



# SOCIO-ECONOMIC REALITIES OF SLUM DWELLERS IN JAISALMER, RAJASTHAN: A MICRO-LEVEL STUDY

**Alpana Jana Maity<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Nizamuddin Ahmed<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Independent Researcher & Ex-Student, Department of Education,  
Diamond Harbour Women's University, West Bengal, India

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Haldia Govt. College, Purba Medinipur,  
West Bengal, India

## ABSTRACT

This study explores the socio-economic and demographic profile of slum dwellers residing in two selected localities of Jaisalmer district, Rajasthan – Transport Nagar (Gandhi Nagar) and Jethwai Road (Kishan Ghat). Utilizing a qualitative survey research design, the study gathered primary data from 50 purposively sampled households, covering a total of 421 individuals. The research aimed to assess multiple dimensions including age distribution, marital status, education, occupation, income levels, caste, religion, and reproductive patterns such as age at marriage and childbirth. The findings reveal a high prevalence of early marriage and adolescent motherhood, low levels of education and literacy, predominance of informal and unskilled occupations, and severe income constraints – with 78% of households earning between ₹4,000–₹6,000 monthly. Additionally, the majority of the population belongs to socio-economically disadvantaged caste groups such as EWS, OBC, and ST. These conditions collectively indicate a complex web of marginalization shaped by poverty, social exclusion, and inadequate access to essential services. The study concludes with targeted policy recommendations advocating for improved access to education, healthcare, livelihood opportunities, and inclusive urban development strategies to address the entrenched vulnerabilities of slum communities.

**KEYWORDS:** Slum Dwellers, Socio-Economic Profile, Slum areas of Jaisalmer

## INTRODUCTION

Slums are densely populated urban settlement characterized by substandard housing, inadequate infrastructure, and extreme socioeconomic deprivation. These areas typically emerge due to rapid urbanization, rural-to-urban migration, and systematic inequality. Approximately one in seven people globally resides in an urban slum community. According to UN-Habitat's 2022 World Cities Report, business-as-usual urbanization will expand slum population by 2030 could reach 1.5 billion( 1 in 4 urban dwellers) could live in slums, Potentially as many as 3 billion by 2050, this urban problem is clearly evident in heritage sites like Jaisalmer.

While Jaisalmer is globally renowned for its golden fort and Thar Desert landscape, the living condition of its slum dwellers present a starkly different narrative. These communities face compounded challenges: extreme desert temperatures (regularly exceeding 48 degree C), low income families, daily -wage labour, limited access to clean drinking water, and educational facilities. Limited access to government welfare programmes and healthcare facilities further worsens their situation, as many slum residents do not possess the necessary documentation to avail themselves of social security benefit. The arid desert environment further intensifies their social- economic struggles, rendering daily survival an ongoing challenge. Persistent income disparities and a lack of diverse employment avenues beyond tourism have reinforced generational cycles of poverty within these marginalized settlements.

“Nobody sees us unless they need cheap labour”, says a construction worker in Jaisalmer largest slum. That statement reflects the harsh reality economic exploitation, social neglect and inequality faced by dwellers in Jaisalmer. This goes beyond just the issue of poverty-it pertains to unfulfilled commitments. Jaisalmer's slums represent the catastrophic failure of trickle down urban development. While the city earns UNESCO accolades, its human infrastructure crumbles. With this background the present research was undertaken with the overarching aim of exploring and analyzing the socio-economic and demographic conditions of slum dwellers reside at Transport Nagar (Gandhi Nagar) and Jethwai Road (Kishan Ghat) slum areas of Jaisalmer district, Rajasthan, India.



## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research was undertaken with the overarching aim of exploring and analyzing the socio-economic and demographic conditions of slum dwellers in selected areas of Jaisalmer district, Rajasthan, India. Given the persistent marginalization and infrastructural deficits experienced by urban poor communities, the study seeks to contribute empirical insights to inform inclusive urban policy and development planning. The objectives of the study are outlined below:

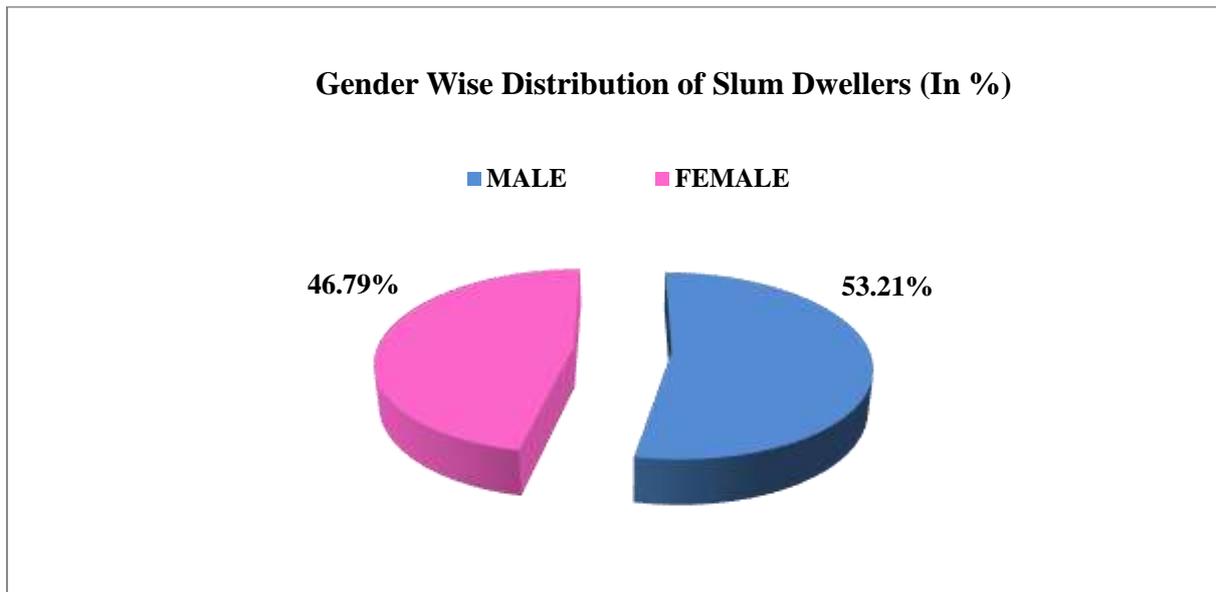
1. To analyze the caste and religious composition of the slum population, thereby identifying patterns of social exclusion and community segmentation within marginalized groups.
2. To assess the levels of educational attainment and literacy, highlighting the extent of formal schooling and functional literacy among both adult and youth populations.
3. To study the age at marriage and age at first childbirth, particularly among females, with a view to understanding the prevalence and socio-cultural drivers of early marriage and adolescent motherhood.
4. To investigate occupational patterns and types of employment among slum dwellers, with attention to informal sector dependence and gender-based divisions of labor.
5. To evaluate the monthly household income distribution, identifying the depth of economic vulnerability and the concentration of families within low-income brackets.
6. To explore the interrelationships between education, income, and occupation in perpetuating cycles of poverty and social immobility within slum communities.
7. To provide a reliable baseline of socio-economic data that can inform targeted policy measures, non-governmental interventions, and integrated development strategies for improving the living conditions of urban slum dwellers.

## METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This study adopts a qualitative survey research design to explore the demographic and socio-economic status of slum dwellers in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan, India. The research was conducted in two purposively selected slum localities—Transport Nagar (Gandhi Nagar) and Jethwai Road (Kishan Ghat)—identified for their high concentration of economically weaker sections and visibly underdeveloped living conditions. A total of 50 households were surveyed using a purposive sampling technique, yielding comprehensive data on 421 individuals. The data collected covered multiple dimensions including educational level, age, income, occupation, marital status, age at marriage, and age at first childbirth. A self-developed interview schedule served as the primary tool for data collection, incorporating questions on demographic characteristics (sex, age, and marital status), education, employment type, monthly household income, as well as caste and religion. Fieldwork was conducted during the months of February and March 2025. The collected data were systematically organized, coded, and entered into Microsoft Excel for tabulation and statistical analysis. Visual tools such as tables and charts were utilized to enhance the clarity and impact of the findings. Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the research process; verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants after explaining the study's purpose, and participation was entirely voluntary, ensuring privacy and respect for all respondents.

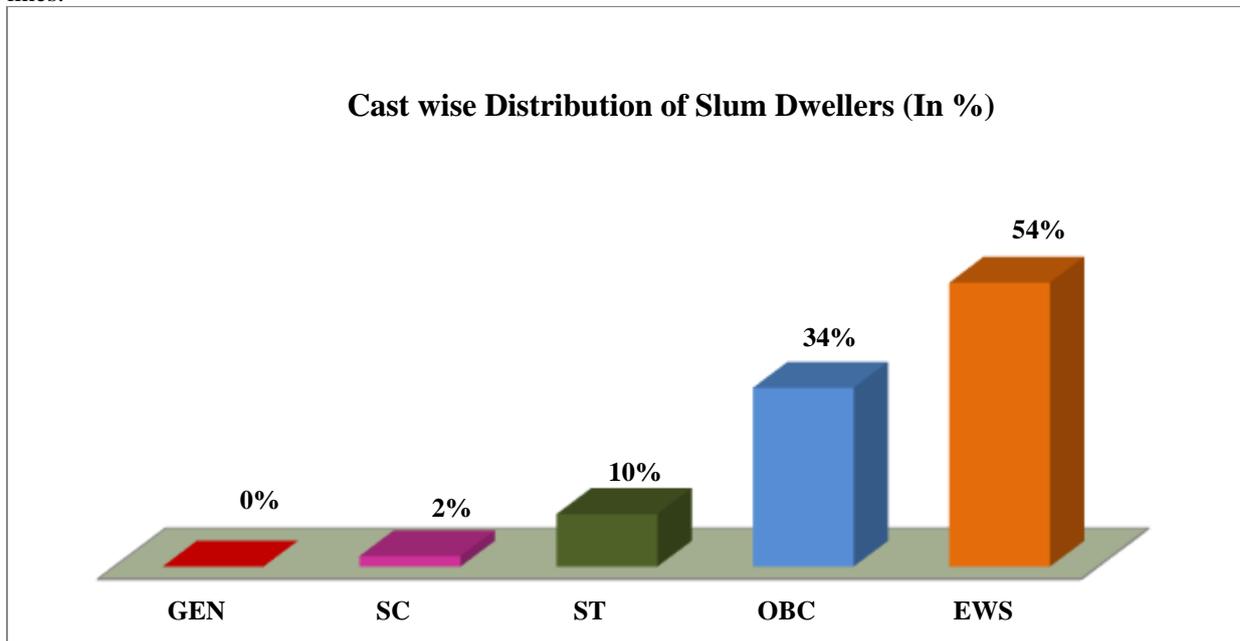
## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

**a) Gender Wise Distribution of Slum Dwellers:** Figure 01 indicates the gender wise distribution of slum dwellers under the present study. It has been found that 53.21% of studied slum dwellers are male, and 46.79% are female.



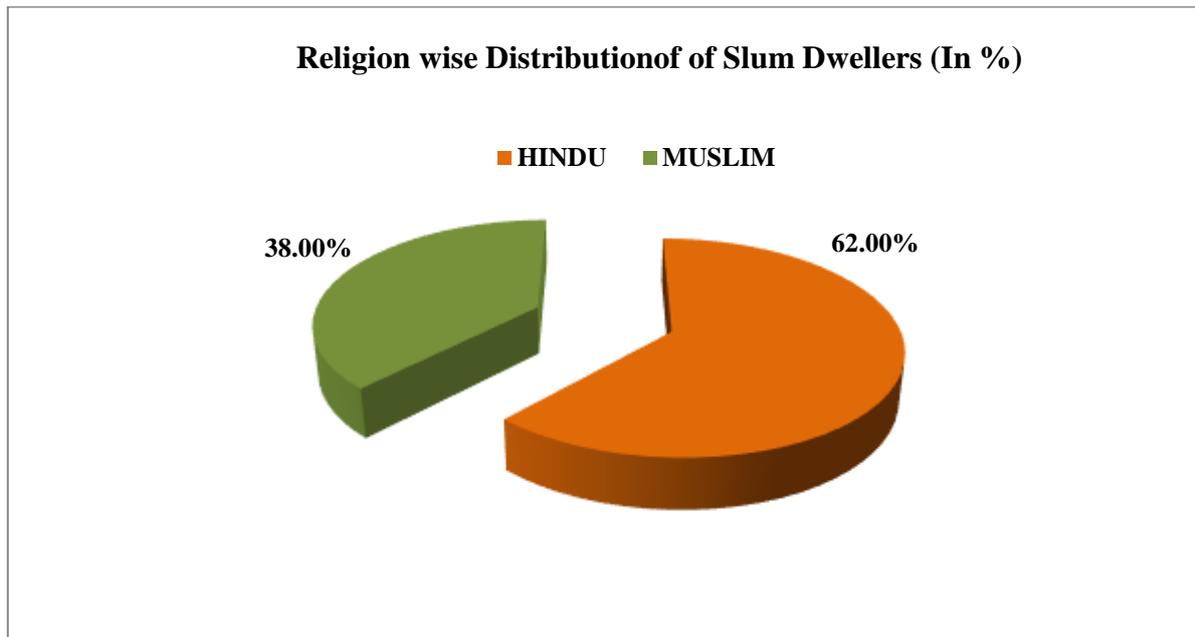
**Figure 01: Gender Wise Distribution of Slum Dwellers**

**b) Cast wise Distribution of Slum Dwellers:** The caste-wise analysis of slum dwellers in the selected regions of Jaisalmer highlights a pronounced dominance of economically weaker sections (EWS), who constitute 54% of the population. This is followed by 34% belonging to Other Backward Classes (OBC), and 10% to Scheduled Tribes (ST). Representation from Scheduled Castes (SC) is minimal at 2%, while no individuals from the General category were recorded. These statistics suggest that the majority of the slum population comes from socio-economically disadvantaged caste groups, reinforcing the deep entrenchment of poverty along caste and class lines.



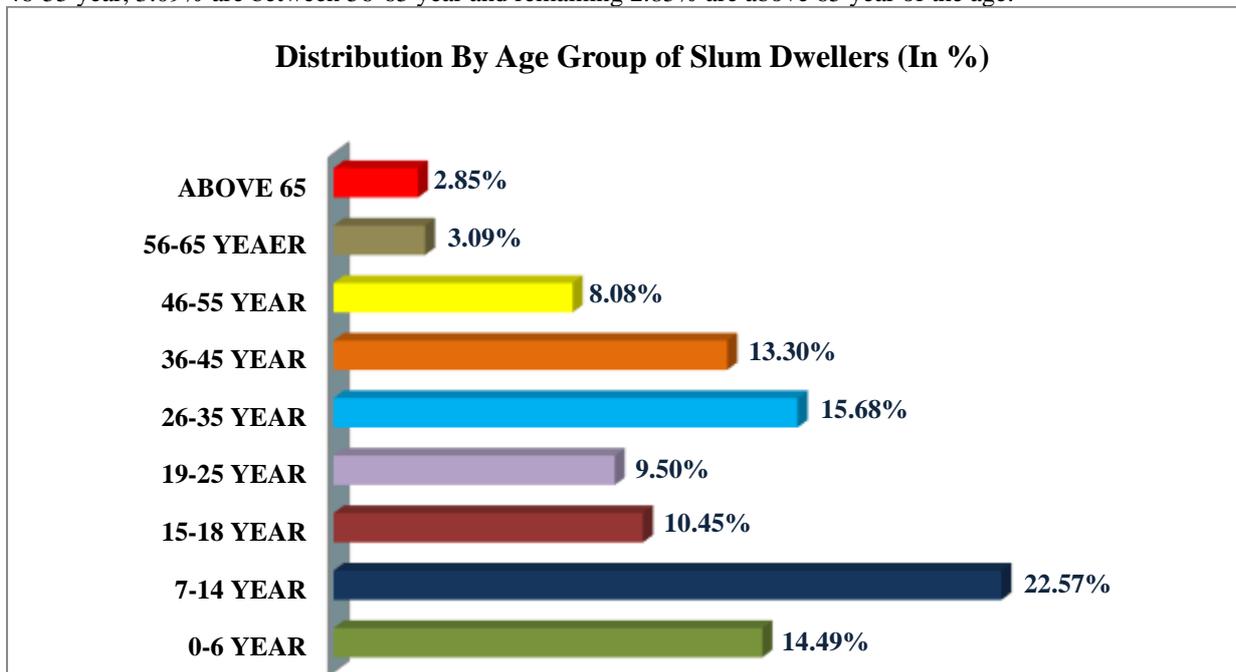
**Figure 02: Cast wise Distribution of Slum Dwellers**

**c) Religion wise Distribution of Slum Dwellers:** The religion-wise distribution of slum dwellers in Jaisalmer indicates that the majority of the population identifies as Hindu (62.00%), while Muslims constitute 38.00%. This demographic pattern reflects the broader religious composition typical of the region, while also underscoring the shared socio-economic challenges experienced across religious groups in the slum area.



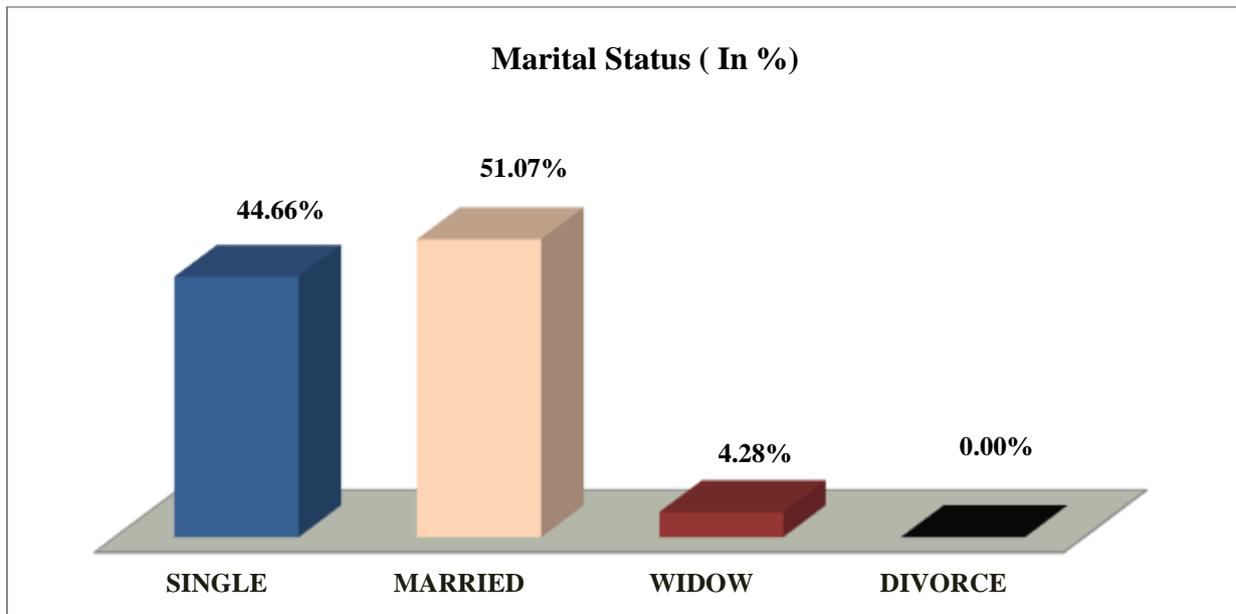
**Figure 03: Religion wise Distribution of Slum Dwellers**

**d) Distribution by Age Group of Slum Dwellers:** Figure 04 indicates the age of the slum dwellers under study was categorized in to nine categories. In the slum area 14.49% individuals are in the age group of 0-6 year, 22.57% fall under the age group 7-14 year, 10.45% are in the age group of 15-18 year, 9.50% in the age group of 19-25 year, 15.68% belongs to 26-35 year, 13.30% fall in the group of 36-45 year, 8.08% each are in the age group of 46-55 year, 3.09% are between 56-65 year and remaining 2.85% are above 65 year of the age.



**Figure 04: Distribution by Age Group of Slum Dwellers**

**e) Marital Status:** Figure 05 reveals the analysis of marital status among slum dwellers. It has been found that a majority of the population is married, accounting for 51.07%. This is followed by 44.66% who are single. A smaller proportion, 4.28%, comprises widows, while no respondents reported being divorced (0.00%). These findings highlight the predominance of traditional marital structures within the community, with negligible instances of divorce.



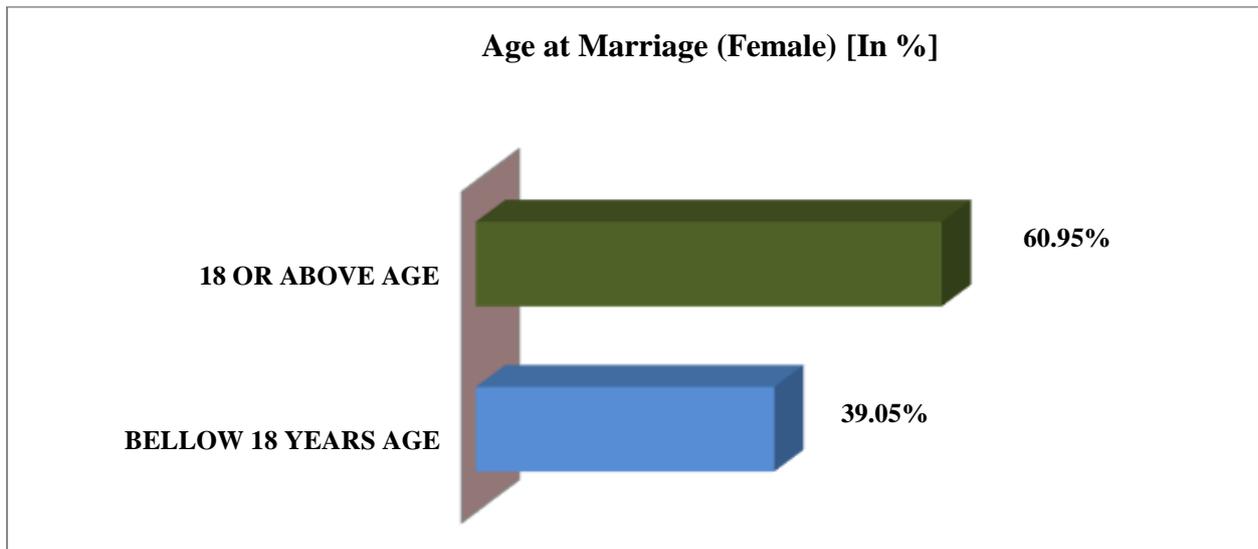
**Figure 05: Marital Status**

**f) Age at Marriage (Male):** The data on the age at marriage among male slum dwellers indicates that early marriage is prevalent. A significant proportion—60.16%—were married below the legal age of 21 years, while only 39.84% were married at the age of 21 or above. This suggests widespread early male marriage within this community, potentially reflecting socio-economic and cultural pressures.



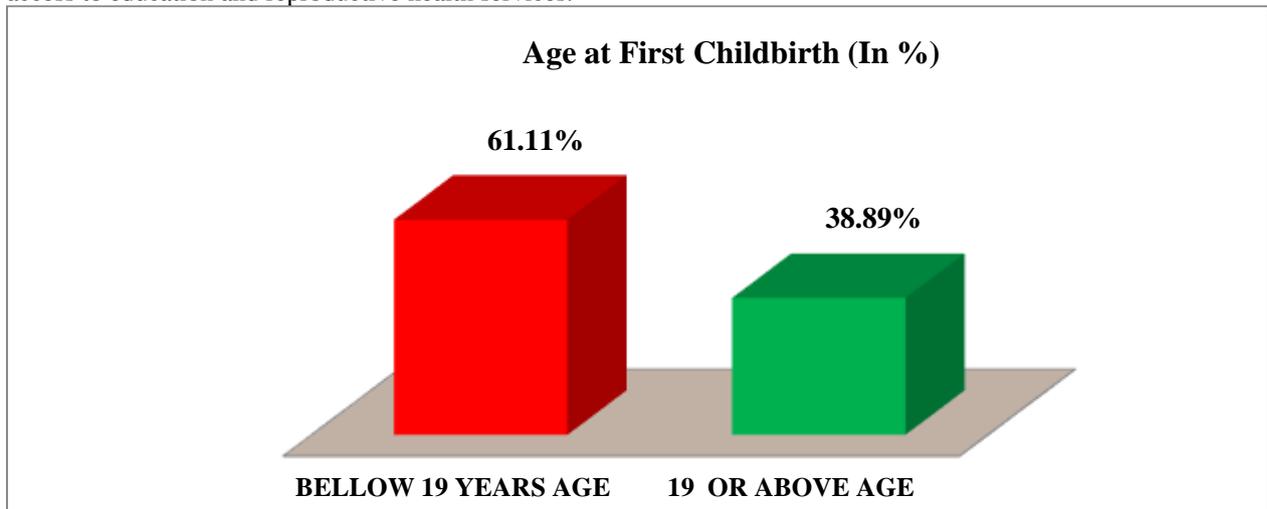
**Figure 06: Age at Marriage (Male)**

**g) Age at Marriage (Female):** The findings on age at marriage among slum dwellers in Jaisalmer reveal notable gender-based disparities. Among males, 60.16% were married before the legal age of 21, whereas 39.84% married at 21 or above. In contrast, a higher proportion of females (60.95%) were married at or after the legal age of 18, while 39.05% married below 18. These statistics reflect that early marriage persists more prominently among males in this community, though a substantial percentage of females also experience underage marriage, indicating ongoing socio-cultural and economic influences shaping marital decisions.



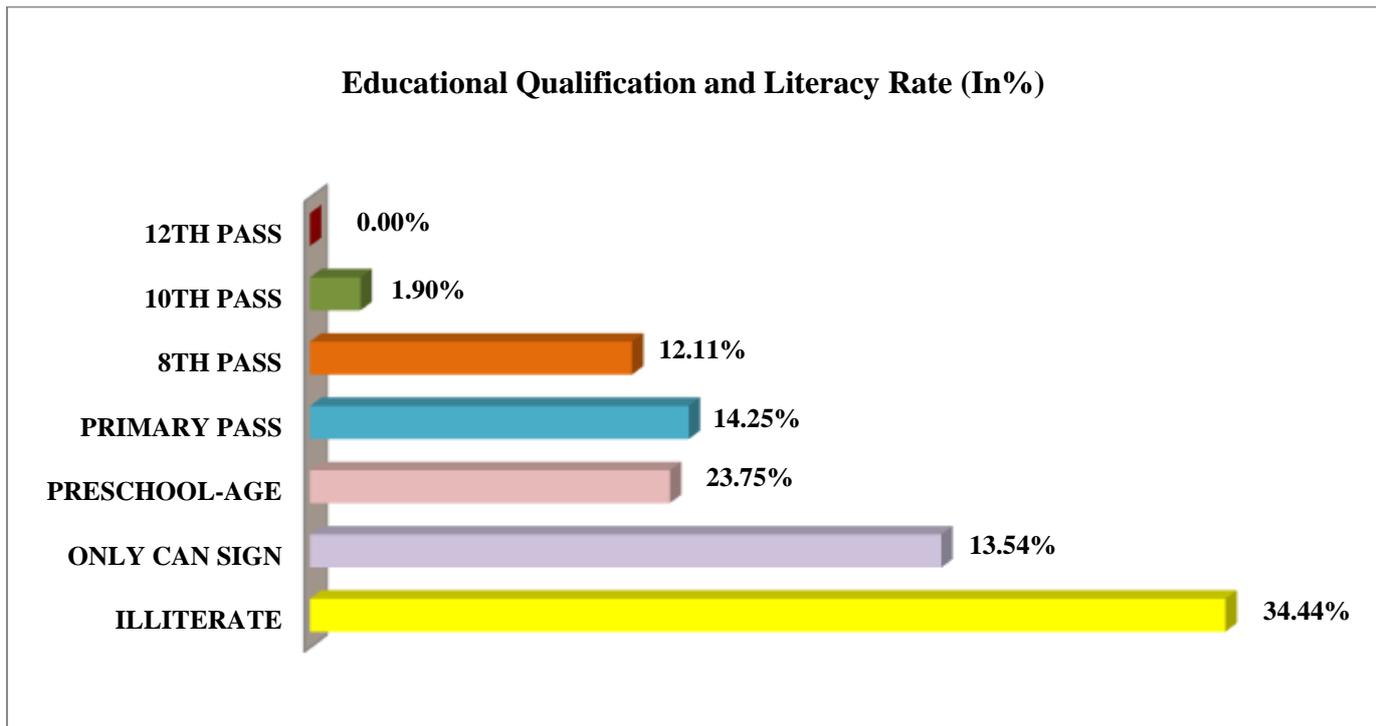
**Figure 07: Age at Marriage (Female)**

**h) Age at First Childbirth:** The data on the age at first childbirth among female slum dwellers in Jaisalmer shows a strong prevalence of early motherhood. A majority—61.11%—had their first child before the age of 19, while only 38.89% became mothers at 19 or older. This trend reflects the continuation of early marriage patterns and highlights potential risks to maternal and child health due to adolescent pregnancies, often associated with limited access to education and reproductive health services.



**Figure 08: Age at First Childbirth**

**i) Educational Qualification and Literacy Rate:** The data on educational qualifications and literacy among slum dwellers in the Jaisalmer area highlights a significant deficit in formal education. The largest group, 34.44%, is illiterate, followed by 23.75% who are of preschool age. Additionally, 13.54% can only sign their names, indicating limited functional literacy. Formal schooling remains minimal, with only 14.25% having completed primary education, 12.11% completing up to 8th grade, and a mere 1.90% having passed 10th grade. Notably, no individuals reported completing 12th grade. This reflects profound educational deprivation, which likely influences early marriage, early childbirth, and overall socio-economic marginalization within the community.



**Figure 09: Educational Qualification and Literacy Rate**

**j) Status of Occupation:** The occupational profile of slum dwellers in Jaisalmer reflects a predominantly informal and low-skilled employment structure, with a significant gender dimension. The highest proportion, 30.50%, is housewives, indicating a substantial segment of non-wage-earning women. Among employed individuals, daily wage labor (13.13%) forms the largest group, followed by goat and camel herding (9.65%), street vending (6.56%), farming (6.56%), and unemployment (6.56%). Smaller proportions are engaged in stone cutting (5.41%), barber work (5.41%), and begging (5.79%), which reflect socio-economic vulnerabilities. Occupations such as drain cleaning (2.32%), carpentry (1.93%), house construction (1.93%), working as maids (1.93%), and auto driving (1.54%) are also present, while only 0.77% works as tour guides. These data highlight the prevalence of unstable, labor-intensive jobs with minimal formal sector representation, underscoring the community’s economic fragility.

**Table 01: Status of Occupation**

Occupation	Percentage
Daily Labour	13.13%
Farmer	6.56%
Stone Cutting	5.41%
Street Vending	6.56%
Barber	5.41%
Drain Cleaner	2.32%
Carpenter	1.93%
House Construction	1.93%
Tour Guide	0.77%
House Wife	30.50%
Auto Driver	1.54%
Goat Camel Harder	9.65%
Maid	1.93%
Beggar	5.79%
Unemployment	6.56%

**k) Monthly Family Income:** The data on monthly family income among slum dwellers in Jaisalmer reveals a stark concentration of households within the low-income bracket. A substantial majority—78.00%—report a monthly family income between ₹4,000 and ₹6,000, while 16.00% earn between ₹7,000 and ₹9,000. Only 6.00% survive on less than ₹3,000 per month. Notably, no households report earning above ₹9,000. These figures



underscore the widespread economic deprivation within the community, where most families live close to or below the poverty line, affecting access to education, healthcare, and overall quality of life.

**Table 02: Monthly Family Income (In Rupees)**

Monthly Family Income (In Rupees)	Percentage
Below 3000	6.00%
4000-6000	78.00%
7000-9000	16.00%
Above 9000	0.00%

### Major Findings

The present study, conducted among slum dwellers in the Jaisalmer district of Rajasthan, reveals several critical insights into the socio-demographic and economic conditions of urban marginalized communities. The major findings are summarized below:

1. **Gender Composition:** The slum population under study is slightly male-dominated, with 53.21% males and 46.79% females, indicating a near-balanced gender distribution.
2. **Caste and Religious Distribution:** A significant majority of the slum population belongs to socially and economically marginalized groups, with 54% from Economically Weaker Sections (EWS), followed by 34% OBC, 10% ST, and only 2% SC. No respondents were from the General category. In terms of religion, 62% identify as Hindu, while 38% are Muslim, reflecting a mixed but socio-economically uniform population.
3. **Age Group Distribution:** Almost half of the population falls in the younger age, with 57.01% aged below 25 years, highlighting a youthful demographic that demands targeted interventions in education, employment, and health services.
4. **Marital Status and Early Marriage:** A large segment of the population is married (51.07%), and early marriage is prevalent. 60.16% of males were married before the legal age of 21, while 39.05% of females were married before 18, suggesting strong cultural and economic pressures driving early matrimonial practices.
5. **Early Childbirth:** Among women, 61.11% had their first child before the age of 19, raising concerns about maternal and child health, as well as interrupted educational and personal development pathways.
6. **Education and Literacy:** Educational attainment is critically low. 34.44% of individuals are illiterate, and 13.54% can only sign their names, reflecting functional illiteracy. Only 14.25% have completed primary education, and a negligible 1.90% passed the 10th grade, with none completing 12th grade, indicating severe educational deprivation.
7. **Occupational Patterns:** The employment landscape is dominated by informal, low-skilled labor. 30.50% are housewives, followed by 13.13% in daily labor, 9.65% in goat and camel herding, and smaller portions in vending, farming, stone cutting, and begging. 6.56% of the population remains unemployed, reinforcing their economic fragility.
8. **Income Levels:** The vast majority of households (78%) earn between ₹4,000–₹6,000 per month, with 16% earning between ₹7,000–₹9,000, and 6% surviving on less than ₹3,000. Notably, no household earns more than ₹9,000, underlining pervasive poverty and financial instability.
9. **Interrelated Vulnerabilities:** The study highlights strong interlinkages between low education, early marriage, early childbirth, and informal employment, forming a cyclical pattern of socio-economic marginalization that restricts upward mobility and access to better opportunities.

### Recommendations

The present study highlights critical socio-economic and demographic challenges faced by slum dwellers in Jaisalmer, including widespread poverty, early marriage, low educational attainment, informal employment, and poor access to health and livelihood resources. In light of these issues, the following recommendations are proposed to guide policymakers, local authorities, NGOs, and development practitioners:

1. **Educational Interventions**
  - Establish community-based literacy and adult education programs to reduce illiteracy and enhance basic functional skills.
  - Strengthen the enrollment and retention of children in formal schooling, especially girls, through incentives such as midday meals, scholarships, and free learning materials.
  - Introduce vocational and life-skills training for youth and school dropouts to improve employability in formal and semi-formal sectors.



2. **Awareness Campaigns Against Early Marriage**
  - Launch sustained community awareness programs to educate residents about the legal age of marriage and the health, psychological, and socio-economic consequences of early marriage and motherhood.
  - Engage local religious and community leaders to advocate for delayed marriage practices and promote girls' education.
3. **Health and Reproductive Services**
  - Strengthen access to reproductive health services for women, especially adolescents, by providing maternal and child healthcare, counseling, and contraceptive access through mobile health units.
  - Conduct regular health check-up camps in slum areas to detect and address malnutrition, maternal risks, and early childhood illnesses.
4. **Livelihood Enhancement and Skill Development**
  - Promote skill development programs tailored to local market needs (e.g., tailoring, plumbing, handicrafts, animal husbandry) to support alternative livelihood options.
  - Encourage the formation of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and micro-credit facilities to support small-scale entrepreneurship among women and unemployed youth.
5. **Employment and Economic Upliftment**
  - Introduce urban employment guarantee schemes and connect slum dwellers with public and private sector job opportunities, particularly in construction, tourism, and services.
  - Facilitate linkages with government poverty alleviation programs, such as ration cards, pensions, housing schemes, and Aadhaar-linked benefits.
6. **Improvement of Slum Infrastructure**
  - Advocate for basic civic infrastructure including clean drinking water, sanitation, electricity, and housing, in line with the goals of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) and Smart Cities Mission.
7. **Data-Driven Policy Planning**
  - Encourage local governments and NGOs to regularly update socio-economic data on slum populations to enable evidence-based policymaking and monitor the effectiveness of interventions.
8. **Inclusive Urban Planning**
  - Ensure that slum dwellers are integrated into urban governance processes and planning decisions, respecting their rights to the city and enabling community-led development initiatives.

## CONCLUSION

The present study provides a detailed and empirical account of the socio-economic and demographic conditions of slum dwellers in selected localities of Jaisalmer district, Rajasthan. The findings reveal that the population residing in these informal settlements is predominantly composed of individuals from economically and socially marginalized backgrounds, including Economically Weaker Sections (EWS), Other Backward Classes (OBC), and minority religious communities. The data highlight critical challenges such as widespread illiteracy, early marriage, adolescent motherhood, unemployment, and dependency on low-skilled, informal occupations. A striking majority of households fall within the low-income bracket of ₹4,000–₹6,000 per month, underscoring acute economic vulnerability and financial instability.

Educational deprivation emerges as a central barrier to upward mobility, affecting not only employment prospects but also health outcomes and social awareness. The interlinkages between poor education, early marriage, and early childbirth reinforce a cycle of poverty that is difficult to break without sustained and targeted interventions. Moreover, the high rate of housewives and limited female participation in income-generating activities reflects entrenched gender roles and socio-cultural constraints.

The study affirms that the challenges faced by slum dwellers in Jaisalmer are not merely economic but are deeply rooted in social structures and systemic exclusion. It underscores the urgent need for integrated development approaches that combine education, health care, livelihood generation, and infrastructural improvements. Only through multi-sectoral collaboration involving government agencies, civil society, and community stakeholders can meaningful and sustainable change be realized for the urban poor in these marginalized settlements.



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