



CAREER ASPIRATIONS AND ADOLESCENTS IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

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Abstract

The dominating task during the adolescent years is the achievement of a sense of personal identity to know oneself, to commit oneself to carefully explored beliefs, purposes and values and to move into adulthood with a sense of responsibility for ones' choices. It is also a time when decisions regarding ones' career are made. The present study was intended to investigate the career aspirations of adolescents. The sample of the study comprised of two hundred senior secondary school students namely from class XI studying in various private, Government, Government aided and Central Government schools of New Delhi selected through convenient sampling. The tool used was a self-constructed questionnaire comprising of 65 agree-disagree statements on a 5-1 Likert scale. The scores indicated that class XI students belonging to private, Government, Government aided and Central Government schools of New Delhi had high career aspirations. Their career aspirations differed with respect to type of schools. However no significant statistical difference in career aspirations between boys and girls could be noticed.

Key words: *Adolescents; career aspirations; vocational development; senior secondary level.*

Career aspirations and adolescents in the Indian context

The process of career development is vital in positive adolescent development and has a significant impact upon occupational attainment and work satisfaction in adulthood (Super 1985). Super suggests that work salience or developing a salient connection to the world of work

and career is an important career development task for adolescents. A future orientation towards career such as developing future expectations regarding one's career in adulthood is an important aspect of adolescent career maturity from life span / life-space perspective (Savickas & Schwartz, 1984). Considered in concert, developmental theories suggest that adolescents need to integrate work as a salient aspect of their lives and develop future expectations regarding the world of work. These aspects of career development are important in monitoring youth so that they can achieve their vocational goals and facilitate the transition in to the world of work, particularly in the later portion of adolescence (Super 1980).

Adolescence is also an age of self-identity and self-expression. But it so happens that many young people stumble or drift into a job giving little scope or thought for consequences. They make career decisions for superficial reasons and land up in inappropriate choices resulting in dissatisfaction and disillusion. Hence, the need to take the crucial decision of selecting a vocational stream becomes most difficult during the adolescent period. Thus the dominating task of the adolescent years is the achievement of a sense of personal identity to know oneself, to commit oneself to carefully explored beliefs, purposes and values and to move into adulthood with a sense of responsibility for one's choices.

In the prevailing conditions of confusion and chaos in all walks of life, adolescents all over the world encounter highly turbulent situations. Adolescence is the stage when an individual undergoes changes, physically, socially, morally and above all psychologically. It is a transitional stage of 'stress and storm'. An adolescent of the modern world in addition to undergoing changes within himself / herself, faces a tough time in adjustment, catering to the demands and expectations of parents at home and teachers in the external world. Academically, intermediate level of schooling (Senior Secondary level) is a crucial change as it is the stepping stone for further education, especially for professional course which still is considered the best for a better future. A major turning point in adolescents' lives involves the career choice that they make while in high school.

Theories of how an adolescent develops career choices are a relatively new and seldom studied phenomenon. Until very recently it was assumed that adolescents underwent a natural progression, first initiated at the high school level, to the world of work. Traditionally, career development theorists examined the individual in isolation from the environment. This belief was widely held until Gottfredson and others reformulated career development theory and drew attention to the interrelatedness and interdependence of the environment on career decisions.

Several studies have shown that, overall youth have high occupational aspirations and that most view their careers in middle-class, white-collar terms (Baker 1985 Krahn, 1992). Women, however, are more likely than men to confine themselves to a range of occupations considered traditionally suitable for females and to consider potential future family responsibilities when making decisions about school and work (Looker, 1993; Erwin, 1996). Youth growing up in

rural areas are also more likely to have lower educational aspirations than their urban peers (Looker, 1993).

Studies have linked youth's educational and career goals to the decision to pursue post-secondary education and to progress at the post-secondary level (Krahn 1996). The development of aspirations has been identified as one of the most significant determinants of eventual educational attainment (Gottfredson 1981). Progress within post-secondary programs has also been linked to aspirations at the point of entry (Campbell et al., 1984; Grayson, 1996; Gilbert et al., 1997). The higher the aspirations, the greater the chances of obtaining a high-level job later on. Aspirations have been shown to be so important that they constituted one definite way to overcome a low-level first job with respect to later employment.

Rationale for the study

Although identity consolidation is achieved only until later, senior secondary level is the most crucial period when career decisions are taken by adolescents. Adolescence would be an ideal time to study the career development of young men and women, as many changes occur during this time that strongly influence the formation of career aspirations and preferences (Watson et al., 2002). With diversity of factors at play, it is not surprising that there is no unifying theory of adolescent development, but also becomes clear why it provides ample scope for research perspectives drawing on the diverse strands of developmental social psychology. The dearth of studies regarding this population is troubling given that adolescence is a pinnacle time for many areas of development, including vocational development.

It has already been recognized that the linkage of child development to vocational development has been neglected.. Because of the relative scarcity of literature focused on adolescent vocational development, the need for such research will prove to be beneficial for educationists, parents, students and the society alike.

Literature on the relation between aspirations and achievement where aspirations are long-term identity goals is also significantly less clear. Research on long-term identity aspirations across gender, class, and race demonstrated that these variables are not strong predictors of aspirations (National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1998-1994). In addition to aspirations not being bound by gender, class, or race, optimistic aspirations persist in adolescence with nearly 70% of teenagers aspiring to and expecting to achieve intrinsically satisfying and economically comfortable careers (Asakawa, 2000). Unfortunately the translation of long-term identity aspirations to achievement is not smooth, Additionally disturbing is the fact that even when these less privileged adolescents are intrinsically motivated to achieve, their performance and ultimate achievement remains depressed in relation to their more privileged peers (Cokley 2003; Cokley, Komarraju, King, Cunningham, & Muhammad 2003).The fact suggests that valuing school and aspiring toward academic success is not enough to significantly enhance achievement for students. These findings and possibilities suggest that it is important to examine other variables influencing aspirations...

Objectives of the study

- 1 To study the career aspirations of senior secondary students.
2. To study the difference between boys and girls in their perception of career aspirations.
- 3 To find if any difference exists in the career aspirations among students according to the type of school.
- 4 To study the perceived parental influence of senior secondary students

Hypotheses

1. There is no statistical difference in the career aspirations among senior secondary students with respect to the type of schools.
2. There is no statistical difference in the career aspirations between boys and girls with respect to the type of schools.

Participants

Population of the present study comprised of senior secondary students studying in various schools of Delhi, India. Senior secondary level is the most crucial time in a students' life as major decisions regarding further studies and career are taken. During this phase, these high school students enter a time in their lives when becoming aware of their vocational interests is a major developmental task. Also, in the Indian education system, it is when students enter class XI or intermediate that choices are made regarding the stream or course which they want to pursue. Many factors come to play before they arrive at any decision regarding their selection of course/stream like their vocational interests, aspirations, expectations, influence of parents, peers, family members, friends etc. Hence, it was decided to include class XI students.

In India, school category is determined as per state pattern on his basis of the highest class in a school. A school having classes up to V will be termed as primary school. School having classes up to VIII will be termed as upper primary. Class up to IX and X will be termed as secondary school and a school having highest classes either XI or XII will be termed as higher secondary or senior secondary school,

Depending on the management, school systems vary from Government to Government Aided, to Private to Central and are affiliated to Central Board of Secondary Education or State Boards.

The sample for the present study comprised of two hundred senior secondary school students namely Class XI studying in various Private, Government, Central and Aided schools of Delhi (25 boys and 25 girls from each type of school). The age range was from 14 to 18 years. And had Indian nationality.

Measures

A questionnaire for students was constructed to study the perceptions of students in senior secondary class about their career aspirations. Overall, eighty seven items were constructed with five response categories which were later reduced and modified to sixty five after consultation with experts and initial try outs.

To judge the face validity and the content validity, relevance of items to the theme and linguistic clarity, the tools were given individually to a panel of seven experts comprising of various teacher educators and psychologists working in various institutes namely, Jamia Millia Islamia, University, NCERT, IGNOU, and University.

The final tool comprised of: 65 agree-disagree statements on a 5-1 Likert scale and, it had four sections

Section (I) Personal Data dealing with demographic details

Section (II) Stream Selection dealing with academic stream/course pursued

Section (III): Career Aspirations, which had twenty-five, questions to study the career aspirations of the respondents

Section (IV) Perceived Parental Influence comprising of five sub parts namely Parent Child Relationship (ten items.), Parental Expectations (eight items), Parental anxiety (six items,) Fathers' support (eight items) and lastly Mothers' Support, which were identical to that of corresponding fathers (eight items). All the items were in Likert Scale (1-Strongly Disagree -5-Strongly Agree).

The Cronbach alpha reliability of this tool was 0.81

Data Analysis

In order to study the career aspirations of senior secondary students, twenty five questions in this dimension from the questionnaire for students that dealt with the aspirations of students about their future career. was analyzed. The items in this dimension were developed by the investigator to study the future plans of senior secondary students with regard to what they looked for in a job, their vocational preferences, their ambitions, aspirations etc. The scoring of the responses was done by assigning numerical 5,4,3,2,1 to positive statements and 1,2,3,4,5 to the negative statements in this dimension. Therefore the maximum score would be 125 and minimum 25. A score above 75 i.e. the neutral score of 75 would imply that the sample students have made definite career plans, and have high aspirations about their career.

Table 2 depicts the scores of students' career aspirations in Aided, Private, Central and Government schools of New Delhi. Graphical representation of the statistical finding is given in Fig 4a

TABLE: 1.2
Mean and SD of Career Aspirations of Students

Type of school	N	Mean	Neutral	S.D
Private School	50	89.18	75	10.47
Aided School	50	88.82	75	11.36
Central School	50	89.00	75	10.96
Govt. School	50	84.48	75	10.36

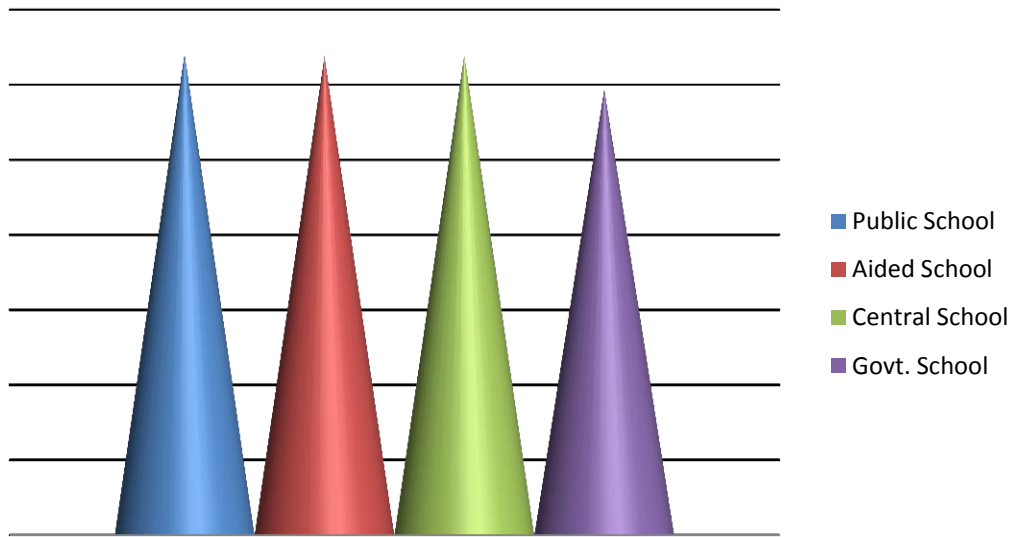


FIGURE: 1a Mean and Standard Deviation of Career Aspiration of Students

The Mean scores of career aspiration of students in the four types of schools namely Private, Aided, Central and Government confirm that the sample students at senior secondary stage had high career aspirations as the scores obtained were above the neutral score of 75. It implies that they were ambitious about their future, they knew the importance of finding a job after completion of studies and had set high goals and expectations for themselves. The mean score was maximum in Private school (89.18) closely followed by Central school (89.00) and Aided school (88.82). Among the four schools, mean score was least in Government school with a mean score of (84.48)

Responses of students were also categorized into low, medium and high aspirations which is illustrated in Table 1.2

TABLE: 1.2
Career Aspiration of students in various types of schools

Level	Private	Aided	Central	Govt.	Total
Low Aspiration	16	17	9	26	68
Medium Aspiration	15	15	26	17	73
High Aspiration	19	18	15	7	59
Total	50	50	50	50	200

The above Table makes it apparent that senior secondary students of private schools had comparatively high aspirations closely followed by Aided school students and Central school students. Among the four types of schools, Government school students expressed low aspirations. The above result is an indication that the perceptions about their career by sample students varied with respect to the type of schools.

The above results have also yielded some interesting findings. The Pattern of aspiration in the case of Private and Aided Schools were more evenly distributed amongst low, medium and high aspiration levels. On the other hand, in Government schools the number of students aspiring high was significantly low in comparison to the other three types of schools... In the case of Central schools the aspiration levels of students were positively skewed towards high and medium levels clearly indicating the overall high aspiration of children in that school. The sex-wise difference in their perceptions was also worked out with the use of Chi-Square. Chi Square was computed with respect to type of schools ($X^2 = 1.98$; $do = 2$;) *It is insignificant.*) And have been recorded in Table 1.3.

TABLE: 1.3

3x2 Contingency Table: Comparison of Career Aspiration of Boys and Girls

Career Aspiration Level	Comparison by sex		
	Boys	Girls	Total
Low	36 (37.5)	32 (30.8)	68 (34)
Medium	36 (37.5)	37 (35.6)	73 (36.5)
High	24 (25.0)	35 (33.7)	59 (29.5)
Total	96 (48)	104 (52)	200 (100)

The figures given in parenthesis indicate percentages $X^2 = 1.98; df = 2; insignificant$

Since the X^2 value of **1.98** obtained for 2df on comparing the career aspirations of boys and girls is not significant, the hypothesis that there is no difference in the career aspirations on the basis of sex is accepted. It is evident that girls and boys studying in class XI had more or less similar views regarding their future career. Their eagerness to achieve a particular rank, fame or position was not distinct from one another. The differences in scores of boys and girls may be due to chance.

In order to find if career aspirations of students differed with respect to type of schools, again Chi Square value was tabulated and the same is given in Table 4.4.4

TABLE: 1.4

3x4 Contingency Table: Comparison of Career Aspirations of Students in Various Types of Schools

Career Aspiration	Type of Schools				
	Private	Aided	Central	Govt.	Total
Low	16 (32.0)	17 (34.0)	9 (18)	26 (42.0)	68 (34.0)
Medium	15 (30.0)	15 (30.0)	26 (52.0)	17 (34.0)	73 (36.5)
High	19 (38.0)	18 (38.0)	15 (30.0)	7 (14.0)	59 (29.5)
Total	50 (100.0)	50 (100.0)	50 (100.0)	50 (100.0)	200 (100.0)

The figures given in parenthesis indicate percentages $X^2 = 19.13; DF = 2; significant at .01 level$

Chi-Square value of **19.13** is significant at .01 levels implying that career aspirations of students at senior secondary level differed with respect to the type school. The ambition of students regarding the career they would like to pursue in future, their anxieties, their expectations etc varied depending on the type of schools where they studied and the difference is not attributable to fluctuations of sampling.

Results

The scores indicated that Class XI students belonging to Private, Government Central and Government Aided schools of New Delhi had high career aspirations, The mean score for career aspirations was highest in Private school (89.18) closely followed by Central school (89.00) and then by Aided school. (88.82). Among the four types of schools, the mean score was comparatively less in Government school (84.48)

The high scores show that Class XI students had thought about their future and were very ambitious. They had strong vocational preferences and were optimistic about their future. The respondents had set high goals and they were confident of making wise decisions in subject selection.

Career aspirations of students at senior secondary level differed with respect to the type school. As indicated by the Chi-Square value of (19.13), the ambition of students regarding the career they would like to pursue in future, their anxieties, their expectations etc varied depending on the type of schools where they studied and the difference is not attributable to fluctuations of sampling.

No Significance difference between boys and girls could be noticed with respect to career aspirations. Gender did not account for variations in career aspirations. Girls and boys studying in class XI had similar views regarding their future career. Their eagerness to achieve a particular rank, fame or position was not distinct from one another. The differences in scores of boys and girls may be due to chance.

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to acquire a baseline data about the degree to which adolescents perceive their future career. The findings of the investigation revealed that majority of participant students did have strong orientation towards career. Senior secondary level is a very important turning point in the life of students as choices regarding futures studies have to be decided which in turn is most crucial for their career. During this phase, students enter a time in their lives when seeking career information and becoming aware of their vocational interest is a major developmental task. Results regarding the career aspirations of the sample students revealed that students at the senior secondary level had made concrete plans about the career they would like to pursue. The high scores indicate their occupational awareness, planfulness and a desire to explore the world of work.

There was no significant statistical difference in the career aspirations between boys and girls. At the same time noticeable difference could be seen with respect to the type of schools. The findings support that of Veena Kumari (2001) who conducted a study on educational aspirations of secondary school students and found that there was no difference between boys and girls with regard to their aspirations.

The study has given some fruitful insight in to the ideal selves of the sample students. They had clear plans for their future and were confident of reaching their goal. There was no significant statistical difference between boys and girls regarding their aspirations.

Delimitations of the study

- The study was confined only to Class XI students.
- The study was confined only to students studying in the National Capital Delhi.

Implications of the study

Based on the findings from this study, several important implications can be argued.

For Scholars

This study's findings imply that scholars should view career aspirations as dynamic over time and should treat the students' career choice stages as an interconnected and synergistic process, rather than a static and disconnected process. The study showed that career aspirations of students at senior secondary level differed with respect to the type of school. Therefore, school environment should be considered as it has a significant bearing on student aspiration.

For Counselors

The results also showed that large individual differences exist as to how students make career decisions. For practice, this implies that the ability to adapt to this task has to be promoted by taking the individual needs of a student into account and counselors cannot assume that all students of a given age or within a given grade require the same degree of assistance. As the study shows, the specific proximity and complexity of the career choice for a student has to be assessed and career intervention should be tailored accordingly. For example, the results show that students from Government schools are also actively engaged in career preparation but can somehow not translate this into more adaptive career aspirations. Counselors may therefore not need to help these students simply do more exploration or planning but do different and more focused career preparation by providing extra help identifying, planning for and exploring realistic aspirations.

For Children

Psychological research has shown that having aspirations is associated with higher levels of mental health adjustment. This may be because having aspirations (and therefore goals) is related to having a desire for control, and also may be an important determinant of adaptive psychological functioning (DeNeve 1999; Diener et al., 1999). In other words, the link between adjustment and aspirations may be explained by the fact that achievement motivation, mastery over problems, general 'toughness' or 'hardiness', commitment, self-confidence, resilience,

optimism and perseverance are associated with both. Therefore children should have realistic as well as idealistic aspirations.

For Parents

Parents can make a significant contribution to their child's education in a number of ways. As teachers, they can provide instructions regarding how to plan their work, how to have a good attitude about work, and how to access information about things that interest him/her. As supporters, they can contribute knowledge and skills, encourage their children to be open to new and different experiences or provide additional resources. As role models they can set examples for their children regarding how to learn new things, how to be persistent in their efforts, how to solve problems etc.

It seems then that children's aspirations and career decisions are influenced by many factors within the wider ecosystem which may have an impact on both aspirations and their realization.

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