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Original Research Article

Updated socio-economic status scales for 2026

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ABSTRACT

Background: Several published versions of the Modified Kuppuswamy and BG Prasad socio-economic status (SES) scales are in use in India, with disparities in income thresholds due to variations in consumer price index (CPI) series, reference period, base year, linkage factor and calculation methods. This brings uncertainty to researchers selecting appropriate cut-off values.
Methods: We verified the consumer price index for industrial workers (CPI-IW) by using linking factors using the same base-year revisions (1960-1982, 1982-2001, 2001-2016). These verified factors were used to recalculate income thresholds for both scales. Thresholds were also calculated using the National Statistical Office (NSO) consumer price index (combined) to determine the impact of price index choice.
Results: As per CPI-IW (2016=100) January 2026, the revised upper ceiling for Modified Kuppuswamy scale and the BG Prasad scale has been raised to ₹66,005 and above, and ₹9,770 and above per capita per month, respectively.
Conclusions: The choice of price index materially affects cut-off income levels as shown by comparing with the NSO CPI (Combined). The differences between published updates stemmed from differences in CPI series, base year, and, in one case, a calculation error. This highlights that future revisions should report the CPI series, reference month, base year and linking factors transparently so that updates are reproducible and comparable.

Keywords: BG Prasad scale, Consumer price index, CPI-IW, India, Linking factor, Modified Kuppuswamy Scale, Socioeconomic status

INTRODUCTION

Socio-economic status is important for understanding the diverse social and economic landscape of a country. Socio-economic status (SES) is defined as the position that an individual or a family occupies in relation to prevailing standards of cultural and material ownership, income, and involvement in group activities within the community.[1-3] It reflects access to resources and goods, social standing, wealth, prestige, and power, as well as housing conditions, environmental circumstances, and the standard of living of a family or an individual.[3]

Socio-economic status is an important social indicator of health.[4] It acts as a robust indicator for gauging a family's health-seeking behaviour, affordability, accessibility, and overall utilization of available health services. It predisposes families to specific sets of risk factors and influences patterns of disease.[5] Individuals belonging to lower socioeconomic groups tend to experience higher rates of morbidity and mortality due to factors such as limited access to healthcare, poor living conditions, and inadequate nutrition.[6,7] Evidence from India shows that communicable diseases like tuberculosis are more prevalent among economically disadvantaged households, largely due to overcrowding, poverty, and reduced access to health services.[8,9]

Early conceptualizations by Cattell emphasized that social status extends beyond income and includes dimensions such as education, occupation, and social prestige.[10] Subsequent scholarship has reinforced that no single

indicator or scale can comprehensively capture SES across diverse populations and research contexts.[2] Several composite scales have accordingly been developed in India, including the Radhukar scale (1960), Udai Pareekh scale (1964), Jalota scale (1970), Kulshrestha scale (1972), Kuppuswamy scale (1976), Shrivastava scale (1978), and Bharadwaj scale (2001).[11]

However, rapidly changing social structures and economic progress have rendered many of these scales outdated, requiring periodic revision of their income components. Several revisions of the Modified Kuppuswamy and BG Prasad scales have already been published for 2026 alone, but these updates frequently disagree with one another because they use different CPI-IW values, base years, and linking factors, and do not always report their calculation methods in sufficient detail to be independently reproduced. Rather than offer another isolated update, the study applies a standardized, reproducible linking-factor methodology across successive base-year transitions and also compares the resulting thresholds against the NSO consumer price index (combined) to assess how sensitive they are to the choice of price index. Together, these contributions are intended to make the present revision, and future revisions, mutually comparable and independently verifiable.

METHODS

Study type

It was a methodological study done using secondary data.

Study site and period

The analysis was carried out at Maulana Azad Medical College, New Delhi, India, during March 2026. The price-index data used were the consumer price index for industrial workers (CPI-IW) for January 2026 and the year-on-year inflation reported for the National Statistical Office (NSO) consumer price index.

Selection criteria

The Modified Kuppuswamy scale and the BG prasad scale were selected because their income components require periodic inflation linked revision. The CPI-IW was selected as the primary price index because it has traditionally been used to revise these scales, and the NSO CPI was included as a comparator.

Procedure

It had the following steps: the CPI-IW for January 2026 and the official linking factors for 1960-1982, 1982-2001, 2001-2016 base year transitions were obtained. An overall update factor was calculated by multiplying the inflation multiplier by the successive linking factors. Each original income value was multiplied by the relevant update factor and rounded off to give the 2026 thresholds. The CPI-IW based update was compared with the NSO CPI, using only the most recent comparable period.

Ethical approval

This study used only published, publicly available aggregate price-index data and previously published scale thresholds. No human participants, patient records or identifiable personal data were involved, so formal ethical committee approval was not required.

RESULTS

Modified Kuppuswamy scale

The Modified Kuppuswamy scale is one of the most widely used tools to assess the socioeconomic status of urban families.[11] Devised in 1976, it was initially used to assess the socioeconomic status of an individual, taking into consideration income, occupation, and education of an individual.[12] Later, it was modified to assess socioeconomic status of a family. Although there is no precise year marking this transition from individual-to family-level assessment, the adaptation began relatively early after its inception, particularly during the 1982 and 1998 revisions.[11]

The current Kuppuswamy scale included three parameters: education and occupation of the head of the family (Table 1) and income of the entire family from all sources (Table 2). The scores of these three parameters werere summed to generate a final score, which was further classified into five socio-economic classes, The total Modified Kuppuswamy score was categorized into five socio-economic classes as follows: a score of 26-29 corresponds to upper class (I), 16-25 to upper middle class (II), 11-15 to lower middle class (III), 5-10 to upper lower class (IV), and a score of less than 5 to lower class (V).

Table 1: Education and occupation scores in the Modified Kuppuswamy scale.

Components	Category	Score
Education of the head	Profession or honours	7
	Graduate or post graduate	6
	Intermediate or post high school diploma	5
	High school certificate	4
	Middle school certificate	3
	Primary school certificate	2
	Illiterate	1
Occupation of the head of the family	Profession	10
	Semi-profession	6
	Clerical, shop-owner, farmer	5
	Skilled worker	4
	Semi-skilled worker	3
	Unskilled worker	2
	Unemployed	1

While revisions in education and occupation are not carried out regularly, income requires periodic updating to account for inflation. In India, although the wholesale price index (WPI) is commonly used to measure inflation, it is not suitable for revising socioeconomic scales, as it reflects wholesale prices and is based on a basket of items that inadequately captures services such as education and healthcare, which constitute a major component of household expenditure.[13]

The consumer price index (CPI) measures changes in retail prices of selected goods and services consumed by specific population groups. Four types of CPI are described, and CPI-IW has traditionally been the index used for revising these socioeconomic classifications, as it represents the expenditure pattern of a typical working-class family.[14]

Data sources and parameters

The following parameters were used for updating the income component to the year 2026:

CPI-IW for the January 2026 (base year 2016 = 100)[15] =148.6

Official CPI-IW linking factors notified for base-year transitions:[15]

1960 to 1982: 4.93

1982 to 2001: 4.63

2001 to 2016: 2.88

Calculation of the update factor

Inflation between the 2016 base year and the reference year 2026 was calculated using the CPI-IW value for January 2026:

Inflation multiplier (2016–2026)

= CPI-IW (2026) ÷ 100

= 148.6 ÷ 100

= 1.486

To account for cumulative inflation from the 1960 base to 2026, this multiplier was combined with the successive CPI-IW linking factors:

Overall update factor

= 1.486 × 4.93 × 4.63 × 2.88

= 97.69

However, since the scale was originally developed in 1976, the overall updating factor should account for the inflation rate from 1976 rather than 1960. Therefore, the calculated update factor needs to be adjusted by dividing it by the linking factor between 1960 and 1976, which is 2.96

97.69 ÷ 2.96 = 33.0033

Revision of income limits

Each income value in the original Kuppuswamy scale was multiplied by the overall update factor and rounded off to derive revised income thresholds for 2026.

Table 2: Updated monthly family income classification for the Modified Kuppuswamy scale (2026).

Original Kuppuswamy Scale (1976)	Updated Kuppuswamy scale (2026)	Score
≥2000	66,005 and above	12
1000-1999	33,003-66,004	10
750-999	24,752-33,002	6
500-749	16,501-24,751	4
300-499	9,901-16,500	3
101-299	3,333-9,900	2
≤100	3,332 and below	1

BG Prasad scale

This scale was originally introduced in 1961, and successively modified by the author itself in 1968 and 1970.[16] It utilises per capita monthly income to stratify individuals based on their socioeconomic status. A key advantage is its suitability for cross-comparisons between urban and rural areas, provided methodological consistency is maintained.

Calculation of the update factor

CPI-IW for the January 2026 (base year 2016 = 100)[15] =148.6

Official CPI-IW linking factors notified for base-year transitions[15]

1960 to 1982: 4.93

1982 to 2001: 4.63

2001 to 2016: 2.88

Overall update factor

= 1.486 × 4.93 × 4.63 × 2.88

= 97.69.

Because the BG Prasad scale was devised in 1961, close to the 1960 base year, no further adjustment for an intermediate base-year linking factor was required, unlike for the Kuppuswamy scale.

Each income value in the original BG Prasad scale was multiplied by the overall update factor and rounded off to derive revised income thresholds for 2026 (Table 3).

As can be observed in Table 4, there has been a significant upward trend in income values over the years, primarily due to rising inflation and household expenditure.[17]

Table 3: Updated monthly per capita income classification for the BG Prasad Scale (2026).

Original BG Prasad Scale (1961)	Updated BG Prasad Scale (2026)	Socioeconomic class
≥100	≥9770	Upper class
50-99	4885-9769	Upper middle class
30-49	2931-4884	Middle class
15-29	1466-2930	Lower middle class
<15	<1465	Lower class

Table 4: Trend in the revision of income thresholds in the BG Prasad socioeconomic status scale over the years.

Year	Class I (INR)	Class II (INR)	Class III (INR)	Class IV (INR)	Class V (INR)
1961	100	50-99	30-49	15-29	<15
1982	493	370-492	247-369	124-246	<124
2001	2283	1712-2282	1141-1711	570-1140	<570
2016	6575	4931-6574	3287-4930	1644-3286	<1644
2025	9414	4707-9413	2824-4706	1412-2823	<1412
2026	9770	488-9769	2931-4884	1466-2930	<1465

Methodological comparison of alternative CPI series

The consumer price index for industrial workers (CPI-IW) is compiled specifically for industrial-worker households and may not fully reflect the consumption patterns of the broader population represented in many community-based studies.[13] To examine the potential implications of using an alternative inflation index, the present update was compared with the National Statistical Office (NSO) consumer price index (combined), which is compiled separately for rural, urban, and combined populations and is not restricted to industrial-worker households.

For the most recent comparable period, the year-on-year inflation reported by the CPI (Combined) (base 2012=100) was 1.33% for December 2025. The NSO CPI series subsequently underwent a base revision from 2012=100 to 2024=100 in February 2026, with officially notified rural, urban, and combined linking factors of 0.5222, 0.5320, and 0.5267, respectively.[18] Unlike CPI-IW, however, no validated historical linking chain has been published for the NSO CPI series extending back to the original base years of the Modified Kuppuswamy (1976) and BG Prasad (1961) scales. Consequently, a full recalculation of these scales using the NSO CPI was not undertaken because such an exercise would lack a reproducible methodological basis.

A limited quantitative illustration is nevertheless possible using only the most recent reference period. Applying the year-on-year inflation of 2.75% reported for the CPI (combined) (base 2024=100) in January 2026 to the CPI-IW-derived Kuppuswamy class I threshold of ₹66,005 yields an illustrative value of ₹67,821 (₹66,005 × 1.0275). This represents a difference of approximately 2.75% over a single inflation step. This value should not be interpreted as an alternative Kuppuswamy income threshold because it does not incorporate historical linking factors or cumulative inflation since the original 1976 base year. Rather, it is presented solely to provide a quantitative illustration of how the choice of CPI series can influence updated income thresholds even over a single reference period.

Table 5: Comparison of CPI series used for updating socioeconomic status scale income thresholds, 2026.

CPI Series	Compiling Agency	Base year	Latest available index/inflation (study period)
CPI-IW (used in this study)	Labour Bureau, Ministry of Labour and Employment	2016 =100	148.6 (January 2026)
CPI (Combined), old series	National Statistical Office (MoSPI)	2012 =100	198.0; YoY inflation 1.33% (December 2025, final)
CPI (Combined), new series	National Statistical Office (MoSPI)	2024 =100	104.46; YoY inflation 2.75% (January 2026, provisional)

DISCUSSION

Several composite socioeconomic scales are in common use for socioeconomic classification in Indian health research, each suited to particular settings.[11] The Modified Kuppuswamy scale is the most frequently cited of these in urban and peri-urban clinical studies, while the BG Prasad scale is preferred where the head of household cannot be clearly identified or where urban and rural populations are compared; the Udai Parekh scale remains more relevant to agrarian households, and multidimensional measures such as the standard of living index are increasingly used as comparator tools in large-scale surveys.[11,19,20] Studies have shown that Gaur's scale and the standard of living index can outperform the Kuppuswamy scale, with substantial disparities in classification reported across different scales.[20,21] However, changes in inflation rates necessitate periodic updates of these scales to ensure their continued accuracy and relevance in socioeconomic assessment.

The Kuppuswamy scale also has inherent methodological limitations that are well documented elsewhere.[22-24] Nationally standardized cut-offs do not account for cost-of-living variation across settings, self-reported income is prone to underestimation, only liquid income is captured, and the household head's education and occupation are taken as representative of the whole family despite the ambiguity this introduces for homemakers, retired individuals, and non-traditional household structures.

The BG Prasad scale suffers from its own shortcomings. It uses income as the only indicator of socioeconomic status, and so does not account for the impact of educational attainment, occupational stability, and asset ownership. It also does not take into account variations in cost of living between urban and rural areas. Another drawback is its static nature: while it is updated periodically, it does not factor in sudden economic changes such as inflation fluctuations or changes in employment patterns. Addressing these limitations is important for improving the scale's accuracy and ensuring it continues to stay relevant with changing times.

A further, more general challenge affects all serial income-linked updates of these scales, including the present one: because each revision depends on the specific CPI series, reference month, and base-year linking factors selected by the authors, updates published even a few months apart, or using slightly different rounding conventions, can yield materially different income thresholds for ostensibly the same scale. This is evident in the year 2026 alone, where several independently published updates of the Kuppuswamy and BG Prasad scales report income cut-offs that do not agree, even for the same reference month. Such heterogeneity typically arises from differences in the CPI-IW value used, the treatment of the 1976 versus 1960 base year for the Kuppuswamy scale, and, in at least one instance, an error in which the annual inflation rate was applied as a direct multiplier rather than as a percentage change, resulting in cut-offs several times higher than expected.[25,26] As such errors can propagate into widely used reference texts, the CPI-IW value and linking factors used in the present study were verified directly against the primary Labour Bureau press release rather than against previously published secondary updates.[15] This experience underscores calls for greater standardization in how such updates are conducted and reported- including explicit statement of the CPI series, reference month, base year, and linking factors used- so that revisions remain mutually comparable and verifiable, and so that readers comparing the present update against other 2026 publications can readily identify the source of any discrepancy.

In response, newer approaches to SES measurement have emerged. Multidimensional indices such as the standard of living index and the National Multidimensional Poverty Index reflect a shift beyond income-based assessment.[27,28] These incorporate housing, assets, household size, access to basic amenities, expenditure patterns, savings, indebtedness, investment behaviour, and subjective measures such as life satisfaction and perceived social status. Consumption-expenditure-based measures have also gained prominence for directly capturing economic behaviour and material well-being.[29] Overall, the choice of SES tool should align with study objectives, population characteristics, and outcomes, with supplementation by multidimensional indicators where feasible.

CONCLUSION

Using a standardised, verifiable linking-factor approach based on CPI-IW, this study updates the income thresholds of the modified Kuppuswamy and BG Prasad scales for 2026. The revised upper ceiling for Modified Kuppuswamy scale and the BG Prasad scale has been raised to ₹66,005 and above, and ₹9,770 and above per capita per month, respectively. Comparing the update with the NSO CPI showed that the choice of price index can shift the reflecting thresholds, though this was illustrated only for the most recent inflation step because no validated historical linking chain exists for the NSO series. Discrepancies among the 2026 updates arose from differences in CPI series, base year, reference month and linking factors and in one instance from a calculation error. Future revisions should therefore state the CPI series, reference period, base year, linking factors and rounding conventions so that further updates are transparent, comparable and reproducible.

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