

In Pursuit Of Equality: Exploring the Role of Gender on Career Aspiration, Self-Esteem and Academic Achievement Among School Adolescents

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It has always been a complex matrix of inquiry to examine the linkage between gender and education, which is quite pronounced at the school level in our society. Academic institutions are places that provide equal opportunity, cultivating an inclusive environment that nurtures diverse perspectives and fosters scholarly excellence. In our society, students' career aspirations are influenced mostly by beliefs and conceptions about what men and women can normally be rather than by their potential, interests, values, and special abilities. The present study aims to understand the gender differences among school boys and girls regarding their career aspirations, self-esteem, and academic achievement. Purposive sampling was used to obtain 100(52 boys and 48 girls) school-aged adolescents. The gender difference was assessed using a between-group design. A significant gender difference was found between school boys and girls in their career aspirations, with girls having higher aspirations than boys.

Keywords: career aspiration, self-esteem, academic achievement, gender difference.

The World Economic Forum (*The Global Gender Gap Report 2013, World Economic Forum, 2013*) highlighted that a nation's competitiveness in the long term depends significantly on whether and how women are educated and enabled to access the same rights, responsibilities, and opportunities as men. Women's empowerment and gender equality are key drivers of human development, effective governance, sustainable peace, and harmonious relationships between human populations and the environment, as stated in UN Women's position paper on the post-2015 development agenda. Empowering women and promoting gender equality is also crucial to accelerating sustainable development.

Policymakers, families, and communities in India face a problem regarding education. Some of the difficulties include a lack of awareness of commonly occurring mental health and learning problems among children and a burgeoning school population. Secondary education is a stage for one's academic or professional life in which prevailed performance is a symptom of pervading national failure that clogs the education wheel. The lives and activities of humans are significantly influenced by education. Selecting a career and settling are important endeavors that bring a sense of fulfillment. While gender disparity is common in a nation like India, it has less bearing on academic institutions since these establishments offer equal opportunity for

students' development and advancement. In contemporary society, men's and women's career aspirations are shaped by preconceptions about what they can normally be, rather than being influenced by their potential, interests, values, and abilities.

The National Education Policy (NEP, 2020) is a crucial framework that outlines the educational goals and objectives for school girls and boys. It heavily emphasizes equal access to high-quality education to level the opportunities for students from all backgrounds, regardless of gender, to pursue their ambitions. It recognizes academic achievement's role in realizing these aspirations by fostering a supportive learning environment that encourages holistic development. In a state like Bihar, conventional gender norms dictate the typical career paths for men and women. Girls are expected to select a career that improves their socioeconomic standing, whereas boys are expected to select a career that can support their family and provide employment. The gender gap in access to education that still exists in Indian secondary schools is partly due to the expectation placed on girls to perform household tasks from an early age (Singh & Mukherjee, 2018). In rural Bihar, 60% of girls even drop out of school to get married (Verma, 2015). This inequality is exacerbated by the fact that females in Indian households are not provided the same financial resources or incentives to pursue higher education as boys (Datta & Kingdon, 2019).

Career aspirations, according to Danziger & Eden (2006), refer to a construct embodying an individual's occupational identity and desired career goals. It is a collection of needs, drives, and behavioural intentions that a person has in relation to potential career prospects. Adolescent career aspirations are linked to adult social status attainment (Ashby & Schoon, 2010). It has been found that educational aspiration

is the key factor in the career development process and educational aspirations are related to strong self-efficacy and high self-esteem, and high educational aspirations translate into attainment of career (Scott et al., 2010). It has been found that self-esteem and career aspirations are related. People with low self-esteem struggle to perform well in settings where they are being evaluated. The cause of this is the interaction between self-focus and unfavourable expectancies. According to research, interests become clear and stabilize during adolescence, and career aspirations and goals appear to be realistic in relation to how one adapts to situational and individual characteristics (Rasheed Ali & Saunders, 2009). Personal or individual characteristics, in this case, could be the self-esteem of the students who are enrolled in various school types that may differ in their environmental influences towards students' career aspirations. According to Gottfredson (1981), children develop their career aspirations through a process of circumscription and compromise informed by their interests, social class, perceived abilities, and gender. As children grow into adolescents, their personal identities and external realities shape their career aspirations.

Self-esteem is a positive or negative attitude toward oneself (Rosenberg, 2015) and the personal judgment of worthiness (Coopersmith, 1965). It is the ability to confront the world with confidence and a sense of worth, and it must be developed through positive reinforcement from significant other individuals in the child's life, primarily parents and teachers. Self-esteem is essential in the classroom since it is a foundational element that supports student motivation, perseverance, and academic success (Tremblay et al., 2000). However, as important as self-esteem has become as a measurement of self-worth, it still does not predict the choice of personal goals or

performance accomplishments (Lane et al., 2004). Subjective experience creates the impression that self-esteem rises when one wins a contest, garners an award, solves a problem, or gains acceptance to a social group, and it falls with corresponding failures. According to research, having a high sense of self-esteem facilitates the ability to accomplish goals. Other studies note (Knightley & Whitelock, 2007; Pepi et al., 2006; Rosenberg, 1989) that self-esteem can have an influence on academic performance. Chiu (1990) suggested that a relationship exists between a student's future schooling, career aspirations, and self-esteem. Low self-esteem might result in problem avoidance, whereas high self-esteem can aid in coping abilities. Students with high self-esteem typically have higher aspirations for themselves (Loree, 2011).

Academic achievement encompasses all behavioral modifications related to the cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor domains. It is the shifts in the students' behavioral patterns. Three primary domains of student behavior are impacted by learning: (i) cognitive (recall, intellectual development, and recognition), (ii) affective (self-concept and personal development), and (iii) psychomotor (development of muscular skills guided by signals from the environment). Consequently, achievement implies knowledge and abilities acquired by experience and proficiency or performance attained in an area of expertise. The academic achievement differences between schools have been explained in research by differences in factors such as poverty, limited educational funding, inadequate teacher training, low teacher expectations, and low access to quality education (Yusuf & Adigun, 2010). Adolescents learn about their talents, abilities, and competencies through academic achievement, which is a crucial component of forming career aspirations (Lent et al., 2000). Notably, Helmke & Van

Aken (1995) suggest that academic achievement has more of an impact on self-concept than the reverse.

The Report from Aust. Dept. of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (Bradley et al., 2008) suggests that working-class girls do slightly better than boys once they enter university, it would be incorrect to suggest that there are no issues with respect to gender equality. Kwena (2007) found that in the lower primary school levels, girls tended to have a greater self-concept than boys did, and as they advanced in classes, this changed. Contrary to this Hossaini (2002) discovered gender was not a predictor of pre-university students' self-esteem in Shiraz. For women, the career pathway identified was dissimilar to that of men. Levy & Baumgardner (1991) stated that people with higher levels of self-esteem are more likely to choose difficult goals than people with lower levels of self-esteem. Dunnell & Bakken (1991) also found girls' career aspirations to be significantly higher than boys'. In addition, their analysis of 9th, 11th, and 12th-grade girls' career aspirations showed less traditional or gender-stereotypical choices than those of the boys. It was also found that male participants chose more difficult goals than did the females. A previous study by Stitt-Gohdes (1997) found that in recent years, there has been an increased awareness of the impact of socioeconomic status, race, gender, and on the career decision-making process and career development. Devi & Mayuri (2003) found that girls were superior to boys in academic achievement. Career aspirations are influenced by factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, race, parents' occupation and education level, and parental expectations. Some studies have found gender difference in terms of career aspiration (Blackhurst & Auger, 2008; Nadeem & Khalid, 2018), where female had higher career aspiration than boys. Studies

have found females to have significantly higher number of careers and showed greater flexibility in gendered role in their career aspirations compared to the men (Mendez & Crawford, 2002). Stevens et al (1992), in a survey of 1000- 9th graders, found no differences in attitudes toward achievement or future work between girls and boys. Girls experience low self-esteem as compared to boys (Carlson et al., 2000; DuBois et al., 2002). O'Brien (1991) examined sex differences in self-esteem and reported that men scored significantly higher in global self-esteem than women. Mehta & Sharma (2004) in their study found that both boys and girls secondary school students have no significant difference in self-concept, level of aspiration, and academic achievement.

Sebastian (2010) studied parental pressure for achievement in school and its influence on children's academic interest, actual academic achievement, self-esteem, and creativity, and results found that pressure reported by parents, as well as that perceived by children, are associated negatively with academic achievement, self-esteem, and creativity. Academic achievement, self-esteem, and creativity show significant positive associations with the socio-economic status of the families. Joshi & Srivastava (2009) studied the self-esteem and academic achievement of adolescents, and the findings indicated that there were no apparent differences between adolescents from rural and urban areas in terms of self-esteem and academic achievement.

Recently a data from center for policy development and practice (Kaur, 2023) reveals that the male literacy rate in Bihar in 2011 is 70%, although the literacy rate of female was around 50%. This shows that almost half of the women are beyond the purview of literacy which points to the burning issue of gender disparity that becomes prominent. Male and female socialization patterns differ under the Indian cultural

framework. In our culture, a male student's main responsibility during child rearing is to select a career that suits him, while a woman's main priority is marriage. This is one of the reasons why men have more professional maturity than women (Hasan, 2006). A recent study by Kainthola, R (2018), found no significant gender difference between urban and rural students in their level of occupational aspiration. Similar findings have been reported by Mahto (2023), who found no significant difference between male and female students on the level of career aspiration.

The adolescent years are when a student's life undergoes a significant turning point because the subjects they choose at this stage will determine their profession. Adolescence is the crucial age in which an adolescent either makes their career or damages it. Hence, Adolescence is an ideal time to study the career development of young women and men. It is during this time that many changes occur that strongly influence the development of career preferences and aspirations for both girls and boys. Puberty and emerging sexuality, including a growing interest in romantic relationships, create an intensification of gender role identity. Keeping these rationales in interest, the present study has the following aims and objectives-

Objective

To study gender differences among school boys and girls on their Career aspirations, self-esteem, and academic achievement.

Hypothesis

The study hypothesized that boys and girls would differ significantly in Career aspiration, Self-esteem, and Academic achievement.

Method

Sample

A group of 100 students (52 boys and 48 girls), age range 15 years to 17 years of both studying in class 11th and 12th from Patna were taken up but for the present study.

Tools used

Career Aspiration- To measure Career aspiration, a structured interview schedule (schedule of 20 items) was prepared by authors in Hindi language based on various tools available currently. The tool consists of four domains, with each domain describing various aspects of career aspiration, namely Success, Involvement, Effort to progress, and Sincere and conscientiousness

The Rosenberg self-esteem scale was developed by Rosenberg (1965), to assess global self-esteem. Ten items, evenly divided between positive and negative statements, are rated on a 4-point scale, with strongly agreeing being the highest score and strongly disagreeing being the lowest. It has a test-retest reliability of 0.85 and a reproducibility index of 0.93.

Academic Achievement: In the present study the marks percentage obtained by subjects in class 9th and 10th as curricular activities and co-curricular was noted to obtain his/her academic achievement.

Procedure

Prior to the actual data collection, a pilot study with 10 samples was conducted to sort the items and create the career aspiration tool. After finalizing the tools, the students were distributed the questionnaire and asked to fill it out accordingly after reading the instructions. The sample was taken from a school in Patna, for which students of classes 11th and 12th were approached. Statistical analysis included Mean, S.D. and t-ratio.

Result and Discussion

Table 1. Mean, S.D., and significant difference of gender on Career aspiration, Self-esteem, and Academic achievement (N=100)

Variables	Gender	Mean	S.D.	t-value
Career aspiration	Boys (N=52)	17.23	2.39	1.04*
	Girls(N=48)	17.68	1.90	
Self-esteem	Boys (N=52)	26.90	2.47	1.96
	Girls(N=48)	26.65	3.43	
Academic achievement	Boys (N=52)	75.14	12.38	0.70
	Girls(N=48)	75.20	12.47	

Note- * $p < 0.05$

Table 2. Mean, S.D., and significant difference of gender on the domains of Career aspiration (N=100)

Variables	Gender	Mean	S.D.	t-value
Success	Boys (N=52)	4.48	0.79	0.32
	Girls(N=48)	4.44	0.54	
Involvement	Boys (N=52)	4.46	0.91	1.50*
	Girls(N=48)	4.69	0.51	
Effort to progress	Boys (N=52)	4.25	0.98	0.10*
	Girls(N=48)	4.38	0.76	
Sincere and Conscientiousness	Boys (N=52)	26.65	3.43	0.87*
	Girls(N=48)	26.90	2.57	

Note- * $p < 0.05$

The present study found significant gender differences among school boys and girls in their Career aspirations. Findings (Table 1) revealed that although the difference in scores obtained by girls and boys is almost negligible, still girls scored slightly higher on the career aspiration and academic achievement, but boys scored a little higher on self-esteem. The present study is in line with previous study by Blackhurst & Auger (2008) and Mendez & Crawford

(2002), who found gender difference on career aspiration, with females having slightly higher aspirations than males. However, the group differences in self-esteem and academic achievement was not significant.

Findings (Table 2) also reveal that girls were significantly higher in various domains of career aspiration, namely involvement, effort to progress, and sincere and conscientiousness. On the other hand, boys scored slightly higher on domain success of career aspiration. The findings are significant only in the domains of involvement, effort to progress, and sincere and conscientiousness. In India, academic career of a woman is influenced by gender disparity within the academic settings (Gupta & Sharma, 2002; Thelwall et al., 2019), due to which in traditionally dominated fields like education in Bihar, women might feel pressure to prove themselves, leading them to work harder and exhibit higher levels of involvement and conscientiousness. This is further fuelled by newer career opportunities aided by programs like scholarships, that can increase involvement in their career. However, societal structures may have an influence of gender while choosing a career, as women always had higher aspiration, although fluctuating, but they were not able to pursue them due to socio-economic status (Gordon, 2023). Data from All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) reveals that there has been an increase in the number of female enrolment in higher education (Amirtham S & Kumar, 2021) that could be attributed to better achievement in schools.

Boys and girls have different socialization experiences. Based on gender, they are treated differently and held to different standards by teachers, parents, and social environment. This, in turn, influences both career aspiration and career decisions. People often view men and women in stereotypical ways. Generally, women are believed to be more nurturing and sensitive,

whereas men are more assertive and directive. These viewpoints can influence the perception of person-job fit in job selection and promotion. Currently, gender stereotype still exists, but the number of unemployed people has been increasing day by day in several countries, so there is an attempt to reduce gender bias and find their actual abilities so that they would have more appropriate career choices. Also, with changing trends, there has been observed division of labor in the family due to which girls are aspiring for their careers, and they are seen as no less than boys. The dilution of gender role stereotypes is also paving the way for both girls and boys to have diverse career options.

Conclusion

1. Boys and girls differ significantly in their career aspirations. This partially proves the hypothesis that boys and girls would differ significantly in their career aspirations, self-esteem, and academic achievement.

2. Boys scored slightly higher in self-esteem than girls but the difference among groups was not found to be significant.

Teenagers' self-esteem is significantly impacted by social comparisons, which can either make them feel better or worse about themselves. The current study provides valuable insight regarding gender differences in career aspiration, self-esteem, and academic achievement. Therefore, it will help understand how these components interact to combat teenagers' challenges with the educational system and social change. Gender differences in India might vary depending on the cultural or social situation. These variables may restrict the findings' generalizability to a particular demographic or environment.

Apart from this, the study has a number of drawbacks, such as a limited sample size that prevents the study from being broadly

generalized. The current study has focused on particular elements of gender differences; additional variables, such as those that connect with other sociodemographic factors or interact with one another, such as self-efficacy, may offer a more comprehensive view of the population under investigation.

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