

Educational Attainment and Occupational Mobility: A Study of Scheduled Caste Women in Alappuzha

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Abstract

This study examines the educational attainment, occupational patterns, and intergenerational mobility among Scheduled Caste (SC) women in Alappuzha, Kerala. Drawing upon data from the survey of 100 SC women, the study highlights significant strides in literacy and education levels within this demographic. Occupational analysis reveals a predominant engagement in informal sectors, with 60% employed in agricultural labor and domestic work, despite educational qualifications. However, intergenerational comparisons show positive mobility trends, with daughters attaining higher educational and occupational statuses than their mothers. A strong positive correlation ($r \approx 0.82$) between education level and upward occupational mobility underscores the pivotal role of education in facilitating socio-economic advancement for SC women in the region.

Key words: Scheduled Caste, Educational Attainment, Occupational Mobility, Intergenerational Mobility

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the socio economic conditions of Scheduled Castes (SCs) in Kerala.
2. To assess the educational attainment levels and current occupational distribution among Scheduled Caste women in Alappuzha
3. To examine intergenerational occupational mobility among Scheduled Caste women in Alappuzha
4. To investigate the relationship between educational attainment and occupational mobility among Scheduled Caste women in Alappuzha

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative as well as quantitative research design to investigate the educational attainment, occupational patterns, and intergenerational mobility among Scheduled Caste (SC) women in Alappuzha, Kerala. The methodology encompassed the following components:

Sample Selection: A purposive sampling technique was utilized to select 100 SC women respondents from various rural and urban areas within Alappuzha district. The sample was stratified based on age groups, marital status, and residential location to ensure a comprehensive representation of the demographic.

Data Collection: Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires, focusing on variables such as age, marital status, educational qualifications, current occupation, and parental occupation. Secondary data were sourced from the 2011 Census of India and relevant academic literature to contextualize the findings.

Data Analysis: The collected data were organized into frequency distributions and percentages to depict the demographic profile, educational attainment, and occupational distribution of the respondents. Cross-tabulation techniques were employed to examine intergenerational occupational mobility and the relationship between education levels and occupational shifts.

Statistical Technique

To assess the strength and direction of the relationship between educational attainment and occupational mobility among SC women, the study utilized the Karl Pearson Correlation Coefficient. The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) was calculated using the formula:

$$r = \frac{n(\sum xy) - (\sum x)(\sum y)}{\sqrt{[n \sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2][n \sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2]}}$$

Socio economic conditions of Scheduled Castes in Kerala

The Scheduled Castes (SCs) in Kerala have historically been among the most disadvantaged communities in terms of socio-economic development. According to the 2011 Census, SCs constitute 9.1% of Kerala's total population, amounting to approximately 30.39 lakh individuals. This is lower than the national average of 16.6% for SCs. Kerala's SC population is unique in its settlement pattern, as they predominantly live scattered among other communities rather than in isolated clusters. The highest concentrations of SCs are found in the districts of Palakkad (13.29%), Thiruvananthapuram (12.27%), Kollam (10.80%), Thrissur (10.67%), and Malappuram (10.14%). These five districts together account for over half of the state's SC population. Notably, in Palakkad and Pathanamthitta districts, SCs make up more than 13% of the total population. Within the SC community, certain groups such as the Vedar, Vettuvan, Nayadi, Kalladi, and Arundhathiyar/Chakkiliar are considered particularly vulnerable, comprising about 3.65% of the SC population in the state.

Kerala boasts a high literacy rate among SCs at 88.7%, significantly above the national average of 66.07% for SCs. However, disparities persist when compared to the state's overall literacy rate of 93.91%. The sex ratio

among SCs in Kerala is 1057 females per 1000 males, reflecting a relatively balanced gender distribution. Despite these positive indicators, challenges remain in achieving full socio-economic parity for SCs in Kerala.

An analysis of the occupational distribution shows that a significant portion of the SC workforce is engaged in agriculture, with 29.9% working as agricultural laborers, compared to 14.18% in the general population. The services sector, which is the primary source of income for about three-fourths of the general population, provides livelihood to two-thirds of the SC population as well. This suggests that the SC community is gradually aligning with the broader occupational structure of the state. Regarding the representation of SCs in government services, the reservation policy has played a crucial role in ensuring their inclusion. The implementation of this policy has facilitated greater access to employment opportunities for SCs in public sector undertakings and government institutions, contributing to their socio-economic upliftment.

Education and occupational mobility of Scheduled Caste (SC) women in Kerala

Education has played a pivotal role in influencing the occupational mobility of Scheduled Caste (SC) women in Kerala. While the state boasts high literacy rates and progressive social indicators, SC women often face unique challenges that affect their educational and occupational trajectories.

Educational Attainment among SC Women

Kerala's emphasis on education has led to significant improvements in literacy rates among SC women. According to the 2011 Census, the literacy rate among SCs in Kerala stood at 88.7%, surpassing the national average for SCs. However, disparities persist when compared to the state's overall literacy rate of 93.91%. Moreover, while many SC women attain primary and secondary education, fewer progress to higher education levels. This gap can be attributed to factors such as economic constraints, early marriages, and limited access to quality educational institutions.

Occupational Patterns and Mobility

Education has facilitated a shift in the occupational structure of SC women in Kerala. Traditionally engaged in manual and unskilled labor, many have transitioned to roles in the service sector, education, and healthcare. However, a significant proportion still remains in low-paying, informal jobs. A study analyzing the occupational structure of SC women in Kerala highlighted that despite educational qualifications, many are employed in the unorganized sector, indicating a mismatch between education and employment opportunities.

Intergenerational Mobility

Intergenerational mobility among SC women has seen positive trends, with daughters achieving higher educational levels and better occupational statuses than their mothers. This upward mobility is often linked to increased access to education and affirmative action policies. However, the pace of this mobility is gradual, and systemic barriers continue to hinder rapid progress.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 offers a detailed overview of the demographic characteristics of 100 Scheduled Caste (SC) women respondents in Alappuzha, Kerala, focusing on age distribution, marital status, and residential location. These factors are crucial for understanding the context of their educational and occupational experiences.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age Group	18–25	20	20%
	26–35	35	35%
	36–45	30	30%
	46+	15	15%
Marital Status	Married	70	70%
	Unmarried	30	30%
Location	Rural	60	60%
	Urban	40	40%

Source: Primary Data

This table shows that a substantial majority (65%) of the respondents are aged between 26 and 45 years, indicating that the study predominantly captures women in their prime working years. Marital status data shows that 70% of these women are married, suggesting that familial responsibilities may influence their educational and occupational choices. Additionally, 60% of the respondents reside in rural areas, highlighting potential challenges related to access to education and employment opportunities compared to their urban counterparts. This demographic information provides a foundational understanding essential for analyzing the impact of education on the occupational mobility of SC women in Alappuzha.

Educational Attainment

Table 2 presents the educational attainment levels of 100 Scheduled Caste (SC) women in Alappuzha, highlighting the distribution of their highest completed education.

Table 2: Educational Attainment of Respondents

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage
No Formal Education	15	15%
Primary Education	25	25%
Secondary Education	30	30%
Higher Secondary	20	20%
Graduate and Above	10	10%

Source: Primary Data

This table illustrates that a significant portion of SC women in Alappuzha have attained at least secondary education, with 60% having completed up to the secondary level. However, only 10% have pursued education beyond the higher secondary level, suggesting limited access to higher education opportunities. These educational levels are crucial for understanding the potential for occupational mobility, as higher educational attainment often correlates with access to better employment opportunities.

Occupational Distribution

Table 3 presents the occupational distribution of 100 Scheduled Caste (SC) women in Alappuzha, highlighting the sectors in which they are employed.

Table 3: Occupational Distribution

Occupation Type	Frequency	Percentage
Agricultural Labor	40	40%
Domestic Work	20	20%
Skilled Labor	15	15%
Self-Employed	15	15%
Government Service	5	5%
Private Sector	5	5%

Source: Primary Data

This distribution indicates that a significant majority (60%) of SC women are engaged in low-paying and informal sectors such as agricultural labor and domestic work. Only a small fraction (10%) is employed in formal sectors like government and private services. The limited presence in formal employment sectors suggests barriers

to accessing stable and well-paying jobs, despite educational qualifications. These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to enhance employment opportunities and support occupational mobility for SC women in Alappuzha.

This cross-tabulation helps in understanding the occupational shifts between generations.

Table 4 offers a detailed cross-tabulation of intergenerational occupational mobility among Scheduled Caste (SC) women in Alappuzha, highlighting the occupational transitions between mothers and their daughters.

Table 4: Intergenerational Occupational Mobility

Mother's Occupation	Respondent's Occupation	Frequency
Agricultural Labor	Agricultural Labor	25
Agricultural Labor	Domestic Work	10
Agricultural Labor	Skilled Labor	5
Domestic Work	Self-Employed	10
Domestic Work	Government Service	5
Skilled Labor	Private Sector	5

Source: Primary Data

Table 4 provides insights into the intergenerational occupational mobility among Scheduled Caste (SC) women in Alappuzha by comparing the occupations of respondents with those of their mothers. The data reveals that 25% of the respondents have remained in agricultural labor, mirroring their mothers' occupation, indicating a persistence of traditional employment patterns. However, there is evidence of upward mobility: 10% have transitioned from mothers engaged in agricultural labor to domestic work, and 5% have moved into skilled labor roles. Further, among those whose mothers were domestic workers, 10% have become self-employed, and 5% have secured positions in government services, suggesting a shift towards more stable and potentially higher-paying occupations. Additionally, 5% of respondents whose mothers were in skilled labor have entered the private sector. These shifts indicate that while a significant portion of SC women continue in traditional occupations, there is a notable trend of upward occupational mobility, reflecting gradual socio-economic progress within this community.

The relationship between education levels and occupational mobility

Table 5 illustrates the relationship between education levels and occupational mobility among Scheduled Caste (SC) women in Alappuzha, highlighting how increased educational attainment correlates with upward occupational shifts.

Table 5: Education Level vs. Occupational Mobility

Education Level	Upward Mobility	No Change	Downward Mobility
No Formal Education	2	10	3
Primary Education	5	15	5
Secondary Education	10	15	5
Higher Secondary	15	5	0
Graduate and Above	10	0	0

Source: Primary Data

The data indicates that women with higher secondary education and above experience significant upward mobility, with 15 out of 20 in the higher secondary category and all 10 graduates moving to better occupations. In contrast, those with no formal education or only primary education predominantly remain in the same occupational status or experience downward mobility. This pattern underscores the pivotal role of education in facilitating occupational advancement for SC women in Alappuzha.

Interpretation of Correlation Coefficients

Based on the study's findings, the study reports the following approximate correlation coefficients:

- **Education Level vs. Upward Mobility:** $r \approx 0.82$
- **Education Level vs. No Change in Mobility:** $r \approx -0.73$
- **Education Level vs. Downward Mobility:** $r \approx -0.69$

These values indicate a strong positive correlation between higher education levels and upward occupational mobility, and strong negative correlations between education levels and both no change and downward mobility. This suggests that as education levels increase among SC women, there is a significant rise in upward occupational mobility and a decrease in the likelihood of experiencing no change or downward mobility in occupational status.

Conclusion

The findings underscore the transformative impact of education on the lives of SC women in Alappuzha, Kerala. While increased literacy and educational attainment have opened avenues for better employment opportunities, systemic challenges persist, limiting the full realization of these gains. The strong correlation between higher education and occupational mobility emphasizes the need for targeted interventions to enhance access to quality education, especially at higher levels. Addressing socio-economic barriers and expanding opportunities in formal employment sectors are crucial for sustaining and accelerating the upward mobility of SC women. Policy

measures focusing on financial support, awareness programs, and infrastructural development in rural areas can play a significant role in bridging the existing gaps and promoting inclusive growth.

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