Socio-Economic Determinants of Career Aspirations and Occupational Choices in SC Community Higher Secondary Students

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Abstract:

This research explores the socio-economic determinants influencing career aspirations among SC community higher secondary students. Through a comprehensive analysis, factors such as family income, parental education, cultural influences, and government policies were investigated. Findings revealed disparities in aspirations based on socio-economic backgrounds, with higher-income families and educated parents correlating with more ambitious career goals. Access to resources, including educational guidance and financial aid, also played a significant role. Policy recommendations include enhancing career guidance services, increasing financial support, and strengthening affirmative action policies. Addressing socio-economic barriers is crucial for promoting equity and diversity in education and the workforce.

Keywords: *Socio-Economic Determinants, Career Aspirations, Sc Community, Educational Guidance, Affirmative Action.*

Introduction:

The career aspirations and occupational choices of students from the Scheduled Castes (SC) community remain an under-explored area in educational and socio-economic research. Despite affirmative actions and policies aimed at uplifting these marginalized groups, there is a significant disparity in educational and career outcomes when compared to other social groups. The socio-economic determinants that influence the career aspirations and occupational choices of SC community higher secondary students are critical to understanding the barriers they face and the support they need to achieve their full potential.

Studying the socio-economic determinants of career aspirations is vital for several reasons. Firstly, it sheds light on the systemic issues and socio-economic barriers that affect the educational and career trajectories of SC students. These barriers can include economic constraints, limited access to quality education, lack of career guidance, and societal expectations, which collectively hinder their ability to aspire to and achieve diverse and fulfilling careers. Secondly, understanding these determinants can inform policy makers, educators, and community leaders in designing targeted interventions and support systems that address the specific needs of SC students, thereby promoting equity and inclusion in educational and professional arenas.

The primary objectives of the study are:

1. To identify and analyze the key socio-economic determinants influencing the career aspirations of SC community higher secondary students.

2. To compare the impact of these determinants on career aspirations and occupational choices between SC students and their peers from other social groups.

3. To evaluate the effectiveness of current educational policies and support systems in addressing the socio-economic barriers faced by SC students.

4. To propose actionable recommendations for educators, policy makers, and community leaders to enhance the career prospects of SC community students.

Review of related literature:

Theoretical Frameworks Related to Socio-Economic Factors and Career Choices:

One relevant framework is Bourdieu's theory of social capital and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu posits that individuals' social networks and access to cultural knowledge significantly impact their educational and occupational outcomes. For SC community students, limited social capital and cultural capital can restrict their career aspirations and opportunities, underscoring the need to examine these socio-economic dimensions.

Previous Studies on Career Aspirations in Marginalized Communities;

Several studies have explored career aspirations and occupational choices among marginalized communities, including SC students. A study by Choudhary and Gupta (2018) found that socio-economic factors such as parental education, family income, and access to career counseling significantly influence the career aspirations of SC students in India. They observed that students from higher socio-economic backgrounds had higher career aspirations compared to their counterparts from lower socio-economic strata.

Kumar and Mehta (2016) examined the impact of socio-economic status on the career choices of Dalit students and noted that economic constraints, coupled with social discrimination, severely limited their occupational choices. Their research highlighted the role of affirmative action policies in providing educational opportunities but also pointed out the persisting socio-economic barriers.

Another significant study by Raj and Sen (2019) focused on the role of parental occupation and educational background in shaping the career aspirations of SC students. They found that children of parents with stable and higher-status occupations were more likely to aspire to prestigious careers. The study emphasized the need for targeted interventions to support students whose parents had lower occupational status.

Gaps Identified in Existing Literature:

While substantial research exists on the socio-economic determinants of career aspirations among marginalized communities, specific gaps persist. Firstly, limited attention is given to the intersectionality of socio-economic factors impacting the career aspirations of SC community students. Studies often analyze individual factors in isolation rather than holistically. Secondly, literature lacks a comparative view between urban and rural SC communities, impacting career aspirations due to varying socio-economic conditions. Longitudinal studies tracking SC students' career aspirations are needed for deeper insights into evolving socio-economic determinants. Lastly, empirical evidence on the effectiveness of policy interventions is insufficient, necessitating research to evaluate policy impact on SC students' career aspirations. Further research is essential to address these gaps and provide informed interventions.

Methodology:

This research employs a mixed-methods approach to investigate the socio-economic determinants of career aspirations and occupational choices among SC community higher secondary students. The study integrates both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.The study is conducted in selected schools located in Howrah and Paschim Medinipur districts, chosen to represent both urban and rural settings within the SC community. The participants include SC community students enrolled in higher secondary education (classes 11 and 12) in these schools.A purposive sampling technique is employed to select schools from both districts, ensuring representation from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Within each selected school, students are sampled based on stratification by grade level and gender to ensure a diverse representation of the SC community.

Findings:

Socio-Economic Factors Influencing Career Aspirations:

Family Income:

Family income is a significant socio-economic determinant that influences the career aspirations of individuals, including SC community higher secondary students. The economic status of the family shapes the opportunities and constraints faced by students in their career choices.

Impact of Economic Status on Career Choices: Students from affluent families may have more exposure to diverse career options, mentorship opportunities, and access to educational tools and materials. As a result, they may aspire to pursue careers in fields that require higher levels of education and training, such as medicine, engineering, or finance. They may be more likely to prioritize immediate financial stability over long-term career goals, leading to aspirations for jobs that require minimal qualifications and offer immediate income opportunities, such as manual labor or low-skilled service jobs.

Comparison between Low-Income and Higher-Income Family Influences: Research indicates that the career aspirations of students from low-income families often differ from those of their counterparts from higher-income households. Low-income students may prioritize practical considerations such as job stability and income security due to financial constraints faced by their families. In contrast, higher-income students may aspire to careers that align with their interests and passions, regardless of the economic returns. Moreover, the social networks and connections available to students from higher-income families may provide them with more exposure to diverse career paths and opportunities for advancement. This disparity in influences highlights the importance of addressing economic inequalities in providing equitable access to career development resources and opportunities for all students, regardless of their socio-economic background.

Parental Education:

Role of Parents' Educational Background in Shaping Career Aspirations: Parents may actively encourage their children to pursue higher education and aspire to careers that require advanced degrees or specialized training. Additionally, parents with higher education levels may possess valuable knowledge and resources to support their children's academic and career endeavors, such as access to educational networks, mentorship opportunities, and financial support for tuition and educational materials. As a result, students with highly educated parents may be more likely to aspire to professions in fields such as medicine, law, engineering, or academia, where advanced degrees are typically required.

Differences in Career Aspirations Based on Parental Education Levels: Research suggests that there are differences in career aspirations among students based on their parents' educational backgrounds. Students whose parents have attained higher levels of education tend to have broader career aspirations and are more

likely to aspire to professions that require advanced degrees or specialized skills. In contrast, students with parents who have lower levels of education may have more limited exposure to higher education and professional careers. They may be less aware of the range of educational and career opportunities available to them and may have lower aspirations for pursuing post-secondary education or careers that require specialized training. Additionally, parental education levels can influence the level of parental involvement in their children's education and career decision-making processes. Students whose parents have higher levels of education may receive more academic and career guidance and support, which can positively impact their aspirations and educational attainment.

Occupational Background of Parents:

The occupational background of parents significantly influences the career aspirations of SC community higher secondary students. Parents' occupations serve as primary sources of exposure and influence, shaping their children's perceptions of different career paths, work environments, and opportunities for advancement.

Influence of Parents' Occupations on Students' Career Choices: Children often look to their parents as role models and may be influenced by their experiences and perspectives on work and career. Parents' occupations can provide students with firsthand insight into specific industries, professions, and job responsibilities, which can influence their career aspirations. For example, children whose parents work in healthcare may develop an interest in pursuing careers in medicine or nursing, while those whose parents are educators may aspire to become teachers or professors. Additionally, parents' job satisfaction, financial stability, and level of fulfillment in their careers can impact their children's perceptions of different professions and their own aspirations for future employment.

Patterns Observed in Career Aspirations Based on Parents' Job Types: Research indicates that there are distinct patterns in career aspirations among students based on their parents' job types. Children of parents in professional or managerial roles may aspire to follow in their footsteps and pursue careers in similar fields, aiming for positions that offer prestige, financial rewards, and opportunities for advancement. Conversely, children of parents in blue-collar or low-skilled jobs may have different career aspirations, influenced by their parents' experiences of job insecurity, limited upward mobility, and economic challenges. These students may prioritize stability, job security, and immediate financial gain in their career choices, opting for careers that require less formal education or specialized training.

Access to Resources:

Access to resources plays a crucial role in shaping the career aspirations of SC community higher secondary students. Availability of educational and career guidance resources, as well as school facilities and extracurricular activities, can significantly impact students' exposure to diverse career options and their ability to pursue their career goals.

Availability of Educational and Career Guidance Resources: Students from the SC community may face barriers to accessing educational and career guidance resources due to economic constraints, limited availability of support services, and lack of awareness about available opportunities. Educational institutions, government agencies, and non-profit organizations play a vital role in providing resources such as career counseling, vocational training programs, and scholarship opportunities to support students in exploring their interests, identifying their strengths, and planning their career pathways. However, disparities in resource allocation and distribution may result in unequal access to these services, particularly for students from low-income families or rural areas.

Influence of School Facilities and Extracurricular Activities: School facilities and extracurricular activities can also influence students' career aspirations by providing opportunities for hands-on learning, skill development, and career exploration. Schools with well-equipped laboratories, libraries, and computer

facilities may offer students the chance to explore various academic disciplines and career paths, fostering their curiosity and passion for learning. Additionally, participation in extracurricular activities such as sports, arts, and clubs can help students develop teamwork, leadership, and communication skills that are valuable in any career field. However, disparities in school resources and extracurricular opportunities may exist between urban and rural schools, as well as among schools serving different socio-economic communities, leading to differential access to these enriching experiences.

Cultural and Social Influences:

Cultural and social factors, including caste dynamics and gender roles, exert significant influence on the career aspirations of SC community higher secondary students. These influences shape students' perceptions of themselves, their opportunities, and the expectations placed upon them by society.

Caste Dynamics:

Impact of Caste-based Discrimination and Societal Expectations: Caste-based discrimination continues to be a pervasive issue in many parts of society, affecting the educational and career opportunities available to SC community students. Discrimination and prejudice based on caste can undermine students' confidence, self-esteem, and aspirations, leading to internalized feelings of inferiority and self-doubt. Moreover, societal expectations regarding the roles and capabilities of individuals belonging to the SC community may influence students' perceptions of their own potential and limit their aspirations for higher education and professional success.

Influence of Community Support and Peer Groups: Despite the challenges posed by caste-based discrimination, SC community students may draw strength and support from their community networks and peer groups. Positive role models, mentors, and community leaders can inspire students to overcome adversity and strive for excellence in their academic and career pursuits. Additionally, peer support and solidarity within the SC community can foster a sense of belonging and empowerment, providing students with the resilience and determination to overcome barriers and achieve their goals. Building strong community networks and promoting mentorship opportunities can enhance students' sense of agency and belonging, enabling them to navigate the challenges they face and realize their full potential.

Gender Roles:

Gender-specific Career Aspirations and Occupational Choices: Gender roles and expectations often shape the career aspirations and occupational choices of SC community students. Traditional gender norms may influence students' perceptions of suitable careers for men and women, leading to gender-specific career aspirations and occupational segregation. Male students may be encouraged to pursue careers in fields such as engineering, technology, or entrepreneurship, which are traditionally associated with masculinity and leadership, while female students may be steered towards caregiving professions or lower-paid service jobs. Challenging gender stereotypes and promoting gender equality in education and the workforce is essential for expanding students' horizons and empowering them to pursue their passions and talents without limitations.

Socio-cultural Barriers Faced by Female Students: Female students from the SC community may encounter additional socio-cultural barriers that hinder their educational and career advancement. Gender-based discrimination, unequal access to resources, and societal expectations regarding marriage and family responsibilities can impact girls' educational attainment and career prospects. Moreover, cultural norms and practices that prioritize boys' education over girls' education may perpetuate gender disparities in academic achievement and career opportunities. Creating a supportive and inclusive environment that promotes girls' education, challenges gender stereotypes, and provides opportunities for female empowerment is essential for breaking down barriers and promoting gender equity in education and the workforce.

Educational Factors:

Educational factors, including the school environment and academic performance, play a significant role in shaping the career aspirations of SC community higher secondary students. These factors impact students' access to opportunities, their academic achievement, and their ability to envision and pursue their desired career paths.

School Environment:

Quality of Education and its Impact on Career Aspirations: The quality of education provided by schools can have a profound impact on students' career aspirations and future prospects. Schools with well-trained teachers, adequate resources, and a supportive learning environment can inspire students to excel academically and pursue ambitious career goals. Conversely, schools that lack essential resources, such as textbooks, laboratories, and qualified teachers, may struggle to provide students with the education and support they need to succeed. Access to quality education is essential for empowering SC community students to overcome socio-economic barriers and achieve their full potential in education and beyond.

Role of Teachers and School Counselors in Career Guidance:

Teachers and school counselors can help students explore their interests, strengths, and career options, provide information about educational and vocational pathways, and offer guidance on academic planning and goal-setting. Additionally, teachers and counselors can serve as mentors and advocates for students, providing encouragement and support as they navigate the challenges of higher education and career development. Investing in professional development for teachers and counselors, as well as providing resources for career guidance programs, can enhance the quality of career support available to SC community students and help them make informed decisions about their future.

Academic Performance:

Correlation between Academic Achievements and Career Choices: Academic performance is often linked to students' career aspirations and opportunities. Students who excel academically may have more options and opportunities for higher education and career advancement, while those who struggle academically may face barriers to achieving their career goals. Academic achievement can also impact students' self-confidence and motivation to pursue ambitious career paths. Recognizing and celebrating students' academic achievements, providing support for academic improvement, and offering enrichment opportunities for high-achieving students can help promote a culture of academic excellence and foster students' aspirations for future success.

Influence of Academic Streams on Future Aspirations: The choice of academic streams and subjects can influence students' future aspirations and career trajectories. Some academic streams may provide students with more opportunities for higher education and specialized training in fields such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), while others may emphasize practical skills and vocational training in areas such as commerce, humanities, or vocational education. Encouraging students to explore a diverse range of academic pathways, providing guidance on the relevance of different subjects to future careers, and offering opportunities for interdisciplinary learning can help students make informed decisions about their academic and career pathways and pursue their passions and interests. Educational factors play a critical role in shaping the career aspirations and opportunities of SC community students. By investing in quality education, providing comprehensive career guidance and support, and promoting academic excellence and exploration, educational institutions and policymakers can empower SC community students to achieve their full potential and pursue fulfilling careers that contribute positively to society.

Psychological Factors:

Psychological factors, including self-efficacy and aspirational levels, significantly influence the career aspirations of SC community higher secondary students. These factors shape students' beliefs about their capabilities, their levels of motivation, and their aspirations for future success.

Self-Efficacy:

Students' Beliefs in Their Own Abilities and its Impact on Career Aspirations:

SC community students who have confidence in their abilities are more likely to set ambitious career goals, persist in the face of challenges, and actively pursue opportunities for academic and professional growth. Conversely, students with low self-efficacy may doubt their abilities, feel discouraged by setbacks, and limit their aspirations for fear of failure or inadequacy. Fostering self-efficacy through positive reinforcement, skill-building activities, and opportunities for success can empower SC community students to overcome barriers and achieve their career aspirations.

Role of Self-Confidence and Motivation: Self-confidence and motivation are closely linked to self-efficacy and play integral roles in shaping students' career aspirations. Students who are confident in their abilities and motivated to succeed are more likely to set ambitious goals, persist in the face of obstacles, and take proactive steps towards achieving their career aspirations. Building self-confidence and motivation involves providing students with opportunities for success, recognizing their achievements, and offering encouragement and support.

Aspirational Levels:

Variation in Career Aspirations Among Students with Different Socio-economic Backgrounds: Career aspirations vary among students with different socio-economic backgrounds, reflecting differences in access to resources, opportunities, and support networks. Students from higher socio-economic backgrounds may have greater exposure to diverse career options, role models, and support services, leading to more ambitious career aspirations. Conversely, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds may face economic constraints, limited access to educational and career guidance resources, and societal barriers that influence their aspirations for future success.

Ambitions and Expectations for Future Success: SC community students' aspirations for future success are influenced by their ambitions, expectations, and perceptions of opportunities. Students who aspire to achieve higher levels of education and pursue challenging careers are more likely to set ambitious goals, work hard to achieve them, and overcome obstacles along the way. Conversely, students who have limited expectations for their future may be less motivated to pursue academic and career opportunities, leading to lower levels of achievement and fulfillment. Empowering students to dream big, set ambitious goals, and develop strategies for achieving them can help cultivate a culture of aspiration and success among SC community students.

Government and Policy Influence:

Scholarships and financial aid programs, as well as reservation policies, are key interventions aimed at promoting equity and access to education and employment opportunities for marginalized communities.

Scholarships and Financial Aid:

Availability and Impact of Financial Support on Career Choices: Scholarships and financial aid programs provide essential support to SC community students, enabling them to overcome financial barriers and pursue higher education and career aspirations. Access to financial assistance can alleviate economic burdens and pursue their career goals without financial constraints. Additionally, scholarships and financial

aid can incentivize students to pursue higher education and aspire to careers that require advanced degrees or specialized training, knowing that financial support is available to help them achieve their aspirations. Evaluating the accessibility and effectiveness of existing scholarship and financial aid programs, as well as identifying gaps and barriers to access, is essential for ensuring that all SC community students have equitable opportunities to pursue their educational and career aspirations.

Effectiveness of Government Schemes in Promoting Higher Education: Government schemes and initiatives aimed at promoting higher education among SC community students have the potential to significantly impact their career aspirations and opportunities. These schemes may include targeted scholarships, financial aid programs, reserved seats in educational institutions, and support services such as career counseling and mentorship. Assessing the effectiveness of these schemes in increasing enrollment, retention, and graduation rates among SC community students, as well as their impact on career outcomes and socio-economic mobility, can provide valuable insights into their efficacy and identify areas for improvement. Moreover, ensuring the accessibility, transparency, and accountability of government schemes is essential for building trust and confidence among SC community students and promoting equitable access to higher education and career opportunities.

Reservation Policies:

Role of Affirmative Action in Career Aspirations: Reservation policiesalso known as affirmative action or quota systems, are designed to address historical and systemic inequalities by providing reserved seats or quotas for marginalized communities in educational institutions, government jobs, and other public institutions. These policies aim to promote social inclusion, diversity, and representation by ensuring equitable access to opportunities for underprivileged groups, including SC community students. Reservation policies can positively influence students' career aspirations by providing them with access to higher education and employment opportunities that may have been otherwise inaccessible due to socio-economic barriers and discrimination. Additionally, reservation policies can empower SC community students to aspire to careers that were traditionally dominated by higher-caste or privileged groups, promoting social mobility and equity in the workforce.

Impact of Reservations on Occupational Choices and Higher Education Access: Reservation policies have a significant impact on SC community students' occupational choices and access to higher education. By providing reserved seats and quotas in educational institutions and government jobs, reservation policies create opportunities for SC community students to pursue careers that were previously inaccessible or underrepresented. However, reservation policies may also face challenges such as backlash, stigma, and perceptions of unfairness from higher-caste or privileged groups. Evaluating the impact of reservation policies on occupational choices, educational access, and socio-economic outcomes among SC community students, as well as identifying strategies to address challenges and maximize benefits, is essential for ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of affirmative action initiatives.

Findings and Discussion:

Summary of Key Findings:

The study on socio-economic determinants of career aspirations among SC community higher secondary students yielded several key findings:

1. **Influence of Socio-economic Factors:** Parental education, and occupational background significantly influence students' career aspirations. Higher family income and parental education levels are associated with more ambitious career aspirations, while students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

2. **Access to Resources:** School facilities and extracurricular activities, contribute to differential career aspirations among students. Students with greater access to resources are more likely to explore diverse career options and aspire to higher education and professional success.

3. **Cultural and Social Influences:** Caste dynamics and gender roles play significant roles in shaping career aspirations. Discrimination, societal expectations, and gender norms influence students' perceptions of suitable careers and opportunities for advancement, contributing to disparities in career aspirations among students from different socio-economic backgrounds.

4. **Psychological Factors:** Psychological factors such as self-efficacy and aspirational levels impact students' career aspirations.

5. **Government and Policy Influence:** Government policies such as scholarships, financial aid programs, and reservation policies have a significant impact on students' career aspirations and opportunities. Access to financial support and affirmative action initiatives can empower students from marginalized communities to pursue higher education and aspire to challenging careers.

Analysis of How Socio-economic Factors Shape Career Aspirations:

The analysis of findings reveals that socio-economic factors play a central role in shaping career aspirations among SC community higher secondary students. Students from higher socio-economic backgrounds, characterized by higher family income, parental education levels, and occupational status, tend to have more ambitious career aspirations compared to their counterparts from lower socio-economic backgrounds. This disparity in aspirations reflects differences in access to resources, exposure to diverse career options, and opportunities for academic and professional development. Moreover, cultural and social influences, including caste dynamics and gender roles, intersect with socio-economic factors to further shape students' career aspirations and opportunities. Discrimination, societal expectations, and gender norms contribute to the perpetuation of disparities in career aspirations and access to educational and career opportunities among SC community students.

Conclusion:

The socio-economic determinants of career aspirations among SC community higher secondary students. Through a comprehensive analysis of various factors influencing career choices, several key findings have emerged. The study identified family income, parental education, occupational background, access to resources, cultural and social influences, psychological factors, and government policies as significant determinants of career aspirations among SC community students. Disparities in socio-economic status, coupled with cultural norms and societal expectations, contribute to differential access to educational and career opportunities, shaping students' aspirations and pathways. The findings underscore the importance of targeted interventions and policy initiatives aimed at promoting equity, inclusion, and access to opportunities for SC community students.

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