

Letter to the Editor

[The Editor is not responsible for the views expressed by the correspondents]

End TB by 2025 : Tribal Perspective

SIR, — We read with interest the article on 'End TB by 2025: Way forward to achieve this mission while recovering from the COVID-19 Pandemic' by Dr Surya Kant in your April 2021 issue. Dr. Surya Kant has discussed in detail the TB situation in the country and the possible impact of Covid 19 on tuberculosis burden in the country. The article also mentions about the commitment of Government of India to eliminate TB by 2025 – five years ahead of the Global target. The NTEP has developed the National Strategic Plan (NSP) 2017-2025 to achieve the targets set to achieve the goal. While the country is taking steps to achieve the goal, the tuberculosis situation in vulnerable population groups deserves special attention. The tribal population is one of these vulnerable groups in the country. According to Census of India -2011, the Scheduled Tribe population in the country is 104 million constituting 8.6% of the country's population. Though, the information on TB situation in tribal population is limited, the available literature point towards high TB burden especially in some tribal groups such as Saharia – a Particularly Vulnerable

Tribal Group (PVTG) in Madhya Pradesh. A series of studies conducted by our group reported a very high TB prevalence ranging from 1518 to 3294/100000 population among them which is five to ten times higher than the national average. The disproportionate disease burden remains a huge challenge for India's TB elimination programme especially in view of our goal of 'Ending TB by 2025'. Though the decline in TB prevalence in this tribe has been reported, there is no room for complacency as it is still alarmingly high and is a matter of concern. What is more worrisome at the present time due to COVID-19 is the overburdening of already inaccessible health services in most tribal areas. This may further deteriorate the TB situation in high TB burden tribal communities. Considering these and to bring TB elimination in to reality, there is an urgent need to frame realistic action plan to address high TB burden in tribal groups such as Saharias in Madhya Pradesh.

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