



# EP01.14 - Oral Potentially Malignant Disorders as Early Cancer Risk Markers among Tobacco-Using Malayali Tribes, India

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## INTRODUCTION

Tobacco use is a major preventable risk factor for cancer; oral potentially malignant disorders (OPMDs) are early clinical markers of tobacco-related oral carcinogenesis. Indigenous/tribal populations face disproportionate tobacco exposure and limited access to preventive oral health services.

**Aim: to estimate the prevalence of OPMDs among tobacco users in the Malayali tribes, and need for early detection of oral cancer.**

## METHODS

### Design:

A community-based cross-sectional study was conducted among Malayali tribal tobacco users across 14 villages of Yelagiri Hills, Tamil Nadu, including adults aged  $\geq 18$  years who had resided in the area for more than 15 years. A total of 240 tobacco users were identified through a community survey. Data were collected using a structured proforma and pre-tested questionnaire, along with intra-oral clinical examination, and tobacco and alcohol consumption patterns were recorded. OPMDs were diagnosed based on WHO criteria on intra-oral examination, and statistical analysis was performed using SPSS (version 27)

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### Actionable Take-Away Message

The high burden of tobacco use and associated OPMDs among the Malayali tribal population highlights a critical opportunity for early cancer prevention through community-based screening.

### Future Directions

Community-based oral screening, culturally tailored tobacco cessation strategies, and integration of oral cancer prevention into primary tribal health services are urgently needed to interrupt progression from premalignant disease to cancer in this high-risk population.

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## RESULTS

Among 240 Malayali tribal tobacco users, 57.7% had no formal education.

- Tobacco use was highly prevalent: raw tobacco chewing 65%, combined smoking + smokeless use 28%, beedi smoking 26%, commercial smokeless tobacco 18%, cigarette smoking 10.9%.
- **Clinically detectable oral mucosal lesions consistent with OPMDs were observed predominantly among tobacco users, particularly those with long-term and combined habit patterns.**
- Lack of awareness regarding health hazards and culturally embedded beliefs were commonly reported contributing factors.

