Analysing Factors Influencing Career Prospects Among Underprivileged Students - A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Poverty and its reduction have been on the agenda of many developing countries and now more than ever education is seen as a catalyst of upward social mobility. Thus understanding the circumstances and views of underprivileged students and their families is very advantageous in policy decisions as well as local support. The aim of this study was to gauge the perceptions of underprivileged youth, residing in a low-income neighbourhood in Bhilai, regarding their career choices and educational opportunities. Surveys were carried out over 2 weeks and interviews with 23 respondents and their families were conducted. The results were analysed using a quantitative and contemporary ethnographic approach. The findings show that the most important factor influencing career choices among underprivileged youth is their Parental Support. Findings also show that the perception of 'stability' in jobs from generation to generation is different, where the parents of the students preferred government jobs as stable, whereas the students believed that jobs in the private sector offered more stability.

Introduction

Tackling wealth disparity and generational poverty has taken a high priority while deciding global policies, as seen in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Poverty still persists, even in wealthy countries where a significant minority of the population is deprived of resources (Green & Hulme,2005). Many policies are also designed to uplift new generations of poverty-struck individuals through education. The last official estimates of poverty in India are at 21.92% (Gaur & Rao 2020). Even with macroeconomic growth at a large scale, a country like India has a considerable amount of its population in poverty.

These numbers beg questions as to why, despite large scale growth in the country, so many families stay poor throughout generations, such questions are of high significance to policy-makers. Many times, exploitative relationships play a major part in keeping the poor disadvantaged over an extended period of time. The younger generation that is born into intergenerational poverty see education as a means for upward social mobility. Many times, the perceptions of the parents and the family on different career paths and forms of schooling play a major role in their children's choice of careers. Different facilities available to communities may or may not be useful in determining the student's choice of careers. Assessing the utility of different government programs and resources available to underprivileged communities can be very useful especially as feedback for creating new policies aimed towards education of low-income students. (Akram et. al., 2020; Joshi, 2016, Sangma, 2013)

Another factor that becomes absent in the educational circumstance of underprivileged and underrepresented communities is exposure to different potential career paths early on in their childhood. This greatly affects their outlook on different career paths available to them.

Previous papers on similar topics have discussed career perceptions in a rural context and also analysed the effect that poverty has on educational circumstances in rural youth(Joshi, 2016;Sangma, 2013). In order to discuss this topic further, this paper also incorporates students' feedback within this context. Allowing underprivileged youth to voice what they lack within their educational and career resources and what is most desired for better outcomes.

This research study takes a look at the perception of low-income students and their families on their career and educational goals that reside in underprivileged communities in a midsize industrial city in India. In

order to discuss this topic further, this paper also incorporates students' feedback within this context. Allowing underprivileged youth to voice what they lack within their educational and career resources and what is most desired for better outcomes.

Description of the Research Study

Aim of the study

With the objective of exploring generational poverty and educational disparity within the context of underserved communities in Bhilai, the aim of this research study is to conduct an in-depth mixed-method ethnographic study on the perceptions of the underserved students, aged 12-18, residing in the districts of Bhilai, with regards to their career prospects.

Research Design

A mixed-method ethnographic approach was used where six on-site visits were conducted
Most people associate "ethnography", with the classic version, whereby the researcher spends time with communities outside his/her country and elicits firsthand accounts about human behaviour and the different social systems (Sidky, 2004). However, a contemporary ethnographic approach seeks to understand people who reside within the community of the researcher, which is highly relevant in this research study, even though the targeted community of study could be as mundane as an ordinary small town (Amit, 2000). Nonetheless, the diverse methods used, such as participant observations and one-on-one interviews, are still the same, regardless of the research setting (Sidky, 2004).

Tools and Instruments Used

A questionnaire was formulated, which covers general sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents and their families (see Appendix A). The first 2 sections covered questions that asked the respondents to rate the importance and interest of various characteristics on a scale of 1 to 7, with "1" being "Not Important at All/ Not Interested at All" and 7 being "Highly Important/ Highly Interested". The first section covered factors influencing career options. The second section gauged the interest in different career options. These occupations were chosen to represent most of the general occupations and were classified on the basis of training and education required. Furthermore, respondents were asked to identify any other occupations they had in mind through an open-ended question and elaborate on any of their ratings in-depth, which served as a source for qualitative analysis. Additionally, to evaluate the impact of the importance of the factors in influencing the respondents' aspirations to specific types of careers, instead of doing a correlation between the factors and every single career separately, we will be analysing the impact of the factors on the job categories.

The third section allowed the respondents to give open-ended answers as to what they desired in the form of career related assistance and identify specific career-related assistance that they would benefit from the most.

As such two hypotheses were tested each on the first two sections.

Null Hypothesis 1a: There would be no significant differences in the mean ratings of importance between the factors influencing career prospects.

Alternative Hypothesis 1b: There would be significant differences in the mean ratings of importance between the factors influencing career prospects.

Null Hypothesis 2a: There are no differences in the mean ratings of interest between the careers.
Alternative Hypothesis 2b: There are differences in the mean ratings of interest between the careers.

Three job categories were developed from the second section in order to gauge the importance of the different factors affecting career choices on different career interests. The categories include: 'Local Job' (Artisan, Day Labourer, and Domestic Helper), 'Specialised Professional' (IT Service, Doctor, and Engineer, Athlete) and 'General Professional' (Teacher, Banker, Manager, and Businessman and Defence). Consequently, the third hypothesis that tested is as follows:

Null Hypothesis 3a: The respondents' ratings of the importance of the factors have no impact on their rating of interest of all the job categories.

Alternative Hypothesis 3b: The respondents' ratings of the importance of the factors have an impact on their rating of interest of all the job categories

Section 1

Factors influencing career options

- Career-related guidance & support (government programs, schools, NGOs, etc.)
- Financial resources for further education
- Proficiency in English language
- Family responsibilities
- Self-confidence
- Academic performance
- Availability of job options
- Ability to move out of town
- Parental attitude/support

These factors were identified from an exhaustive review of literature (Blustein et al., 2002; Joshi & Bakshi, 2016; Sangma & Arulmani, 2013; Schaefer & Meece, 2009).

Section 2

Career Aspirations

- Artisan
- Teacher
- IT Services
- Domestic Helper
- Doctor
- Engineer
- Day Labourer
- Banker
- Manager
- Athlete
- Businessman
- Defence Services

Criteria for selection of students surveyed.

The criteria for inclusion of the respondents were 12-18 years of age and residence in a low-income neighbourhood. The criteria for exclusion of respondents was being aged over 18 or residence in a middle, high-income neighbourhood.

Data Collection Procedure

The original intent of the research method had been to gather data from the respondents via surveys containing 10 close-ended questions and two open-ended questions. However, as the respondents were not able to complete the survey online because they did not have access to IT devices, six on-site visits were ultimately conducted. This resulted in the gathering of qualitative data, such as notes on the observations of the community and interactions with the families of the respondents. This information was recorded by writing down the observations in-depth in a journal after returning from the interview sites. The respondents were engaged in spontaneous conversation where the narratives of the respondents and their families could be understood beyond the scope of the questionnaire of the survey.

On-site Visits

Disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the Sector 4 and Sector 5 Area were visited 6 times over the course of 2 weeks. Most of the respondents had been contacted by knocking door-to-door in the neighbourhood, some were servant quarters that were built to house servants serving in BSP(Bhilai Steel Plant) Workers' homes, others were joint kutcha-houses where different families took a loan together to pay their mortgages. Most of these low-income areas had very tight-knight communities, as observed later. Respondents were first engaged in a general conversation about their school and life and later transitioned into the questionnaire.

Results and Findings

Demographics

Demographic information of the surveyed respondents was organised. Out of the 23 respondents, 19 were boys (82.6%) and 4 girls (17.4%) who were of the ages 12 - 18 ($M = 15.4$ yr, $SD = 0.39$ yr). The education level of the respondents ranged from grade 6 - 12 with 16 students (69.5%) being in grade 10 - 12, 6 students (26.1%) in grade 7 - 9, and 1 student (4.3%) in grade 6.

13 (56.5%) respondents reported their family's monthly income level to be under ₹30,000, among those, 6 (26.1%) reported it in the range ₹2,000 - ₹10,000, 4 (17.4%) in the range of ₹11,000 - ₹20,000 and 3 (13%) in the range of ₹21,000 - ₹30,000. 10 (43.5%) respondents reported their family's monthly income to be above ₹30,000.

15 (65.2%) of the students surveyed had 4 members in their household, 5 (21.7%) students had 5 or more members, and 3 (13%) students had 3 members in their households respectively.

The majority of the respondents (12, 52.2%) had only 1 person employed in their household. Whereas, 9 (39.1%) students had 2 earners, 1 (4.3%) had 3 earners and 1 (4.3%) had 0 people employed in their household.

13 (56.5%) reported College Graduate to be the highest level of education in their households. 7 (30.4%) reported it to be between Grades 10 and 12 and 3 (13%) reported it to be between Grades 7 and 9. (These statistics were for the families of the respondents excluding the respondents themselves)

An overwhelming % of students' families reported professions were blue collar jobs (40.9%) such as Dhobi, Watchman, Mechanic, Tailor etc. among these, 5 were workers employed by the BSP. The rest of the occupations were divided between working in private companies and owning small businesses such as Shops etc.

Factors Influencing Career Options

Descriptive Statistics show that Parental Support ($M = 6.61$, $SD = 0.838$) had the highest level of influence for career options among the respondents, followed by Self Confidence ($M = 5.66$, $SD = 1.824$), Academic Performance ($M = 5.47$, $SD = 1.274$), and Family Responsibilities ($M = 5.35$, $SD = 2.248$). Career-related guidance & support along with government programs, NGOs etc. ($M = 4.26$ $SD = 2.199$) had the lowest level of influencing the career options of the respondents.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Factors influencing career options

Factors	M	Median	SD	Range	Minimum	Maximum
Career related guidance	4.26	4	2.199	6	1	7
Family-Friends connections	4.35	5	2.327	6	1	7
Financial Resources	5.26	6	2.093	6	1	7
Proficiency in English	5.26	5	1.514	5	2	7
Family Responsibilities	5.35	7	2.248	6	1	7
Self-Confidence	5.66	7	1.824	6	1	7
Academic Performance	5.47	6	1.274	5	2	7
Availability of job options	4.65	4	1.849	6	1	7
Availability to move out of town	5.09	6	2.020	6	1	7
Parental Support	6.61	7	0.838	3	4	7

To Determine the statistical significance among the various factors, a one-way ANOVA was run. The one-way ANOVA for factors influencing career options shows that the differences between the mean ratings of the level of importance of the different factors are statistically significant: $F(9, 220) = 3.065$ (higher than F critical value of 1.922), $p < 0.01$ (see Table 2). Null Hypothesis 1a has been rejected. Alternative Hypothesis 1b has been retained.

Table 2
One-Way ANOVA Table for Factors influencing career options

Factors	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
Career-related guidance & support, along with vocational training by government, schools NGOs, etc.	23	98	4.26	4.84
Family and friend connections	23	100	4.35	5.42
Financial resources for further education	23	121	5.26	4.38
Proficiency in English	23	121	5.26	2.30
Family responsibilities	23	123	5.35	5.06
Self-confidence	23	130	5.65	3.33

Academic performance	*23*	*126*	*5.48*	*1.62*
Availability of job options in the local area	*23*	*107*	*4.65*	*3.42*
Ability to move out of town	*23*	*117*	*5.09*	*4.08*
Parental attitude/support	*23*	*152*	*6.60*	*0.70*

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Factors	96.9782608695654	9	10.7753623188406	3.0658644474434	0.00175493728734893	1.92261376460948
Within Factors	773.217391304348	220	3.51462450592885			
Total	870.195652173913	59				

Interest in Different Careers

Descriptive Statistics show that Businessman (M = 4.52, SD = 2.212) and Banker (M = 4.52, SD = 2.313) had the highest level of interest among the respondents. This was followed very closely by Defense Services [Army, Navy etc] (M = 4.47, SD = 2.44) and Manager (M = 4.13, SD = 2.510). Day Labourer (M = 1.39, SD = 0.94) had the lowest level of interest among respondents.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics for interests in different career options

Careers	M	Median	SD	Range	Minimum	Maximum
Artisan	3.7	4	2.265	6	1	7
Teacher	2.08	1	1.504	6	1	7
IT Service	2.86	2	2.159	6	1	7
Domestic Helper	2.26	1	1.839	5	1	6
Doctor	2.65	1	2.166	5	1	6
Engineer	4.08	5	2.627	6	1	7
Day Labourer	1.39	1	0.94	4	1	5
Banker	4.52	5	2.313	6	1	7
Manager	4.13	4	2.510	6	1	7
Athlete	4	4	2.354	6	1	7
Businessman	4.52	5	2.212	6	1	7
Defense Services	4.47	5	2.44	6	1	7

Table 4
One-Way ANOVA for interests in different career options

Careers	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
Artisan	23	85	3.70	5.13
Teacher	23	48	2.09	2.26
IT Service	23	66	2.87	4.66
Domestic Helper	23	52	2.26	3.38
Doctor	23	61	2.65	4.69
Engineer	23	94	4.09	6.90
Day Labourer	23	32	1.39	0.89
Banker	23	104	4.52	5.35
Manager	23	95	4.13	6.30
Athlete	23	92	4.00	5.55
Businessman	23	104	4.52	4.90
Defense services [Army, Air-force, Navy]	23	103	4.48	5.99

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Careers	299.7	11	27.2411067193679	5.8369680287953 3	1.81269124300 781E-08	1.825032361 94171
Within Careers	1232	264	4.66699604743083			
Total	1532	275				

To Determine the statistical significance among the various factors, a one-way ANOVA was run. The one-way ANOVA for interests in different career options shows that the differences between the mean ratings of the careers are statistically significant: $F(11, 264) = 5.836$ (higher than F critical value of 1.825), $p < 0.05$ (see Table 2). Null Hypothesis 2a has been rejected. Alternative Hypothesis 2b has been retained.

Qualitative Findings Regarding Career Interests

Respondents were also asked to further specify what their desired careers were and why they were interested in them in an open-ended qualitative question. However, the responses were very different from those in the quantitative survey. Most respondents reported that they would prefer to have a stable job rather than a high-paying one, unlike the responses in the quantitative question, where, Banker, Businessman and Manager were the highest rated respectively and further, one respondent specified that "Management and Business roles are looked upon as very elite". In the qualitative question, 11 out of 23 respondents wanted to have a government job since it is considered

stable. Among the respondents that showed high interest in Defense Services, 2 of them reported that it is their desired career due to the benefits and stability it would provide to their family long-term.

A multiple regression analysis was run in order to see whether the respondents' ratings of the factors had any impact on their rating of interests among all job categories. Among the three job categories (*Specialised Professional*, *General Professional* and *Local Professional*), Out of the 10 factors, none of them were found to be statistically significant. Alternative Hypothesis 3b has been rejected. Null Hypothesis 3a has been retained.

Next, in an open-ended qualitative question, the respondents were asked to specify on what they were lacking and what they desired in career-related assistance. 10 out of 23 respondents answered that financial assistance (Scholarships, NGOs etc) towards their coaching and tuition costs would be their desired form of assistance. 1 respondent who was highly interested in the defense sector reported that awareness about *"internships in defense sector undertakings like DRDO, Army, Navy"* would help him the most. Yet another respondent said that there was a lack of awareness about the *"NDA exam in Bhilai"*. 4 respondents said that they were lacking their parents' support in their desired field, 2 of whom had high interests in Athletics. 5 respondents reported that they lacked self-confidence to pursue their interests. When two of them were asked to specify further they said that "*coming from this economic background we feel different than other aspirants*". 2 other 12th grade students reported during the interview, that by the time they came to know of the opportunities in their field, their peers had already started working towards them and had known about them beforehand. Both of these respondents attended government schools, one of them further specified about his career interests in general, he said *"I want to become a lawyer and have started preparing for the exams, I want to get into the nonprofit sector. It will be very crucial to the beginning of my career to get good internships and work experience in the sector."*

Discussion

The aim of this research study was to conduct an in-depth study on the perceptions of underprivileged students, aged 12-18, residing in the districts of Bhilai, with regards to their career prospects. Based on the survey conducted, it can be concluded that the difference in the mean ratings of Factors influencing career options and Interests in different career options are statistically significant.

Notably, it was found that respondents' family backgrounds were very crucial in influencing their career options. Accordingly Parental Support, Self Confidence, Academic Performance and Family responsibilities were the highest rated factors. This suggests that in communities similar to these, the role of the parents is very high in deciding the career options for students. This was also evident in the proceedings during the interviews, where family members of the respondents took high interest in finding out what the questionnaire was about and aiding their children to help fill it out as well as giving more information about the different factors along with the careers that interested their child.

This parental involvement is something to keep in mind and might be influential while making policy changes and adding programs to uplift the status of these students. Especially in low-income households that face generational poverty, education is seen as a means of uplifting socioeconomic conditions of the family. Many times, students' from such backgrounds might be the first in their family to obtain higher education. In such circumstances, high parental involvement is quite normal and is something that if considered while designing programs for these students, will certainly yield better results. Hence, better communication and more feedback from students and their parents alike should be of high significance in educational policies.

Another significant finding was that the respondents reported their highest level of career interest in Businessman, Banker and Defense Services respectively. Blue-collar jobs such as Day Labourer had the lowest level of interest among respondents. When asked further about career interests, several family members of the respondents said that getting a government job would be the ideal situation, since it provided stability. The respondents themselves also said that a stable job was their reasoning behind their ratings of different careers. This shows that even among families, the perception of stability is different from generation to generation, where students perceive high-paying jobs such as Management, Banking etc. to be stable whereas parents believe the same to be true with government jobs. This represents a broader shift in the youth's positive perception of the private sector.

Conclusion

This research paper examined the career perceptions and educational backgrounds of students in a disadvantaged neighbourhood in Bhilai, however the findings of this paper are still significant in other similarly placed communities. The findings of this study, particularly the extremely high importance of parents in career choices, marks a significant learning that could possibly be used while designing educational policy for similar underprivileged communities, also taking into account the feedback given by students themselves, where we saw the most notable deficiencies were in lack of awareness and exposure in the student's fields of interest.

Acknowledgments

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