

## Original Research Article

# Unearthing transformation: a qualitative study on the impact of Radio Dhimsa bringing changes in health-seeking behaviour in Odisha's Tribal-Rich Koraput district

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** The tribal-rich Koraput district of Odisha, India, is home to diverse indigenous communities facing various socio-economic and health challenges. In this context, Radio Dhimsa, a community radio station, has emerged as a powerful medium for potential health-seeking behaviour change. This qualitative case study aims to explore Radio Dhimsa's role in the Koraput district's healthcare practices, focusing on the narratives and experiences of community members.

**Methods:** Narrative analysis explored the personal stories, struggles, and successes of individuals and communities influenced by Radio Dhimsa. The study involved in-depth interviews and content analysis of the radio programs.

**Results:** The findings demonstrate that Radio Dhimsa has played a pivotal role in preserving indigenous cultures and languages while promoting community empowerment, education, and awareness. The narratives reveal shifts in social attitudes, health-seeking behaviour, health-care practices, and community health standards attributed to the radio station.

**Conclusions:** Radio Dhimsa's impact extends beyond mere broadcasting; it catalyzes positive change in community healthcare practices, especially within underserved tribal regions. This study underscores the significance of community engagement in media-driven narratives and their contribution to transformative changes in health-seeking behaviour. Understanding the complex interplay between media and narratives in tribal communities can inform strategies for sustainable development and empowerment.

**Keywords:** Community radio, Health-seeking behaviour, Tribal, Underserved population

## INTRODUCTION

The convergence of health communication and behavior change has received a lot of attention in public health, especially in rural and underserved communities where health-seeking behaviors are influenced by cultural, social, and economic variables. Among numerous initiatives, community radio has emerged as an effective medium for closing the gap between health information transmission and behavioral change, particularly in areas with limited access to traditional media and healthcare

services. Globally, community radio is credited with solving local health issues, engaging communities, and encouraging beneficial health behaviors. In India, there are approximately 300 operational community radio stations, many of which target rural people to raise awareness and promote health interventions.<sup>1,2</sup>

In Odisha, Koraput district is a tribal-dominated and geographically isolated region with over 50% of its population belonging to Scheduled Tribes. The district faces significant challenges in healthcare delivery, with



28 codes emerged from the manual analysis of the 16 transcripts. These were grouped into 13 subthemes which led to the emergence of 4 themes, namely Role of Radio

Dhimsa, Community Health Awareness, Community-led Interventions and Sustainability and Future Impact (Table 1).

**Table 1: Emergent themes, subthemes, and codes.**

| Themes                                  | Subthemes                                 | Categories                                  | Codes                                                              |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Role of Radio Dhimsa</b>             | Information dissemination                 | Availability of health-related content      | Radio as a health information source                               |
|                                         |                                           | Accessibility of local health knowledge     | Easy to understand health messages                                 |
|                                         | Community engagement and empowerment      | Interactive discussions on health issues    | Platform for voicing concerns                                      |
|                                         |                                           | Increased participation in health dialogues | Active listener engagement                                         |
|                                         | Cultural sensitivity and local relevance  | Use of local dialect and context            | Broadcasts in Desia language                                       |
|                                         |                                           | Representation of tribal health concerns    | Addresses tribal-specific issues                                   |
|                                         | Behavioral changes and decision-making    | Shift in treatment preferences              | Seeking medical care over traditional healers                      |
|                                         |                                           | Enhanced decision-making in health choices  | Increased hospital visits                                          |
| <b>Community health awareness</b>       | Impact on health knowledge                | Awareness of diseases and prevention        | Knowledge of symptoms and treatments                               |
|                                         |                                           | Increased understanding of health services  | Awareness of free healthcare facilities                            |
|                                         | Perceived relevance of health information | Trust in radio health messages              | Credibility of radio health content                                |
|                                         |                                           | Reinforcement through repetition            | Memorization of jingles/messages                                   |
|                                         | Adoption of preventive measures           | Changes in hygiene practices                | Handwashing, sanitation improvement                                |
|                                         |                                           | Increased use of vaccinations               | Immunization awareness                                             |
| <b>Community-led interventions</b>      | Initiatives inspired by radio programs    | Youth involvement in awareness programs     | Health ambassadors among children and adolescents                  |
|                                         |                                           |                                             | Less development of addiction and antisocial behaviour among youth |
|                                         |                                           | Influence on family health practices        | Parents adopting health tips from children                         |
|                                         | Grassroots health campaigns               | Formation of local health committees        | Community-organized health meetings                                |
|                                         |                                           | Mobilization for medical camps              | Increased attendance at camps                                      |
|                                         | Participation in health initiatives       | Community-driven health education           | Teaching and learning within villages                              |
|                                         |                                           | Local advocacy for improved healthcare      | Demands for better health facilities                               |
| <b>Sustainability and future impact</b> | Long-term behavior change                 | Consistent shift towards medical care       | Preference for hospitals over traditional healers                  |
|                                         |                                           | Continued use of radio for health education | Radio as a trusted health resource                                 |
|                                         | Institutional linkages                    | Collaboration with healthcare providers     | Partnership with medical institutions                              |
|                                         |                                           | Strengthening of community health networks  | Formation of self-help groups                                      |

Continued.

| Themes | Subthemes        | Categories                                 | Codes                                 |
|--------|------------------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
|        | Future prospects | Desire for more health-related programming | Requests for expanded health content  |
|        |                  | Aspirations for improved healthcare access | Demand for more local health services |



**Figure 2: Code cloud based on the frequency of generated codes.**

Figure 2 showed the various code clouds based on frequencies. The code cloud highlighted the key themes and patterns that emerged from the qualitative study on the role of Radio Dhimsa in shaping health-seeking behaviors among tribal communities in Odisha's Koraput district. The most prominent codes-represented in larger font sizes-indicated the most frequently mentioned aspects of the study, demonstrating the areas where the radio station had the most significant influence.

One of the strongest themes observed in the study was Information Dissemination, where Radio Dhimsa emerged as a trusted health information source, particularly due to its easy-to-understand health messages delivered in the Desia language. The prominence of "Broadcasts in Desia language" and "Addresses tribal-specific issues" in the code cloud signified how linguistic and cultural relevance played a crucial role in making health information more accessible and relatable to the community. Participants reported that hearing health messages in their native language made them feel included and encouraged them to engage more actively with the information provided.

The theme of Community Engagement and Empowerment was also highly emphasized. The radio platform served as a medium for voicing concerns, fostering active listener engagement, and increasing community-led health discussions. The significance of these codes in the cloud suggested that Radio Dhimsa

went beyond passive broadcasting and facilitated interactive dialogues, allowing tribal listeners to share their health challenges and learn from each other's experiences.

Another key insight reflected in the cloud was the Behavioral Changes and Decision-Making fostered by Radio Dhimsa. The codes "Seeking medical care over traditional healers" and "Increased hospital visits" appeared prominently, indicating a clear shift in health-seeking behavior. Traditionally, many community members relied on local healers (Disharis) for medical treatment, but Radio Dhimsa's programs encouraged people to seek modern medical care. The increased awareness of free healthcare facilities further strengthened this transition, reducing financial barriers that might have previously discouraged hospital visits.

The Community Health Awareness theme also stood out, particularly in terms of knowledge of symptoms and treatments and the adoption of preventive measures. The prominence of handwashing, sanitation improvement, and immunization awareness suggested that the radio programs successfully contributed to promoting preventive healthcare practices, reducing the prevalence of communicable diseases in these tribal areas. The memorization of health jingles/messages further reflected the effectiveness of repetitive health messaging, as community members internalized key health messages and applied them in their daily lives.

A particularly interesting observation was the emergence of community-led interventions, where children and adolescents became health ambassadors. The codes “Health ambassadors among children and adolescents” and “Parents adopting health tips from children” highlighted an intergenerational knowledge transfer, where young listeners took the initiative to educate their families on healthy behaviors. Additionally, there was a decline in addiction and antisocial behavior among youth, indicating that engagement with Radio Dhimsa contributed to positive social change.

The Sustainability and Future Impact of the radio program was also reflected in the cloud. The consistent shift towards modern healthcare (as seen in the “Preference for hospitals over traditional healers” code) suggested that the impact of Radio Dhimsa was not short-lived but rather led to long-term behavioral transformation. The radio became a trusted health resource, and there were growing demands for expanded health content and more local health services, indicating an increasing reliance on credible health information sources. Furthermore, the formation of self-help groups and partnerships with medical institutions suggested that the community actively worked towards sustaining and expanding health interventions beyond just radio broadcasts.

Radio Dhimsa, a community-driven radio station, profoundly impacted the tribal communities of the Koraput district, fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment. Unlike other radio channels in English and Hindi, Radio Dhimsa broadcasted in Desia, the local dialect, creating a deep connection with its listeners. As one participant fondly expressed, “We had many radio channels in English and Hindi but not in Desia... It gave us a feeling that it was our own station, by our own people, working for us” (Participant 1).

### ***A voice for the community***

For many, Radio Dhimsa became more than just a source of entertainment; it served as a powerful medium for voicing health concerns. Listeners felt heard, validated, and included in discussions about their well-being. “The radio station gave us a platform to voice our health concerns” (Participant 3), shared one participant, highlighting its role in bridging the communication gap between healthcare providers and the community. Another listener emphasized the emotional connection fostered by the station, stating, “The personalized health stories on Radio Dhimsa made us feel connected. It was like learning from our neighbors” (Participant 4).

### ***Community-led awareness***

One of the most remarkable aspects of Radio Dhimsa’s impact was its ability to deliver health messages in an engaging and memorable way. Through catchy jingles and relatable storytelling, health awareness seamlessly

wove itself into the fabric of everyday life. As one listener noted, “The radio jingles were catchy, but the health messages were even more memorable. We found ourselves repeating them” (Participant 2). This repetition transformed casual listeners into active participants, reinforcing positive health behaviors within the community.

### ***Empowering community-led interventions***

Beyond awareness, the station inspired proactive health initiatives within families and neighborhoods. Children, in particular, emerged as key agents of change. A proud parent shared, “Our children became health ambassadors... Instead of spending their free time gambling or drinking, they took part in creating programs and taught the same to us” (Participant 5). This shift in youth engagement had a ripple effect on older generations as well. Another participant reflected, “How could we not follow something that our children said and did? Today’s children knew the best, right?” (Participant 7). This generational transfer of knowledge underscored the sustainability of health awareness fostered by Radio Dhimsa.

### ***Sustainability and future impact***

The transformation sparked by Radio Dhimsa extended beyond individual behavior to systemic changes in health-seeking practices. Many listeners, who once relied solely on traditional healers, actively sought medical assistance at healthcare centers. “Earlier, we used to go to local Disharis for our treatment, but Radio Dhimsa encouraged us to go to hospitals as well” (Participant 6). Others emphasized how their understanding of health and available services deepened over time. “Our understanding of health evolved. We now knew about the health services available to us free of cost” (Participant 9), shared another listener, reflecting the long-term impact of the radio station on informed decision-making.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings from this qualitative study highlight the transformative impact of Radio Dhimsa on health-seeking behavior in Odisha’s tribal-rich Koraput district. Through in-depth interviews with 16 participants, the study identified four major themes—Role of Radio Dhimsa, Community Health Awareness, Community-led Interventions, and Sustainability and Future Impact—each contributing to the broader shift towards informed health decisions within the tribal communities. The analysis, supported by a code cloud visualization, underscores the significant role played by Radio Dhimsa in fostering health awareness and behavioral change.

One of the most striking findings is the importance of information dissemination through culturally relevant and linguistically accessible content. Radio Dhimsa, broadcasting in the Desia language, has bridged the gap

between healthcare providers and tribal communities by presenting complex health messages in an easy-to-understand manner. This localization of health communication has not only made information more relatable but has also encouraged greater community engagement. Participants expressed a deep connection with the station, reinforcing the idea that accessible communication is fundamental in improving health literacy.

Community engagement and empowerment emerged as another crucial theme, with the radio station providing an interactive platform for discussions on health issues. The active listener engagement demonstrated in the study highlights how Radio Dhimsa has gone beyond passive broadcasting to create a two-way dialogue where community members can voice their concerns and learn from one another's experiences. This participatory approach has strengthened the trust in health messages and has encouraged tribal communities to take ownership of their health outcomes.

A significant behavioral shift was also observed in terms of health-seeking practices and decision-making. Traditionally, reliance on Disharis (local healers) was prevalent in these communities, but Radio Dhimsa has played a critical role in shifting this paradigm towards hospital-based care. Participants reported an increase in hospital visits and utilization of free healthcare services, indicating a move towards evidence-based medical treatment. The repetitive health messaging strategy, including jingles and storytelling, further solidified key health concepts, leading to greater awareness and proactive health behaviors.

The study also sheds light on community-led interventions, particularly the role of youth as health ambassadors. A notable finding was the intergenerational transfer of knowledge, where children and adolescents, after learning from the radio programs, influenced their families' health decisions. This shift not only improved household health practices but also contributed to a decline in addiction and antisocial behaviors among youth. The emergence of local health committees and community-driven health education initiatives signifies a broader social impact, as the radio's influence extends beyond individual listeners to collective action for improved health outcomes.

Finally, the study highlights the sustainability and long-term impact of Radio Dhimsa's programs. The consistent preference for modern healthcare services suggests a lasting change in health-seeking behavior rather than a temporary shift. Additionally, the institutional linkages formed with healthcare providers indicate a growing synergy between the community and formal health systems. Participants also expressed a desire for expanded health programming and better healthcare access, emphasizing the need for continued investment in community-based media as a tool for health promotion.

## CONCLUSION

Radio Dhimsa has emerged as a powerful catalyst for health transformation in Odisha's tribal communities. By combining local language broadcasting, interactive engagement, and culturally sensitive content, the radio station has successfully fostered health awareness, behavioral shifts, and community-driven health initiatives. The findings of this study reinforce the potential of community radio as a sustainable medium for public health communication, especially in marginalized and underserved regions. Future efforts should focus on expanding the scope of health programming, strengthening partnerships with healthcare providers, and ensuring long-term sustainability of such initiatives to further enhance health outcomes in these communities.

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