

Socio-Economic Dimensions of Rural Development in Kullu District

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ABSTRACT

Rural areas in Himalayan regions are undergoing significant socio-economic transformation due to economic diversification, infrastructural development, and targeted policy interventions. Understanding these changes is essential for ensuring balanced and sustainable rural development. The present study examines the socio-economic determinants influencing rural development processes in Kullu District. Primary data were collected from 180 rural households using a structured interview schedule, focusing on household characteristics, access to public services, livelihood opportunities, and community participation. Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, including chi-square test, correlation, and multiple regression analysis, were applied to identify key factors affecting household welfare and development outcomes.

The findings reveal that socio-economic conditions, particularly income level, education, and occupation, significantly influence household welfare. Access to public services such as healthcare, drinking water, electricity, education, and road connectivity plays a crucial role in improving living standards. Livelihood diversification and community participation also emerge as important determinants of rural development. The regression model indicates that these variables collectively explain a substantial proportion of variation in household welfare, highlighting strong explanatory power. The study concludes that rural development in the region is gradually improving; however, disparities persist between marginal, small, and medium households. The research emphasises the need for strengthening human capital, improving infrastructure, ensuring equitable service delivery, and promoting diversified livelihood opportunities to achieve long-term sustainable development in Himalayan rural areas.

Keywords: *Livelihood Diversification; Human Capital; Community Participation; Infrastructure Accessibility; Regional Planning; Household Welfare*

INTRODUCTION

Rural development remains a central component of India's development agenda because a large proportion of the population continues to reside in rural areas. Development is now understood in a broader sense, extending beyond economic growth to include improvements in living standards, access to essential services, social inclusion, and overall community well-being. In mountainous regions, the process of development is particularly complex due to geographical constraints, limited resource availability, fragile ecosystems, and restricted livelihood opportunities, all of which significantly influence the pace and pattern of rural transformation.

Kullu District represents an important Himalayan region where agriculture, horticulture, tourism, and small-scale enterprises play a vital role in sustaining rural livelihoods. Over the past few decades, substantial improvements in road connectivity, educational infrastructure, healthcare facilities, and government development programmes have contributed to noticeable changes in rural living conditions. These developments have enhanced access to markets, improved mobility, and expanded employment opportunities in both farm and non-farm sectors.

Despite these positive changes, significant disparities still exist in the distribution of resources and access to essential services. Variations in employment opportunities, income levels, and infrastructure availability continue to create unequal development outcomes across different social and economic groups. Marginal households, in particular, often face limited access to resources, lower income stability, and fewer opportunities for livelihood diversification, which hinders inclusive development.

Against this backdrop, the present study aims to examine the socio-economic dimensions shaping rural development outcomes in Kullu District. It seeks to identify the key factors influencing household welfare and overall development processes by analysing variables such as income, education, occupation, access to public services, and community participation. The study also highlights the need for integrated and inclusive policy approaches to ensure balanced and sustainable rural development in Himalayan regions.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature helps to understand existing studies related to rural development and identify research gaps in the field. It provides a theoretical and empirical base for the study and helps in selecting appropriate variables and methodology. It also guides the researcher in understanding socio-economic and infrastructural factors affecting rural households. Moreover, it ensures that the present study is scientifically grounded and contributes new knowledge to existing research.

Sharma (2012) conducted a study on rural Himalayan regions and reported gradual socio-economic transformation due to a shift from subsistence agriculture toward diversified livelihood activities. The study emphasised that education, income, and occupational structure play a crucial role in determining household welfare outcomes.

Kumar and Verma (2016) conducted a study in Himachal Pradesh and found that access to basic amenities such as drinking water, electricity, healthcare, and education significantly improves rural living standards. Their study reported that road connectivity and electrification have improved substantially, but healthcare accessibility in remote villages remains a major concern.

Joshi and Pant (2017) examined livelihood patterns in Himalayan villages and found increasing dependence on horticulture, tourism, and wage employment in addition to traditional agriculture. The study concluded that livelihood diversification reduces vulnerability and improves income stability. However, marginal farmers face constraints in adopting diversified economic activities due to limited land and capital resources.

Das (2019) emphasized that household welfare is strongly influenced by income level, employment status, and access to public services. The study revealed that households with better access to infrastructure and government schemes tend to have higher welfare outcomes.

Sharma and Kaur (2021) analysed the impact of government welfare schemes in rural India and found that such programmes have significantly improved access to basic services. However, the effectiveness of these schemes varies across socio-economic groups, with marginal households benefiting less compared to medium and large landholders.

Verma (2022) highlighted that community participation plays a key role in ensuring effective implementation of rural development programmes. The study found that households actively involved in local institutions and self-help groups show better awareness and utilisation of public services, leading to improved socio-economic outcomes.

Kumar and Thakur (2023) studied rural development trends in Himachal Pradesh and observed significant improvements in infrastructure, education, and electrification. However, they also reported that healthcare services and drinking water supply remain uneven across different villages, especially in high-altitude areas.

Singh et al. (2024–2025) emphasize the importance of sustainable rural development strategies in Himalayan regions. These studies highlight climate change impacts, migration trends, and the need for integrated rural planning. They conclude that long-term development requires strengthening human capital, improving infrastructure equity, and promoting diversified livelihoods.

Research Gap

Although studies by Sharma (2012), Singh (2015), and Kumar & Verma (2016) have examined rural development in Himalayan regions, important gaps still remain. Most research treats socio-economic and infrastructural factors separately with limited integrated analysis. Studies by Reddy & Singh (2020) highlight inequality and policy impacts but lack multivariate analysis of household welfare. Further, district-level evidence from Kullu is limited, especially based on recent primary household data. Therefore, this study addresses these gaps by analysing 180 rural households using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To assess the socio-economic profile of rural households in Kullu District.
- To examine access to basic amenities and public services among rural households.
- To analyse the influence of socio-economic and infrastructural factors on household welfare.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Study Area

The study adopted a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the socio-economic dimensions of rural development in selected areas of Kullu District, Himachal Pradesh, with a focused case study of the Sainj Valley. The descriptive component was used to analyse household socio-economic characteristics and access to basic development facilities, while the analytical component focused on examining relationships among selected variables influencing rural development outcomes. The Sainj Valley was taken as a case study area, representing a remote Himalayan sub-region characterized by ecological sensitivity, limited infrastructural connectivity, dependence on agriculture, horticulture, and forest-based livelihoods, along with emerging tourism activities, making it suitable for understanding rural transformation processes at the micro level. The study area was purposively selected due to its diverse rural economy and varying levels of infrastructural and socio-economic development across villages. A total of 180 households were selected to ensure adequate representation of rural socio-economic conditions. A multistage sampling technique was adopted, involving the selection of development blocks in Kullu district, followed by selection of villages from both Kullu Valley and the Sainj Valley case study area, and finally selection of households through random sampling to ensure representativeness and minimize selection bias.

Data Collection

The study is based on both primary and secondary data sources for the financial year 2025–26. Primary data were collected through a structured interview schedule administered to the selected households, supported by a comprehensive household survey to capture detailed socio-economic information. In addition, personal interviews were conducted to obtain in-depth qualitative insights from respondents, while field observations were undertaken to assess real-time conditions related to housing, infrastructure, and livelihood patterns in the study area. Secondary data were compiled from authenticated sources, including the Census of India reports, District Statistical Handbook of Kullu, various government publications, and relevant peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and research reports, which were used to strengthen the analytical framework and contextualize the empirical findings.

Statistical Tools

The data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive tools such as frequency distribution, percentage, mean,

and standard deviation were used to describe the socio-economic conditions of the respondents in a simple and clear form. Inferential tools like the Chi-Square test, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analysis were used to test relationships between variables and to examine the hypotheses of the study. These tests helped in understanding how different socio-economic factors are related to rural development outcomes in the study area. The analysis was done using SPSS software and Microsoft Excel for calculation, tabulation, and presentation of data in an organized manner.

Formulas Used

The study used the following statistical formulas for data analysis:

1. Percentage

$$\text{Percentage} = \left(\frac{f}{N} \right) \times 100$$

Where: f = frequency of respondents, N = total sample size

2. Mean (Average)

$$\bar{X} = \frac{\sum X}{N}$$

Where: $\bar{X}$ = mean value, $\sum X$ = sum of all observations, N = total number of observations

3. Standard Deviation

$$SD = \sqrt{\frac{\sum (X - \bar{X})^2}{N}}$$

Where: X = individual value, $\bar{X}$ = mean, N = number of observations

4. Chi-Square Test

$$X^2 = \sum \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

Where: O = observed frequency, E = expected frequency

5. Pearson Correlation

$$r = \frac{N \sum XY - (\sum X)(\sum Y)}{\sqrt{[N \sum X^2 - (\sum X)^2][N \sum Y^2 - (\sum Y)^2]}}$$

6. Multiple Regression Model

$$Y = a + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + b_3X_3 + b_4X_4 + b_5X_5 + e$$

Where: Y = Household Welfare Index, a = constant, $b_1, \dots, b_5$ = regression coefficient, $X_1, \dots, X_5$ = independent variables, e = error term

These formulas were used to analyse the relationship between socio-economic factors and rural development outcomes in Kullu District.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

The study is based on the hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between socio-economic characteristics, access to public services, livelihood diversification, and household welfare in Kullu District (H_0), while the alternative hypothesis (H_1) assumes a significant relationship among these variables. The hypotheses were tested using Pearson correlation, Chi-Square test, and multiple regression analysis. The decision was based on the p-value, where $p > 0.05$ indicates acceptance of H_0 and $p < 0.05$ indicates rejection of H_1 .

NEED OF THE STUDY

The present study is important to understand the changing socio-economic conditions of rural households in Kullu District. It helps in assessing the availability and utilization of essential public services and infrastructure in the study area. The study also focuses on identifying the major factors that influence household welfare and overall community development. Further, it aims to generate empirical evidence that can be useful for policymakers and development planners in designing better rural development strategies. In addition, the study contributes to the existing literature on rural development, especially in Himalayan regions like Himachal Pradesh.

VARIABLES OF THE STUDY

The study considers a range of socio-economic and developmental variables to analyse rural development in Kullu District. These include age of household head, educational level, occupation, annual household income, family size, and landholding size under socio-economic characteristics. In terms of access to basic amenities and public services, the variables include drinking water availability, electricity access, healthcare accessibility, educational facilities, road connectivity, and government scheme utilization. For assessing household welfare and development outcomes, the variables considered are household income, employment status, access to public services, livelihood diversification, community participation, and household welfare index.

RESULT AND FINDINGS

The study found that household welfare in Kullu District is significantly influenced by income, education, access to public services, and livelihood diversification. Access to public services emerged as the strongest determinant of rural welfare, followed by household income. Overall, the results show that socio-economic and infrastructural factors jointly explain a major variation in rural household welfare.

Classification of Households by Landholding Size:

The households in Kullu District were classified on the basis of landholding size into marginal, small, and medium farmers. Most of the sampled households fall under the marginal category with less than 1 hectare of land. Small and medium farmers represent a smaller proportion of the population. This classification helps in understanding the socio-economic differences and disparities among rural households.

Table 1. Classification of Households by Landholding Size **N=180**

Landholding Category	Classification	No. of Households	Percentage	SPSS Code
Marginal	0–1 hectare	110	61.11	1
Small	1–2 hectares	50	27.78	2
Medium	Above 2 hectares	20	11.11	3
Total	—	180	100.00	—

Source: Field Survey, Kullu District, Himachal Pradesh (2025–26)

The table shows the distribution of households in Kullu District based on landholding size. The majority of households (61.11%) are marginal farmers with less than 1 hectare of land, followed by small farmers (27.78%) owning 1–2 hectares. Only a small proportion (11.11%) are medium farmers with more than 2 hectares of land. This clearly indicates that most rural households in the study area are land-poor and depend on small-scale agriculture.

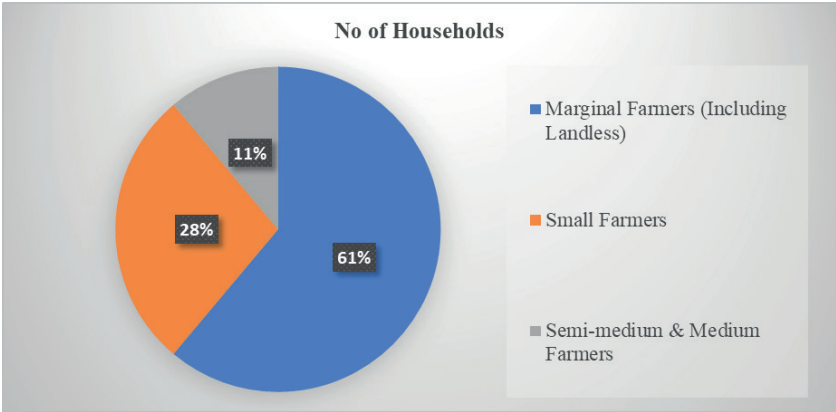


Figure 1: Distribution of Sample Households by Landholding Size in Kullu District

The pie chart shows the distribution of households in Kullu District based on landholding size. It indicates that the majority of households (61%) are marginal farmers, including landless families, making them the largest group in the study area. Small farmers account for 28% of the total households, while semi-medium and medium farmers represent only 11%. This clearly shows that the rural economy is dominated by small and marginal landholders, highlighting the prevalence of land inequality in the region.

Socio-Economic Characteristics of Rural Households

The socio-economic profile of rural households in Kullu District shows that most households belong to the marginal farmer category with limited landholding and income levels. The majority of the population is engaged in agriculture, followed by horticulture and wage-based employment. Educational attainment is generally moderate, with a significant proportion having only primary or secondary education. Overall, the profile indicates that rural households face moderate socio-economic conditions with clear disparities based on land size and income levels.

Table 2: Socio-Economic Profile of Rural Households

Variables	Categories	Marginal	Small	Medium	Total
Age	Below 30	20 (18.18%)	5 (10.00%)	0 (0.00%)	25
	30–45	45 (40.91%)	20 (40.00%)	5 (25.00%)	70
	46–60	30 (27.27%)	15 (30.00%)	10 (50.00%)	55
	Above 60	15 (13.64%)	10 (20.00%)	5 (25.00%)	30
	Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	180
	Mean ± SD				2.38 ± 0.98
Education	Illiterate	30 (27.27%)	5 (10.00%)	0 (0.00%)	35
	Primary	35 (31.82%)	10 (20.00%)	5 (25.00%)	50
	Secondary	30 (27.27%)	20 (40.00%)	5 (25.00%)	55
	Higher	15 (13.64%)	15 (30.00%)	10 (50.00%)	40
	Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	180
	Mean ± SD				2.52 ± 1.05
Occupation	Agriculture	60 (54.55%)	15 (30.00%)	5 (25.00%)	80
	Horticulture	20 (18.18%)	15 (30.00%)	5 (25.00%)	40
	Labour/ Service	25 (22.73%)	15 (30.00%)	5 (25.00%)	45
	Others	5 (4.55%)	5 (10.00%)	5 (25.00%)	15
	Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	180
	Mean ± SD				2.00 ± 1.01
Income	<1 lakh	50 (45.45%)	10 (20.00%)	0 (0.00%)	60
	1–3 lakh	45 (40.91%)	25 (50.00%)	5 (25.00%)	75
	>3 lakh	15 (13.64%)	15 (30.00%)	15 (75.00%)	45
	Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	180
	Mean ± SD				1.85 ± 0.79
Family Size	1–4	30 (27.27%)	15 (30.00%)	5 (25.00%)	50
	5–7	60 (54.55%)	25 (50.00%)	5 (25.00%)	90
	8+	20 (18.18%)	10 (20.00%)	10 (50.00%)	40
	Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	180
	Mean ± SD				2.22 ± 0.73
Welfare	Low	70 (63.64%)	20 (40.00%)	2 (10.00%)	92
	Medium	30 (27.27%)	20 (40.00%)	8 (40.00%)	58
	High	10 (9.09%)	10 (20.00%)	10 (50.00%)	30
	Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	180
	Mean ± SD				1.88 ± 0.76
Overall Mean ± SD					2.15 ± 0.89

Source: Field Survey, Kullu District, Himachal Pradesh (2025–26)

The overall mean value (2.15) indicates that households are generally in the middle socio-economic category, ranging between low and medium levels. The standard deviation (0.89) shows moderate variation, meaning that socio-economic conditions differ across households but are not highly extreme. The findings also indicate a clear structural inequality linked with landholding size in the study area. This highlights the need for targeted rural development policies focusing on marginal households to reduce socio-economic disparities. Improving access to income opportunities, education, and basic services can significantly enhance rural livelihoods.

The given bar diagram represents the socio-economic characteristics of rural households in the study area. It shows the distribution of respondents according to age, education, occupation, income, family size, and welfare status. The graph clearly highlights that most households fall under marginal categories with moderate socio-economic conditions. Overall, it indicates significant variation in living standards based on landholding size.

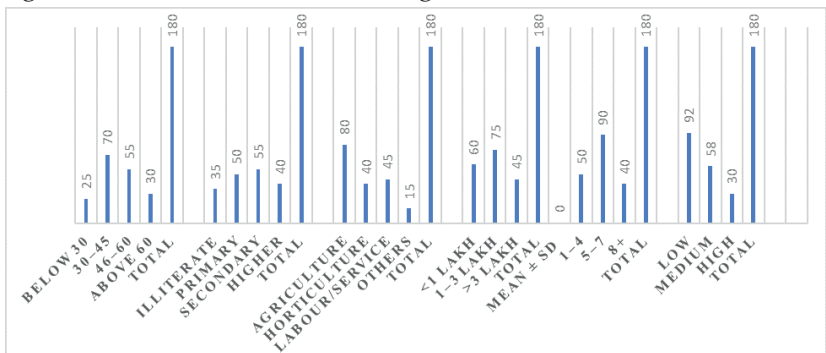


Figure 2. Socio-Economic Profile of Rural Households in Kullu District

Access to Basic Amenities and Public Services in Kullu District

The level of access to basic amenities and public services among rural households in the study area is shown in this bar diagram. It includes key indicators such as drinking water, electricity, healthcare, education, road connectivity, and government scheme utilization. The results indicate that electricity and government scheme access are relatively better than other services. Overall, it highlights uneven availability of essential facilities across rural households.

Table 3. Access to Basic Amenities and Public Services

Variables	Categories	Marginal	Small	Medium	Total
Drinking Water	Adequate	70 (38.89%)	40 (22.22%)	18 (10.00%)	128 (71.11%)
	Inadequate	40 (22.22%)	10 (5.56%)	2 (1.11%)	52 (28.89%)
Electricity Access	Full Access	85 (47.22%)	45 (25.00%)	20 (11.11%)	150 (83.33%)
	Partial Access	25 (13.89%)	5 (2.78%)	0 (0.00%)	30 (16.67%)
Healthcare Access	Easy Access	60 (33.33%)	35 (19.44%)	18 (10.00%)	113 (62.78%)
	Difficult Access	50 (27.78%)	15 (8.33%)	2 (1.11%)	67 (37.22%)

Educational Facilities	Available	75 (41.67%)	40 (22.22%)	20 (11.11%)	135 (75.00%)
	Not Adequate	35 (19.44%)	10 (5.56%)	0 (0.00%)	45 (25.00%)
Road Connectivity	Good	80 (44.44%)	45 (25.00%)	20 (11.11%)	145 (80.56%)
	Poor	30 (16.67%)	5 (2.78%)	0 (0.00%)	35 (19.44%)
Govt Scheme Utilization	Yes	90 (50.00%)	45 (25.00%)	20 (11.11%)	155 (86.11%)
	No	20 (11.11%)	5 (2.78%)	0 (0.00%)	25 (13.89%)
TOTAL		110 (61.11%)	50 (27.78%)	20 (11.11%)	180 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, Kullu District, Himachal Pradesh (2025–26)

The table shows that access to basic amenities improves with higher landholding size in Kullu District. Overall, 71.11% of households have adequate drinking water (128 households) and 83.33% have electricity access (150 households). However, marginal households face more deprivation, especially in drinking water (40 households) and healthcare access (50 households face difficulty).

About 62.78% of households (113) have easy healthcare access, while 37.22% (67) face difficulties. Educational facilities are available to 75% (135 households) and road connectivity is good for 80.56% (145 households). Government scheme utilisation is also high at 86.11% (155 households). Overall, marginal households remain relatively disadvantaged compared to small and medium farmers, indicating rural inequality in access to services.

Table 4. Mean Score Analysis and Ranking of Basic Amenities

Variables	Mean Score	Std. Deviation	Rank
Drinking Water	1.71	0.45	IV
Electricity Access	1.83	0.37	II
Healthcare Access	1.63	0.48	VI
Educational Facilities	1.75	0.43	III
Road Connectivity	1.81	0.39	V
Govt Scheme Utilization	1.86	0.35	I

The ranking indicates that government scheme utilization holds the first position, reflecting strong policy implementation in rural Kullu District. Electricity access and educational facilities follow, showing relatively better infrastructure development. Drinking water and road connectivity fall in the middle range, while healthcare access ranks last, indicating it is the most underdeveloped service. Overall, the results highlight uneven development of rural amenities in the study area.

Influence of Socio-Economic and Infrastructural Factors on Household Welfare in Kullu District

The impact of socio-economic and infrastructural factors on household welfare in the study area is explained in this diagram. It includes important variables such as income, employment status, access to public services, livelihood

diversification, and community participation. The findings reveal that access to public services and income are the most significant determinants of household welfare. Overall, it indicates that improved socio-economic conditions and infrastructure lead to better rural household welfare.

Table 5. Influence of Socio-Economic and Infrastructural Factors on Household Welfare

Variables	Categories	Marginal	Small	Medium	Total
Household Income	Low (<1 lakh)	60 (33.33%)	10 (5.56%)	0 (0.00%)	70 (38.89%)
	Medium (1–3 lakh)	40 (22.22%)	30 (16.67%)	5 (2.78%)	75 (41.67%)
	High (>3 lakh)	10 (5.56%)	10 (5.56%)	15(8.33%)	35 (19.44%)
Employment Status	Agriculture Based	70 (38.89%)	25 (13.89%)	5 (2.78%)	100 (55.56%)
	Non-Agriculture	40 (22.22%)	25 (13.89%)	15 (8.33%)	80 (44.44%)
Access to Public Services	High	80 (44.44%)	45 (25.00%)	20 (11.11%)	145 (80.56%)
	Low	30 (16.67%)	5 (2.78%)	0 (0.00%)	35 (19.44%)
Livelihood Diversification	Diversified	50 (27.78%)	35 (19.44%)	15 (8.33%)	100 (55.56%)
	Non-Diversified	60 (33.33%)	15 (8.33%)	5 (2.78%)	80 (44.44%)
Community Participation	High	65 (36.11%)	35 (19.44%)	15 (8.33%)	115 (63.89%)
	Low	45 (25.00%)	15 (8.33%)	5 (2.78%)	65 (36.11%)
Household Welfare Index	Low	70 (38.89%)	20 (11.11%)	2 (1.11%)	92 (51.11%)
	Medium	30 (16.67%)	20 (11.11%)	8 (4.44%)	58 (32.22%)
	High	10 (5.56%)	10 (5.56%)	10 (5.56%)	30 (16.67%)
TOTAL		110 (61.11%)	50 (27.78%)	20 (11.11%)	180 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, Kullu District, Himachal Pradesh (2025–26)

The table shows that household welfare in Kullu District is strongly influenced by socio-economic and infrastructural factors. Higher income groups and households with diversified livelihoods tend to have better welfare outcomes. Access to public services and community participation also positively affect household welfare levels. However, marginal households show lower income, limited diversification, and weaker welfare status. Overall, the findings indicate that socio-economic conditions and infrastructure access play a significant role in determining rural household welfare.

Table 6. Integrated Statistical Results for Household Welfare Determinants

Variables	χ^2	p-value	r	Beta (β)	t-value	Result
X1	18.76	0.001	0.62**	0.28	4.12	Significant
X2	12.44	0.002	0.48**	0.19	3.21	Significant
X3	21.33	0.000	0.71**	0.35	5.44	Highly Significant
X4	9.85	0.007	0.55**	0.22	3.58	Significant
X5	8.92	0.011	0.41**	0.15	2.97	Significant
R ² = 0.68, Adjusted R ² = 0.65 F-statistic = 32.45 (p < 0.001)						

* = $p < 0.05$ (Significant), ** = $p < 0.01$ (Highly Significant)

The results show that all variables significantly affect household welfare in Kullu District. Access to public services is the strongest determinant ($r = 0.71$, $\beta = 0.35$), followed by household income ($r = 0.62$). Livelihood diversification and employment status also have positive effects, while community participation shows a moderate impact. The model is strong and reliable ($R^2 = 0.68$), explaining 68% variation in household welfare, and the overall model is highly significant ($p < 0.001$).

X_1 = INC = Household Income, X_2 = EMP = Employment Status, X_3 = APS = Access to Public Services, X_4 = LD = Livelihood Diversification, X_5 = CP = Community Participation, e = error term

The integrated model shows that all variables significantly influence household welfare in Kullu District. Access to public services ($\beta = 0.35$) is the strongest determinant, followed by income and livelihood diversification. The model explains 68% variation in welfare, indicating strong explanatory power.

RESULT OF HYPOTHESES

The hypotheses of the study examined the relationship between socio-economic characteristics, access to public services, livelihood diversification, community participation, and household welfare in rural areas of Kullu District. The null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected as the results of Chi-square, Pearson correlation, and regression analysis showed a significant relationship between all selected variables and household welfare ($p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.01$). Access to public services ($r = 0.71$, $\beta = 0.35$) and household income ($r = 0.62$, $\beta = 0.28$) emerged as the strongest determinants, followed by livelihood diversification, employment status, and community participation. The regression model explained 68% of the variation in household welfare ($R^2 = 0.68$), indicating strong explanatory power. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted, confirming that socio-economic and infrastructural factors significantly influence household welfare in the study area.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings, the following policy suggestions are proposed for improving rural development outcomes in Kullu District:

- Strengthening public service delivery by improving healthcare infrastructure in remote and high-altitude villages of Kullu District and ensuring equitable access to drinking water and sanitation for marginal households.
- Promoting livelihood diversification by encouraging non-agricultural employment opportunities such as tourism, horticulture value chains, and small-scale enterprises, along with skill development programmes for rural youth and women.
- Reducing inequality among landholding groups by focusing on marginal farmers (0–1 ha) and strengthening targeted subsidies and financial inclusion measures.
- Enhancing human capital through improved rural education, vocational training facilities, digital literacy, and employment-oriented skill development.
- Strengthening community participation by encouraging involvement in local governance institutions and self-help groups and improving awareness of government schemes.
- Improving rural infrastructure by enhancing road connectivity and strengthening last-mile connectivity in remote villages.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The study is geographically limited to selected rural areas of Kullu District, particularly the Sainj Valley, which limits wider generalization.
- The sample size is restricted to 180 households and may not fully represent the entire district population.
- The study is based on cross-sectional data collected for 2025–26, which limits analysis of long-term trends.
- The findings rely on self-reported survey data, which may include recall and response bias.
- The study includes limited variables and does not deeply address factors such as migration, climate change, and environmental risks.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that household welfare in rural areas of Kullu District is significantly influenced by socio-economic and infrastructural factors such as income, access to public services, livelihood diversification, employment structure, and community participation. Among these, access to public services is the most important determinant, followed by income levels. The study also highlights clear inequalities between marginal, small, and medium households, with marginal farmers being the most disadvantaged. Although rural development is improving due to better infrastructure and policy interventions,

uneven development still exists. Therefore, integrated and inclusive development strategies focusing on equity, human capital, and livelihood opportunities are necessary for sustainable rural development.

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