

**ABANDONING THE GAP:
ANALYZING THE DECLINE OF MALE STUDENTS IN UNIVERSITY
ADMISSIONS IN SAMMANTHURAI EDUCATION DIVISION**

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The underrepresentation of male students in university admissions within the *Sammanthurai* Divisional Education office has emerged as a significant educational challenge, raising concerns about gender disparities in academic achievement. This study investigates the multifaceted factors contributing to the decline in male university enrollments through a mixed-methods research approach, integrating quantitative analysis of admission data with qualitative insights from interviews and focus groups. Focusing on seven mixed-gender schools within the *Sammanthurai* Division, the research study conducted separate interviews with school principals, counselors, and male students and had independent discussions with parents. A total of 70 male students were surveyed, with insights gathered from ten students from each school. Additionally, 30 female students from the same schools were surveyed to explore gender dynamics in educational aspirations. Independent interviews with the Divisional Education Director, local religious leaders, and parents provided further context to the findings. The analysis reveals that economic pressures and entrenched family responsibilities significantly deter male students from pursuing higher education. Many feel compelled to seek immediate employment to support their families, prioritizing short-term income over long-term academic pursuits. Cultural perceptions regarding the value of vocational training compared to university education, urbanization, and peer influences also contribute to this trend. Interestingly, female students often pursue higher education in search of limited job opportunities, highlighting a significant gender dynamic within the region. Quantitative data indicates a 25% decrease in male university admissions over the past five years, underscoring the widening gender gap in educational attainment. By identifying these contributing factors, the research seeks to provide evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, educators, and community leaders to boost male student retention and promote equitable educational outcomes in the *Sammanthurai* region. Ultimately, this study contributes to a nuanced understanding of the socio-economic and cultural factors influencing educational dynamics.

Keywords: Male university admissions, gender disparity, socio-economic factors, educational attainment, *Sammanthurai* division