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RESEARCH ARTICLE

GENDER DISPARITIES AND SOCIOECONOMIC INFLUENCES ON HIGHER EDUCATION ENROLMENT IN ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

Higher education is a cornerstone of socio-economic development and individual empowerment. In the dynamic landscape of Assam, India, this study delves into the intricacies of higher education enrolment patterns following the completion of higher secondary education. Leveraging unit-level data from the 75th Round of the National Sample Survey (NSS) on Household Social Consumption on Education in India, our research employs a multifaceted analytical approach, including logistic regression and data visualization, to unravel the determinants shaping enrolment decisions. Our findings reveal that 44.47% of respondents choose higher education, while 55.53% opt not to enrol, shedding light on their motivations and challenges. Gender disparities, especially among Scheduled Tribes, and variations by religion are evident. Factors such as the gender of the head of the household, their education level, family income, and household size significantly affect enrolment. This research contributes to understanding higher education dynamics in Assam and informs evidence-based policies for equitable access and reduced disparities in higher education enrolment.

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education stands as the cornerstone upon which the future of nations is built. It is a crucible for intellectual growth, a catalyst for innovation, and a nurturing ground for critical thinking. The global consensus recognizes robust higher education systems as engines of economic progress, vehicles for social mobility, and repositories of cultural enrichment (World Bank, 2020). With the cultivation of a skilled and enlightened workforce, higher education fuels economic growth, propels technological advancements, and sparks entrepreneurial endeavours (Altbach et al., 2019). It is, moreover, a powerful instrument for advancing social justice, empowering individuals from diverse backgrounds to transcend the confines of socio-economic disparities and collectively shape a more equitable society. Enrolment in higher education institutions transcends being a mere personal milestone; it serves as a transformative catalyst for individuals and societies alike. It marks the commencement of a voyage towards knowledge acquisition, personal growth, and the expansion of horizons. On a global scale, the significance of higher education enrolment lies in its potential to nurture a skilled workforce, stimulate innovation, and foster critical thinking (World Bank, 2020).

It acts as a cornerstone of social mobility, providing individuals with the tools to surmount socio-economic barriers and chase their aspirations (Hossain & Hossain, 2019). Furthermore, higher education institutions serve as crucibles of cultural exchange, hubs of intellectual discourse, and nurturing grounds for leadership qualities (Chauhan, 2018). In the context of India, a robust higher education system is essential to harness the demographic dividend presented by its youthful population, propelling the nation into a future driven by knowledge. The assurance of accessible, high-quality, and inclusive higher education opportunities forms the bedrock of India's aspirations for socio-economic development and global competitiveness. School dropout is prevalent among lower social and economic strata in India, with factors like mother's education, parental interaction, sports participation, and role models reducing it (Kumar et al., 2023). Higher education enrollment in Assam has seen significant growth over the years, driven by various factors such as increased awareness, government initiatives, and socio-economic development. However, despite this progress, several challenges persist for students seeking higher education in the state. Das et al., (2016) in their study identify four key parameters for quality improvement in higher education in North-Eastern India, aiming to boost pass rates in the region by addressing academic, administrative, socio-economic, and placement issues.

However, while enrollment figures have risen, concerns remain regarding the equitable access for marginalized communities. According to Saha (2021) female participation in higher education in Assam has increased in urban and suburban areas, but low rates persist in rural areas and technical and job-oriented courses. Faridus et al., (2023) discovered that within the realm of education, the Muslim community, in particular, is more prone to dropping out or not enrolling compared to Hindus. They also noted significant gender discrepancies, highlighting that females are notably more likely to not enroll or drop out. The researchers identified household socio-economic status, such as the education level of the household head and family income, as crucial factors influencing educational achievements. This research endeavour is grounded in the quest to comprehend the nuances of higher education enrolment and dropout trends among students in Assam, India, following the completion of their higher secondary education. We seek to explore gender-based disparities in higher education enrolment across diverse demographic factors such as caste and religion while identifying the determinants affecting enrolment for higher education in this region. Our analysis leverages unit-level data from the 75th Round of the National Sample Survey (NSS) on Household Social Consumption on Education in India. We employ a multifaceted analytical approach, encompassing descriptive statistics, advanced statistical techniques like logistic regression, and data visualization to shed light on the complex factors influencing higher education enrolment.

Objectives and Research Questions

The primary objectives of this research are as follows:

- To examine the higher education enrolment trends in Assam.
- To investigate the gender-based disparities in higher education enrolment and
- To identify the determinants affecting higher education enrolment in Assam.

Based on the above objectives, the research questions to be addressed are as follows

- What are the enrolment trends in higher education among students in Assam after completing their higher secondary education?
- To what extent do gender-based disparities exist in higher education enrolment in Assam, and how do these disparities intersect with demographic factors such as caste and religion?
- What are the key determinants that influence higher education enrolment decisions among students in Assam, and how do factors like socio-economic background, family income, household size, and education level of the household head impact enrolment choices?

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection: The foundation of our study lies in the utilization of unit-level data extracted from the 75th Round of the National Sample Survey (NSS) on Household Social Consumption on Education in India. Our central sample encompasses a total of 113,757 sample households, which are further distributed into 64,519 in rural areas and 49,238 in

urban areas. Within this dataset, a total of 513,366 individuals were included for analysis, with 286,456 residing in rural settings and 207,462 in urban locales (Government of India, 2019). From this central sample of households, we meticulously extracted a subset that pertains specifically to Assam, a region of interest for our study. This subset comprises 3,744 households, with 2,688 located in rural areas and 1,056 in urban areas of Assam. Within this Assam-specific subset, we identified and selected 1,842 samples that align precisely with the objectives of our research. These 1,842 samples are individuals who meet our desired criteria, representing cases where individuals had completed their high secondary education, subsequently either enrolled in higher education or dropout after completing higher secondary.

Analytical Framework: The analysis was conducted by employing a multifaceted approach that encompassed descriptive statistics, advanced statistical methods like logistic regression, and data visualization techniques. For examining the gender-based disparities in higher education enrolment across various demographic factors such as caste and religion, we utilized fundamental statistical tools, including ratios, percentages, and tables, which allowed us to provide a comprehensive examination of the enrolment patterns. To examine the factors contributing to the enrolment for higher education, a binomial logistic regression model has been employed. The dependent variable in our case is the status of enrolment. The explanatory variables include gender, social group, religion, sex of the head of the household, household Head's education level, family income and household size. As the dependent variable is categorical in nature, there are two options- individuals who enrolled for higher education and individuals who dropout after completing higher secondary education; the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression technique will not be applicable. Therefore, we used a binary logistic regression technique for our analysis. In our case the dependent variable is binary outcome coded as 0 and 1. Individuals who enrolled for higher education are assigned with 1, while individuals who dropout after completing higher secondary education are assigned with 0. Among the explanatory variables we have both numerical variables as well as categorical variables. The functional form of the relationship is:

Enrolment status = f(Gender, Social Group, Religion, Sex of Head, Head's Education, family Income, Household Size): Here, numerical variable includes Family Income (FI) and household size (HS). Binary coding has been used for two variables namely, the gender of the respondent (male=1; female=0) and sex of the head of the respondent (male=1; female=0). We have used dummy variables regarding religious affiliations, social group categories and head's education. The dummy structures for these three characters are as below:

For religion, considering Hindus as the reference group, Drel1 refers to Muslim=1, 0 otherwise; Drel2 refers to Christians=1, 0 otherwise; and Drel3 refers to Others=1, 0 otherwise. Similarly, for social group categories, considering SCs as the reference group, Dsg1 refers to OBCs=1, 0 otherwise; Dsg2 refers to STs=1, 0 otherwise; and Dsg3 refers to Others=1, 0 otherwise. Finally, for head's education, considering "No literate" as the reference category, Dhedu1 refers to "Literate without schooling"=1, 0 otherwise; Dhedu2 refers to "Below primary"=1, 0 otherwise; Dhedu3 refers to "primary"=1, 0 otherwise; Dhedu4 refers to "Secondary"=1, 0 otherwise; Dhedu5 refers to "Higher secondary"=1, 0 otherwise; Dhedu6

refers to "Graduate"=1, 0 otherwise; and Dhedu7 refers to "Post Graduation and above" =1, 0 otherwise. By employing a binomial logistic regression model, this study aims to assess the individual and combined effects of these factors on the likelihood of an individual either enrolled for higher education or had dropped out after completing higher secondary education in the specified study area.

Model specification: Let, Y_{ij} denotes the category of enrolment status of the respondents,

Where, i : indexed for individual respondent

j : indexed for categories of enrolment status. j takes values 0 and 1 for dropped out after higher secondary and enrolled for higher education, respectively.

Thus, Y_{ij} is the i^{th} individual fall in the j^{th} category.

Now,

$\pi_{i1} = \Pr(Y_{i1} = 1)$ is the probability that i^{th} individual has enrolled for higher education.

Thus, the model for odds ratio in favour of enrolling for higher education is as follows:

$$\frac{\pi_{i1}}{1-\pi_{i1}} = \frac{1+e^{Zi}}{1+e^{-Zi}} = e^{Zi} \tag{1}$$

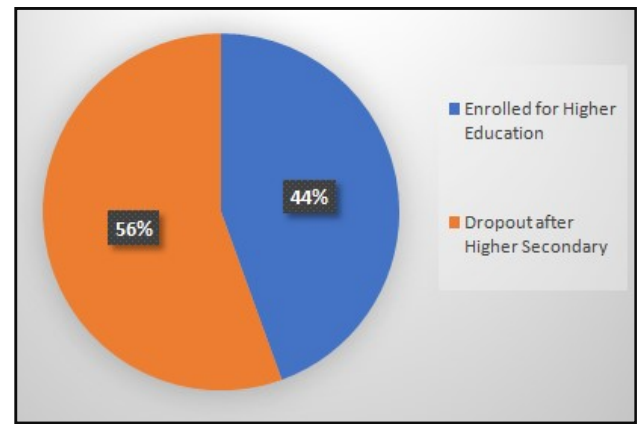
Where, $\left(\frac{\pi_{i1}}{1-\pi_{i1}}\right)$ is simply the odds ratio in favour of enrolled for higher education i.e., the ratio of the probability that an individual will have enrolled for higher education to the probability that he/she will be dropout after completing higher secondary education.

$$Z_i = \alpha + \gamma_1(DGender_i) + \delta_1Dsg1_i + \delta_2Dsg2_i + \delta_3Dsg3_i + B_1Drel1_i + B_2Drel2_i + B_3Drel3_i + \lambda_1(DHead_i) + \eta_1Dhedu1_i + \eta_2Dhedu2_i + \eta_3Dhedu3_i + \eta_4Dhedu4_i + \eta_5Dhedu5_i + \eta_6Dhedu6_i + \eta_7Dhedu7_i + \theta_1FI_i + \psi_1HS_i + \mu_i$$

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

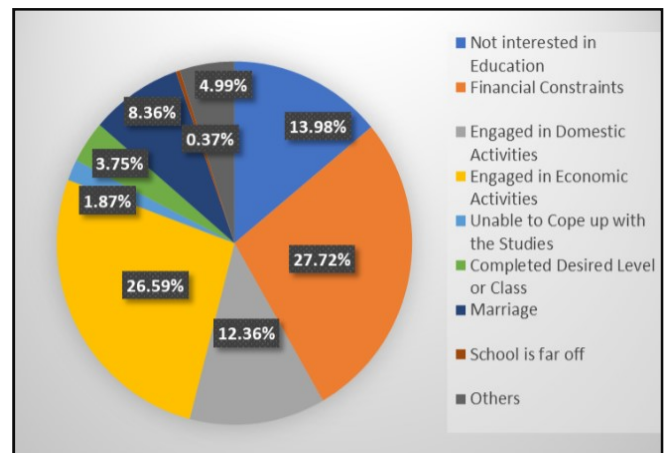
Distribution of Respondents Based on Enrolment Status:

This section analyses the distribution of respondents based on their enrolment status after completing higher secondary education in Assam. Figure 1 visually represents this distribution, providing insights into the percentage of respondents who opt for higher education and those who choose to drop out. The section aims to shed light on the educational aspirations, socioeconomic factors, and career goals of these individuals. Figure 1 presents a graphical representation of the enrolment status of the surveyed respondents. As depicted in Figure 1, the data shows that 44.47% of the surveyed respondents made the choice to continue their education by enrolling in higher education institutions following the completion of their higher secondary education. These students are expected to pursue various undergraduate and postgraduate courses offered by colleges and universities, thereby indicating a clear commitment to further academic advancement.



Source: Author's compilation

Figure 1. Distribution of the Respondents on the Basis of Enrolment Status



Source: Author's compilation

Figure 2. Reasons for Not Enrolling in Higher Education After Higher Secondary Completion

Conversely, Figure 1 also reveals that a substantial portion, specifically 55.53% of the respondents, decided not to pursue higher education after successfully completing their higher secondary education. This statistic is a matter of significant interest and prompts further exploration. The high proportion (55.53%) of respondents who opt not to enrol in higher education after their higher secondary education raises fundamental questions regarding their educational aspirations and career objectives. Understanding the motivations behind this choice is crucial for educational policy formulation and interventions aimed at enhancing access to higher education. Socioeconomic factors such as financial constraints, the obligation to contribute to family income, and limited accessibility to higher education institutions may play a pivotal role in the decision-making process, contributing to the observed high dropout rate. Investigating these factors is essential for a comprehensive understanding of enrolment and dropout patterns. In the subsequent sections, we will delve deeper into the distribution of enrolment status across various demographic factors, including gender, caste, religious affiliation, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Additionally, we will explore the reasons behind the decision not to enrol in higher education after completing the higher secondary level, providing a comprehensive overview of the factors influencing educational choices in Assam.

Social Group-wise Distribution and Gender Disparity in Enrolment:

This section examines the distribution of respondents based on their enrolment status after completing higher secondary education, with a specific focus on social

Table 1. Social Group and Gender Wise Distribution of Enrolment Status after Higher Secondary Education (in %)

All					
Enrolment Status	ST	SC	OBC	Others	Total
Enrolled for Higher Education	39.95	59.38	44.3	43.97	44.47
Dropout after Higher Secondary	60.05	40.62	55.7	56.03	55.53
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Male					
Enrolled for Higher Education	46.84	62.43	47.04	46.7	48.02
Dropout after Higher Secondary	53.16	37.57	52.96	53.3	51.98
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Female					
Enrolled for Higher Education	30.22	53.48	40.74	39.89	39.34
Dropout after Higher Secondary	69.78	46.52	59.26	60.11	60.66
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Author's calculation

Table 2. Religion-wise and Gender Wise Distribution of Enrolment Status after Higher Secondary Education (in %)

All					
Enrolment Status	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Others	Total
Enrolled for Higher Education	46.95	34.63	55.86	20.11	44.47
Dropout after Higher Secondary	53.05	65.37	44.14	79.89	55.53
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Male					
Enrolled for Higher Education	60.94	51.18	50	60	58.78
Dropout after Higher Secondary	39.06	48.82	50	40	41.22
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Female					
Enrolled for Higher Education	55.21	40.65	76.19	57.14	53.53
Dropout after Higher Secondary	44.79	59.35	23.81	42.86	46.47
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Table 3. Logistic Regression Analysis of Factors Influencing Higher Education Enrolment

Logistic regression		Number of obs.	=	1842
		LR chi2(17)	=	231.600
		Prob > chi2	=	0.000
		Pseudo R2	=	0.092
Explanatory variables		Std. Err.	z	P>z
Gender				
Female	Reference category			
Male	1.5022	0.1542	3.9600	0.000***
Social group				
SC	Reference category			
OBC	0.8937	0.1803	-0.5600	0.577
ST	0.6425	0.1412	-2.0100	0.044**
Others	0.7700	0.1586	-1.2700	0.205
Religion				
Hindu	Reference category			
Muslim	0.6930	0.1047	-2.4300	0.015**
Christian	1.8831	0.6638	1.8000	0.073*
Others	0.8322	0.4475	-0.3400	0.733
Head of Household				
Female	Reference category			
Male	0.6408	0.0989	-2.8800	0.004***
Head of HH's Education				
No literate	Reference category			
Literate without schooling	0.7712	0.3036	-0.6600	0.509
Below primary	0.8533	0.2473	-0.5500	0.584
Primary	1.1386	0.2208	0.6700	0.503
Secondary	1.0213	0.2109	0.1000	0.919
Higher secondary	1.3574	0.2744	1.5100	0.131
Graduate	4.0661	0.9828	5.8000	0.000***
Post graduate and above	6.6852	4.3372	2.9300	0.003***
Family Income				
Household size	1.0001	0.0000	6.5100	0.000***
Constant	0.9143	0.0252	-3.2500	0.001***
Constant	1.1046	0.3349	0.3300	0.743

***, **, * implies significant at 1%; 5% and 10% level respectively Source: Authors calculation

group and gender disparities. The table below presents the data for both social group-wise and gender-wise distributions.

ST (Scheduled Tribes): Among respondents belonging to the Scheduled Tribes (ST), the enrolment rate stands at 39.95%, while a notable 60.05% opted to discontinue their education after higher secondary. This data highlights a significant dropout rate among ST students. Among male ST respondents, 46.84% chose to enrol in higher education, while 53.16% decided to drop out. In stark contrast, female ST respondents exhibited a lower enrolment rate at 30.22%, with 69.78% choosing to dropout. This substantial gender disparity underscores the pressing need for targeted interventions to encourage higher education participation among female ST students.

SC (Scheduled Castes): SC students showed a higher enrolment rate (59.38%) compared to other social groups, with 40.62% deciding to dropout. Male SC respondents showed a high enrolment rate (62.43%), with 37.57% deciding to dropout.

Among female SC respondents, 53.48% chose to enrol in higher education, while 46.52% opted to dropout. While there is a gender disparity, it is less pronounced compared to ST females.

OBC (Other Backward Classes): OBC respondents demonstrated an enrolment rate of 44.3%, with 55.7% deciding to terminate their educational pursuits. Male OBC respondents displayed an enrolment rate of 47.04% and a dropout rate of 52.96%. Female OBC respondents exhibited a slightly lower enrolment rate at 40.74% compared to males, with 59.26% choosing to dropout.

Others (General Category): In the "Others" category, 43.97% enrolled for higher education, while 56.03% opted to dropout. In the "Others" category, 46.7% of males enrolled for higher education, while 53.3% chose to dropout. Female respondents in the "Others" category had a lower enrolment rate (39.89%) compared to males, with 60.11% opting to dropout. The data elucidates significant disparities in enrolment status based on social groups, with SC students demonstrating a higher inclination towards higher education, while ST students exhibit a higher dropout rate. The most significant gender disparity in enrolment is observed within the ST category, where a substantially lower percentage of females choose higher education compared to males, necessitating targeted interventions to encourage ST females to pursue higher education. In the SC category, while a gender disparity exists, it is relatively less pronounced compared to the ST group, with both male and female SC respondents displaying relatively high enrolment rates. In the OBC and "Others" categories, gender disparities in enrolment are present, though not as marked as in the ST group. These gender disparities underscore the necessity for gender-sensitive policies and initiatives aimed at promoting higher education among females, especially within marginalized communities like STs.

Religion-wise Distribution and Gender Disparity in Enrolment:

This section examines the distribution of respondents based on their enrolment status after completing higher secondary education, with a focus on religious groups and the gender

disparities that exist. The table below presents data illustrating both religion-wise and gender-wise distributions.

Hindu: Among Hindu respondents, 46.95% chose to enrol in higher education, while 53.05% decided to discontinue their education after higher secondary. Male Hindus exhibited a high enrolment rate of 60.94%, with 39.06% opting to drop out. Female Hindus also displayed a strong enrolment rate of 55.21%, with 44.79% choosing to discontinue their education.

Muslim: Muslim respondents had a lower enrolment rate at 34.63%, with 65.37% opting to drop out. Male Muslims had a relatively higher enrolment rate of 51.18%, with 48.82% deciding to drop out. Female Muslims had a lower enrolment rate at 40.65%, with 59.35% opting to drop out.

Christian: Christian respondents exhibited a high enrolment rate at 55.86%, with 44.14% choosing to discontinue their education. Male Christians had an enrolment rate of 50%, with 50% deciding to drop out. Female Christians displayed a robust enrolment rate of 76.19%, with only 23.81% choosing to discontinue their education.

Others: Respondents from other religions had a lower enrolment rate at 20.11%, with 79.89% opting to drop out. Male respondents from other religions had a high enrolment rate of 60%, with 40% choosing to drop out. Female respondents from other religions had a 57.14% enrolment rate, with 42.86% opting to discontinue their education. The data highlights substantial variations in enrolment status based on religious affiliations. Christians show the highest enrolment rate, followed by Hindus, while Muslims and respondents from other religions have lower enrolment rates. Gender disparities exist within religious groups as well, with varying patterns. For example, female Christians have a much higher enrolment rate than male Christians, while female Muslims have a lower enrolment rate compared to male Muslims. Respondents from other religions, particularly females, face significant challenges in terms of enrolment and retention in higher education.

Reasons for Not Enrolling in Higher Education: Understanding the reasons behind the decision not to enrol in higher education after completing higher secondary education is crucial for policymakers and educators. This section explores the various reasons cited by respondents for not pursuing higher education, shedding light on the factors that influence this choice. Figure 2 presents a breakdown of the reasons provided by respondents for not enrolling in higher education:

Not Interested in Education (13.98%): A notable portion of respondents cited a lack of interest in education as a reason for not enrolling in higher education. This suggests that some individuals may have different career aspirations or life goals that do not align with further academic pursuits.

Financial Constraints (27.72%): Financial constraints were the most frequently cited reason for not pursuing higher education. This indicates that a significant proportion of respondents face economic barriers that hinder their ability to access and afford higher education.

Engaged in Domestic Activities (12.36%): A portion of respondents reported being engaged in domestic activities as a

reason for not pursuing higher education. This could include responsibilities related to household chores and caregiving.

Engaged in Economic Activities (26.59%): Many respondents indicated that they were engaged in economic activities, such as employment or work-related responsibilities. This suggests that the need to contribute to family income or gain work experience may influence the decision not to enrol in higher education.

Unable to Cope up with the Studies (1.87%): A small percentage of respondents cited academic challenges, indicating that they may have struggled with their studies during higher secondary education.

Completed Desired Level or Class (3.75%): Some respondents may have achieved their desired level or class of education and felt no need for further academic pursuits.

Marriage (8.36%): Marriage was another reason mentioned by respondents for not enrolling in higher education. This suggests that life events like marriage may lead individuals to prioritize family life over further studies.

School is Far Off (0.37%): A very small percentage of respondents mentioned that the distance to educational institutions as a factor influencing their decision.

Others (4.99%): Various other reasons not covered in the specific categories above were grouped under "Others." The reasons provided by respondents for not enrolling in higher education after completing higher secondary education are multifaceted.

Financial constraints, engagement in economic and domestic activities, and a lack of interest in education emerge as prominent factors. Addressing these barriers and tailoring educational opportunities to the needs and aspirations of individuals is essential for increasing higher education enrolment rates.

Factors Affecting the Higher Education Enrolment in Assam: In the quest for equitable access to higher education and the rectification of educational disparities, a comprehensive understanding of the myriad factors influencing higher education enrolment is indispensable. As Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson (2009) aptly note, crossing the finish line of higher education is not only of intrinsic value to individuals but also vital for societal advancement. The present study employs logistic regression analysis to delve into the determinants of higher education enrolment within a diverse cohort of 1,842 individuals. Drawing inspiration from the research of Hossain and Hossain (2019), this research seeks to illuminate the intricate tapestry of variables affecting enrolment decisions. Mincer's (1974) pioneering work underlines the significance of education and experience in shaping economic outcomes, a notion that resonates in the context of higher education. Perna's (2006) exploration of the relationship between information about college prices, financial aid, and college-going decisions underscores the complexity of choices faced by prospective students. Moreover, against the backdrop of UNESCO's (2015) Education for All initiative and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (United Nations, 2020) calling for quality education for all, this study assumes paramount importance. By identifying the key drivers and

barriers to higher education enrolment, we aim to contribute to the formulation of evidence-based policy interventions and educational strategies. The multifaceted nature of higher education enrolment, as illuminated by our findings, serves as a valuable compass for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders alike, steering efforts towards fostering inclusive and accessible higher education opportunities. In the following sections, we present the results of our logistic regression model, elucidating the extent to which each of these variables influences the likelihood of higher education enrolment in our diverse study population. The logistic regression model yielded a statistically significant chi-squared test statistic (LR $\chi^2(17) = 231.60$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the model as a whole is a good fit for the data. The pseudo-R-squared value (0.0918) suggests that the model explains approximately 9.18% of the variance in the likelihood of higher education enrolment.

Gender: We found a significant association between gender and higher education enrolment. Males (Odds Ratio = 1.502, $p < 0.001$) were 1.502 times more likely to enrol in higher education compared to females.

Social Group: Social group membership did not show a statistically significant association with higher education enrolment. Specifically, individuals from the OBC and Others social groups did not show significant differences in enrolment compared to Hindu. However, individuals from the ST (Scheduled Tribe) group had lower odds of higher education enrolment (Odds Ratio = 0.643, $p = 0.044$).

Religion: Religion also played a role in higher education enrolment.

Muslims had lower odds of enrolment (Odds Ratio = 0.693, $p = 0.015$) compared to Hindu. Christians had higher odds of enrolment (Odds Ratio = 1.883, $p = 0.073$), although this result was marginally significant. There was no significant difference for individuals with other religious affiliations.

Head of Household Gender: The gender of the head of the household was significantly associated with higher education enrolment. Households with male heads had lower odds of enrolment (Odds Ratio = 0.641, $p = 0.004$).

Head of Household Education: The educational attainment of the head of the household showed a significant relationship with higher education enrolment. Individuals living in households where the head had a graduate degree (Odds Ratio = 4.066, $p < 0.001$) or a post-graduate degree (Odds Ratio = 6.685, $p = 0.003$) had substantially higher odds of enrolling in higher education compared to those with heads having lower education levels.

Family Income: Family income had a statistically significant positive association with higher education enrolment (Odds Ratio = 1.000073, $p < 0.001$). For each unit increase in family income, the odds of higher education enrolment increased by a factor of 1.000073.

Household Size: Household size was negatively associated with higher education enrolment (Odds Ratio = 0.914, $p = 0.001$). Larger household sizes were associated with lower odds of enrolment. In summary, this logistic regression analysis highlights several important factors influencing higher education enrolment.

Gender, social group membership, religion, the gender of the head of the household, education level of the head of the household, family income, and household size all play significant roles in determining the likelihood of higher education enrolment in the studied population. These findings provide valuable insights for policymakers and educational institutions aiming to promote higher education access and enrolment.

Limitations: In this study, we have employed monthly consumption expenditure as a proxy for family income, a common practice in economic research. Monthly consumption expenditure reflects the portion of a household's income allocated to goods and services and is valuable for assessing immediate consumption patterns. However, it is essential to acknowledge that this measure may not encompass savings or account for non-monetary sources of support, such as gifts and in-kind contributions. These factors could influence a household's overall economic well-being but are not fully captured by our chosen proxy. Therefore, while our findings provide valuable insights, they should be interpreted with awareness of this limitation, and future research may explore additional dimensions of family income and well-being.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study provides a comprehensive analysis of higher education enrolment patterns in Assam, India, revealing multifaceted dynamics influenced by demographic factors. The findings demonstrate that while a significant portion of students choose to pursue higher education after completing high secondary schooling, there is a substantial proportion who opt not to enrol. These trends are indicative of various motivations and challenges faced by individuals in Assam.

One of the most critical findings is the presence of gender-based disparities, with males being more likely to enrol compared to females. This discrepancy is most pronounced among Scheduled Tribes, necessitating targeted interventions to encourage female ST students to pursue higher education. Such interventions are not only essential for achieving gender equity but also for harnessing the full potential of Assam's youth. Moreover, this study highlights variations in enrolment based on religious affiliations, shedding light on the complex interplay of socio-cultural factors in higher education choices. Understanding these variations can inform strategies to promote diversity and inclusion within higher education institutions. Importantly, socio-economic factors, including the gender of the household head, their education level, family income, and household size, significantly impact enrolment decisions. Policy interventions aimed at improving access to higher education should address these factors, ensuring that financial constraints and family obligations do not deter deserving students from pursuing further education. The implications of this research extend beyond Assam, as similar patterns may exist in other regions of India and globally. Policymakers, educators, and stakeholders can utilize these insights to formulate evidence-based strategies for fostering inclusive and accessible higher education opportunities. Such efforts align with global goals for quality education (UNESCO, 2015) and contribute to societal advancement by equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills needed for personal growth and economic prosperity. Ultimately, ensuring equitable access to higher education is imperative for

realizing India's aspirations for socio-economic development and global competitiveness.

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