

YOUTH ASPIRATIONS IN THE TEA PLANTATION SECTOR: THE CASE OF RAGALA ESTATE, SRI LANKA

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This research explores the aspirations of youth in the *Ragala* Estate, Nuwara Eliya, examining influencing factors, challenges, and opportunities in their pursuit of aspirations. Data were collected from 90 youths (aged 15-24) through a structured questionnaire and analysed using multiple, frequency, cross-tabulation, and mean statistics with SPSS 22 software. Factors influencing youth aspirations were measured on a scale from 0 to 10. Aspirations ranged from 4 to 9, with building a house being the most frequent (11.7%). Eight aspiration dimensions were identified. Wealth-based aspirations were most prominent (27.2%), followed by occupational (20.9%), family and community-oriented (16.6%), educational (13.3%), migration (11.4%), independence-based (5%), travel-based (4.3%), and prestige-based (1.3%) aspirations. Occupational aspirations scored highest in perceived importance ($\bar{x}=8.98$, $\sigma = 0.82$), while educational aspirations indicated the highest perceived urgency ($\bar{x}=8.74$, $\sigma = 0.63$) and perceived family support ($\bar{x}=8.25$, $\sigma = 0.96$). Perceived peer support is highest ($\bar{x}=8.12$, $\sigma = 1.57$) for independence-based aspirations. Migration aspirations have the highest opportunities ($\bar{x}=7.09$, $\sigma = 0.16$), while self-efficacy was most pronounced ($\bar{x}=7.72$, $\sigma = 0.92$) for occupational aspirations, and the highest likelihood to achieve ($\bar{x}=7.52$, $\sigma = 0.65$) for educational aspirations. The study identified a highly positive correlation between perceived likelihood to achieve and perceived family support ($r = 0.922$, $p>0.01$), as well as perceived urgency ($r = 0.922$, $p>0.01$). The study highlighted a significant relationship between gender and educational aspirations ($x^2 = 5.657$, $df=1$, $p = 0.017$), with women showing higher educational aspirations. Economic crisis (30.9%) was the highest challenge, while family support (39.8%) was a prominent opportunity. This study offers insights into youth aspirations in plantation communities, with practical suggestions for policymakers and community leaders to transform youth aspirations into tangible possibilities. Recommendations for policymakers include enhancing educational opportunities, providing economic support, and fostering community Programmes to leverage family support for youth aspirations.

Keywords: Dissatisfaction, Estate sector, Economic challenges Youth unrest, Self-efficacy