

## **PSYCHOSOCIAL CORRELATES OF VOCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS OF ADOLESCENT BOYS AND GIRLS**

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### **Abstract**

The study investigated the relationship between vocational aspirations and selected psychosocial variables, namely, gender, social class, sex roles, self-concept and achievement motivation. The sample comprised 600 adolescents, 300 boys and 300 girls, 15 to 18 years, from the high, middle and low socioeconomic strata studying in English medium schools in Baroda city in Gujarat. Standardized tools were used to assess the study variables. Statistical analyses including t-tests, analysis of variance, and chi-squares were computed. Results revealed that gender, social class and achievement motivation were significantly related to vocational aspirations. No significant relationship, however, was found between sex roles, self-concept and vocational aspirations. Implications for adolescents counseling and parental guidance towards enabling appropriate vocational aspirations have been outlined.

**Key Words:** Adolescents; Vocational aspirations; Gender; Achievement motivation; Social class

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## Introduction

Recognition of adolescence as a critical distinct stage in human development is gaining ground in the Indian context (Verma & Saraswathi, 2000). In the present globalizing context, innumerable changes are unfolding across societies and India is no exception. Adolescents are most affected by such changes. In line with their developmental stage, they are curious and open to change, and hence vulnerable to the myriad influences of the global world (Arnett, 2002).

A notable fallout of globalization is the lengthening of the adolescent transition, especially in urban middle class settings (Mortimer & Larson, 2002). In particular, adolescents are spending more time in formal education. The value of education is increasing across social classes, although it is greater in middle class families as they perceive educational achievement as a route to upward mobility (Kapadia, 2017). The late adolescent years, that is, 15 to 18 years, are crucial as the formative years of life for selection of a vocation for the future.

‘Vocational aspiration’ usually means what the individual considers to be the ideal vocation for oneself. It refers to the level at which an individual wishes to work. The aspirations can be either ideal or realistic vocational or career aspirations are an individual’s point-in-time expressions of educational and occupational goals (Rojewskij, 2005).

Many individual and contextual factors influence an adolescent’s vocational aspirations. Among these, socio-emotional capital assumes much significance. This paper has documented the role played by social-emotional capital in explaining the education and labour market aspirations of adolescents in India. Our focus on aspirations in these two domains as our key dependent variables, rather than actual attainment, is motivated by the fact that previous studies have argued that adolescent aspirations for the future are important predictors of adult attainment. For example, it has been shown that young people with high employment aspirations are more likely to enter a professional career in adulthood (Schoon, Martin, & Ross, 2007).

Among the many factors that influence vocational aspirations, gender, sex roles, and social class are ubiquitous determinants. One of the most striking characteristics of the vocational world is intense gender segregation. Gender influences behaviours and preferences across a variety of contexts. Men tend to work in some occupations, women in others, and from very early years,

boys and girls tend to aspire and prefer different vocations. Gender typed characteristics are encouraged from early years which in turn affect their career aspirations. Typically, the male role is associated with instrumental/agentive behaviors and traits that reflect independence, assertiveness, and dominance and the female gender role has been associated with expressive behaviors and traits that reflect sensitivity to others and communality. Androgynous traits refer to a mix of masculine and feminine characteristics (Bem, 1981). According to Correll (2001), gender beliefs, which are cultural schemas for interpreting or making sense of the social world, lead to gender differentiated career perceptions and choices.

Every individual is born into a social and economic context within which one's vocational aspirations develop. Adolescent's aspirations and intentions regarding higher education are strongly influenced by socioeconomic background; it is the major factor in the variation in student perspectives on the value and attainability of higher education. According to Schoon (2006) parents with limited financial resources tend to hold lower aspirations for their children, and young people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds tend to have lower aspirations than their more advantaged peers. Salgotra and Roma (2018) in their study with class X students in Jammu district found a significant but positive relationship between socio-economic-status and educational aspiration. They concluded that the variables of socio-economic-status and educational aspiration are directly related to each other.

Other specific determinants of vocational aspirations are individual level factors such as self-concept and achievement motivation. According to Deci and Ryan (2000) motivation is greatly appreciated because of the consequences it produces. The attitude that is often used in conjunction with motivation to achieve is self-concept, or the way one thinks about oneself to perform a task successfully. Adolescence has long been considered a time when self-concept concerns increase in prominence. Academic self-concept influences the level of vocational aspirations which also become particularly salient during this period. Various studies have identified a positive relationship between self-concept and an individual's educational potential and vocational aspirations (Chamundeswari, Sridevi, & Kumari, 2014; Sikhwari, 2014).

Achievement motivation is another important determinant of vocational aspirations. Academic achievement and motivation are significantly related (Shikwari 2014). Tella (2007) reported that highly motivated students performed better academically than lowly motivated students. Lack of motivation is a big hurdle in learning and a pertinent cause in the deterioration of education standards. There is considerable evidence to support the contention that positive academic self-concept contributes to academic achievement by enhancing the motivation to achieve (Awan, Noureen, & Anjum, 2011).

The study addressed the psychosocial variables gender, sex roles, social class, self-concept and achievement motivation to determine their role in determining adolescent students' vocational aspirations.

#### Objectives

1. To find out the differences between the vocational aspirations of adolescent boys and girls.
2. To find out the effect of social class on the vocational aspirations of adolescent boys and girls.
3. To find out the effect of sex roles on the vocational aspirations of adolescent boys and girls.
4. To find out the effect of self-concept on the vocational aspirations of adolescent boys and girls.
5. To find out the effect of achievement motivation on the vocational aspirations of adolescent boys and girls.
6. To find out the interaction between genders, social class, sex roles, self-concept and achievement motivation on the vocational aspirations of adolescent boys and girls.

#### Hypotheses

Based on the trends indicated in the review of literature the following hypotheses were generated:

1. There will be significant differences between the vocational aspirations of adolescent boys and girls.
2. There will be significant differences between the vocational aspirations of adolescent boys and girls belonging to different social class.

3. There will be significant differences between the vocational aspirations of adolescent boys and girls belonging to different sex role categories.
4. There will be significant differences between the vocational aspirations of adolescent boys and girls belonging to different categories of self-concept. There will be significant difference between the vocational aspirations of adolescent boys and girls having different levels of achievement motivation.
5. There will be significant interaction effects of gender, social class, sex roles, self-concept, and achievement motivation on vocational aspirations of adolescents.

## **Method**

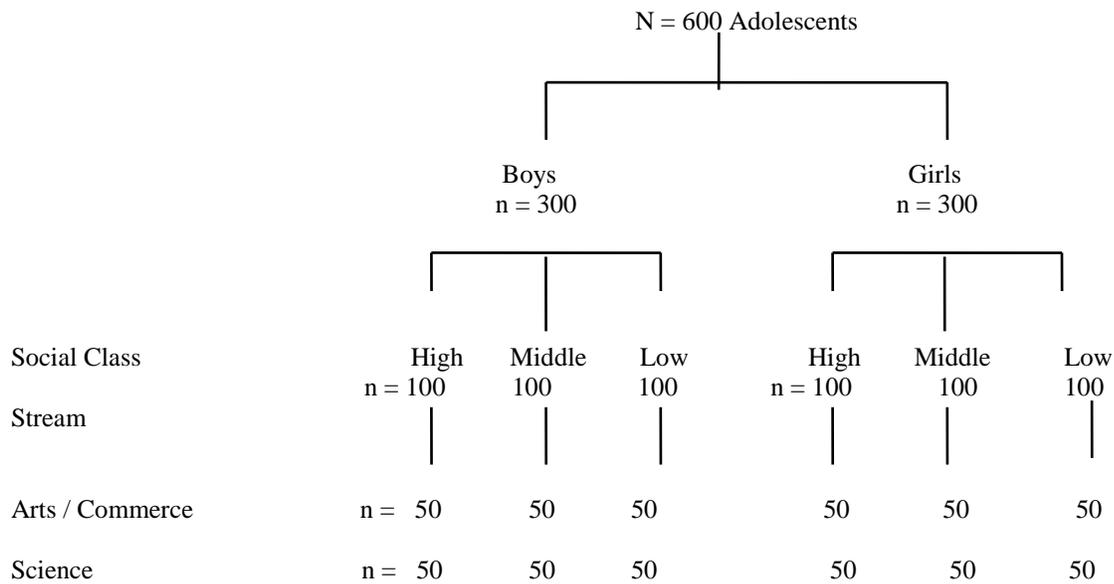
### **Sample**

In the present study the focus was on adolescents from higher secondary standards, as the last three years of school are very important for the selection of a vocation and happen to be terminal points in the Indian education system.

A stratified random sample was drawn. It comprised of 600 adolescents, equally distributed by gender social class, and subject stream (see Figure 1 below). All the subjects were residents of Baroda city and came from the higher secondary sections (i.e., 10th, 11th, and 12th standards) of English medium schools. Five English medium schools were selected on the basis of the following criteria:

1. The medium of instruction was English.
2. All the schools were co-educational. All the schools either had science or arts/commerce stream, or both the streams. The schools were selected from various areas of the city so that students from all the three social classes, namely, high, middle and low would be available.

The sampling design is presented in the Figure 1 below.



*Figure 1.* Sampling design

The study variables.

*Independent variables.*

The five independent variables of the study are described below:

1. *Gender*: It encompasses the social differences between the two sexes, which affects the development of specific psychological dispositions and attitudes.
2. *Social class*: Social class may be defined as a group of people who share similar values and attitudes, a particular life-style and feel themselves to be similar to each other. The placing of an individual in a given social class system depends on his social relationships, his occupation, income, education, type of house and area of the community (Patel, 1989).
3. *Sex roles*: refers to behaviors viewed as acceptable for each sex according to societal norms. The terms sex roles and gender roles are often used interchangeably to denote a repertoire of emotions, attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions that are commonly associated more with one sex than with the other (Levesque, 2011). Essentially the concept denotes the gender stereotypical traits and behaviors that persons use to describe themselves and which influence their dispositions.
4. *Self-concept*: Self-concept is the opinion an individual holds about oneself, which may be favorable or unfavorable, strong or weak. These opinions no matter how real or distorted,

are held as powerful beliefs by the individual, and form one's self-concept. There are three aspects of self-concept which are self-image (of what the person is), ideal self (what the person wants to be), and self-esteem (what the person feels about the discrepancy between what she/he is and what she/he would like to be) (Lawrence 1996).

5. *Achievement motivation*: According to Kaplan (2008) the term 'achievement motivation' denotes processes leading to behavior that aims to achieve a certain criterion or standard. The criterion can be any goal or objective, formal or informal, set by an individual or by others, in any professional or leisure domain (e.g., school, sports, work, music, gardening, even social relationships and moral conduct), which provides a guide for evaluating success and failure (p. 13).

#### *Dependent variable.*

*Vocational aspirations*: Vocational aspirations are the thoughts, feelings, fantasies and goals that people have about their work, that affect their motivation and decision making with respect to their occupational choice and subsequent participation in their occupation. Rojewski (2005) defined occupational aspirations as "an individual's expressed career related goals or choices".

#### Measures

The following assessment measures were used:

1. ***Socio-economic status scale***. In the present study the socio-economic status of the sample was determined by Desai's (1983) scale. The scale includes elements of income, education and occupation as well as type of residence and ownership of vehicles. Under each category there are specific items and each item carries a weight. These weights are added to get a final score and based on the score the individual is placed in any one of the three social classes, high, middle or low.
2. ***Gender role/Sex role inventory***. The gender role/sex role inventory is a Likert type scale (Patel & Gon, 1989). It contains 32 personality characteristics. Of these, 16 are stereotypically masculine (e.g., adventurous, independent) and 16 are stereotypically feminine (e.g., adaptable, sensitive to others' needs). Based on the responses, the individuals are categorized into one of the following four sex roles based on the median split of the

- masculinity and femininity scores: (1) androgynous, (2) masculine, (3) feminine, and (4) undifferentiated.
3. ***Self-concept questionnaire.*** The self-concept inventory developed by Saraswat (1992) provides six separate dimensions of self-concept, viz., physical, social, intellectual, moral, educational and temperamental self-concept.
  4. ***Achievement motive test.*** The achievement motive test developed by Bhargava (1984), measures the academic achievement. The test consists of 50 items of incomplete sentences which are to be completed by the subject by putting a tick mark on any one of the three alternative responses given against each items.
  5. ***Occupational aspiration scale.*** A scale including a range of currently prevalent occupations in India was developed based on the structure of Haller and Miller's (1968) scale for measuring the Level of Occupational Aspiration.

#### Procedure of data collection

The present study was conducted in the following two phases:

*Phase I:* Principals of different schools were contacted personally and the time and place for administering the tools was scheduled according to the convenience of the classroom teachers.

*Phase II:* For the purpose of the data collection, the investigator met the students in small groups in their classrooms. The booklet containing the measures (social class scale, sex role inventory, self-concept scale, achievement motivation scale and the occupational aspiration scale) was distributed among the participants after the initial rapport was established. On completion the booklets, were closely scrutinised. Incomplete, wrongly filled or copied answers were eliminated from the data set.

#### Plan of analysis

The statistical techniques used to analyze the data are stated below:

- t - tests were computed to find out any significant differences in vocational aspirations according to gender, self-concept and subject stream.
- One way Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) was computed to find out the differences in vocational aspirations according to social class, sex roles, and achievement motivation.

- Chi - square and contingency coefficients were computed to find out the relationship between study stream (i.e., arts /commerce and science) and sex roles (i.e., androgynous, masculine, feminine and undifferentiated).

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## Results and Discussion

### 1. Vocational aspirations and psychosocial variables.

The t - test revealed a significant gender difference in vocational aspirations ( $t = 3.55$ ,  $df = 598$ ,  $p < .05$ ) with aspirations of girls being lower than those of boys (Girls  $\bar{X} = 47.39$ ,  $10.527$ ; Boys  $\bar{X} = 50.45$ ,  $10.614$ ). Indian social norms prescribe two clearly differentiated roles for men and women, and majority of the Indian women have been socialized to believe in the traditional subordinate role which is that of giving priority to family and children. Although cultural values are changing in India, and girls are becoming increasingly concerned about career interests, the traditional cultural goal of marriage and childbearing continues to be regarded as the primary one. Although family members, especially in the urban middle class context, are encouraging of girls' education, they tend to impose limits on the type of subject stream and career a girl may choose. Anything that may compromise her traditionally valued gender role is mostly discouraged (Kapadia, 2017). Therefore, venturing into the outer world and exploring and aspiring for something which falls out of the stereotyped may not elicit interest or effort beyond a certain point.

Social class in relation to vocational aspirations revealed a significant difference with adolescents from higher social classes having higher aspirations than those from lower classes (see Table 1).

Table 1.

#### *One-way ANOVA of Occupational Aspirations and Social Class*

| Source         | DF  | Sum of Squares | Mean Squares | F Ratio | F Prob |
|----------------|-----|----------------|--------------|---------|--------|
| Between Groups | 2   | 1758.4338      | 879.2169     | 7.8972  | .001** |
| Within Groups  | 597 | 66466.0395     | 111.3334     | -       | -      |
| Total          | 599 | 68224.4733     | -            | -       | -      |

\*\*  $p < .001$

The F ratio presented in Table 1 indicates a significant difference in the occupational aspirations of adolescents from different social classes. Scheffe's post-hoc test revealed the significant differences between groups 1 and 3, that is, high and low social class groups ( $\bar{X} = 51.11$  and 46.93 respectively). As expected, adolescents from the high social class aspired for higher vocations. A probable reason for this could be that the attitudes, values, life-styles and goals of people are different by virtue of their status in the society. Differential socio-economic class structures and the related ethos create differential patterns of social ambience for the child. For instance, the learning environments in the middle and upper classes seem to be aimed more at setting long-term goals and they emphasise a stronger sense of control over events and a greater optimism as to the realization of one's future goals. Parents in these social classes also place greater emphasis on education. The lower class individuals on the other hand, may often be compelled to compromise with situational and societal demands, thereby undermining personal demands. Studies have shown that young individuals from lower social classes tend to prioritize employment and are often observed to leave school in the interest of earning for self and family (Kapadia & Gala, 2017).

Table 2 below presents the one-way ANOVA results for occupational aspirations and sex roles.

Table 2.

*One-way ANOVA of Occupational Aspirations and Sex Roles.*

| Source         | DF  | Sum of Squares | Mean Squares | F Ratio |
|----------------|-----|----------------|--------------|---------|
| Between Groups | 3   | 676.8057       | 225.6019     | 1.9901  |
| Within Groups  | 595 | 67449.0307     | 113.3597     | -       |
| Total          | 598 | 68125.8364     | -            | -       |

\*  $p < .05$

The result in Table 2 indicates a non-significant F ratio for occupational aspirations of adolescents with different sex role orientations, which is perhaps indicative of the changing gender role expectations in the Indian society. Another probable reason could be the possibility of a discrepancy between one's wishes and actually choosing a vocation. In the present context, young individuals are exposed to a wide array of career choices and hence their inclination and aspiration for a particular vocation may be well-articulated. However, in reality the choice is

likely to be mediated by family and societal expectations that generally tend to lean toward culturally valued gender or sex roles. Thus, it is likely that the adolescents belonging to the various sex role categories had similar higher aspirations, disregarding the various limitations they might have to encounter. Examination of the means however, reveals a trend in favor of masculine and androgynous adolescents ( $\bar{X}$ s = 50.17 and 49.43, respectively). Those with a masculine sex role orientation aspired for higher vocations, whereas, adolescents with a feminine sex role orientation had the lowest means.

With regard to vocational aspirations and self-concept, the t-tests did not reveal a significant difference. In order to study more clearly the effect of self-concept on occupational aspirations, an attempt was made to analyze the data by formulating extreme groups of the self-concept scores. However, the difference between these two extreme groups was not significant. A probable reason could be that by and large the adolescents' vocational choice has perhaps been in consonance with their perceptions of their abilities. Also, a traditional culture such as India has stronger gender role prescriptions. Although these are changing in the contemporary times, the core elements seem to persist. Thus, choosing vocations that are in line with one's gender, would generally elicit positive reinforcement from significant others, thereby, making the adolescent feel fairly satisfied with oneself.

A significant relationship was revealed between achievement motivation and the vocational aspirations of adolescent boys and girls. Table 3 indicates a significant difference between the occupational aspirations and achievement motivation ( $F = 10.96$ ;  $df = 3$ ,  $p < .01$ ) of adolescents. Scheffe's post-hoc test revealed a significant difference between groups 0 and 2 ( $\bar{X}$ s = 46.46 and 52.59) and groups 1 and 2 ( $\bar{X} = 48.87$  and 52.59). Achievement motivation is closely related to vocational aspirations, and therefore it would be natural for high achieving adolescents to have higher aspirations and low achieving adolescents to have lower aspirations.

Table 3.

*One-way ANOVA of Occupational Aspirations and Achievement Motivation*

| Source         | DF  | Sum of Squares | Mean Squares | F Ratio  |
|----------------|-----|----------------|--------------|----------|
| Between Groups | 2   | 2355.1347      | 1177.5674    | 10.9635* |
| Within Groups  | 588 | 63155.7824     | 107.4078     | -        |
| Total          | 590 | 65510.9171     | -            | -        |

\*  $p < .05$ 

## 2. Study stream and psychosocial variables.

Chi-square analysis presented in Table 4 reveals a significant relationship between sex roles and the educational stream.

Table 4.

*Proportions of Study Stream Expressing Sex Roles*

| Stream        | Undifferentiated | Feminine | Masculine | Androgynous | Total % |
|---------------|------------------|----------|-----------|-------------|---------|
| Arts/Commerce | .522             | .521     | .333      | .571        | .499%   |
| Science       | .478             | .479     | .667      | .429        | .501%   |

 $\chi^2 (599) = 17.58, df = 3, p < .001$ 

Adolescents from the science stream show a masculine sex role orientation (66.7%), whereas, adolescents from the arts / commerce stream showed an androgynous orientation. The contingency coefficient C was significant ( $C = .169, p < .01$ ), thereby revealing a close association between educational stream and sex roles.

With regard to self-concept, a significant difference was revealed between the students in science and arts/commerce streams ( $t = 3.72, df = 598, p < .001$ ). The means show that students from the arts / commerce stream have higher self-concept ( $\bar{X} = 178.42$ ) compared to those from the science stream ( $\bar{X} = 173.55$ ).

The t-tests revealed a significant difference in the achievement motivation scores of students from the arts / commerce and science streams ( $t = 5.43, df = 589, p < .001$ ), with science students

showing higher mean scores than those from the arts / commerce stream ( $\bar{X} = 19.24$  and  $17.10$  respectively). The vocational aspirations of student from the science stream were significantly higher ( $\bar{X} = 51.43$ ) than of students in the arts/commerce stream ( $\bar{X} = 46.41$ ). ( $t = 5.93$ ,  $df = 561.82$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Worldwide, as well as in the Indian context, science, medicine and engineering fields hold the highest average prestige and have always been viewed as a masculine domain, reserved mainly for men. Those who opt for this field are supposed to be bright, serious, career minded individuals, with high goals and aspirations in life, as well as high commitment levels, and men across social class are largely socialized to develop these characteristics. Hence, adolescent girls as well as boys having masculine traits have opted for science. Interestingly, there are more androgynous adolescents in the arts/commerce field than the science stream. Due to the changing times there are a lot of opportunities as well as varieties in jobs that are not highly sex-typed in the arts/commerce field; hence it is possible to pursue varied vocations such as executive, linguistic, computational business, etc.

An interesting finding revealed in the present study was that adolescents belonging to the arts/commerce stream have a higher self-concept than those from the science stream. A probable reason could be that the students from the science field may not feel satisfied with what they have achieved and, therefore, strive to improve upon what they actually possess. This desire may be due to the fact that medical professions are put on a high pedestal by society, family members, close relatives, and friends. Thus, besides being accountable to themselves, they are accountable to others too. Basically, the respondents from the science stream face a lot of competition and have to undergo a lot of pressures to excel. Often they develop a deep rooted fear of failure that they will not be able to do as well and all this may eventually lead to a lower self-concept. Those belonging to the arts/commerce stream, on the other hand, do not necessarily have as high aspirations for academic achievement as those from the science stream, and hence they may not have much to lose even if they do not perform as well. With regard to achievement motivation the results have revealed that adolescents belonging to the science stream had higher achievement motivation scores than those from the arts/commerce stream. This needs to be viewed in light of the finding that those who had higher vocational aspirations belonged to the science stream.

## **Conclusion and Implications**

The findings of the present research reveal the social and psychological factors that influence adolescents' vocational aspirations. Gender, social class and achievement motivation show a significant relationship with vocational aspirations.

Gender, sex roles and social class are pervasive variables that influence much of one's life goals. Interestingly, despite modernization, the traditional orientation of adolescent girls aspiring for less and adolescents with a masculine and androgynous sex role orientation aspiring for higher vocations persists. This indicates the deep-rooted socio cultural beliefs and attitudes that reinforce differential gender socialization. The significant influence of social class on one's vocational aspirations must be viewed in relation to gender and sex role orientation. It is quite likely that families from lower social strata are more steeped in traditional sex-role or gender role stereotypes. Coupled with a relatively small range of experiences beyond the family, it is not surprising that the adolescent develops aspirations that are more in tune with the reality of their social context.

Interestingly, a crucial variable such as self-concept does not seem to play a significant role in determining one's vocational aspiration. This may well be an indication that by and large the adolescents' vocational choice has been in consonance with their perceptions of their abilities. As achievement motivation is closely related to high academic achievement it is natural for high achieving adolescents' to have higher aspirations and low achieving adolescents' to have lower aspirations.

With respect to the study stream, more adolescents from the science stream have a masculine orientation, whereas there are more androgynous adolescents in the arts/commerce stream. They also have a higher self-concept than those from the science stream. Generally, society, family members, close relatives and friends expect a lot from adolescents who are enrolled in the science field. Therefore, besides being accountable to themselves, they are accountable to others too. In the process they might develop a deep-rooted fear of failure that they will not be able to do as well, which in turn may eventually lead to a lower self-concept. Adolescents' from the science stream also had high academic achievement scores, besides having higher vocational

aspirations. As stated earlier, those who have high achievement scores are more inclined towards academics; hence it is not surprising that they have high vocational aspirations.

One of the major implications of the present study would be to make adolescent girls and boys aware of the range of vocations available to them. Both, girls and boys can be encouraged to aspire for vocations that are stereotypically dominated by one gender. For instance, if a boy has the aptitude for becoming a preschool teacher, he may be encouraged to pursue this vocation. It is heartening to note that the feminist movement and the increased communication network has enhanced awareness about various vocations and opened new avenues. Consequently, the present day adolescents experience greater educational and career opportunities than ever before.

One of the fallouts of such a scenario is that students often make career plans without possessing adequate knowledge about various vocations. Thus, they fall an easy prey to pressure from parents and suggestions from friends, and aspire for unrealistic career decisions without assessing their suitability for themselves. This leads, in many instances, to floundering from job to job, resulting in dissatisfaction and maladjustment in the vocation thus selected. In view of this, adolescents need individual as well as group counseling to enable them to choose vocations that are in line with their interest, aptitude and ability. In fact, such counseling may also be extended to parents as they play a significant role in this process. Parents should set up a democratic home environment by showing unconditional positive regard for the adolescent, by listening to his or her ideas, suggestions, opinions and points of view, be they idiosyncratic or revolutionary. Parents can induce a meaningful dialogue with the adolescent on significant issues like future goals and plans, about their own selves, and possible vocations that they may choose.

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