

# Lifestyle of Women in Tea Garden Community: A Systematic Literature Review

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## Abstract

Tea is integral part of our society. Popularity of tea as a beverage was established by the British East India Company. However, the soothing aroma and delicate beauty of tea conceal the harsh reality of the heavy labor of tea garden workers, specifically women. More than fifty percent of workers in tea industry are women. So, the economic role of women in tea industry is very crucial. In the tea garden community women are the primary breadwinners and men livelihood depend on them. They manage both domestic responsibilities and work in tea estate from early in the morning to evening. Despite this, in their community women receive limited recognition and value. They also struggle for decent education, healthcare, living conditions, and safety. To better understand their circumstances, a systematic review was conducted to provide an overview of lifestyle of the female tea garden community. Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) was used to identify, screening the article then eligible articles were included. A total number of 932 studies were eligible for systematic review. Most of the studies were obtained from Google Scholar, followed by Science Direct and Eric. Only 16 studies were included in our study. Based on these studies, educational and financial condition are the major factor that effect their lifestyle. Studies pointed out tea community women are in most vulnerable position. Every aspect of their lifestyle is filled with difficulties from their early marriage to discrepancies in wages. So, there is a need for evidence based, comprehensive intervention procedures to uplift the women's lifestyle of tea community.

**Keyword:** Lifestyle, Livelihood, Living Condition, women, Tea Garden Community.

## INTRODUCTION:

We are all familiar with the word “tea”. This word evokes feelings of comfort and warmth. As a major global tea producer, India produces 31% of the global tea. Assam, West Bengal, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu are the four states that produce most of the tea in India (S. Aruna, 2024). Thousands of people work in tea gardens, and this community is defined as a tea garden community. They are generally tribal people who were migrated in the 19th century. Though tea is the second most popular global beverage, the lifestyle of this community is very hard and unpredictable.

In general, lifestyle is defined as a way of living. In addition to this definition, lifestyle also describes individual or group behaviour, including their daily domestic and work-related activity, health condition, and well-being (A.J. Veal 1993). Among the tea garden community, lifestyle is slightly different than others because integration of the tea culture and tea preparation work into their daily life. The tea garden workforce is divided into two categories: permanent workers who are employed full-time and paid daily,

and temporary workers, known locally as ‘Bigha Worker’, who work seasonally. Seasonal workers are hired to help out with the during plucking time (Sarkar, B. C. 2017). Tea preparation work varies seasonally; in the peak season, they only pluck the tea leaves. In the dry season, they do the weeding, dressing tea plants, applying fertiliser, clearing the forest and land for the extension of plantation areas, pruning vulnerable tea trees, and repairing canals and roads. Though job hierarchy operates in minimal level among tea garden workers, there is a distinct division of labour based on gender.

Women play a vital role in the tea industry comprising half its workforce. However, in the tea community, women are always perceived as having “soft hands and nimble fingers” (Sarkar K. 2015). Generally, women in the tea community are isolated from main society, which is why they lag in various social, political, and health-related rights, despite the Plantation Labour Act (1951), which was established to secure the minimum standards of healthcare, accommodation, paid leaves, education facilities, housing, and wages. Due to illiteracy, unskilledness, and poverty, they have limited scope and opportunity in aspects like job and personal life (Sharma et al., 2013 & Biswas, 2015). As a product-based industry, tea industry workers’ wages depended on tea production, where discrimination against women is clear, despite provisions of the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, and the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 (Saikia et al. 2013). The unfree condition of women in the tea garden gradually changed their social life, like their marriage, family structure, and status. As tea garden community women, they have to take responsibility both in domestic and economic fields. However, they suffer from sexual abuse and insecurity in both places (Mitra, 2021). To overcome this sadness and desperation, they consume alcohol for temporary relief, which affects their health in the long term. They often develop several diseases like skin ulcers, malaria, skin rashes, infection due to exposure to different pesticides, long-standing work in the sun, the length of the task, and working posture (Gogoi & Radha 2023). Unfortunately, women have to face significant challenges to provide basic necessities for their families. Because their husbands spent their wages within a few days (Sharma & Bhuyan 2016).

This implies that women’s lifestyle in the tea garden community is affected by several factors like – educational status, home environment, safety, health, and financial condition. Many attempts have been made to describe each factor but there are no exploration has been made on previous studies about the lifestyle of women in the tea garden community. From the existing body of knowledge, the researchers want to provide reliable and unbiased summarized content that will help the legislator and academician to convert the garden community into a better living place.

## OBJECTIVES

- Identify the most influential factors of lifestyle among tea garden community women.
- Finding the research trend of women lifestyle in tea garden community based on year.

## METHODOLOGY

For this study, researchers chose systematic literature review as a study design. Systematic Literature Review is a process where systematically pre-decided, transparent criteria are used to collect the relevant literature from different data sources on a given topic and summarize the studies to answer the research question (Menigst, W. et al .2020). Research questions are selected first, next step is to set the criteria for articles and then assess the quality of the article. Finally, the selected articles were summarized and synthesized according to the research questions. For selecting the article, PRISMA model was used, this model has four phases – Identification, Screening, Eligibility, and Inclusion (Selcuk, 2019).

### Article Searching Strategy

In systematic literature review mainly SCOPUS and Web of Science were used to search the data because of the quality and impactful databases. In this study, researchers used Google Scholar, and ERIC to search the articles because of the limited articles on other databases. Also on those databases articles were not aligned with our keywords. Keywords such as “Living Condition”, “livelihood”, “lifestyle”, “women”, “tea garden community” and “tea garden worker” were used to search for articles.

### Article Selection Criteria

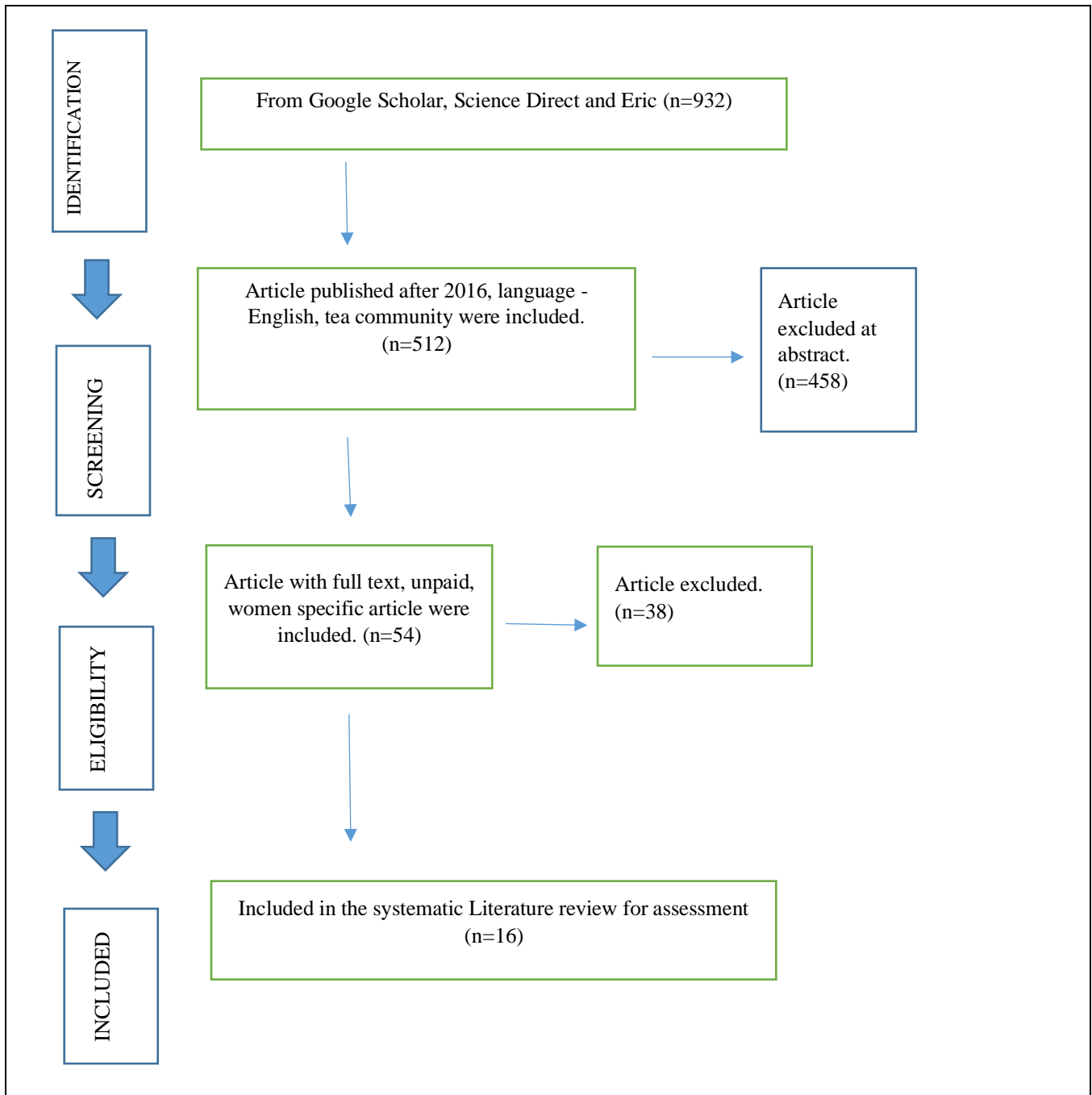
Based on some criteria, articles are selected. Selected articles are from 2016 to 2024. Published articles must be in English language. Journal articles must relate to tea garden community. Gender is also selected as a selection strategy which means women-based articles were chosen for this study. The selection criteria for this study are shown in Table

**Table No. 1 Article Selection Criteria**

Criteria	Acceptance	Rejection
Year of Publication	Article Published from 2016 to 2024.	Article published before 2016
Language	English	Language except English
Gender	Female	Other than Female
Community	Tea Garden	Other than Tea Garden

### Article Selection Process

The article selection process is shown in Figure 1. For showing the different phases of systematic literature review, PRISMA model was used. In the identification stage, 932 articles were found from Google Scholar, Science Direct and Eric databases. Second, these articles were screened based on some excluded and included criteria, those included criteria were – published after 2016, article written in English language, tea community related and journal articles. Excluded criteria were – articles published before 2016, written other than English language, other community, review articles, dissertations or thesis and proceedings. Only 54 study were selected for eligibility stage. In the eligibility stage, only full text, unpaid and women specific articles were included. After thoroughly studying the articles, researchers included those in final stage which were fit with the context of the study. So, 16 articles were included in systematic literature review.



**Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram in the article selection procedure.**

### Data Collection and Analysis

Data were obtained through Google scholar, Science Direct, and ERIC databases. The criteria for the data selection were articles year, language, and journal articles. Then based on PRISMA model 16 articles were selected for the study. Title, year of publication, author name, and country were extracted from each article and collected into a table using Microsoft Excel. Analyzed data were shown in the form of Tables and Figures.

**Table No. 2 List of Previous Research Articles**

Authors Name	Year of Publication	State	Title
Majumder, S., & Roy Chowdhury,	2024	West Bengal, India.	Beyond the leaves: Unveiling the societal impact of research on the self-perceived quality of life among indigenous female tea garden workers.
Bhuyan, H.	2024	Assam, India.	Status of the Tea Garden Women Workers of Assam: An Analysis.
Das & Paul	2024	West Bengal, India.	Livelihood realism of tribal women: A case study on the perspectives of the tea garden workers in Jalpaiguri district, West Bengal, India.
Murmu & Pyal	2024	West Bengal, India	Women Socio-Economic Status of Tea Garden Labourers In Darjeeling District, West Bengal.
Gogoi & Radha	2023	Assam, India.	Living and Working Conditions of Women Tea Garden Workers in Assam.
Sarkar, S. Dr.	2022	West Bengal, India.	Gender Discourse on Displacement and Livelihood Issues: A Study of Women Tea Plantation Workers, North Bengal, India.
Jumi et al.	2021	Assam, India.	Problems Faced by Women Tea Plantation Workers in Performing Their Duties.
Chatterjee, R.	2021	West Bengal, India.	Women in a Mountainous Society: A Case from Limbu Community.
Rajbangshi, P & Nambiar, D	2020	Assam, India.	“Who will stand up for us?” the social determinants of health of women tea plantation workers in India.
Basistha, S	2019	Assam, India.	Exploring the socio-economic profile of the women labourers in the tea garden of Sonitpur District Assam.
Begum, R.	2019	Assam, India.	Socio-economic Status of Tea Garden Women Workers of Assam: A study with special reference to Mohima Tea Estate in the Golaghat district of Assam.
Bora et al.	2018	Assam, India.	Availability and utilization of sanitation facilities amongst the tea garden population of Jorhat district, Assam.

Gurung, M and Roy Mukherjee, S.	2018	West Bengal, India.	Gender, Women and Work in the Tea Plantation: A Case Study of Darjeeling Hills.
Moktan, R.	2018	West Bengal, India.	Education Status of Women Workers in the Tea Industry of Darjiling: A Geographical Analysis.
Roy, S	2017	West Bengal, India.	Women Labour in the Tea Gardens of West Bengal: Changing Orientation and Emerging Challenges.
Sharma, A and Bhuyan, B.	2016	Assam, India.	Livelihood pattern among the Tea garden labours: Some Observations.

**Discussion**

**Table No.3 Findings Based on Articles**

Sl. No.	Factors	Author name
1.	Education	Basistha, S. (2019), Begum, R. (2019), Bhuyan, H. (2024), Chatterjee, R (2021), Gogoi and Radha. (2023), Gurung, M and Roy, Mukherjee, S. (2018), Majumder, S., & Roy Chowdhury (2024), Moktan, R (2018), Murmu and Pyal (2024), Rajbangshi, P and Nambiar, D. (2020), Roy, S (2017), Sarkar, S (2022), Sharma, A. and Bhuyan, B. (2016)
2.	Work Environment	Jumi et al. (2021), Gurung, M and Roy Mukherjee, S. (2018), Sharma, A. and Bhuyan, B. (2016), Rajbangshi, P and Nambiar, D. (2020)
3.	Sanitation	Sharma, A. and Bhuyan, B. (2016), Bora et al. (2018), Jumi et al. (2021), Basistha, S. (2019), Rajbangshi, P and Nambiar, D. (2020), Gurung, M and Roy, Mukherjee, S. (2018),
4.	Safety	Sarkar, S (2022), Roy, S (2017), Rajbangshi, P and Nambiar, D. (2020), Bhuyan, H. (2024),
5.	Housing	Bhuyan, H. (2024), Gogoi and Radha. (2023), Sharma, A. and Bhuyan, B. (2016), Gurung, M and Roy Mukherjee, S. (2018), Bora et al. (2018), Begum, R. (2019), Rajbangshi, P and, Nambiar, D. (2020), Das and Paul (2024),
6.	Health Care	Jumi et al. (2021), Majumder, S., & Roy Chowdhury (2024), Chatterjee, R (2021), Bhuyan, H. (2024), Gogoi and Radha. (2023), Roy, S. (2017), Murmu and Pyal (2024), Rajbangshi, P and Nambiar, D. (2020), Begum, R. (2019), Sarkar, S (2022),
7.	Financial Condition	Gogoi and Radha. (2023), Chatterjee, R (2021), Sarkar, S (2022), Sharma, A. and Bhuyan, B. (2016), Bhuyan, H. (2024), Das and Paul (2024), Gurung, M and Roy Mukherjee, S. (2018), Bora et al. (2018),

		Jumi et al. (2021), Murmu and Pyal (2024), Rajbangshi, P and, Nambiar, D. (2020), Begum, R. (2019)
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### Discussion for first objective

The study found that various factors influence the Lifestyle of Women in the tea garden community based on a systematic literature review. In this study, researchers selected seven factors. The study results revealed that educational and financial condition, play a vital role in influencing women's Lifestyle in tea garden community. Among the two factors, education included 13 studies and financial condition included 12 studies.

Women workers are paid a fixed daily wage, known as 'Haziri', which is earned by completing a specified daily work quota (Gurung, M and Roy, Mukherjee, S. 2018). Women workers often had to continue plucking tea leaves during rain without any proper protective gear, only using traditional hats 'Japi' or plastic bags to shield themselves from the rain. Because they feared losing wages if they didn't meet their daily quota (Rajbangshi, P and Nambiar, D. 2020 & Jumi, et. al. 2021). During peak seasons, tea gardens rely on temporary workers who work longer hours than their experienced colleagues, putting in an average of 8 hours a day, despite working equally hard, they are denied the same benefits as permanent employees. Management has pressure to continue their work whether the weather is good or bad. In the summer season, women face the constant threat of snake bites, and the winter and rainy seasons bring their challenges, with mosquitoes and frogs becoming a nuisance (Sharma, A. and Bhuyan, B. 2016).

Gogoi and Radha (2023) revealed that the majority of the workers have "Kacha House" but Begum (2019) stated permanent worker have their quarter while the other workers have "Paaka Bari". However, the authority did not provide the repair and renovation work of the resident quarters despite their constant complaints (Rajbangshi and Nambiar 2020). Though, the lands they live like their own land in reality, they have no rights on that land also the next generations do not have the right to inherit their residential home (Das and Paul, 2023 & Gogoi and Radha, 2023). Women live in unhygienic sanitary environments without access to basic comfort. Most houses in the tea community lack proper bathrooms and hand washing facilities are unavailable in toilets. Many people are forced to use unsanitary pit latrines. They are struggling with a lack of clean water, and they have to buy drinking water or send family members usually girls to fetch water from distant sources (Sharma, A. and Bhuyan, B. 2016 & Bora et al. 2018 & Gurung, M and Roy, Mukherjee, S. 2018). Also, the sanitation infrastructure at work was found to be inadequate. Therefore, there were no facilities for changing sanitary pads or clothes at work. Women were forced to change their pads or clothes in unsanitary conditions, or under tea bushes (Rajbangshi, P. and Nambiar, D. 2020). Even women do not know about menstrual hygiene. Due to busy schedules and low economic conditions, malnutrition is common among women. The maternal mortality rate is also higher in the garden community because of overwork, malnutrition, and the unavailability of nearby hospitals and healthcare facilities (Bhuyan, 2024). Even pregnant women in the tea industry are compelled to work long hours in their final months, and just days after childbirth for inadequate maternity leave (Jumi et al, 2021). However, the women in the tea community have more belief in shamans rather than in doctors and they still use witchcraft for illness (Begum, 2019 & Chatterjee, 2021). The primary health care is available, but free health care is only for permanent workers and it has become more financial burden if other family members get sick (Gogoi and Radha, 2023 & Rajbangshi, 2020). Women often face abuse and sexual harassment from managers and tea planters. Many tea planters keep young women in their homes or

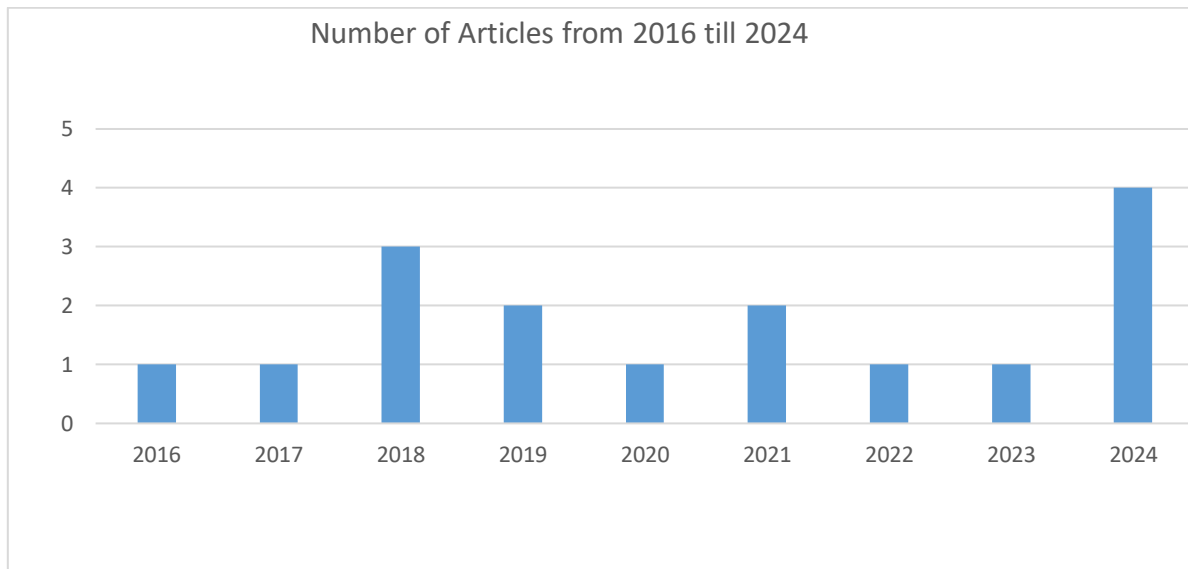
bungalow for sexual exploration. However, in this community witch hunts are common, and many women are killed as a result. Many young girls are trafficked and exploited in tea gardens. Unfortunately, violence is a common occurrence in tea garden, and their families have become desensitized to it. In this community, people are unaware of their legal rights and fear the legal process. They often neglect missing children due to poverty and a lack of understanding about the outside world (Bhuyan, H.2024 & Roy, S. 2017 & Sarkar, S. 2022).

Women workers' monthly income is Rs. 3000 to 6000 which is insufficient, many of them overtime because their income does not cover their daily expenditures (Jumi et al. 2021 & Sharma & Bhuyan, 2016 & Gogoi and Radha, 2023). Sarkar (2022) shared that women workers grew bonded over the tea garden which is why after low wages and humiliation they tend to stay close to the garden. Household heads have positive outlooks towards working women because the majority of them work in a family atmosphere. Women also have to perform dual work like household maintenance, and garden work, and they also enjoy economic freedom (Roy, 2017). Bhuyan, (2024) reported most of the financial decisions are made by the wife, however, women do not have the opportunity to spend their hard-earned money for their comfort, and gender equality in the tea garden society is still a dream (Begum, 2019). Women in the tea garden community do not have access to financial facilities provided by the government, or knowledge regarding savings to support their children in their education. Seasonal work makes them economically vulnerable, recently different self-help groups have been formed for women workers to help them financially. Das and Paul (2023) recommended introducing a flexible microcredit system of finance and need-based skill training must be introduced.

Many women in the tea garden community were deprived of educational opportunities (Chatterjee, R., 2021, & Rajbangshi, P. and Nambiar, D., 2020) and they get very little exposure to higher education (Gogoi and Radha, 2023). Also, school enrollment rates among girls children are low because their parents work in tea gardens, and the girls have to take care of their younger siblings in the house (Sharma, A. and Bhuyan, B. 2016). Bhuyan, H. (2024) also found that women in tea garden community educational condition was unsatisfactory. Compared to male workers, female workers have significantly lower levels of basic education. This disparity is likely due to societal norms and a lack of attention from estate authorities (Moktan, R., 2018). Widespread illiteracy among tea garden women and a lack of job skills hinder their path to alternative job opportunities (Majumder, S., & Roy Chowdhury, 2024, & Gurung, M and Roy, Mukherjee, S., 2018). Among the tea garden community, most of them belong to the Adivasi community, they tend to send their children to work rather in school and also they still don't see the value in educating girls, and believe it's a waste of resources (Chatterjee, R., 2021 & Murmu and Pyl, 2024). Basistha, S., (2019) & Sarkar, S. (2022) found some reasons why women lose interest in their education, lack of proper attention, uneducated parents, economic conditions, lack of facilities in the gardens, teacher-student ratio, lack of equipment in the schools, and language barrier. Though older women struggle with basic literacy, and despite their limitations, nowadays they encourage the younger generation to pursue education (Roy, S. 2017). Therefore, organizing women's literacy campaign is one of many ways to eradicate illiteracy and educate the community to understand the importance of education for women.



## Discussion for Second Objective



**Figure No. 2 Frequency of Number of Articles from 2016 till 2024**

The research trend of lifestyle of women in tea garden community based on the year showed the number of publications from 2016-2024. The highest number of articles published in years 2024, which was four. The second highest number of articles published in years were in 2018 was three. The third highest number of articles were published in 2019 and 2021. At last, a similar number of articles were published in five years respectively in 2016, 2017, 2020, 2022, and 2023 which was one.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the study found that education as well as economic conditions are the biggest factors that influence lifestyle of women in the tea garden community. The year 2024 has the highest number of research publications on lifestyle of women in tea garden community. This study has several limitations such as limited access to high impact journals, and most of the articles were obtained from Google Scholar. However, the summarized content of this study proved that little exposure to education hinders the process of upward mobility of women's lifestyle in tea garden community. So, policymakers should develop different intervention programs for women. The challenges, the women are facing in family and work, can only be resolved if the government acts decisively and takes economic and social welfare responsibility for women of the tea garden community.

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