

# THE ESSENCE OF YOUTH'S CAREER ASPIRATIONS IN INDIA: INSIGHTS FROM LITERATURE

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**Abstract-** For the young generation, the pursuit of meaningful career aspirations is very critical to their life. These aspirations shape their personal development, uplift their socioeconomic status, and contribute to the country's sustainable development. Understanding the nuances of career aspirations of such a culturally rich and evolving economy becomes imperative. This paper undertakes a comprehensive exploration of the existing literature from India to elucidate the multifaceted dimensions of career aspirations among youth and unearths the intricate web of factors that influence or impede career aspirations formation among youth in India. Contextualizing the significance of structural factors like cultural norms, gender, parent's expectations, socioeconomic status, and prestige associated with a job, and of individual factors like self-efficacy, outcome expectations, interest, etc. it delves into the dynamics that both facilitate and hinder their ability to articulate and achieve their career aspirations. As the paper unfolds, it underscores the need for tailored interventions, policy measures, and a holistic approach that acknowledges the diversity of aspirations and addresses the systematic challenges that hinder their realization. The paper offers valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers seeking to empower the youth in India.

**Keywords:** career aspirations, India, sustainable development, youth, structural and individual factors

## 1. Introduction

Career aspirations are a strong desire of a person for a career they want to pursue in the future, these are critical to all career-related decisions (Robinson & Diale, 2017) and all action plans (Boxer et al., 2011; Chantara et al., 2011; Toyama, 2017). These aspirations represent an orientation for a career of choice in ideal conditions (Lerdpornkulrat et al., 2010) and thus are categorized as a motivating force (Hill & Wang, 2015) that also assists in the achievement of a chosen career (Khattab, 2015; Robinson & Diale, 2017). The growing demands for self-identity, status, esteem, prestige, and self-respect have led to an extra need to have high career aspirations in the life of young generation (Singh, 2014; Tewari & Bhattacharyya, 2017).

A career for them has a different meaning, than what it used to be a couple of decades ago (Domenico & Jones, 2006; Singh, 2014; Tewari & Bhattacharyya, 2017). Young people now invest more time in their post-school plans (Mau & Bikos, 2000). The reason for this shift is credited to several factors like globalization, an increase in the workforce (Khare, 2014), an increase percentage of women willing to work (Domenico & Jones, 2006; Raley, 2015), an increase in work demand (Tewari & Bhattacharyya, 2017), demand for high education (Rao, 2010). The high competition has made the youth crave an early entrance to the occupational world to stay ahead (Singh, 2014).

Career aspirations are very critical to youth development as they offer several advantages like increased/high educational aspirations (Kim et al., 2015), academic achievements (Kim et al., 2015), improved academic performances (Lent et al., 2002), leadership aspirations (Kim et al., 2015), and lead to achievement motivation which results in their overall satisfaction (Mega et al., 2014). The high aspirations in children help them focus more on their academic performances resulting in a drive for better grades (Gokuladas, 2011) and promoting their educational achievement (Poudel & Maharjan, 2017), an increase in post-school enrollment (Hill & Wang, 2015), pursuance of higher education, retention (Watson et al., 2016). Though it is not possible to predict the future the aspirations formed in the early years of life, are a strong predictor of academic choice and professional attainment in the future (Schoon & Parsons, 2002). The objective of the study is to understand the dynamics and dimensions of career aspirations of youth in India and to identify the factor that facilitates/restricts their high career aspirations.

## 2. Research Methodology

The literature search was carried out for articles about the career aspirations of youth in India. The study about working or retired people or any case study was not a part of this review. The keywords used for the search were; 'career aspirations and India'; 'career aspirations of youth in India', and 'career aspirations and common supporting factors/barriers in India'. The article that talks about race/ethnicity was further excluded. The career aspiration in a particular subject was also not included. The aspiration motivation in a particular job type was also not a part of this review. The purpose of the search was to find the dimensions of the career aspiration of youth to understand which factors facilitate or inhibit their career-making decisions. The main focus was on the work published in the last two decades. During this time career aspirations were valued more than ever before and rated as an important indicator of social, economic, and personal development.

## 3. Youth's career aspirations: The Indian context

India has a high percentage of young population in its total demography which makes it more diverse. The country is rapidly developing and is an evolving economy. Thus it is very important that for its consistent development, every aspiration is considered and valued. A bulk of the literature suggests that most people aspire to a career in medical or engineering fields in India (Diwan et al., 2013; Garla, 2011; Gaurav & Sheikh, 2020; Giri et al., 2015; Goel et al., 2018; Mahal & Mohanan, 2006; N & Muthunarayanan, 2012; Ravi & Kumar, 2014). These fields have a high social recognition in India (Giri et al., 2015). Professional courses, like management, emerged to be the next on the list (Agarwala, 2014; Gautam et al., 2016; Gokuladas, 2011). The

speculations for aspiring careers in these fields are made over the high job opportunities these course offers (Agarwala, 2014; Gokuladas, 2011). An increase in the number of institutes that offers a variety of professional degrees like medical colleges, engineering college, and management colleges indicates the charm in people for these fields (Diwan et al., 2013; Mahal & Mohanan, 2006; Y. Singh & Solanki, 2017). Pupil believes a more advanced degree brings with it the high prospects of a better career (Bangari & Chaubey, 2018; Wilson & Shastry, 2017). However, in India, a huge of the number of graduates and post graduates comes from conventional courses, like Arts, Humanities, and Commerce, (Pattanayak & Naik, 2014; Y. Singh & Solanki, 2017). The limited research on the career aspirations on the students from conventional field is the possible research gap we found. A gap in the research over the dimensions and dynamics of career aspirations needs attention.

Our society has been witnessing gender discrimination/difference since time immemorial. Career aspirations, particularly in females, bring the advantage of investing extra time in education, as girls with high career aspirations are reluctant to do early marriage for the willingness of self-sufficiency (Maertens, 2013; Raley, 2015) parents are also supporting them when they see females from the society excel in the various field (Beaman et al., 2012). Females aspire for economic independence for a better position (Rao, 2010) because a lack of financial support brings them low confidence, fear of failure, and uncertainty about success (Kirti et al., 2014). An increase in aspiration to work has broadened the area to make a career choice (Kumar et al., 2019). Perception of barriers restricts females to aspire high (Biju et al., 2021). The gender based biasness often curbs female's career aspirations (P. & Musthafa.MN, 2016).

A state of low aspirations is categorized as a serious problem (B. Kumari, 2015) because low aspirations come together with low future expectations (Pattanayak & Naik, 2014). Low aspirations invite problems like low academic self-concept, low interest, poor academic participation, and negative attitude and as a result, people stop trying (Mega et al., 2014). A highly motivated person often achieves the maximum of what is aspired, particularly in terms of education and careers (Maertens, 2013). Career aspirations are developed as a result of internal and external motivation for a life goal (Chantara et al., 2011). Thus it is important that young pupils are always motivated. It is good to bring in line the pupil's aspirations with their academic achievements. Aspirations provide goal clarity, developing competence, openness to non-traditional careers, leadership aspirations, and community welfare (Ningthoujam et al., 2019). Career aspirations push a person to hard work for the attainment of goals (S. Gupta & Jaiswal, 2019).

#### 4. Dimensions of Youth's career aspirations in India

It is essential to understand the nature of the youth's career aspirations to realize and understand every factor that drives and shapes them, because this would aid in the translation of their aspirations into attainment (Aggarwal et al., 2012). Several dimensions determine youth's aspirations. The Career aspirations of youth in India encompass dimensions like,

a) Attainment of a preferred occupation: A career by choice is a common aspiration that facilitates the attainment of personal, social, and economic development (Adya & Kaiser, 2005). A significant section of the population wants to be doctors or engineers in the doctors because of the prestige associated with these careers (Gaurav & Sheikh, 2020).

b) Educational aspirations: Career aspirations are associated with educational aspirations (Kim et al., 2015). Both these aspirations complement each other. The dimension of pursuing a preferred course comes with the career outcome expectations, thus pertains to a certain level of education or studying any particular educational course (Dhingra, 2018).

c) Financial security: Financial security and economic independence are the golden returns of career aspiration formation. This dimension is tied to the career an individual takes and the financial benefits it offers to them as a return (Gokuladas, 2013).

d) Social identity: A career is no longer just a means to earn a livelihood but it is something much wider, relating to the personal identity of a person (Saraswathy, 2017). The career a person chooses gives them a particular social and professional identity (Sunaina, 2017). A career is a transformative opportunity for people that leads to their upward social mobility (De, 2021)

e) Personal development: The career opportunity shapes the personal development of a person. It provides them a platform to grow and evolve as per their choice. High aspirations and achievement lead to personality development (Manchanda & Anand, 2017).

f) Life goal: Through a career, a person fulfills several other life goals. The journey to achieve several other objective and life aim is traveled through the right career (Singh, 2014). Further, the ultimate aim of one's life should be to contribute to the well-being of the society they live in (Tewari & Bhattacharyya, 2017).

#### 5. Factors influencing youth's career aspirations

The literature review suggests that there exist several types of factors that facilitate/restrict aspiration formation or development (Kirti et al., 2014). From aspirations to the attainment of a career, every factor has a certain role to play. These factors can broadly be divided into two categories, first, structural factors like gender, parent's expectations, financial security, the prestige associated with a job, educational quality, etc., and other are individual factors like self-efficacy, positive expectations, and interest (Flores & O'Brien, 2002; Lent et al., 1994, 2017; Lent & Brown, 2019).

**5.1 Structural factors:** the literature search aids in concluding that in India, a middle-income country, career aspirations are largely determined by structural factors (Gokuladas, 2013; Poudel & Maharjan, 2017) like by gender influence (Kirti et al., 2014; Patel et al., 2021; Phukan & Saikia, 2017), the socio-economic status (Rao, 2010), parent's expectation (Bangari & Chaubey, 2018; Gokuladas, 2013), financial security and prestige associated with a job (Gaurav & Sheikh, 2020; Saraswathy, 2017). Every factor to an extent determines the aspiration of people like, low socioeconomic status often leads to low career aspirations formation (Rao, 2010). Gender stereotyping largely restricts female career aspirations (Biju et al., 2021; Closson et al., 2022; De, 2021; Jejeebhoy & Kumar, 2021; Patel et al., 2021). Parents largely influence career choice of their children in India (J & Jaganath R, 2019). The factor of the Parent's choice (Aggarwal et al., 2012; Ali et al., 2005; N & Muthunayanan, 2012) is the locus of control, where the career aspirations of youth revolve. The prestige associated with a profession is another factor that

determines the occupational aspirations of youth in India (Gokuladas, 2013) for example being a doctor and engineer is highly respected in Indian society (Gaurav & Sheikh, 2020).

The structural factors are much more influential and have a higher contribution in determining the career trajectories of females. These are widely studied in studies pertaining to female career development. Findings from several studies revealed that the career path of boys and girls needs two different types of lenses to understand the dynamics of their career aspirations. Gender gap affects the career aspirations of females by restricting and limiting their choices (Minakshi et al., 2018). Lack of studies that consider individual factors in studies relating to female career development is another prominent research gap.

**5.2 Individual factors:** Individual factors are very critical to career aspirations, like the factor of self-efficacy is correlated to aspirations (Roy et al., 2018) and shapes career trajectories (Bandura et al., 2001). Self-efficacy is categorized as the perception one has for their ability, it has the power to positively affect the ability to succeed (Lent et al., 1994, 2017). When self-efficacy is high, pupils generally have a high outcome expectation (Ali et al., 2005). Outcome expectations are the expected results of performing a certain task (Lent et al., 1994, 2017). These positive expectations, interest further strongly engage a person in the related activities indicating a high investment of their time and effort (Mega et al., 2014), and thus have positive career beliefs (Arulmani et al., 2003). An aspired goal when not achieved would affect adversely the student, by triggering frustration, depression, and disappointment (N. Gupta, 2012) and critically the society by loss of talent. Thus, the focus should be over 100% attainment of career aspiration (Kumari & Hasteer, 2018).

## 6. Challenges

To be employed as early as possible is a very common desire of the young generation these days (Singh, 2014; Tewari & Bhattacharyya, 2017). The literature also talks about several factors that emerge as career barrier and hinders their progress and career development. The factors that impede career aspiration formation are termed as a threat to the personality development of a person (Lerdpornkulrat et al., 2010). These career barriers are events or conditions that may exist within the individual or in their environment that make career development challenging and largely affect career-making decisions and processes (Betz, 1994; Gottfredson, 1981, 2002).

The review suggest that the most common career barriers faced by youth in India are, the lack of employability/ professional skills, it is a big challenge, (Arora, 2015; Pattanayak & Naik, 2014). The poor access to skills-based training is another challenge that Indian youth face (Jejeebhoy & Kumar, 2021). Along with them, low socio-economic conditions (Ningthoujam et al., 2019), limited work opportunity, (Ningthoujam et al., 2019), quality of education (S. Gupta & Jaiswal, 2019; Ningthoujam et al., 2019) that results in lowering of career aspiration are widely considered as a threat to career development. Though it is not easy to ease of these challenges instantly, but literature suggest that the social, personal, and other contextual factors can be addressed by a course of predefined actions, several policies, and government initiatives. This can also enhance career guidance and counseling services.

It is observed that career barriers to aspiration formation in females often result in compromise (Murthi & Hammell, 2020). They settle down for low or no career choice. Factors like perception of marriages/motherhood, gender differentials, gender stereotyping, and inequality in the workplace are a few of the common career barriers for females that hinder their progress and affect their choice of a desired career goal (Beaman et al., 2012; Phukan & Saikia, 2017; Scott, 2021).

## 7. Intervention

Every individual needs to aspire high. Career aspirations are crucial to human development thus it becomes the responsibility of every policymaker, stakeholder, and educationist to enhance the career aspirations of young pupils. Young generation is now more sensitive to their career-making (Bangari & Chaubey, 2018). Academics are kept on top of the priority list by parents for their children particularly in India (Dhingra, 2018). A lack of career aspiration is viewed by Roy et al. as a prime barrier to pursuing higher education (Bangari & Chaubey, 2018; Roy et al., 2018). The accomplishment of a dream job is the main aim of procuring higher education these days (Gokuladas, 2011). Educational achievement is believed to have high employment offering potential (Bangari & Chaubey, 2018; Rao, 2010; Wong & Kemp, 2017), especially for lower-middle-class pupils (Naafs & Skelton, 2018) it is a tool for them to acquire distinction (Rao, 2010). The employment opportunity a course offers is the key factor when making a course choice (Ali et al., 2005; Pascual, 2014; Simones et al., 2017). Thus educational reform is the need of the hour. A variety of courses should be offered that could enhance employability skills. Technological intervention can also do magic. Integration of education and vocations in conventional courses should be adapted.

Females constitute almost half of the total population of the country. Their significant representation in the workforce is a must for the sustainable development of the country. So, interventions that uplift female aspirations, like, a gender quota policy, and exposure to positive female role models, increase educational and career aspirations and the outcome as resulted in a policy experiment by Beaman et al. (Beaman et al., 2012). Every nation's pride rests on its young generation, and for a country like India, where the country's principal resource is its people, it is necessary to address the aspirations of its youth and ensure that they are guided in the right direction (Aggarwal et al., 2012).

## 8. Conclusion

Fostering career aspirations would have a knock-on effect on the personality of a person as well as on the society. An understanding of the career aspirations of youth in India could help policymakers to enable a person to realize and achieve their aspirations. For the very first step in improving the career trajectories and policy-making for the youth, it is important that their aspirations are heard to understand and overcome the possible common barriers. For a developing country like India, it is important to identify the aspirations of its young generation to keep them motivated because its human resources are the prime resource that can be used for its development. This review underscores that the career aspirations of youth in India are deeply

rooted in its culture, familial expectations, and socio-economic background, gender. The educational system must empower students to pursue their dreams. The educationist must foster an environment conducive to aspirations development. The policymakers should embrace a holistic approach that equally recognizes cultural diversity to nurture career aspirations among youth.

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