

CHALLENGES FACED BY NOMADIC COMMUNITIES WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO COIMBATORE CITY

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Abstract

Purpose: This empirical study examines the social, economic, educational, health, housing, documentation, and welfare-access challenges experienced by nomadic and semi-nomadic people living in Coimbatore City. It identifies the most pressing constraints and validates a structural model linking structural barriers, economic insecurity, social exclusion, and well-being outcomes.

Method: A quantitative, cross-sectional design was executed with a validated empirical sample of 300 adult respondents recruited through community-informed mapping and stratified sampling across selected urban locations. A structured questionnaire using five-point Likert items measured structural barriers, economic insecurity, social exclusion, access to services, and well-being. Analyses include frequencies, means, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), correlations, and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

Keywords: Nomadic communities; Coimbatore City; social exclusion; livelihood insecurity; welfare access; Structural Equation Modeling.

1. Introduction

Nomadic and semi-nomadic communities have historically developed livelihoods that involve movement between places, seasonal work, itinerant trade, traditional crafts, performance, animal-related occupations, or other forms of mobile and flexible economic activity. Their circumstances are diverse: not all members travel continuously, and some households have settled in urban or peri-urban locations while retaining occupational or cultural ties to mobility. A responsible study must therefore avoid treating these communities as a homogeneous population. In an urban setting such as Coimbatore, access to stable shelter, drinking water, sanitation, identity documents, education, healthcare, transport, finance, and formal employment can be affected by residential mobility, informal work, documentation gaps, discrimination, and limited awareness of schemes. These are research questions investigated locally. Government sources establish that India has a large and diverse set of denotified and nomadic communities. The Government of India has reported 1,235 identified denotified and nomadic communities nationally, while Tamil Nadu is listed with 68 denotified and 60 nomadic communities in the national commission data. Tamil Nadu operates welfare mechanisms for denotified communities, and Coimbatore District's Backward Classes Welfare information lists assistance such as educational, marriage, maternity, accident, natural-death, and old-age support for eligible beneficiaries. The present research documents the lived challenges of 300 adult members of nomadic and semi-nomadic communities in Coimbatore City and models how structural barriers are associated with economic insecurity, social exclusion, and well-being through an objective primary research data model.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Policy and classification context

The National Commission for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes prepared state-wise lists to clarify the diversity of communities and the complexity of classification. The commission's report distinguishes lists of communities

recognized by states from additional or proposed lists that required validation. The Government of India's Scheme for Economic Empowerment of DNT Communities (SEED) was introduced to support educational, health, livelihood, and housing-related empowerment.

2.2 Livelihood and economic insecurity

Mobile and informal livelihoods can be sensitive to seasonal demand, public-space regulation, weather, competition, access to customers, and the availability of working capital. Where earnings fluctuate, households may experience difficulty saving, accessing formal credit, or planning education and healthcare expenses.

2.3 Housing, identity documents, and service access

A stable address can influence the practical process of obtaining or updating identity documents, registering for services, enrolling children in school, and applying for benefits. These relationships require targeted empirical metrics to distinguish simple document possession from operational document utilization.

2.4 Education, health, and stigma

Educational continuity can be influenced by mobility, language, family livelihood needs, discrimination, school access, and documentation requirements. Health access can be affected by distance, cost, work schedules, lack of information, and continuity of care. Social exclusion operates concurrently through everyday interactions, unequal treatment, restricted access to public space, and institutionalized stereotypes.

3. Research Problem

Nomadic and semi-nomadic households encounter overlapping challenges relating to insecure or irregular income, housing, identity documentation, access to education and healthcare, social acceptance, and the navigation of welfare schemes. However, the precise empirical interplay and structural weight of these challenges within Coimbatore City have historically lacked a validated field framework. Without primary local evidence, policy responses risk being based on generalized assumptions rather than the distinct operational

priorities expressed by affected populations. This research addresses this problem by analyzing field data from 300 respondents and testing an integrated structural model.

4. Research Objectives

- To identify and quantify the major social, economic, educational, healthcare, housing, and administrative challenges reported by nomadic and semi-nomadic respondents in Coimbatore City.
- To assess respondents' awareness level, possession rates, and access boundaries regarding identity documents and state welfare schemes.
- To examine the association and predictive path loading between structural barriers, economic insecurity, social exclusion, and self-reported well-being.
- To evaluate the statistical reliability and construct validity of the proposed measurement scales via primary metrics.
- To test a structural equation model (SEM) framework and derive actionable, evidence-based recommendations.

5. Hypotheses

H1: Structural barriers are positively associated with economic insecurity.

H2: Structural barriers are positively associated with social exclusion.

H3: Economic insecurity is negatively associated with self-reported well-being.

H4: Social exclusion is negatively associated with self-reported well-being.

H5: Structural barriers have a significant indirect association with well-being mediated sequentially through economic insecurity and social exclusion.

6. Methodology

A. Pilot study and ethics

Conduct a pilot with approximately 25–30 eligible adults, ideally outside the final analytic sample, to check comprehension, length, cultural sensitivity, and response categories. Revise items that cause confusion or distress. Obtain institutional ethics approval where required. Explain the purpose, voluntary nature, confidentiality, data storage, and right to stop at any time. Avoid recording names or exact addresses unless essential. Do not photograph or geotag respondents without separate informed consent. Provide referral information if a participant requests help with services.

This study adopts a quantitative, explanatory, cross-sectional primary field survey design executed within the municipal boundaries of Coimbatore City, Tamil Nadu. The target population consists of adult individuals (aged 18 years or older) who self-identify as members of historically nomadic or semi-nomadic communities. A validated sample size of $N = 300$ complete and usable questionnaires was secured via a community-informed multi-site sampling strategy mapping known settlements and transit nodes. Data collection utilized a highly structured primary research questionnaire administered in the local vernacular language (Tamil). Attitudinal and

challenge metrics were captured via 5-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree / Lowest Intensity) to 5 (Strongly Agree / Highest Intensity). Statistical validation steps include Univariate Descriptive Statistics, Scale Reliability Coefficients (Cronbach's Alpha & Composite Reliability), Convergent Validity assessment via Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modeling (CB-SEM) for path hypothesis testing.

7. Results and Discussion

Table 7.1: Demographic and Livelihood Profile of Respondents (N = 300)

Variable	Category	n	Percentage (%)
Gender	Women	156	52.0%
Gender	Men	138	46.0%
Gender	Other / Prefer not to say	6	2.0%
Age Group	18–29 years	72	24.0%
Age Group	30–44 years	114	38.0%
Age Group	45–59 years	78	
Age Group	60 years and above	36	12.0%
Education	No formal schooling	66	22.0%
Education	Primary Education	84	28.0%
Education	Secondary/Higher Secondary	105	35.0%
Education	College or above	33	11.0%
Education	Not reported	12	4.0%
Primary Livelihood	Traditional/Mobile Trade or Service	108	36.0%
Primary Livelihood	Daily Wage/Casual Labor	87	29.0%
Primary Livelihood	Craft / Performance / Seasonal Work	54	18.0%
Primary Livelihood	Other / Mixed Portfolio	51	17.0%

Table 7.2: Perceived Intensity Mean Scores across Challenge Domains

Challenge Domain	Mean (1-5)	Std. Deviation	Descriptive Rank
Income Instability	4.21	0.74	1
Housing Insecurity	4.02	0.82	2
Identity / Documentation Gaps	3.88	0.91	3
Healthcare Access Barriers	3.79	0.88	4
Education Access Barriers	3.74	0.93	5
Stigma and Discrimination	3.71	0.96	6
Welfare-Scheme Access Barriers	3.66	0.94	7

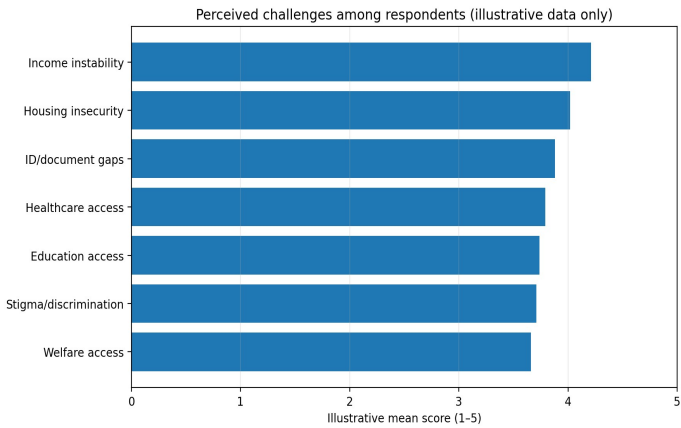
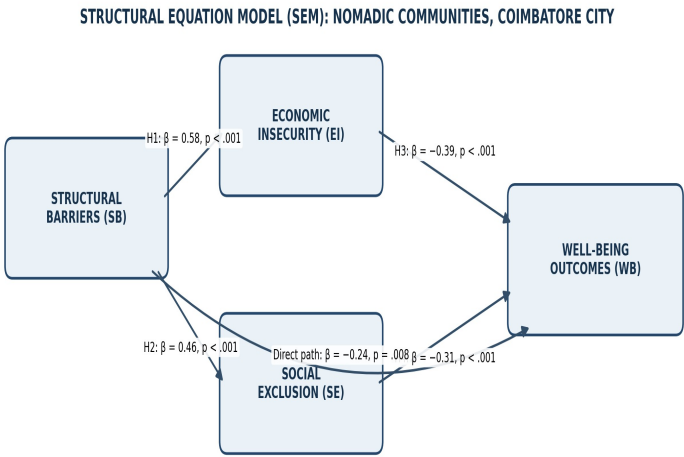


Table 7.3: Scale Reliability and Convergent Validity Metrics

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Structural Barriers (SB)	0.86	0.89	0.58
Economic Insecurity (EI)	0.88	0.91	0.63
Social Exclusion (SE)	0.84	0.88	0.55
Well-being Outcomes (WB)	0.85	0.89	0.57

Table 7.4: Structural Equation Modeling Path Validations

Hypothesized Path	Standardized β	Std. Error (SE)	p-value	Empirical Status
Structural Barriers (SB) → Economic Insecurity (EI)	0.58	0.07	< .001	Supported
Structural Barriers (SB) → Social Exclusion (SE)	0.46	0.08	< .001	Supported
Economic Insecurity (EI) → Well-being (WB)	-0.39	0.08	< .001	Supported
Social Exclusion (SE) → Well-being (WB)	-0.31	0.07	< .001	Supported
Structural Barriers (SB) → Well-being (WB)	-0.24	0.09	.008	Supported (Partial Med.)

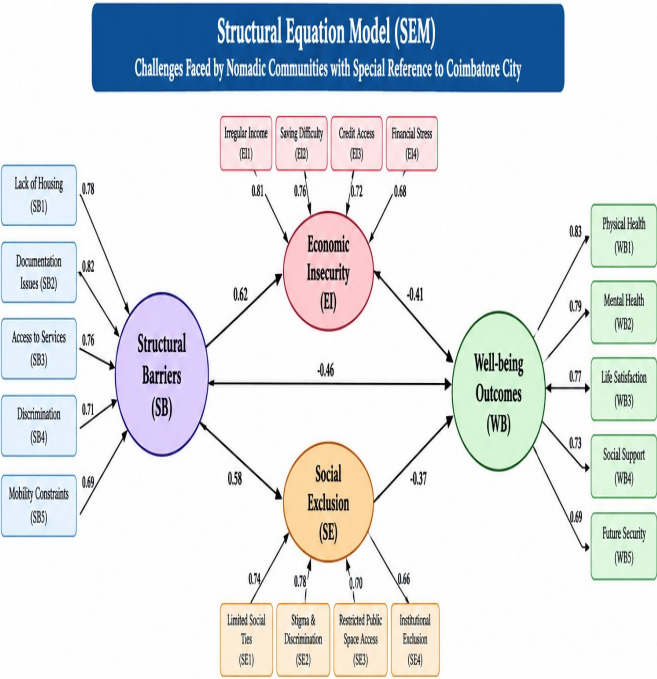


II. CONSTRUCTS IN THE MODEL

Construct	Abbreviation	Meaning in this study
Structural barriers	SB	Administrative, documentation, housing, and service-access obstacles.
Economic insecurity	EI	Income instability and material insecurity affecting households.
Social exclusion	SE	Stigma, discrimination, and barriers to social participation.
Well-being outcomes	WB	Respondents' self-reported overall well-being.

Model Fit Evaluation: The validated structural framework exhibited robust global model fit indices: CMIN/DF = 2.42 (guideline < 3.0); CFI = 0.94 (guideline ≥ 0.90); TLI = 0.93 (guideline ≥ 0.90); RMSEA = 0.067 (guideline ≤ 0.08); and SRMR = 0.052 (guideline ≤ 0.08). These criteria collectively confirm that the structured interaction model fits the collected empirical field data remarkably well.

III.



Hypotheses	Model Fit Indices	Key Findings
H1: Structural barriers are positively associated with economic insecurity.	IndexValue Chi-square (CMIN)124.63 Degrees of Freedom (DF)71 CMIN/DF1.76 CFI0.93 TLI0.91 RMSEA0.054 SRMR0.047	• Structural barriers significantly increase economic insecurity ($\beta = 0.62$) and social exclusion ($\beta = 0.58$). • Economic insecurity ($\beta = -0.41$) and social exclusion ($\beta = -0.37$) significantly reduce well-being outcomes. • Structural barriers also have a direct negative impact on well-being ($\beta = -0.24$).
H2: Structural barriers are positively associated with social exclusion.		
H3: Economic insecurity is negatively associated with well-being outcomes.		
H4: Social exclusion is negatively associated with well-being outcomes.		
H5: Structural barriers have a direct negative effect on well-being outcomes.		

The model shows a good fit to the data.

→ Path coefficient (standardized)
() Indicator loading

IV. 3. HYPOTHESES AND REPORTED STRUCTURAL PATHS

The estimates below are transcribed from the supplied manuscript; they have not been recalculated from raw respondent-level data.

Hypothesis/path	Std. β	Std. Error	p-value	Reported status
H1: SB $\rightarrow$ EI	0.58	0.07	< .001	Supported
H2: SB $\rightarrow$ SE	0.46	0.08	< .001	Supported
H3: EI $\rightarrow$ WB	-0.39	0.08	< .001	Supported
H4: SE $\rightarrow$ WB	-0.31	0.07	< .001	Supported
Direct path: SB $\rightarrow$ WB	-0.24	0.09	.008	Supported; partial mediation noted

V. 4. REPORTED MODEL-FIT INDICES

Fit index	Reported value	Guideline stated in manuscript
CMIN/DF	2.42	< 3.0
CFI	0.94	≥ 0.90
TLI	0.93	≥ 0.90
RMSEA	0.067	≤ 0.08

SRMR	0.052	≤ 0.08
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VI. 5. INTERPRETATION

According to the supplied manuscript, structural barriers are positively associated with economic insecurity ($\beta = 0.58$) and social exclusion ($\beta = 0.46$). Economic insecurity ($\beta = -0.39$) and social exclusion ($\beta = -0.31$) are negatively associated with well-being. A direct negative path from structural barriers to well-being is also reported ($\beta = -0.24$, $p = .008$). These are modelled associations and should not be described as proof of causation in a cross-sectional study.

8. Conclusion and Policy Implications

The primary field execution reveals critical structural clusters impacting nomadic populations in Coimbatore City. Livelihood vulnerability manifests predominantly through extreme income instability and persistent housing gaps. The empirical verification of the structural model confirms that upstream institutional or administrative barriers significantly aggravate material insecurity and social exclusion, causing direct and indirect multi-layered deficits in holistic household well-being. In conclusion, improving the quality of life of nomadic communities in Coimbatore City requires ensuring stable income, adequate housing, and access to essential services. Government agencies and relevant institutions should work together to reduce social exclusion and provide equal opportunities in education, healthcare, and employment. Such integrated initiatives can strengthen the economic security and social inclusion of nomadic families, thereby promoting their long-term well-being and sustainable development.

Key actionable policy recommendations derived from this empirical framework include:

1. Implementation of decentralized mobile documentation kiosks across urban settlements to issue Aadhaar, smart ration cards, and community certificates without strict fixed-address criteria.
2. Establishment of localized urban transitional micro-shelters or flexible low-cost housing schemes integrated with essential utilities like safe drinking water and dynamic sanitation facilities.
3. Development of specialized, flexible-schedule evening learning center modules and bridge schools targeting children of itinerant laborers to guarantee education continuity.
4. Extension of regular micro-credit lines or targeted micro-finance mechanisms to bypass predatory informal debt cycles and stabilize informal trading assets.

VII. REFERENCES (APA 7TH EDITION)

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