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THE STUDENT'S CHOICE ON DOING POST-GRADUATION

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Abstract

Even though the question of quality versus quantity of education was much debated and improvised with changes over time, little was the concern for students' choice in higher education in India. The study examines the impact of various factors such as the age of marriage, community requirements, gender, social group, family order of birth, and mother's education and employment status on the graduate student's decision on whether or not to pursue higher education. The study is relevant in two aspects. No studies were conducted on students' choice of post-graduate education in Kerala. Secondly, apart from the contemporary studies, our study tries to build a different approach from the students' perspectives to re-examine the choice of the student on whether or not to pursue post-graduation. We find that the socioeconomic status of the household, the mother's employment status, and community perceptions are important to the choice of the graduate student.

Keywords: Education, Employment, Community Perceptions.

INTRODUCTION

The marketization and massification of higher education have epitomized the transitional phase of the education industry in several developed countries. India, a developing nation with the potential to excel in producing a vast army of the highly educated, relatively affordable labor force, which could meet the demand for skilled professionals in developed countries, garners special attention to its purported production factories of talented intellects.

The institutional changes in the higher education system in India have undergone a metamorphosis over the decades. From imparting the moksha to a Vedic system of varnas, which demanded a systematized, well-segregated labor force, to ashrams at the banks of the Nalanda river during Guptas' reign, followed by the concept of 'modern education' by British colonial masters, the transition has accelerated at a tremendous rate over time, given the fact that these changes are minute yet cardinal. Describing the golden era of Indian education would be a tough nut to crack even for renowned historians, based on the mystifying arguments on 'what an education should be?'

As students of the dismal science, we are not pondering over the debacle of reaching a rational conclusion but rather prefer to rack our brains on what all this means today. In the Indian context, the persistence of a diversified culture and socio-economic environment makes it challenging to approach any particular question of interest.

Given the importance of micro-units or an individual's decision, which could provide an explanation for many macro-economic problems we are dealing with today, issues in higher education are no exception. Therefore, our focus is on the choice or preferences of a student to pursue higher education or not. Having emphasized the significance of India's higher education industry and the diversified nature of India as a nation, we narrow our research scope to a particular state.

According to the 2011 census, Kerala boasts the highest graduation rate in India with the lowest gross enrollment ratio (21.8) for higher education among its peer southern Indian states. Coupled with the policies and initiatives from the Kerala government on higher education in the state, it would be reasonable to investigate higher education in the state of Kerala.

RELEVANCE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In recent times, there has been a significant focus on the quality versus quantity of education, with many changes being implemented to improve the overall education system. However, the concern for students' choice in higher education has been largely overlooked in India. Therefore, the present study aims to shed light on this crucial issue, with a specific focus on postgraduate education. The primary objective of this study is to examine the factors that influence a graduate student's decision to pursue postgraduation in Kerala. In particular, the study seeks to investigate whether certain characteristics such as gender, financial status, caste, perception, parental occupation, number of siblings, the scope of the degree, ease of obtaining a job after completion of the degree, cost of pursuing post-graduation, individual and family perceptions, and other relevant factors have any impact on the choice to pursue post-graduation. Given the importance of education in shaping an individual's future, understanding the factors that influence a student's decision to pursue postgraduation is of utmost importance. It is hoped that the findings of this study will provide insights into the decision-making



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process of students and help policymakers and educationists in formulating policies that are more aligned with the aspirations and needs of students.

METHODOLOGY

Apart from the contemporary studies, our study tries to build a different approach from the students' perspectives to re-examine the choice of the student on whether or not to pursue post-graduation. Based on the primary case studies conducted, we try to see if the listed reasons by the students are seen in the following random survey. To procure primary data, a two-phase study with a survey of 50 graduate students in the second phase was conducted in the Idukki district of Kerala using a pre-designed questionnaire. The collected data were analyzed through a variety of statistical tools such as percentages, tables, bar diagrams, and pie diagrams. These analytical techniques help to reveal patterns and trends in the data, offering valuable insights into the study's objectives.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The selection of a higher education institution is a complex and intricate process, and numerous studies have been conducted worldwide to identify and assess the factors that influence an individual's decision to pursue higher education. Most of the studies on students' selection criteria for higher education institutions have been conducted in European nations.

The decision to pursue a higher degree can be seen as a consumer's choice of consumption, and several models have been developed in the literature to analyze this process. However, these models have not been widely accepted. The most popular three-stage models were proposed by Hossler and Gallagher in 1987, Jackson in 1982, and Litten in 1982. Kotler's five-stage model on the consumer decision-making process was the basis for the five-stage models on students' choices (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

When deciding to pursue a degree, an individual must consider the opportunity cost of foregoing valuable experience in the job market. In this decision-making process, there is a trade-off between better qualifications and more years of experience in the job market (Hossler et al., 1989). Additionally, the social, economic, and political characteristics of the individual decision-maker can also influence this issue (Champan, 1981).

Furthermore, an individual's personal aspirations and goals play a crucial role in the decision to pursue higher education. External factors such as family expectations, social pressure, and cultural norms can also influence this decision. The decision to pursue higher education also has significant financial implications, with the cost of tuition, textbooks, and other fees associated with college enrollment often posing a significant burden on individuals and their families. As a result, financial aid and scholarship opportunities can play a critical role in the decision-making process for many students.

Moreover, the job market is continuously evolving, and the skills required to succeed in the workforce are continually changing. A college degree may provide individuals with the necessary skills and qualifications to secure a job in their desired field. However, it is important to note that higher education does not guarantee employment, and other factors such as job availability and competition can also play a significant role in the job search process. Another factor that influences the decision to pursue higher education is the potential for increased earning potential. Studies have demonstrated that individuals with higher education degrees earn more on average than those without (Carnevale et al., 2011), providing long-term financial benefits for individuals and their families.

The likelihood of finding a job is a crucial factor in determining college enrollment (Garma and Moy, 2003). Other external factors such as the popularity of the course (Hossler and Bean, 1990; Keling, 2006), the location of the institution (Absher and Crawford, 1996), the financial cost of attending college, and the assistance provided by the college (Jackson, 1986) are also essential determinants in the decision to join a higher education institution.

In a nutshell, the decision to pursue higher education is a multifaceted issue that involves trade-offs between better qualifications and more experience in the job market, personal aspirations and goals, financial implications, and external factors such as family expectations, social pressure, and cultural norms. Ultimately, the decision to pursue higher education should be based on a comprehensive analysis of these factors and an understanding of the potential benefits and drawbacks associated with obtaining a college degree.

PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

The study sample in the second phase of the study comprises 50 graduate students, with a slight majority of 54 percent male respondents and 46 percent female respondents. A substantial portion of the sample, approximately 80 percent of the respondents, falls into the age category of 20 to 21 years, with a range of ages between 19 to 26 years. Notably, half of the respondents hail from rural



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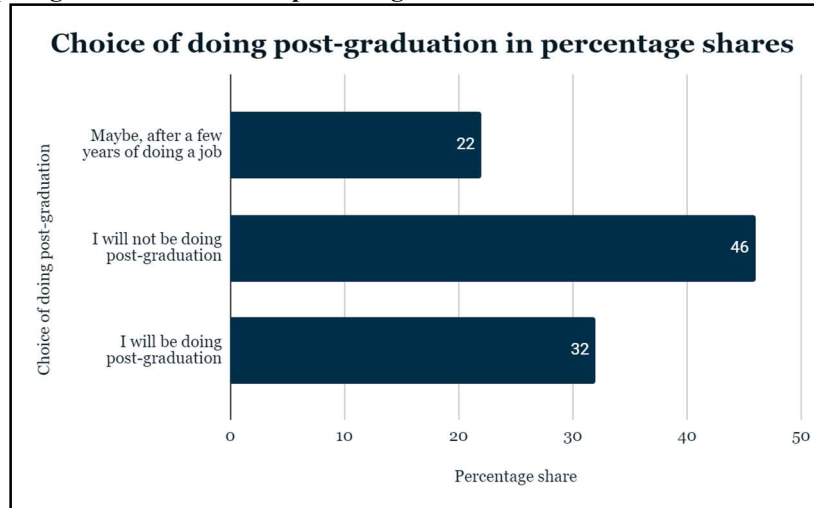
areas of the district, and a majority of them belong to the general category. In contrast, respondents from Scheduled Tribes accounted for a very small percentage, a mere 4 percent of the sample. Furthermore, an impressive 58 percent of the respondents did not have any debt.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

we begin by looking into the study’s general objective, which is to examine the choice of a graduate student on whether or not to pursue postgraduation. Figure 1 and Figure 2 show the choice of pursuing post-graduation by the respondents and the reason for doing post-graduation respectively.

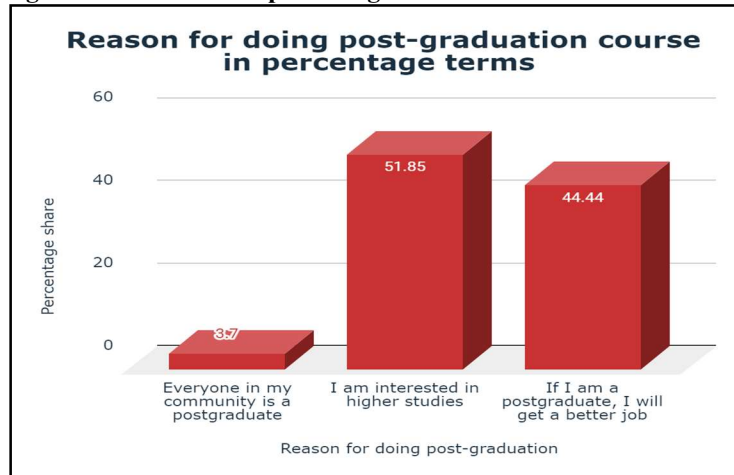
About 46 percent of the respondents are not doing the post-graduation course. Only 32 percent of the respondents will be opting for the post-graduation course after being graduated whereas 22 percent of the respondents may be doing a post-graduation course after a few years of doing a job. Most of the respondents are doing post-graduation because of their interest in studies and to get a better job as seen in Figure 2. It is also important to note that 3.7 percent of the respondents are doing the post-graduate course just because everyone in their community does so.

Figure 1: Choice of doing post-graduation course in percentage terms



Source: Computed from primary data

Figure 2: Reason for doing post-graduation course in percentage terms



Source: Computed from primary data



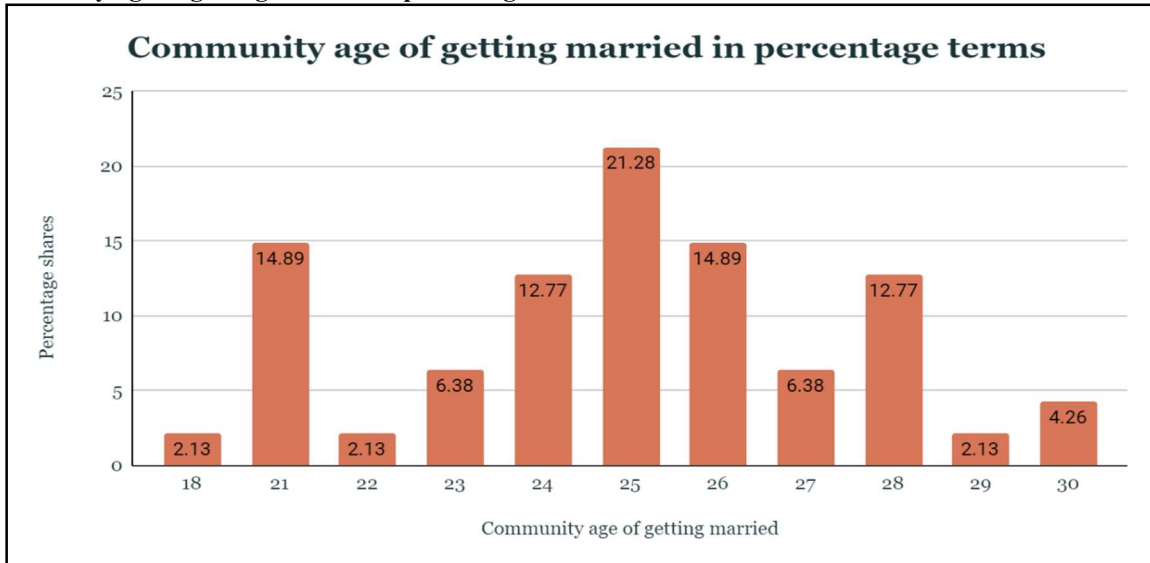
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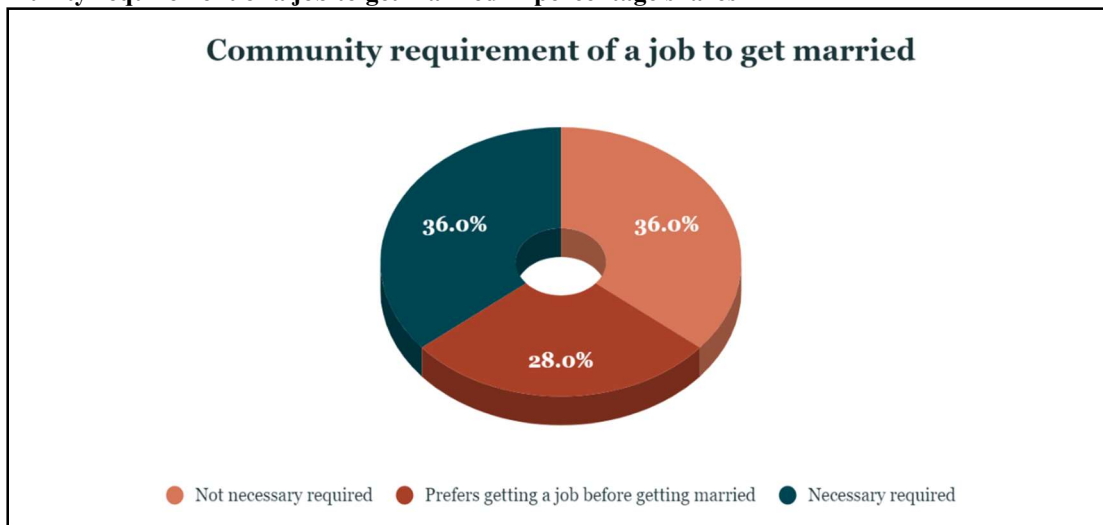
Marriage, the need for getting a job to get married, and the pressure from family and relatives to secure a job as soon as possible are common issues faced by graduate students in Kerala, which are often underestimated in their studies. We attempt to look into this perspective in our study. Figure 3 shows the percentage shares of respondents with the mean age at which the members of their community are getting married. About half of our respondents to the survey have the mean age at which the members of their community get married to be in the range of 24 years to 26 years.

Figure 3: Community age of getting married in percentage shares



Source: Computed from primary data

Figure 4: Community requirement of a job to get married in percentage shares



Source: Computed from primary data

Figure 4 shows the requirements of the community of the respondents to get a job to be married. As seen in Figure 4, about 64 percent of the respondents belong to a community where getting a job is either preferred or a necessary condition to get married. We have already seen that the preferred age for getting married is in the range of 24 years to 26 years for most of the respondents. So, getting a job before getting married at the ideal age preferred by the community becomes difficult after pursuing a two-year master's if we are not guaranteed a job after post-graduation. Hence, it is rational to look for a job or prepare for competitive exams after graduation. This



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should be read along with the high valuation of education in the marriage market by Keralites. We will look further into the gender aspects of this in our analysis.

The age of getting married among females is low as compared to males in most of the communities in Kerala. We find about 8.7 percent of females prefer to prepare for competitive exams rather than do a post-graduation. There are no large differences among gender categories in the percentage share of respondents opting for post-graduation.

Table 1: Gender and choice of doing post-graduation in percentage shares

Choice of doing post-graduation	Gender of the respondent	
	Female	Male
I am going to prepare for competitive exams	8.70	0.00
Maybe, after a few years of doing a job	21.74	22.22
I will not be doing post-graduation	39.13	44.44
I will be doing post-graduation	30.43	33.33
Total	100.00	100.00

Source: Computed from primary data

The social group of the respondent is an important determinant in the community's requirements for getting a job before getting married. The necessity of getting a job before getting married is more stringent among the respondents, except those belonging to other backward classes.

Table 2: Social group and community requirement of the job to get married in percentage shares

Community requirement of the job to get married	Social Group			
	OBC	S.C	S.T	General category
Not necessary required	58.83	40.00	50.00	19.23
Prefers getting a job before getting married	23.53	20.00	0.00	34.62
Necessary required	17.64	40.00	50.00	46.16
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Computed from primary data

Table 3 shows the choice of doing post-graduation with the social group. A comparatively higher percentage share of respondents belonging to the general category is opting for post-graduation. In the case of the Other backward classes, a higher percentage share of respondents are not opting for post-graduation.

Table 3: Social group and choice of doing post-graduation

Choice of doing post-graduation	Social Group			
	OBC	S.C	S.T	General category
I am going to prepare for competitive exams	0.00	0.00	50.00	3.85
Maybe, after a few years of doing a job	35.29	20.00	0.00	15.38
I will not be doing post-graduation	47.06	40.00	50.00	38.46
I will be doing post-graduation	17.65	40.00	0.00	42.31
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Computed from primary data

Even though the respondents from the Scheduled tribe are very less, almost all of the respondents are either opting for post-graduation or preparing for competitive exams. The role of the social group in the community decisions and norms is very important to be observed along with the income status of the households and other determinants in the society.



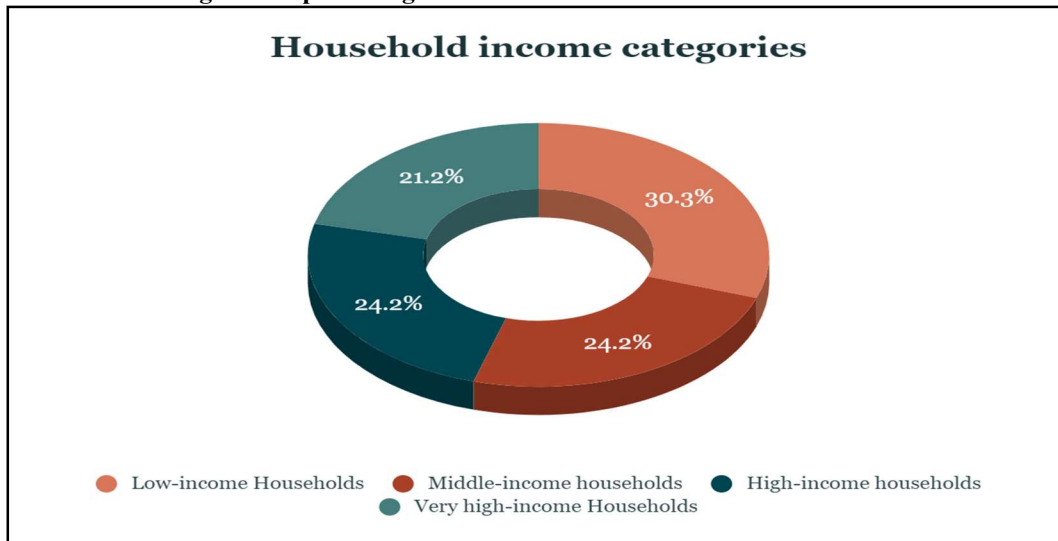
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For our analysis, we categorize the annual income of the households into four quartiles as shown in Figure 5. The income categories with the social group are seen in Table 4. Most of the respondents belonging to the general category are from high-income or very high-income households and a job is either preferred or necessary for most of the respondents belonging to this category. The number of respondents belonging to Scheduled tribes was very small to analyze. In the case of the respondents belonging to the Other backward classes, a very high percentage share of the respondents are belonging to low-income households, and for most of them, getting a job before getting married is not a necessary condition.

Figure 5: Household income categories in percentage shares



Source: Computed from primary data

Table 4: Income Categories and social group in percentage shares

Income categories based on annual household income	Social Group			
	OBC	S.C	S.T	General category
Low-income Households	45.45	25.00	100.00	17.65
Middle-income households	18.18	75.00	0.00	17.65
High-income households	18.18	0.00	0.00	35.29
Very high-income Households	18.18	0.00	0.00	29.41
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Computed from primary data

It would be interesting to look into the student’s choice with the family order of birth of the child. It is argued within the communities that the eldest child is supposed to bear a greater share of the family burden than other children. We attempt to look into this in more detail on whether being a single child or being an eldest child has any impact on the student’s choice of pursuing post-graduation. Table 5 shows the percentage share of respondents who are having siblings or do not. The data has reasonable shares of respondents belonging to all the categories mentioned in the table.

Table 5: The percentage share of respondents having siblings

Having or not having siblings	Percentage shares
I do not have any siblings	14.00
I am not the eldest child	42.00
I am the eldest child	44.00
Total	100.00

Source: Computed from primary data



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Table 6 shows the choice of doing post-graduation is dependent on the order of birth. The differences are evident if we look into the percentage shares of respondents not opting for post-graduation.

Table 6: Siblings’ status and choice of doing post-graduation

Choice of doing post-graduation	Siblings’ status		
	I do not have any siblings	I am not the eldest child	I am the eldest child
I am going to prepare for competitive exams	14.29	4.76	0.00
Maybe, after a few years of doing a job	14.29	19.05	27.27
I will not be doing post-graduation	57.14	38.10	40.91
I will be doing post-graduation	14.29	38.10	31.82
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Computed from primary data

As seen in Table 6, 57 percent of respondents who do not have a sibling are not opting for post-graduation and a comparatively high percentage share of respondents are preparing for competitive exams. When it comes to the eldest child as compared with other categories, a higher percentage share of respondents may be doing post-graduation after a few years of working. We also see that a comparatively high percentage share of graduates who are not the eldest child are doing post-graduation.

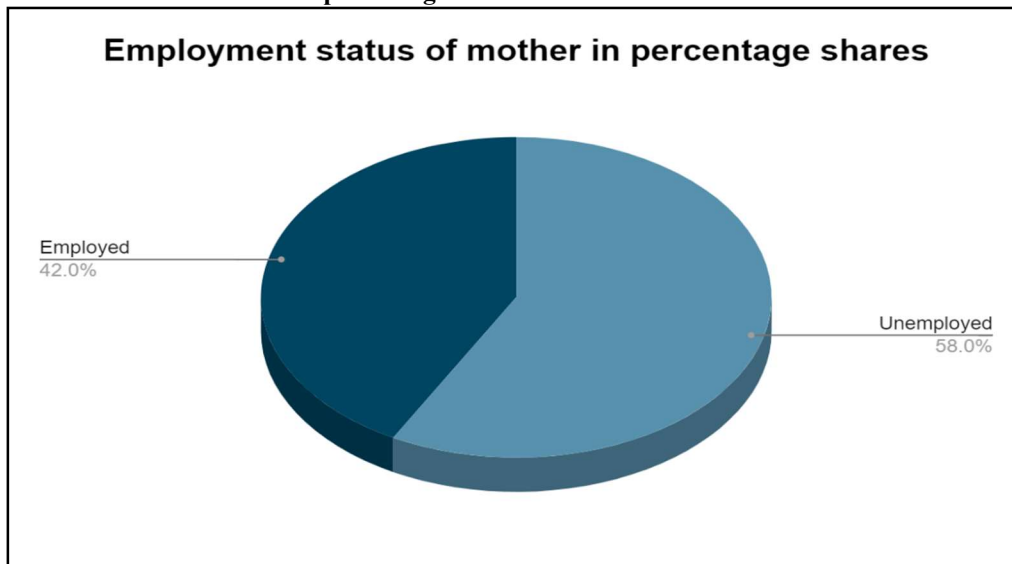
Mothers’ education and employment status are often shown as more important to the decision-making process. So, we will look into this factor and its role in the choice of the graduate student to opt for post-graduation. Table 7 shows the education status of the mother. Most of the mothers have an education up to school education. About 34 percent of the mothers of the respondents are graduates or have an education qualification of graduation and above.

Table 7: Education status of the mother and percentage share of respondents

Education status of the mother	Percent
Up to 7th standard	10.00
Up to higher secondary	56.00
Graduate or above	34.00
Total	100.00

Source: Computed from primary data

Figure 6: Employment status of the mother in percentage shares



Source: Computed from primary data



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Figure 6 shows the employment status of the mothers of the respondents in percentage terms. We have reasonably good data with about 42 percent of mothers who are employed compared to 58 percent of unemployed mothers.

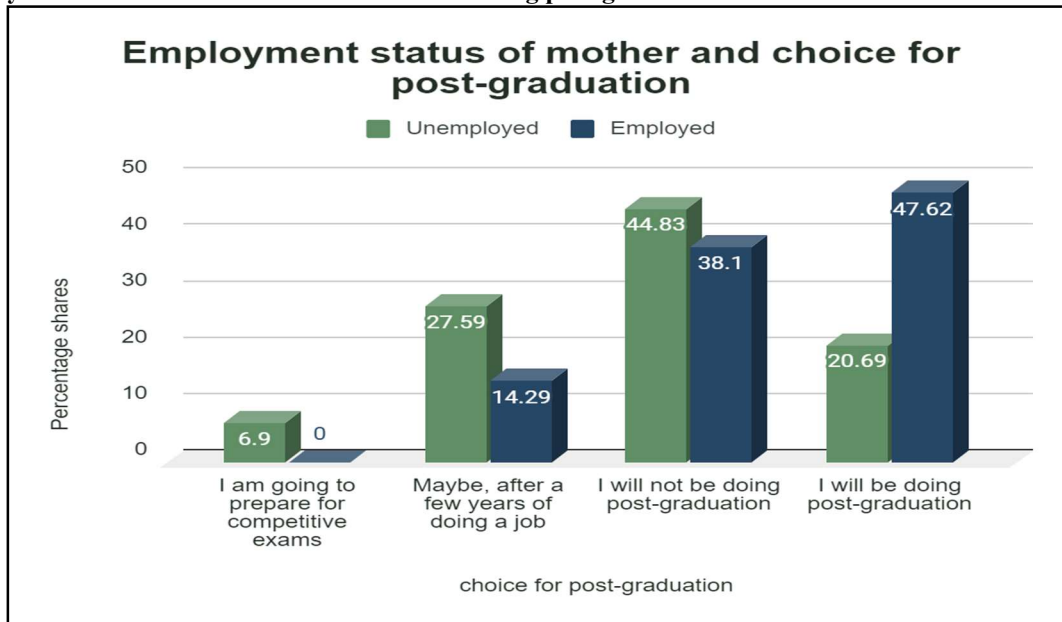
As seen in Table 8, with an increase in mothers' education level, the percentage share of respondents opting for post-graduation also increases. But it contradicts the percentage share of respondents who do not opt for post-graduation. The percentage share of respondents who do not opt for post-graduation is also the highest among respondents whose mothers have an education level of graduation and above. It should be read along with the percentage share of respondents who are going to prepare for competitive exams and the percentage share of respondents who may be doing post-graduation after working for a few years.

Table 8: Education status of mother and choice of doing post-graduation

Choice of doing post-graduation	Education status of the mother		
	graduate or above	Up to 7th standard	Up to higher secondary
I am going to prepare for competitive exams	0.00	40.00	0.00
Maybe, after a few years of doing a job	17.65	0.00	28.57
I will not be doing post-graduation	47.06	40.00	39.29
I will be doing post-graduation	35.29	20.00	32.14
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Computed from primary data

Figure 7: Employment status of the mother and choice of doing post-graduation



Source: Computed from primary data

When it comes to respondents whose mothers have an education level only up to the seventh standard, a very high percentage of them are preparing for competitive exams, and the respondents whose mothers have an education level only up to the twelfth standard, a comparatively high percentage share of them may be doing post-graduation after working for a few years.

Figure 7 shows the employment status of the mother and the choice of post-graduation. It is evident that if the mother of the



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respondent is employed, there is a comparatively higher possibility that the respondent is opting for the post-graduation course and vice-versa. It seems mothers' employment status is more relevant to the child's choice of post-graduation than the education status of the mother.

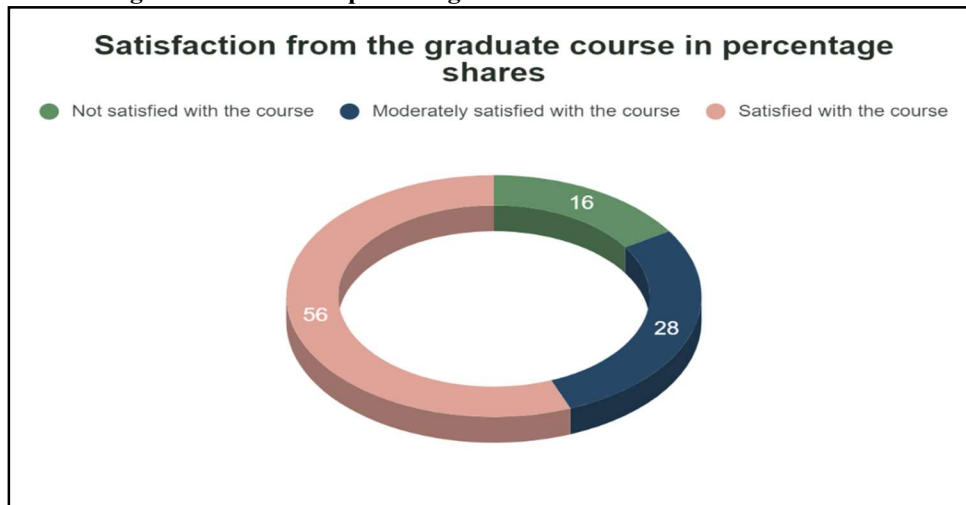
The choice and type of course in graduation are relevant in the choice of doing a post-graduation or not. About 44 percent of the respondents are doing their current graduate subject because of their interest in the course and 34 percent of the respondents are doing the graduate course because of better job opportunities. The mentioned are the major reasons for doing the graduate course for most of the respondents.

Table 9: Reason for doing the graduate course in percentage terms

Reason for doing a graduate course	Percentage shares
Because my parents told me to do so	14.00
Better job opportunities	34.00
I am interested to study the course	44.00
Just for sake of getting a job	8.00
Total	100.00

Source: Computed from primary data

Figure 8: Satisfaction from the graduate course in percentage shares



Source: Computed from primary data

Figure 8 shows satisfaction with the graduate course. 56 percent of the respondents were satisfied with the graduate course whereas 16 percent of the respondents are not satisfied with the graduate course. The reason for joining the graduate course and the satisfaction from the course are more or less related. The reason for joining the course and the satisfaction from the course is given in Table 10. As we could see, about 73 percent of the respondents who joined the graduate course because of their interest are satisfied with the course. Only 59 percent and a mere 30 percent of the respondents who joined the graduate course for the purpose of getting a better job and due to parents' decision are satisfied with the course.

Table 10: Reason for joining the course and satisfaction with the course in percentage shares

Satisfaction with the course	Reason for joining the course			
	Because my parents told me to do so	Better job opportunities	I am interested to study the course	Just for the sake of getting a job
Not satisfied with the course	28.57	11.76	13.64	25.00
Moderately satisfied with the course	42.86	29.41	13.64	75.00
Satisfied with the course	28.57	58.82	72.72	0.00
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Computed from primary data



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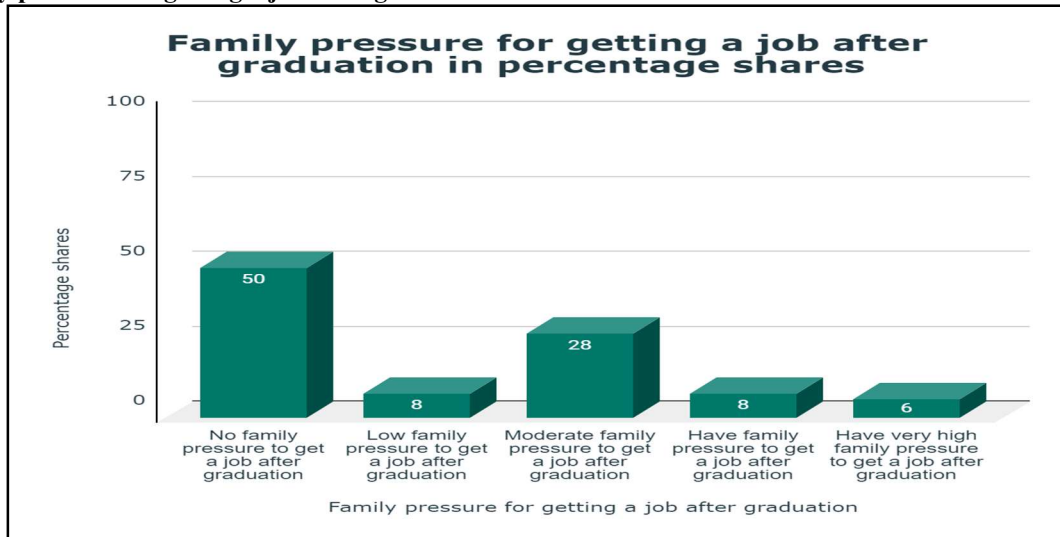
On pursuing higher education, the student loses the possibility of getting employed at an earlier age. Hence, the possibility of getting a job after the graduate course is an important factor for the choice of post-graduation. Table 11 shows the percentage share of respondents with their possibility of getting a job after the graduate course. Only 18 percent of the respondents are sure of getting a job after graduation.

Table 11: Possibility of getting a job after the graduate course

Possibility of getting a job after the graduate course	Percentage shares
No chance of getting a job	22.00
Low chances of getting a job	14.00
May get a job	26.00
High chances of getting a job	20.00
I will get a job	18.00
Total	100.00

Source: Computed from primary data

Figure 9: Family pressure for getting a job after graduation



Source: Computed from primary data

Compulsion from family to look for a job after graduation is very important to our analysis. About 42 percent of the respondents have moderate or high pressure from their families to get a job after graduation. Income categories based on family pressure to get a job are shown in Table 12. Low-income households have a relatively low percentage share of respondents having no family pressure to get a job after graduation. They also have a high percentage share of respondents having high family pressure to get a job after graduation.

As seen in Table 13, the possibility of getting a job after graduation has no big impact on the choices made by the student on whether to opt for post-graduation. But the clarity on getting or not getting a job is associated with more respondents opting for post-graduation. Meanwhile, a very low percentage share of respondents opted for post-graduation when there is only a moderate chance of getting a job after graduation. In the latter case, a higher percentage share of respondents may be doing post-graduation after working for a few years as compared to other categories.

Table 12: Pressure from family to secure a job after graduation and family income

Family pressure for getting a job after graduation	Annual family income of the household			
	Low-income household	Middle-income household	High-income household	Very high-income household
No family pressure to get a job after graduation	40.00	62.50	50.00	57.14



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Low family pressure to get a job after graduation	10.00	0.00	0.00	28.57
Moderate family pressure to get a job after graduation	20.00	12.50	50.00	0.00
Have family pressure to get a job after graduation	10.00	12.50	0.00	14.29
Have very high family pressure to get a job after graduation	20.00	12.50	0.00	0.00
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Computed from primary data

Table 13: Possibility of getting a job and choice of post-graduation

Choice of doing post-graduation	Possibility of getting a job after graduation				
	No chance of getting a job	Low chance of getting a job	Moderate chance of getting a job	High chance of getting a job	I will get a job
I am going to prepare for competitive exams	9.09	0.00	7.69	0.00	0.00
Maybe, after a few years of doing a job	9.09	14.29	38.46	30.00	11.11
I will not be doing post-graduation	36.36	42.86	46.15	50.00	33.33
I will be doing post-graduation	45.45	42.86	7.69	20.00	55.56
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Computed from primary data

Table 14: Family pressure for getting a job after and choice of post-graduation

Choice of doing post-graduation	Family Pressure of getting a job as soon as possible				
	No pressure from family for getting a job as soon as possible	low pressure from family for getting a job as soon as possible	Moderate pressure from family for getting a job as soon as possible	High pressure from family for getting a job as soon as possible	Very high pressure from family for getting a job as soon as possible
I am going to prepare for competitive exams	4.00	25.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Maybe, after a few years of doing a job	12.00	50.00	35.71	0.00	33.33
I will not be doing post-graduation	48.00	25.00	35.71	50.00	33.33
I will be doing post-graduation	36.00	0.00	28.57	50.00	33.33
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Computed from primary data

It seems that pressure from family members or relatives to secure a job after graduation had no evident impact on the choice of the graduate students on whether or not to opt for post-graduation as seen in Table 14.



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CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study finds that the age of getting married and the necessity of getting a job before getting married are very important in the choice of the graduate on whether or not to go for higher studies. The necessity of getting a job before getting married is more stringent among the respondents, except those belonging to other backward classes. The role of the social group in the community decisions and norms is very important to be observed along with the income status of the households and other determinants in the society. Mothers' education and employment status are often shown as more important to the decision-making process. The pressure from family members or relatives to secure a job after graduation had no evident impact on the choice of the graduate students to pursue post-graduation.

Based on the findings of the study, there are several recommendations that can be made to address the challenges faced by graduate students in Kerala. The study indicates that a significant proportion of students are opting out of post-graduation due to societal pressures and expectations around marriage and employment. Therefore, it is important to encourage and support students in pursuing post-graduation, particularly female students who may face greater pressure to marry early. This can be done through financial assistance, career counseling, and awareness campaigns. The study reveals that socioeconomic status and social group play a significant role in determining the choice to pursue post-graduation. Therefore, it is important to address socioeconomic disparities by providing equal opportunities and resources to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. This can be done through affirmative action policies, scholarships, and other forms of support.

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