



Educational and Career Aspirations among Young Females in Aalo, West Siang & Arunachal Pradesh

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Abstract: This study digs into the educational and career aspirations of young females aged 15–24 in Aalo, West Siang District, Arunachal Pradesh. It emphasizes on different kinds of challenges they face varying from inadequate infrastructure and challenging terrain to social, cultural and economic impediments based upon interviews and group discussions with 200 participants. The study attempts to show the importance of focused actions such as infrastructural development, extending financial assistance, mentorship, and community awareness programs. It contributes to the discussions on gender and education with special reference to insights and solutions especially suited to development studies in hilly and remote regions.

Keywords: Educational aspirations, Career choices, Gender and education, youth empowerment.

Introduction:

The educational and career aspirations of young women are important indicators of social and economic development but until now they remain one of the under-studied topics in remote places like Aalo, West Siang District, Arunachal Pradesh. Aalo, inhabited predominantly by the Galo tribe of the Abo Tani group, throws back a distinctive social, cultural and historical conditions determined by factors such as colonial neglect, strategic isolation, and gradual post-independence integration. Since its attainment of statehood in 1987, development in education, health, and infrastructure has progressed slowly in Arunachal Pradesh but lagged behind mainland India. Historically, Aalo has evolved from an unadministered frontier during the colonial era to a strategic administrative centre in present-day Arunachal Pradesh. Recent educational advancements in Aalo include schools like Kendriya Vidyalaya, Siyom Army Public School, government higher secondary school, Ramakrishna Mission School, ITBP public school etc., HEIs such as the SFS College (2007), The Teachers Training College (2012), North East Frontier Technical University (2014), and an 84.88% literacy rate (2011), surpassing state (65.38%) and national (74%) averages. Health infrastructure is improving with a 60-bedded hospital under construction, and cultural tourism thrives through festivals like Yomgo River festival (January) and Mopin (April). Among significant infrastructure,

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mention can be made about the vast highway networks mostly constructed by the BRO, Patum Iron Bridge (146 m), a proposed railway to Silapathar, an Advanced Landing Ground etc. All of these development measures have surely expanded opportunities but have not fully bridged historical inequalities. Moreover, inequal regional development favours urban centres like Itanagar, leaving Aalo with limited healthcare and employment (7,656 workers out of 20,684 residents). Factors like border issues diverting funds to security, and social challenges, including gender disparities (female literacy 78.47% vs. male 90.24%), a low child sex ratio (920), compounded by slow policy implementation and tribal diversity, have left Aalo lagging behind mainland India in quality of life and economic opportunities.

Understanding the aspirations of young women in Aalo requires placing them within both intrinsic motivations (personal development, intellectual fulfilment) and extrinsic factors (economic security, social status). From educational aspirations, one can know about an individual's desired academic achievement, while from career aspirations, it can be known about long-term professional goals and how they are shaped by one's personal interests and fundamental opportunities. It is therefore crucial to distinguish between aspirations and realistic expectations, especially in socio-economically transitional societies. This study examines the educational and career aspirations of young women in Aalo, identifying the social, cultural, economic, and institutional factors that either contribute to or hinder their aspirations. By doing so, it seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of gendered youth transitions in India's frontier regions, offering insights relevant to implementing policies, undertaking educational reforms, and broader debates on aspiration formation in marginalized contexts.

Existing literature on youth aspirations are mostly shaped by instruments like the Educational Aspiration Scale and frameworks such as Social Cognitive Career Theory. This is largely centred on urban or general populations, often overlooking tribal or rural contexts. This study addresses that gap by exploring how educational and career aspirations co-evolve among tribal girls in Aalo, Arunachal Pradesh, through a qualitative-dominant, context-sensitive lens.

While offering in-depth insights into Aalo, the study's geographic specificity may limit broader applicability, and its focus on immediate aspirations does not account for evolving trajectories shaped by migration, digital access, or policy shifts.



Research Methodology:

This study investigated the educational and career aspirations of young females (aged 15-24) in Aalo, Arunachal Pradesh, using a hybrid research design. Quantitative data on the distribution of aspirations were collected via structured questionnaires from 200 participants using purposive sampling. This was complemented by qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to explore underlying motivations and challenges. Quantitative data on educational aspirations were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean, median, mode, standard deviation, frequency distributions) after assigning numerical values based on participant perceptions. Career aspirations were analysed using frequency counts and thematic interpretation to account for cultural context. Thematic analysis was also applied to qualitative data to identify recurring influences on both educational and career aspirations. The interpretation of findings was rooted in Social Cognitive Career Theory, Gottfredson’s Theory of Circumscription and Compromise, Super’s Life-Span, Life-Space Theory, and Eccles’ Expectancy-Value Theory.

Findings and Analysis:

(a) Demographic Profile of Respondents:

Academic aspirations of Aalo ST females across age groups (15-17: 17.5%; 18-21: 55%; 22-24: 27.5%) show younger cohorts prioritizing schooling/undergraduate studies, while older participants pursued professional/postgraduate courses. 32% migrated for education. Employment increased with age; 3% (oldest group) were married.

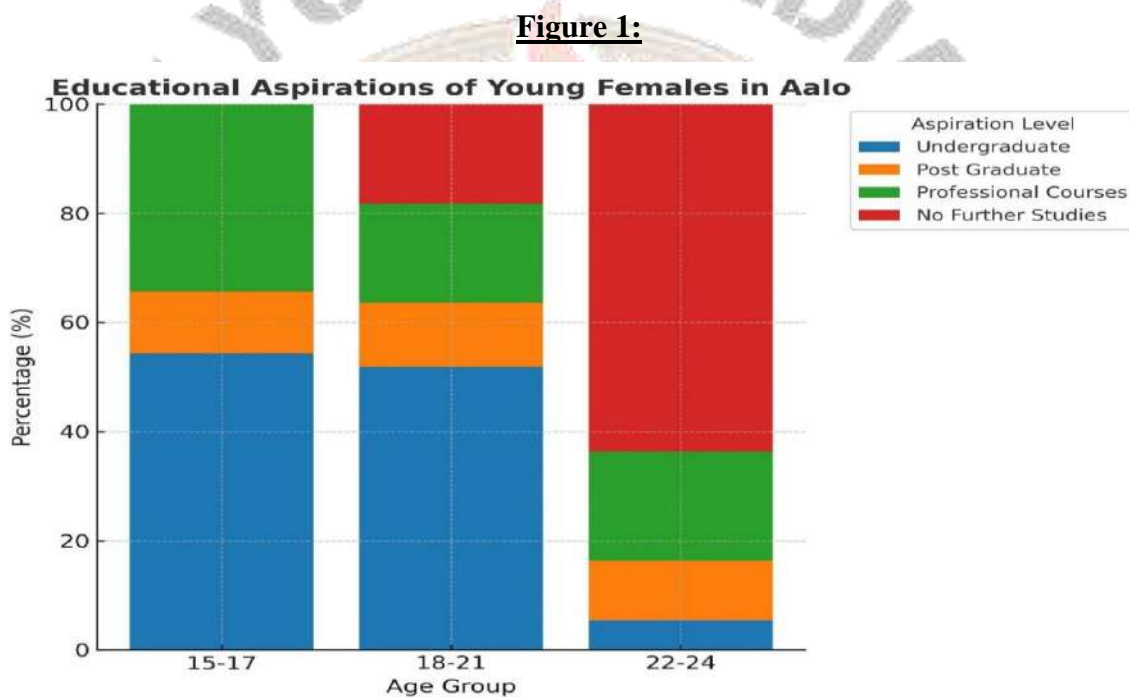
Table 1: Demographic Profile

Age Range	Educational Level	Number of Respondents	Number of Married Females	Number of Respondents Working
15-17	Secondary and Higher Secondary	35	0	0
18-21	Higher Secondary and Undergraduate	110	0	4
22-24	Undergraduate, Postgraduate, and Professional	55	6	15

Source: Primary Data

(b) Educational Aspirations of Young Females in Aalo:

The graph in Figure 1 illustrates distinct patterns of educational aspirations across different age groups, highlighting both the ambitions that shape the academic trajectories of young females in Aalo. Three primary categories of educational aspirations have been identified: Undergraduate, Postgraduate, and Professional Studies, along with an additional category for those opting for No Further Studies. Notably, none of the respondents indicated a desire to terminate their education at the schooling level, underscoring a strong inclination toward higher education.



Source: Primary Data

School-Going Non-Adults (15–17 Years): Among school-going non-adult females, 54.29% aimed for undergraduate studies, though many were unsure about further plans. Meanwhile, 45.71% preferred postgraduate or professional programs like nursing, law, and teacher training. None intended to discontinue, reflecting strong motivation and career focus.

Young Adults in Transition (18–21 Years): Most young adults pursued undergraduate degrees, with 51.82% committed to completion but less inclined toward further studies. Only 18.18% chose career



courses like teacher training, 11.82% preferred postgraduation, and 18.18% planned to discontinue. A few (3.6%) worked part-time for financial support.

Mature Adults Making Practical Choices (22–24 Years): Among mature adults, 63.64% showed limited interest in further studies, often after recent discontinuation. About 20% chose professional courses, and 10.91% aimed for postgraduation. This group had the highest share of married (10.9%) and employed (23.3%) females, prioritizing financial stability and career growth.

Summary Statistics

Educational aspirations in Aalo show a central tendency towards undergraduate studies (mean 1.17, mode/median 1) with moderate variability (SD 0.96). A slight positive skew (0.44) indicates some pursuing higher education, while a flat distribution (kurtosis -0.75) suggests varied aspirations. Age-wise, mean aspiration decreases from 1.57 (15-17) to 1.24 (18-21) and 0.78 (22-24), with the mode shifting from Undergraduate to No Further Studies. A significant association between age and aspiration ($\chi^2 = 64.045$, $df = 6$, $p < 0.0001$) suggests evolving ambitions with increasing age, potentially influenced by changing circumstances.

Key Observations

Undergraduate studies, particularly in the Arts, are initially popular, with Political Science emerging as the most preferred subject due to its perceived connection with public sector employment. However, interest in subjects requiring mathematical proficiency, such as Economics, Commerce, and Science, is notably low. As students grow older, their interest in undergraduate education declines, driven by increasing financial pressures and concerns about future employability, often leading to either completion or discontinuation of their studies.

Professional courses show fluctuating demand due to limited support and finances, though societally respectful professions like Education and Law remain preferred. Doctoral and technical fields relevant to the state are mostly unexplored due to poor awareness and infrastructure. Younger students pursue intrinsic goals such as interest and growth, which shift toward extrinsic aims like security and jobs with age. Weak infrastructure and a lack of career counselling suppress early ambitions. Although gender barriers are minimal, significant knowledge gaps exist among the young females of Aalo.

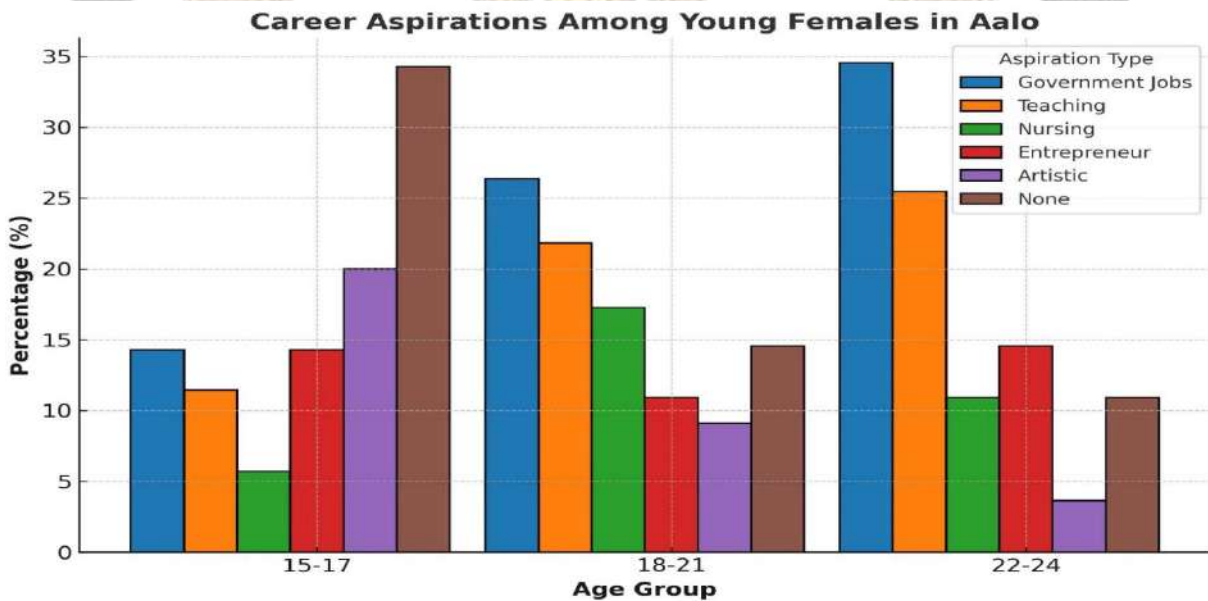
(c) Career Aspirations of Young Females in Aalo

The career aspirations of young females in Aalo are distributed across various professions, exhibiting variations by age group. The data indicate that career preferences shift as individuals age and gain exposure to social and economic realities.

School-Going Non-Adults: Among females aged 15–17, 34.29% lacked defined goals, while others leaned toward artistic and entrepreneurial careers. Teaching and government jobs had moderate appeal; nursing saw little interest. Limited career awareness continued to hinder broader exploration and informed choices.

Career Aspirations Among Young Adults: Among young adults, aspirations shifted toward stability—26.36% preferred government jobs, 21.82% public teaching, and 17.27% nursing, valued for security. Entrepreneurial and artistic interests fell to 20%. Only 14.55% remained undecided, though choices stayed limited by earlier constraints.

Figure 4



Source: Primary Data

Career Aspirations Among Mature Adults: Among mature adults, 34.55% aimed for public sector jobs and 25.25% for teaching, driven by financial stability. Entrepreneurial interest rose with a desire for



independence, while nursing and artistic paths declined due to practical barriers. This group showed the highest career clarity, reflecting age-based refinement in aspirations.

Key Observations

Growing older, respondents strongly prefer stable, respected public service and teaching jobs for financial security and societal contribution. While aspiring for government roles, their understanding of diverse opportunities and preparation is limited, often based on a potentially misleading perception of easy access due to reserved categories. Entrepreneurship is the main alternative for older adults, yet it is aspired to with scepticism. Academic research is largely unconsidered. Artistic aspirations decline with age, favouring practical careers, while entrepreneurship remains stable but often dependent on securing a stable job first. Nursing interest fluctuates with awareness and infrastructure access. Career uncertainty is high among younger students, decreasing with age and exposure, however, choices remain constrained by financial stability and societal norms, limiting exploration of broader avenues. Overall, increasing education leads to more structured, pragmatic career choices, but a lack of guidance and support hinders diverse aspirations.

(d) Challenges Faced by Young Females in Educational and Career Choices:

Young females in West Siang, particularly Aalo, face several key challenges impacting their educational and career aspirations:

- **Limited Access to Higher Education and Training:** A shortage of HEIs and training centres in specialized fields (STEM, arts, business, law, agriculture, healthcare) limits local options, forcing costly and emotionally taxing migration or compromised aspirations. Despite better school access, higher secondary and specialized education infrastructure remain inadequate, especially in neighbouring districts.
- **Lack of Structured Mentorship:** Absence of structured educational and career counselling leaves young females unaware of opportunities, recruitment processes, skill needs, and higher education pathways, hindering informed choices and growth.
- **Economic Constraints:** Economic pressure to secure stable jobs for family support limits the pursuit of entrepreneurial or artistic careers, especially in the absence of training centres and financial aid for such paths.
- **Geographical Mobility and Infrastructure:** Despite improved mobility, the lack of specialized institutions in West Siang forces relocation, creating financial and logistical challenges for students.

Theoretical Interpretation

Educational and career aspirations of young females in Aalo are shaped by individual drive and local barriers, reflect adaptive responses. Social Cognitive Career Theory suggests early self-efficacy drives ambition, but structural limits (finance, access, support) and lack of mentorship diminish it later. Gottfredson's theory explains how practical/socially acceptable "secure" choices (teaching, public sector) replace initial artistic/entrepreneurial interests due to systemic constraints. Super's theory shows a shift from intrinsic youthful ambition to pragmatic choices aligned with stability as life evolves. Eccles' theory highlights how limited local higher education access tempers the perceived value of education and expectations of success, recalibrating aspirations to fit attainable options. Aspirations are dynamic, context-dependent, demanding policy interventions (guidance, diverse local institutions, financial aid) to broaden possibilities in underserved regions like Aalo, preventing aspirations from mirroring constraints.

Suggested Solutions:

- **Expand Educational Opportunities:** Introduce more diverse and specialized programs locally.
- **Establish Mentorship Programs:** Create accessible, structured career counselling at the district level.
- **Increase Financial Support:** Broaden scholarships and seed funding for entrepreneurship and non-traditional careers.
- **Leverage Existing Policies:** Strengthen implementation of NEP 2020 and ST support schemes.

Conclusion:

Empowering young females in Aalo through education and careers drives community progress. Their resilience despite challenges demands tangible institutional support. Addressing constraints in arts, entrepreneurship, and STEM is urgent to nurture ambition and ensure equal opportunity. A supportive ecosystem with family engagement, economic aid, and mentorship is crucial to bridge aspiration and achievement, enabling young women to reach their full potential and uplift their communities, fostering a future of boundless opportunity.



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Citation in APA 7th Edition: Singh, M. S., & Chatterje, S. (2025). Educational and Career Aspirations among Young Females in Aalo, West Siang & Arunachal Pradesh. *Lyceum India Journal of Social Sciences*, 2(1), 33–42. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15491528>

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