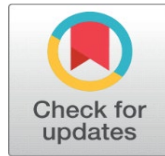
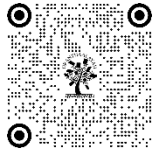


EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF WOMEN SLUM DWELLERS IN KOLKATA MUNICIPAL CORPORATION: A CASE STUDY ON SELECTED WARDS

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ABSTRACT

The educational status of women living in urban slums is a critical indicator of social development, yet it remains an underexplored area in the context of Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC). This study examines the educational attainment, challenges, and socio-economic factors influencing the education of women slum dwellers in selected wards of KMC. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, the research utilizes primary data collected through surveys and interviews with 200 women from 10 selected wards, complemented by secondary data from government and non-governmental reports. The findings reveal stark disparities in educational attainment, with a significant proportion of women possessing only basic literacy or no formal education. Key barriers include financial constraints, early marriage, lack of access to educational infrastructure, and socio-cultural norms that de-prioritize women's education. The study also highlights the role of community-based initiatives and government programs in fostering educational opportunities, albeit with limited outreach and effectiveness. The findings also reveal that while literacy rates have improved in recent years, the majority of women have limited access to higher education or skill development programs. Economic constraints, gender biases, lack of infrastructural facilities, and the competing demands of household responsibilities emerged as major obstacles to educational attainment. Additionally, the study highlights variations in educational status across the selected wards due to differences in socio-economic conditions and proximity to educational institutions. This paper underscores the critical need for targeted interventions, such as inclusive education policies, community-based awareness programs, and infrastructural improvements, to address these disparities. By providing a nuanced understanding of the educational challenges faced by women in slum areas, this research aims to contribute to the discourse on urban poverty and gender inequality.

Keywords: Women Education, Gender Inequality, Economic Constrains, Infrastructural Improvement

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1. INTRODUCTION

Urban slums represent a growing challenge in the rapidly expanding cities of the Global South, where urbanization often coincides with poverty, inequality, and social exclusion. In India, slums are home to millions of marginalized individuals, many of whom face systemic barriers to accessing basic amenities such as housing, healthcare, and education. Among these, women in slum communities are particularly disadvantaged, especially concerning education. Education is a vital

tool for individual empowerment and societal progress, yet it remains an elusive dream for many women living in urban poverty.

The city of Kolkata, a major metropolitan hub in India, is characterized by stark socio-economic contrasts, with sprawling slums existing alongside areas of rapid development. According to the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC), over 1.4 million people reside in slum settlements within its jurisdiction, and women constitute a significant portion of this population. Despite national and state-level efforts to improve education through initiatives such as the Right to Education Act (RTE) and various literacy campaigns, many women in Kolkata's slums continue to experience limited access to formal education. This not only perpetuates cycles of poverty but also curtails opportunities for upward mobility and gender equality.

This study focuses on the educational status of women slum dwellers in selected wards of KMC, seeking to explore the extent of educational attainment, the socio-economic and cultural barriers they face, and the implications for their personal and communal well-being. The wards selected for this study reflect a microcosm of the broader challenges faced by urban slums in Kolkata, with diverse demographic and infrastructural conditions.

By examining the intersection of education, gender, and urban poverty, this research aims to shed light on the factors influencing the educational landscape for women in slum communities. The study also seeks to identify actionable pathways for improving educational access and outcomes for women in these marginalized settings. Ultimately, this research contributes to the growing discourse on inclusive urban development, gender equity, and the transformative potential of education in combating urban poverty.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The education of women living in urban slums has garnered attention in academic and policy discussions due to its critical role in breaking cycles of poverty and promoting gender equity. However, the intersection of gender, urban poverty, and education remains a complex and under-researched domain, particularly in the context of Indian metropolitan cities such as Kolkata. This section reviews relevant literature to contextualize the educational status of women in slum areas, focusing on key themes such as access to education, socio-economic barriers, and the role of policy interventions.

Studies such as those by **UNESCO (2019)** and **Mukherjee and Banerjee (2017)** highlight the precarious living conditions in slums, including overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to public services, which significantly hinder educational opportunities for women. Additionally, factors such as early marriage, gender norms, and the burden of domestic responsibilities disproportionately affect women, reducing their chances of continuing formal education.

Srivastava (2020) found that in Delhi's slums; nearly 60% of women had not completed primary education, largely due to financial constraints and societal perceptions that prioritize male education. These findings are echoed in studies of other Indian metropolitan cities, though specific analyses of Kolkata's slums remain limited.

Agarwal (2015), argues that the opportunity cost of education is higher for women in slums because they are often expected to contribute to household income or unpaid domestic labor.

Kabeer (1999), notes that, cultural expectations around marriage and motherhood often overshadow the perceived benefits of education for women.

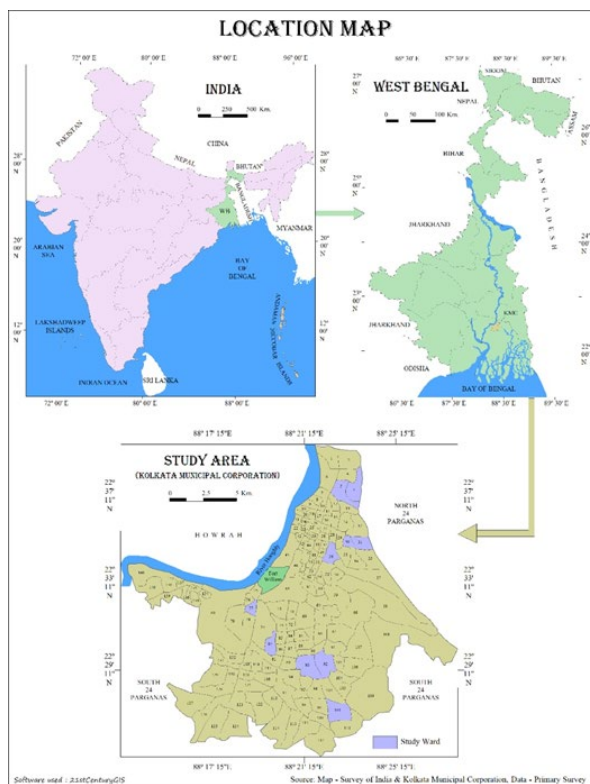
Chakraborty and Roy (2018), emphasize that this is particularly evident in Kolkata, where some slum areas lack adequate schooling facilities or suffer from overcrowding in government schools.

Right to Education Act (2009) and **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (2015)** have aimed to improve access to education for marginalized groups, including women in slums. However, the impact of these policies has been uneven.

Sharma et al. (2020) suggest that while these initiatives have increased enrollment rates, they have failed to address systemic issues such as dropout rates and quality of education.

In the specific context of West Bengal, state-driven initiatives like **Kanyashree Prakalpa**, which provides financial incentives for girls to continue their education, have shown some success in reducing early marriage and improving school retention among adolescent girls (**Sarkar, 2021**).

Kolkata's slums are unique in their historical and socio-economic context, with many originating from rural migration during the colonial period and post-independence industrial decline (Chatterjee, 2008).



Limited studies focus specifically on women's education in these slums. However, broader research by **Bhattacharya (2014)** highlights a significant gap in educational outcomes between men and women in the city's low-income communities.

Furthermore, **Roy and Basu (2016)** argue that while NGOs and grassroots organizations have played a critical role in promoting education in Kolkata's slums, their efforts are often fragmented and lack scalability.

3. OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the current educational status of women residing in the slums of selected wards within the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC).
2. To identify the socio-economic factors influencing the educational attainment of women in these slum areas.
3. To analyze the role of government policies and local initiatives in promoting education among women slum dwellers in the selected wards.
4. To explore the challenges and barriers faced by women in accessing educational opportunities in the slum areas.
5. To assess the impact of education on the overall empowerment and quality of life of women in the studied wards.
6. To provide recommendations for improving the educational status of women slum dwellers based on the findings.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND STUDY AREA

The study employs a descriptive research design to analyze the educational status of women slum dwellers in selected wards of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC). A case study approach is adopted to provide in-depth insights into the factors affecting educational attainment, challenges faced, and the role of socio-economic and institutional frameworks. The research focuses on selected slum areas within specific wards of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation. The wards are chosen based on criteria such as population density, literacy rate, and representation of women slum dwellers. Women aged 15 years and above living in slums within the selected wards. A purposive sampling method is used to ensure the inclusion of diverse socio-economic and age groups. The study includes a sample of approximately 200 respondents, depending on the population size and feasibility of data collection. Both primary and secondary data are utilized for the study. Ward no 3 & 5 (Belgachia and Tala area) for north Kolkata, ward no 30, 31 & 36 (Phoolbagan, Kadapara & Belegghata area) for north eastern part of Kolkata, ward no 92 , 93 & 101 (Lake Gardens, Dhakuriya and

Baghajatin area) for south Kolkata, ward no 77 & 82 (Khidirpur and Chetla area) covering south western part of Kolkata have been selected for sample survey. A pre-tested questionnaire is used to gather quantitative data on educational attainment, family background, and perceptions of education. **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)** was conducted to capture qualitative insights into barriers to education, cultural attitudes, and aspirations. Field visits are conducted to assess the availability and quality of educational facilities in the slum areas. Government reports, census data, and NGO publications relevant to education and slum development. Research papers, books, and articles on women's education and urban poverty are studied thoroughly. Statistical tools such as percentages, cross-tabulations, and Sopher's Disparity Index are employed to analyze survey responses. Content analysis is used to interpret data from FGDs and observations. Emerging themes are identified to understand challenges and opportunities.

5. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

The study surveyed 200 women from selected slums within the Kolkata Municipal Corporation. Key demographic characteristics include:

Table 1: Age Structure of the Respondents

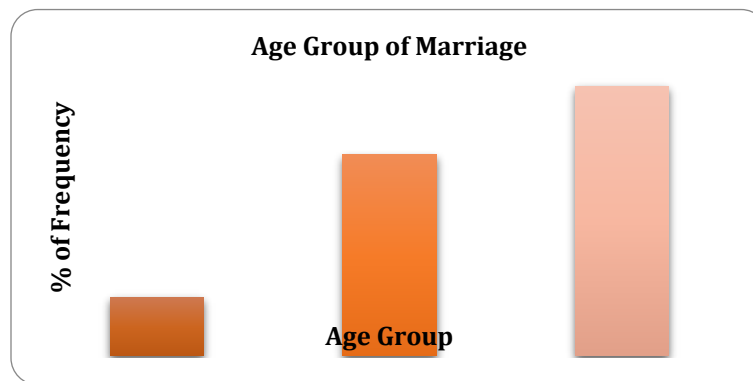
Age Group	No of Respondents	% of Respondents
Less than 6 years	8	4
6-12 years	14	7
12-18 years	20	10
18-24 years	46	23
24-30 years	52	26
30-36 years	28	14
36-42 years	20	10
Greater than 42 years	12	6
Total	200	100

Source: Primary Survey, February 2023

Table 2: Marital Status of the Respondents

Marital Status	No of Respondents	% of Respondents
Married	70	35
Unmarried	32	16
Divorced	18	9
Widowed	54	27
Separated	26	13
Total	200	100

Source: Primary Survey, February 2023



Source: Primary Survey, February 2023

AGE DISTRIBUTION: The majority of respondents (52%) belonged to the 24-30 age groups, followed by 26% aged 30-36, and 16% above 36 years.

MARITAL STATUS: Approximately 72% of the respondents were married, 15% were unmarried, 7% were widowed, and 6% were separated.

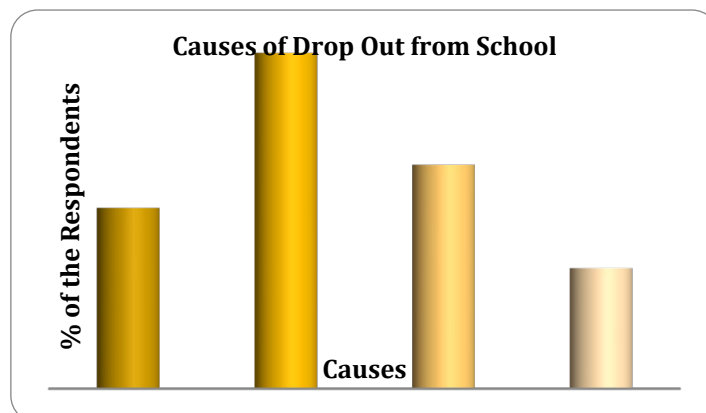
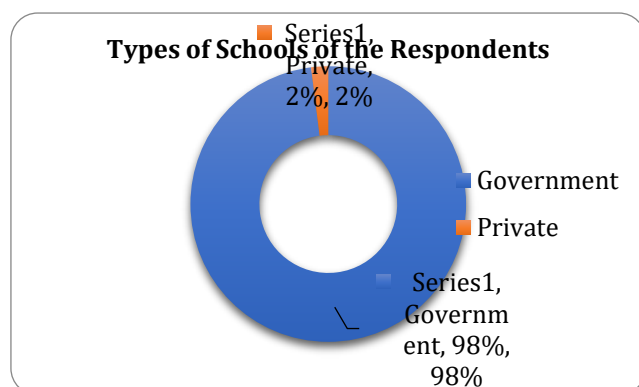
AGE GROUP OF MARRIAGE: 51% of the respondents belong to less than 18 years followed by 18-20 years (38%)

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Table 3: Educational Status of the Respondents

Educational Status	No of Respondents	% of Respondents
Illiterate	42	21
Primary	52	26
Upper Primary	56	28
Secondary	28	14
Higher Secondary	18	9
Graduate	4	2
Total	200	100

Source: Primary Survey, February 2023



28% of the respondents have studied up to upper primary followed by primary level of education. Many of them are illiterate (21%). Very less amount of women reaches up to higher education.

Most of the respondents have studied in government schools (98%) and the main cause of the drop out from school is marriage (39%) followed by need to work at early age (26%). These have led to the irregularity of their schooling (48%). The survey also exhibits that the main age group of drop out is 10- 15 years (58%).

Table 4: Regularity in Going to School

Status	No of Respondents	% of Respondents
Irregular	96	48
Frequently Absent	74	37
Sometimes Absent	18	9
Regular	12	6
Total	200	100

Source: Primary Survey, February 2023

Table 5: Age Wise Drop Out

Age Group	No of Respondents	% of Respondents
Less than 10 years	36	18
10 – 15 years	116	58
Greater than 15 years	48	24
Total	200	100

Source: Primary Survey, February 2023

The **Sopher's Disparity Index** has been calculated on the basis of the data acquired from the local schools to understand the education attainment levels between males and females of the study area.

SOPHER'S DISPARITY INDEX:

$$D = \log(X_2/X_1) + \log(200-X_1) - \log(200-X_2)$$

Where, X_1 = % of Education Completed for Females

From the primary study it has been revealed that 37% of females and 62% of males have completed their school education. So, the **disparity index** is:

$$D = \text{Log}(62/37) + \text{Log}(200-37) - \text{Log}(200-62) = 0.2965$$

This implies that there is a disparity, with males having a higher education rate than females.

Around 30% of respondents highlighted the lack of nearby schools or safe transportation as a deterrent to attending school. Despite barriers, 80% of respondents recognized the value of education in improving their quality of life. Women, who had completed secondary education or higher were more likely to report empowerment in decision-making and financial independence,

Awareness about government schemes like Kanyashree Prakalpa, Oikashree, Sikhsashree and Sabooj Sathi was low, with only 25% of respondents reporting familiarity with such initiatives.

MAJOR FINDINGS

1. **LOW EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT:** The literacy rate among women slum dwellers in the selected wards was 62%. Only 26% of respondents had completed primary education, and merely 9% pursued education beyond the secondary level. High dropout rates were observed, particularly after primary school, due to financial constraints and family responsibilities.
2. **ECONOMIC BARRIERS:** Financial challenges were a significant deterrent to education, with 65% of respondents citing the inability to afford school-related expenses as the primary reason for dropping out. Families often prioritized male members' education over that of females, reflecting entrenched gender biases.
3. **CULTURAL AND SOCIAL FACTORS:** Traditional gender roles and societal norms were reported as major barriers to women's education. Early marriages and household responsibilities often disrupted educational continuity for women in the community.
4. **EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION TRADE-OFF:** A significant portion (45%) of respondents had to join the informal workforce at an early age to support their families, which hindered their access to education.
5. **AWARENESS AND UTILIZATION OF GOVERNMENT SCHEMES:** Awareness of government schemes like Kanyashree Prakalpa, Oikashree, Sikhsashree and Sabooj Sathi was low, with only 25% of respondents familiar with these programs. Among those aware, many faced bureaucratic challenges in accessing the benefits.
6. **PERCEIVED VALUE OF EDUCATION:** Despite challenges, 80% of respondents believed that education could improve their quality of life, empower them in decision-making, and enhance employment opportunities.

The findings highlight the interplay of socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors in shaping the educational outcomes of women slum dwellers. While there are positive trends, significant barriers persist that limit access to education and its benefits. Targeted interventions focusing on financial aid, awareness campaigns, and improving infrastructure are crucial to address these challenges.

SUGGESTIONS

1. **STRENGTHENING GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES:** Increase awareness about government schemes such as Kanyashree Prakalpa, Oikashree, Sikhsashree, Sabooj Sathi, and other educational programs through community outreach and local campaigns. Simplify the process of availing benefits under these schemes to ensure more accessibility for women in slum areas.
2. **IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE:** Establish more government schools and learning centers in slum areas to reduce travel distance and associated safety concerns. Enhance school infrastructure with better classrooms, sanitation facilities, and access to safe drinking water, especially for girls. Ensure regular teacher attendance and availability of qualified educators to improve the quality of education.
3. **FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE AND INCENTIVES:** Provide financial support to families through scholarships, stipends, or subsidies for women's education. Introduce free or subsidized school supplies, uniforms, and books to reduce the financial burden on families.
4. **COMMUNITY AND NGO INVOLVEMENT:** Encourage collaboration with NGOs to provide informal education, vocational training, and awareness programs for women and their families. Promote community-based initiatives such as peer mentoring and women's education collectives to create a supportive environment for learning.

5. **ADDRESSING CULTURAL AND SOCIAL BARRIERS:** Conduct workshops and awareness campaigns to challenge traditional gender roles and emphasize the importance of women's education. Implement programs to prevent early marriages and encourage families to prioritize education for girls.
6. **VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND ADULT EDUCATION:** Introduce vocational training programs for women who could not complete formal education to enhance their employability and financial independence. Establish adult literacy programs to empower older women with basic education and life skills.
7. **MONITORING AND EVALUATION:** Regularly monitor and evaluate the impact of educational programs and policies on women in slum areas to identify gaps and improve implementation. Engage local stakeholders, including ward councilors and community leaders, in tracking educational outcomes and promoting accountability.
8. **INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT APPROACH:** Address intersecting issues like poverty, health, and housing alongside education to create a holistic environment for women's development. Encourage inter-sectoral collaboration between education, health, and social welfare departments to achieve long-term benefits.

6. CONCLUSION

The study on the educational status of women slum dwellers in selected wards of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation reveals the multifaceted challenges that hinder women's access to education in urban slum settings. While there has been gradual progress in literacy and educational attainment among younger generations, significant barriers persist, including economic constraints, cultural norms, and inadequate infrastructure. Financial hardships remain a critical obstacle, forcing many women to prioritize family responsibilities or informal employment over education. Traditional gender roles and early marriages further exacerbate the issue, limiting opportunities for women to complete their schooling. Additionally, a lack of accessible schools, poor quality of education in government institutions, and limited awareness of government schemes impede the advancement of women's education in these communities. Despite these challenges, the study highlights a growing recognition among women of the transformative potential of education in improving their quality of life, enhancing decision-making capacities, and fostering economic independence. Encouragingly, the role of NGOs and community-led initiatives has been instrumental in bridging educational gaps, though these efforts need to be scaled up for broader impact. To address these issues, a multi-pronged approach involving government policies, community engagement, and local initiatives is essential. Strengthening educational infrastructure, providing financial assistance, challenging cultural norms, and promoting vocational training can collectively empower women and ensure their right to education. In conclusion, achieving educational equity for women in the slums of Kolkata requires sustained efforts, targeted interventions, and collaboration among stakeholders. By addressing the identified barriers and building on existing opportunities, this study underscores the potential for education to become a powerful tool for breaking the cycle of poverty and empowering women in urban slum communities.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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