



SOCIO-ECONOMIC INEQUALITY AND CAREER ASPIRATIONS AMONG CHILDREN IN INDIA

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Abstract

The socio-economic backgrounds of children have a major impact on their access to education. The factor that serves as a backdrop to this relationship is “aspiration”, which has been completely overlooked in India, given the fact that the presence of a large number of poor and illiterate people and unavailability of adequate facilities for education are amongst the crucial issues that the country is facing. This paper thus aims to account for the dearth of quality studies on the role of economic factors (such as parental income, family wealth, credit availability, and availability of investable resources) in influencing career aspirations of children in India. These factors, coupled with other social factors, including religion, caste/community and its position in the society, family’s social class, area born and raised in, role of media, previous educational background, and various other variables, act as both a constraint as well as an opportunity to a child’s career aspirations. It can be observed that children from affluent families do not experience any economic constraints to attain higher education, while those from poverty-stricken households experience huge economic constraints which restrict their capacity and ability to pursue higher education. Whether the same has varied impacts on the educational and career aspirations of children has not been taken up as a matter for empirical investigation in India. By accounting for how poverty affects aspiration formation, aspiration gap, aspiration window, aspiration failure, the capacity to aspire and the ability to aspire, this paper draws a link between poverty and aspirations in India. Since a considerable number of international studies consider poverty as a causal factor of low aspirations among individuals, such as Debraj Ray’s study on the aspirations of Ethiopia. Therefore, based on such a relationship established at the international level, the present paper investigates the relationship between socio-economic differences and their impact on educational and career aspirations of children in India. Furthermore, the study has also identified various socio-economic factors to test the presence of fatalism among students, which in turn affects their career aspirations. The study is based on primary data collected by means of a questionnaire technique administered among students from government run, private, and international schools, located in urban and rural areas in and around Bengaluru, India. The reason for selecting Bengaluru is that urban Bengaluru is one of the most developed cities in India and possesses all categories of schools, as well as students belonging to various communal backgrounds that the study has targeted. Alternatively, the government run schools from rural Bengaluru have been identified and included in the study for making the comparison of their aspirations with students from sound economic backgrounds. Appropriate statistical and econometric methods have been used to arrive at the conclusion.

Keywords: Socio-Economic Background, Aspirations, Poverty, Aspiration Formation, Aspiration Gap, Aspiration Window, Aspiration Failure, Capacity to Aspire, Ability to Aspire, Fatalism.