | – | – | – | 1 | 10 | 0.001 | 50 | 6.46 |
| 40-44 | 46 | 14.60 | 5.94 | – | – | – | 1 | 10 | 0.001 | 47 | 6.07 |
| 45-49 | 27 | 8.57 | 3.49 | 2 | 0.45 | 0.26 | – | – | – | 29 | 3.75 |
| 50-54 | 22 | 6.98 | 2.84 | 1 | 0.22 | 0.13 | 2 | 20 | 0.26 | 25 | 3.23 |
| 55-59 | 14 | 4.44 | 1.80 | – | – | – | – | – | – | 15 | 1.94 |
| 60-64 | 14 | 4.44 | 1.80 | – | – | – | 1 | 10 | 0.001 | 15 | 1.94 |
| 65-69 | 6 | 1.90 | 0.76 | – | – | – | – | – | – | 6 | 0.76 |
| 70+ | 17 | 5.40 | 2.20 | – | – | – | 5 | 50 | 0.65 | 22 | 2.84 |
| Total | 315 | 100 | 40.70 | 448 | 100 | 57.90 | 10 | 100 | 0.91 | 774 | 100 |

The age-sex specific distributions of marital status among male and female Karbi individuals are presented in Tables 5a and 5b respectively. Among males 40.70% are married, 57.90% are unmarried and 0.91% belongs to those who are widowed, separated and divorced. Among the females 36.60% are currently married and 56.49% are unmarried.

However, a total of 6.78% of the total females were widowed, separated and divorced. The proportion of unmarried population is observed to be higher in the study population. The comparison between sex on marital status shows statistically highly significant ($\chi^2=31.52$, d.f., 3; $p<0.001$).

TABLE 5B
The distribution of marital status among Karbi females of Langsomepi block

| Age-groups (in years) | Married individuals | | | Unmarried individuals | | | Widow/divorcee/ separated individuals | | | Total | |
|--------------------------|---------------------|-------|---------------------------|-----------------------|-------|---------------------------|--|-------|---------------------------|-------|-------|
| | Abs. | % | % age to total females | Abs. | % | % age to total females | Abs. | % | % age to total females | Abs. | % |
| 0-4 | – | – | – | 69 | 14.29 | 8.07 | – | – | – | 69 | 8.07 |
| 5-9 | – | – | – | 76 | 15.73 | 8.89 | – | – | – | 76 | 8.89 |
| 10-14 | – | – | – | 130 | 26.92 | 15.20 | – | – | – | 130 | 15.20 |
| 15-19 | 10 | 3.18 | 1.17 | 111 | 22.98 | 12.98 | 1 | 1.72 | 0.12 | 122 | 14.27 |
| 20-24 | 47 | 15.00 | 5.50 | 46 | 9.52 | 5.38 | 1 | 1.72 | 0.12 | 94 | 10.10 |
| 25-29 | 54 | 17.20 | 6.32 | 23 | 4.76 | 2.69 | – | – | – | 77 | 9.0 |
| 30-34 | 53 | 16.90 | 6.20 | 12 | 2.48 | 1.40 | 1 | 1.72 | 0.12 | 66 | 7.72 |
| 35-39 | 39 | 12.42 | 4.56 | 7 | 1.45 | 0.82 | 2 | 3.45 | 0.23 | 48 | 5.61 |
| 40-44 | 42 | 13.37 | 4.19 | 4 | 0.83 | 0.47 | 3 | 5.17 | 0.35 | 49 | 5.73 |
| 45-49 | 19 | 6.05 | 2.22 | 2 | 0.41 | 0.23 | 5 | 8.62 | 0.58 | 26 | 3.04 |
| 50-54 | 16 | 5.09 | 1.87 | – | – | – | 12 | 20.70 | 1.40 | 28 | 1.05 |
| 55-59 | 4 | 1.27 | 0.47 | – | – | – | 5 | 8.62 | 0.58 | 9 | 1.05 |
| 60-64 | 14 | 4.45 | 1.64 | 2 | 0.41 | 0.23 | 10 | 17.24 | 1.17 | 26 | 3.39 |
| 65-69 | 10 | 3.18 | 1.17 | – | – | – | 3 | 5.17 | 0.35 | 13 | 0.35 |
| 70+ | 6 | 1.91 | 0.58 | 1 | 0.20 | 0.12 | 15 | 25.86 | 1.75 | 21 | 2.46 |
| Total | 314 | 100 | 36.60 | 483 | 100 | 56.49 | 58 | 100 | 6.78 | 855 | 100 |

TABLE 6
Sex-wise distribution of population according to their level of activity among Karbi individuals

| Occupations | Male (N=774) | | | No | Female (N=855) | | Total | |
|-----------------|--------------|-------|-------------------------|-----|----------------|---------------------------|-------|-------|
| | Abs. | % | % age to total males | | % | % age to total females | Abs. | % |
| Agriculturist | 304 | 51.01 | 18.66 | 292 | 48.99 | 17.92 | 596 | 36.59 |
| Govt. service | 36 | 46.51 | 2.21 | 42 | 53.49 | 2.58 | 78 | 4.79 |
| Weaver | 1 | 11.11 | 0.06 | 8 | 88.89 | 0.49 | 9 | 0.55 |
| Private service | 7 | 58.33 | 0.42 | 5 | 41.67 | 0.31 | 12 | 0.74 |
| Business | 17 | 54.84 | 1.04 | 14 | 45.16 | 0.86 | 31 | 1.90 |
| Contractor | 3 | 50 | 0.18 | 3 | 50 | 0.18 | 6 | 0.37 |
| House wife | 0 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 65 | 100 | 3.99 | 65 | 3.99 |
| Student | 314 | 47.00 | 19.27 | 354 | 52.99 | 21.73 | 668 | 41.01 |
| Any other | 92 | 56.10 | 5.65 | 72 | 43.90 | 4.42 | 164 | 10.07 |
| Total | 774 | – | 47.49 | 855 | – | 52.48 | 1629 | 100 |

The sex specific distribution according to the level of activity among Karbi individuals is presented in Table 6. The Karbis are primarily subsistence based agricultural economy. It has been observed that 36.59% (18.66% males; 17.92% females) of the totals individuals are agriculturist. The Karbis are found to be engaged in another occupation include government service (4.79%), weaver (0.55%), private service (0.74%), Business (1.90%) and any other (10.07%). The sex-differences in the nature of occupation were observed to be statistically significant ($\chi^2=73.15$, d.f., 9; $p<0.001$). The Karbis are well in handicraft and women made the process of making their traditional

dress all by themselves at home starting from carding, spinning, weaving and stitching. Animal husbandry is an integral part of their economic activity, especially pig rearing is common among them. Transition in the occupational pattern has brought about many changes in the socio-cultural practices.

The results of the present study showed that the distribution of low income groups was observed to be higher than the middle and high income group (Table 7). The overall distribution of the income groups showed that a total of 50.15%, 25.23% and 24.61% of the individuals were belonging to the lower, middle and high income groups, respectively. Out of

TABLE 7
Distribution of households according to the of per-capita income among the Karbi individuals

| Income groups | Total (N=1629) | Male (N=774) | Female (N=855) |
|--|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Low Income (<50 th Percentile) | 817 (50.15)* | 374 (48.32) | 443 (51.81) |
| Middle Income (50 th -75 th Percentile) | 411 (25.23) | 203 (26.23) | 208 (24.33) |
| High Income (>75 th Percentile) | 401 (24.61) | 197 (25.45) | 204 (23.86) |

*Values in parenthesis indicates percentages

774 males 48.32%, 26.23% and 25.45% belongs to low, middle and high income group, respectively. Out of 855 females, 51.81%, 24.33% and 23.86% belong to low, middle and high income group, respectively. The sex-specific differences were observed to be statistically insignificant ($\chi^2=1.99$, d.f., 4; $p>0.05$) in the prevalence of per-capita income among the Karbi individuals.

CONCLUSION

The present study has reported the socio-economic and demographic aspects of the indigenous Karbi tribal population of Karbi Anglong district of Assam. It is interesting to observe that the sex-ratio of female is very high and the younger age dependency ratio is significantly higher than the old age dependency ratio. The present study also reveals the lowest literacy rate, but interesting to note here that female literacy rate appears to have a relatively higher level than that the male literacy rate during the last decade. The new opportunities and better availability of physical infrastructures that include

educational fields, occupational perspectives are found to be influenced in various demographic attributes of age-sex composition, sex-ratios, literacy levels, family pattern, marital status and physical activity of the present study population of Langsomepi block.

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