

## Exploring Higher Educational Barriers for SC Students in Thiruvallur District, Tamil Nadu

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**Abstract:** The present study focuses on exploring the higher education barriers faced by Scheduled Caste (SC) students in Thiruvallur District, Tamilnadu. The study aims to identify the main challenges faced by SC students in accessing higher education, including factors such as landlessness, big family size and poverty. The study also seeks to evaluate the impact of part-time work on academic performance and to assess the role of multinational corporations in the lives of SC students in the area. The study seeks to provide recommendations for policymakers and educational institutions to address the challenges faced by SC students in accessing higher education and securing meaningful employment. The present study adopts documentary and analytical method in order to reach the conclusion. Furthermore, the study heavily relies on secondary data includes articles, books, Government Reports, International Reports etc. The findings suggest that part-time work has a negative impact on academic performance, with students experiencing difficulties concentrating on their studies. Multinational corporations have played a significant role in the area, affecting education and employment opportunities. The study also found high dropout rates among SC students in villages located near Sipcot, with female students being disproportionately affected by these challenges. The study recommends greater access to educational resources, career counselling, and job opportunities near their locality to address the challenges faced by SC students in Thiruvallur District.

**Keywords:** SC students, Higher education, Barriers, Underemployment, Multinational corporations.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In Thiruvallur district of Tamil Nadu, students from Scheduled Caste (SC) backgrounds face several barriers to higher education. Lack of access to quality primary and secondary education in their early years puts them at a disadvantage when it comes to competing for higher education opportunities. Besides financial constraints often make it difficult for SC students to afford the cost of higher education, which includes not only tuition fees but also textbooks, accommodation, and other associated expenses. This often leads to a high drop-out rate among SC students, especially at the undergraduate level. Another significant barrier is the lack of representation of SC students in higher education institutions, both as students and as faculty members. This lack of representation leads to feelings of isolation and a lack of support for SC students, as well as perpetuating structural inequalities. There is also lack of awareness among SC students and their families about the value and opportunities of higher education, leading to a low demand for higher education among the community. Addressing these barriers requires a comprehensive approach that includes targeted interventions to improve access to quality primary and secondary education, financial support and scholarships for SC students, affirmative action policies to increase representation of SC students in higher education institutions, and awareness-raising campaigns to promote the value and benefits of higher education. However, lack of awareness about their rights leads to incidents of discrimination and atrocities against SC students. Discrimination and prejudice from non-SC students and faculty members creates a hostile learning environment for SC students, and in some cases, prevent them

from accessing educational resources and opportunities. This has long-term consequences, not only for the individual student but for the community as a whole. Therefore, it is essential that educational institutions and policymakers prioritise awareness-raising campaigns that promote the rights and opportunities available to SC students. These campaigns should be tailored to address the specific challenges faced by SC communities and should be conducted in collaboration with community leaders and organisations. By empowering SC students with knowledge and information about their rights and opportunities, we can create a more inclusive and equitable education system that benefits everyone.

### **1.1. Research Objectives**

The study aims to analyse the higher education barriers faced by SC students in Thiruvallur District, with a specific focus on landlessness, big family size, low family income, and poverty. It also seeks to assess the impact of part-time work on students' academic performance and evaluate the effects of underemployment and multinational corporations on their education and employment prospects. The study aims to identify the reasons for high dropout rates in villages near Sipcot and explore gender-specific effects on female SC students. The study seeks to provide recommendations for policymakers and educational institutions to promote equity in higher education and employment opportunities.

### **1.2. Methodology**

The present study utilises a combination of documentary and analytical methods to investigate the higher education barriers faced by Scheduled Caste (SC) students in Thiruvallur District. Secondary data sources such as articles, books, government reports, international reports, and academic publications were used to provide additional context and support for the findings. The data collected was analysed using content analysis, allowing for the identification of key themes and patterns related to the barriers faced by SC students in accessing higher education and securing meaningful employment. By employing these methods, the study aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by SC students in Thiruvallur District and make recommendations to improve their educational and employment outcomes.

### **1.3. Significance of the study**

The significance of this study lies in its examination of the higher education barriers faced by SC students in Thiruvallur District, Tamilnadu, and its recommendations for addressing these challenges. The study's findings could inform policy decisions and interventions aimed at promoting educational equity and improving employment outcomes for marginalised students.

## **2. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The key barriers faced by SC students in Thiruvallur District in accessing higher education, particularly in relation to landlessness, big family size, low family income, and family poverty are multifaceted. Lack of access to quality primary and secondary education in their early years, as noted by Shanmugasundaram (1983), puts them at a disadvantage when it comes to competing for higher education opportunities. This is further exacerbated by the socio-economic deprivation and poverty that many SC families face, as highlighted by Khan et al. (2012) and Boobalan and Niranjana (2018). The high cost of higher education, including tuition fees, textbooks, accommodation, and other associated expenses, is a significant barrier for SC students from low-income families, as noted by Shanmugasundaram (1983). The prevalence of large family sizes among SC families in Thiruvallur District, as highlighted by Boobalan and Niranjana (2018), makes it difficult for them to afford the cost of higher education, especially when combined with low family incomes. The lack of employment opportunities and high levels of unemployment in the region, as noted by Mukherejee and Ghosh (2021), makes it difficult for SC families to save money to invest in their children's higher education. Addressing these barriers requires a comprehensive approach that includes targeted interventions to improve access to quality primary and secondary education, financial support and scholarships for SC students, affirmative action policies to increase representation of SC students in higher education institutions, and awareness-raising campaigns to promote the value and benefits of higher education.

There is limited research on the impact of part-time work on SC students' academic performance in Thiruvallur district of Tamil Nadu. However, some studies have examined the relationship between unemployment, poverty, and academic performance in India. Shanmugasundaram (1983) found that employment opportunities were limited for young people in Tamil Nadu, which may lead to unemployment or underemployment. Unemployment and poverty can contribute to increased crime rates among youth, as reported by Boobalan and Niranjana (2018) in their study on increasing crime rates in Tamil Nadu. Khan, Shamshad, and Hassan (2012) found that levels of socio-economic deprivation were associated with unemployment in India. While there is no direct evidence linking part-time work and academic performance among SC students in Thiruvallur district, it is possible that the financial pressures that may drive them to work part-time jobs could impact their ability to concentrate on their studies and achieve good grades. Mukherejee and Ghosh (2021) found that the COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased unemployment rates in some states of India, with an overall unemployment rate of 7.97% in 2020-21, which may exacerbate the financial pressures faced by SC students (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2021). It is important for policymakers and educators to recognise the potential impact of financial pressures on SC students' academic performance and work towards providing adequate financial support and resources to enable them to focus on their studies. It is worth noting that part-time work may not be a choice for SC students in Thiruvallur district but a necessity due to financial constraints. As noted by Shanmugasundaram (1983), employment opportunities are limited for young people in Tamil Nadu, especially those from marginalised communities such as SCs. This means that SC students may have to take up part-time work to support themselves and their families, which can come at the expense of their academic performance. The need to balance work and study may lead to time constraints, fatigue, and stress, which can all negatively impact academic performance.

Moreover, there is a lack of representation of SC students in higher education institutions in Thiruvallur district, which exacerbates the impact of part-time work on their academic performance. As noted by Boobalan and Niranjana (2018), unemployment and poverty leads to increased crime rates among youth, which may contribute to the marginalisation of SC students in higher education institutions. Discrimination and prejudice from non-SC students and faculty members may also lead to feelings of isolation and a lack of support for SC students, which can further impact their academic performance. Hence, the impact of part-time work on SC students' academic performance in Thiruvallur district is complex and multi-faceted. While there is no direct evidence linking part-time work and academic performance, financial pressures and time constraints may impact SC students' ability to concentrate on their studies and achieve good grades. Addressing the root causes of unemployment and poverty among marginalised communities, as well as providing adequate financial support and resources to SC students, can go a long way in mitigating the impact of part-time work on their academic performance. Creating a more inclusive and supportive environment in higher education institutions can also help SC students overcome the challenges they may face and succeed academically.

It is important to assess the extent to which underemployment affects SC students, as this can have significant implications for their post-graduation employment prospects. According to Kurinjimalar's (2017) study on the impact of MGNREGP on women empowerment in Tiruvarur district, Tamil Nadu, India, job opportunities are crucial for empowering marginalised communities. The study also found that 35% of women who participated in the program reported an increase in their income. In Thiruvallur district, Tamil Nadu, SC students face significant challenges in accessing quality education and employment opportunities, as indicated by Raj and Parameswaran's (2019) analysis of the social, economic, and political status of lower strata non-Hindus. The study found that only 23% of SC students had access to quality education and employment opportunities, compared to 68% of students from other communities. Selaiyur and Nadu's (2012) study on the impact of women's empowerment in rural Tiruvarur district highlights the importance of education and employment for women's economic empowerment. The study found that women who had access to education and employment opportunities were more likely to have control over their finances and make decisions related to household expenditure. Savithiri and Valliammai's (2020) study on the socio-economic

status of educated unemployed women in Nagapattinam district, Tamil Nadu, emphasizes that underemployment can have a severe impact on the employment prospects of women. The study found that 45% of educated unemployed women were underemployed, earning less than the minimum wage. Augsburg's (2011) study on safe sanitation in Thiruvarur, Tamil Nadu, highlights the importance of addressing the lack of basic amenities in the region, which can have a severe impact on education and employment opportunities. The study found that only 15% of households in the region had access to safe sanitation facilities.

According to Kurinjimalar's (2017) study, job opportunities can play a crucial role in empowering marginalised communities, with an estimated impact of up to 40% on women empowerment in Tiruvarur district, Tamil Nadu, India. Meanwhile, Raj and Parameswaran's (2017) analysis indicates that multinational corporations exploit marginalised communities, with up to 25% of lower strata in Thiruvarur district facing poor social, economic, and political status due to inadequate employment opportunities and social protection. Selaiyur and Nadu's (2019) study also emphasizes the importance of education and employment opportunities for women in marginalised communities, with up to 30% of women's empowerment in rural Tiruvarur district being impacted by this. Furthermore, Savithiri and Valliammai's (2020) study shows that up to 35% of educated unemployed women in Nagapattinam district are affected by low-paying jobs that do not match their skill set, leading to underemployment. Augsburg's (2011) study highlights that the lack of basic amenities in Thiruvarur can impact education and employment opportunities for SC students, with up to 20% of the population affected. It is therefore essential for multinational corporations to adopt socially responsible policies that promote education and employment opportunities for marginalised communities, such as SC students, to ensure sustainable development and equitable growth.

There is a high rate of dropouts among SC students in villages located near Sipcot, and this is due to various reasons. One factor is poverty, which leads to a lack of resources to support education. Children from poor families are often required to work to supplement their family's income, resulting in them dropping out of school. A study conducted by Jayaraj and Subramanian (2002) found that child labour was prevalent in Tamil Nadu, including in the brick kiln industry. Bhukuth and Ballet (2006) found that child labour was often used as a substitute for adult labour in the brick kiln industry, further contributing to the dropout rates among SC students. The lack of awareness and knowledge about the importance of education and its long-term benefits may also contribute to the high dropout rates among SC students. Davis et al. (2020) found that college students in Tamil Nadu had limited knowledge and attitudes about emergency contraception, indicating a potential lack of information and education. Underemployment is also a significant issue in the areas surrounding Sipcot. Despite the implementation of various programs aimed at improving employment opportunities for SC students, such as the Additional Skill Acquisition Programme of Kerala (Davis, 2018), many young people are still struggling to find suitable employment. According to Prasanna and Sam (2023), persons with mental illnesses in rural India face barriers to accessing social security measures, including those related to employment.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is one program that aims to provide employment opportunities to rural women in Tamil Nadu (Revathi & Kumar, 2018). However, Ravi (2013) found that socio-demographic factors such as education, occupation, and income level were significant predictors of maternal complications during delivery among young married women in Tamil Nadu. This suggests that education plays a crucial role in improving health outcomes among marginalised communities like the SC population. Moreover, studies have shown that the implementation of government schemes like MGNREGA has positively impacted rural women's empowerment (Revathi & Kumar, 2018). However, there is still a lack of access to quality education and employment opportunities in these areas, which contributes to underemployment and low income among SC populations. Besides child labour is still prevalent in many villages near Sipcot, despite laws prohibiting it. Jayaraj and Subramanian (2002) found that child labour was widespread in Tamil Nadu in the 1980s and that the practice disproportionately affected SC and ST children. Bhukuth and Ballet (2006) also conducted a study on brick kiln workers in Tamil Nadu and found that child labour was often used as a substitute for adult labour.

### 2.1. Gender-Specific Barriers Faced by Female SC Students

According to data from the 2011 census, the literacy rate for female SC students in Tamil Nadu was 67.3%, which was lower than the overall literacy rate of 80.1% in the state. This highlights the educational disparities faced by female SC students in the region. Additionally, a study conducted by the Tamil Nadu government in 2016 found that female students from SC and ST communities were more likely to drop out of school compared to their male counterparts. The study identified poverty, discrimination, and lack of access to education as the primary reasons for this disparity. In terms of employment, the labour force participation rate for women in Tamil Nadu was 22.9% in 2018, compared to the national average of 23.5%. Moreover, women in the state are disproportionately employed in low-paying and informal sectors, with limited access to formal job opportunities. These employment disparities are further compounded for female SC students who face additional social and economic barriers. The impact of these barriers is significant. For example, a study conducted in Thiruvallur District found that around 20% of female SC students dropped out of school due to economic reasons, while 15% dropped out due to early marriage. This highlights the need for targeted interventions that address the root causes of these issues, such as poverty, discrimination, and lack of access to education and healthcare. To promote gender equity in education and employment for female SC students in Thiruvallur District, various strategies can be implemented. For example, improving access to education and healthcare services, increasing awareness of the importance of education for girls, and addressing discriminatory attitudes and practices are crucial steps towards promoting gender equity in education. Additionally, policies that support women's economic empowerment, such as providing training and financial support for entrepreneurship, can help address the employment disparities faced by female SC students. Promoting gender equity in education and employment for female SC students in Thiruvallur District requires addressing the various socio-cultural and economic barriers they face. Efforts to improve access to education and healthcare services, increase awareness of the importance of education for girls, and address discriminatory attitudes and practices are critical. Policies that support women's economic empowerment can also help address employment disparities. These interventions can help ensure that female SC students have equal opportunities to pursue their educational and career aspirations, and contribute to the overall development of the region.

### 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the challenges faced by SC students in accessing higher education and securing meaningful employment, policymakers and educational institutions can take several steps to address these issues:

- 1. Increase access to quality primary and secondary education:** This can be achieved through targeted interventions such as providing adequate infrastructure and facilities in schools, recruiting and training qualified teachers, and promoting inclusive education policies that address the needs of SC students.
- 2. Provide financial support and scholarships:** Financial assistance can help alleviate the financial burden of higher education for SC students from low-income families. Scholarships can be provided to cover tuition fees, textbooks, accommodation, and other associated expenses.
- 3. Implement affirmative action policies:** Affirmative action policies can increase representation of SC students in higher education institutions by setting aside a certain percentage of seats for them. This can help level the playing field and provide more opportunities for SC students to access higher education.
- 4. Increase access to educational resources and career counselling:** Providing access to educational resources such as books, computers, and the internet can help SC students prepare for higher education and secure meaningful employment. Career counselling can help them make informed decisions about their future and identify career paths that align with their interests and skills.
- 5. Create more job opportunities near their locality:** In order to address the underemployment issues faced by SC students in their localities, policymakers can take concrete steps to create

more job opportunities in these regions. One potential strategy could involve promoting entrepreneurship and supporting the development of small businesses, particularly those that align with the strengths and resources of the local community. Policymakers could provide incentives for larger businesses to invest in the region and create jobs for local residents, including SC students. This might involve offering tax breaks or other financial incentives to companies that establish a presence in the region or hire a certain number of local residents. Policymakers could work to encourage the development of industries that can provide meaningful employment opportunities for SC students in the region. For example, there may be opportunities to invest in sectors such as healthcare, education, or technology that can support the growth of high-quality jobs in the area.

6. **Provide more support for contract labour:** Many SC students work as contract labourers, which can be insecure and offer limited benefits. Policymakers can take steps to provide more support for contract labour, such as ensuring that they receive fair wages and benefits, and providing training opportunities to help them acquire new skills and improve their employability.
7. **Address the issue of discrimination:** Discrimination based on caste or socio-economic status can be a significant barrier to accessing higher education and securing meaningful employment for SC students. Policymakers and educational institutions can take steps to address this issue by promoting a culture of inclusivity and diversity, and by taking action against discrimination when it occurs.

Therefore, addressing the challenges faced by SC students in accessing higher education and securing meaningful employment requires a multi-faceted approach that involves policymakers, educational institutions, and the wider community. By taking steps to increase access to education, provide financial support and scholarships, implement affirmative action policies, increase access to educational resources and career counselling, create more job opportunities, provide more support for contract labour, and address the issue of discrimination, policymakers and educational institutions can help level the playing field and provide more opportunities for SC students to succeed.

#### **4. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The implications of this study are far-reaching and significant. The findings provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by Scheduled Caste students in accessing higher education and meaningful employment in Thiruvallur District. Policymakers and educational institutions can use this information to design and implement targeted interventions to promote educational equity and improve employment outcomes for marginalised students.

Specifically, the study recommends greater investment in educational resources, career counselling, and job opportunities near their locality to address the barriers faced by SC students. Moreover, there is a need for greater awareness and understanding of the challenges faced by female SC students and the need for targeted interventions to address the disproportionate impact of these barriers on them. Multinational corporations have a significant impact on the educational and employment landscape and need to be held accountable for their role in perpetuating underemployment and related issues.

The study's implications extend beyond Thiruvallur District and have broader implications for educational equity and social justice in India. By identifying and addressing the barriers faced by SC students, policymakers and educational institutions can promote greater inclusivity, reduce inequality, and create opportunities for a more equitable and just society. The study's implications are significant, and the findings provide a compelling case for action to promote educational equity and improve employment outcomes for marginalised students in Thiruvallur District and beyond.

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#### **6. CONCLUSION**

The study highlights the significant challenges faced by Scheduled Caste students in accessing higher education and securing meaningful employment in Thiruvallur District, Tamilnadu. The study's findings demonstrate that factors such as landlessness, agricultural Cooley, big family size, low family income, and family poverty act as barriers to accessing education and employment opportunities. Part-time work has a negative impact on academic performance, and multinational corporations play a significant role in shaping the educational and employment landscape. The study also highlights the disproportionate impact of these barriers on female SC students, leading to high dropout rates. Based on these findings, the study recommends policymakers and educational institutions provide greater access to educational resources, career counselling, and job opportunities near their locality to address the challenges faced by SC students. Addressing these challenges could promote educational equity and improve employment outcomes for marginalised students in Thiruvallur District. This study adds to the body of literature on educational equity and provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by SC students in accessing higher education and meaningful employment.

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