

Occupational Aspirations: Exploring the linkage with Parental Education and examining the gender differences

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the relation between parental education level and occupational aspirations of undergraduates belonging to different streams of study. Discrepancy between the occupational aspirations of males and females is also explored. Related studies have suggested significant role of father's education level in shaping the aspirations of young adults. However, role of mother's education level in shaping occupational aspirations of undergraduates has mixed results. It was observed that a large percentage of both males and females have average level of occupational aspirations and only a negligible percentage fell in 'very high' and 'very low' level. The results have also highlighted positive and significant role of father's education level on occupational aspirations of both male and female undergraduates. There exists a significant difference between occupational aspirations of males and females. Males have significantly higher occupational aspirations than females.

1. Introduction and objectives

The medium-low human development countries are the emerging economies with a growing participation in global economy. These countries, especially the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) countries are undergoing substantial expansion in their systems (Guimarães, 2013). It is being estimated that the BRICS countries will have a major share in world's production and population in the coming future. The rapid transition in these countries has brought on both challenges and opportunities. Though these nations are progressing in economic and non-economic sector, their pace is constantly slowed down by the problems and challenges. In the developing countries, especially in India, problems of unemployment, lack of infrastructural facilities, lack of skilled personnel, quality education, and school and college dropout rates have been recurring. In college education, the problems are mainly associated with a dearth of skilled teachers, funding, language, and outdated syllabi. Another important statistics states that these countries will have major share of young population in the near future and their rising aspirations. In The United Nations Population Fund's survey conducted in 2014 it was found that about 9 out of 10 people between the ages 10 and 24 live in developing countries. Youth population in low development nations is also growing at a fast pace (Gupta et al., 2014) and so are their educational and occupational needs and aspirations. They are highly motivated and aspiring and choosing the right occupation/career is the major source of worry amongst them. From the research perspective occupation is described as the principal means through which people develop and express their personal identities (Cristiansen, 1999). The word career has been defined by many noteworthy authors in their own perspective and is sometimes synonymously used with occupation. It was Frank Parson, founder of vocational guidance and counseling, who used the words career and

occupation synonymously (Jones, 1994; Patton & McMohan, 2006). However, the present context talks the students' aspirations towards more constructive occupations. It talks about those highly professional and skilled occupations that have monetary returns and enhance the standard of living. Aspirations are the goals a person sets for himself in tasks which have intense personal significance or in which he is ego-involved (Varghese, 1990). Cooper, Arkelin and Tiebert (1994) defined aspirations as hopes and ambitions that influenced by intrapersonal and interpersonal factors. Pursuing an aspiration towards an occupation is described as occupational aspiration. Rojewski (2005) defined occupational aspirations as "an individual's expressed career related goals or choices". Thus, literature suggests that occupational aspiration is a dimension of one's internal desire for a career that essentially emerges from an individual, which in turn influences one's values, norms and beliefs (Karami, et. al., 2011). Occupational aspirations are formed after an influence of number of factors from childhood to youth. These are present within an individual such as his personality, instincts and inclinations and outside factors such as family, peer group, friends and society. During childhood choices, experiences and aspirations constantly tend to keep on molding until adulthood; when choices become relatively definite. This paper examines the occupational aspirations of young adults who become more serious towards finding and choosing suitable career options.

From a theoretical standpoint the development of occupational aspiration can be explained by several different theories. Donald Super's 1990 developmental theory is a psychological theory based on the views that career development is a series of specific vocational tasks that must be accomplished according to a defined and predictable sequence (Brown & Lent, 2005). Super identified these 5 basic stages of vocational life as- growth, exploration, establishment,

maintenance and decline. In a word, Super's theory focuses on four major elements: vocational life stages, vocational maturity, translating the self-concept into vocational self-concept and career patterns (Beatrice Kuo, nd). His theory views occupational aspirations from the point of view of occupational self-concept. Moreover, it views aspirations from a developmental perspective. On the other hand, social psychological theories lay emphasis on gender, culture and life events in determining career aspirations and choices. Theory of career circumscription and compromise has been developed by **L.S. Gottfredson** in the early nineteen eighties and she posited that occupational aspiration is a reflection of one's self-concept. Compromise occurs when individuals give up their ideal albeit inaccessible occupations and settle for more realistic and accessible ones (Brown, 2004). Gottfredson described circumscription as narrowing in of occupational aspirations by comparing self-image to the images of occupation and determining the compatibility. In a nutshell, this theory says that interests and personality are compromised the most, then comes prestige level and sex type is least likely to be compromised in order to settle for a good enough job rather than settling for a best possible choice. The focus in the compromise theory is on elimination of alternatives rather than selection and expansion. However, both the social and socio-psychological theories view aspiration as reflection of occupational self-concept. The third category of sociological theory asserts that social forces are more powerful in determining occupational aspirations than the personal factors. In 1976, Peter Blau and Otis Duncan posed a model in which they identified four variables of importance to obtain occupational attainment, including antecedent variables (for example, father's education attainment and occupational status) and intervening variables (for example, educational achievement and status of first job) (Sewell et al. 1970). The present paper explores the role of familial factors viz. mother's education level and father's education level in affecting occupational aspirations of undergraduates. Another important objective of this study is to measure the level of Occupational Aspirations of undergraduate students. Third important objective is to examine that whether there is a difference between the male and female students in terms of Occupational Aspirations.

2. Literature Review and background

The Occupational Aspirations of students are impacted by various factors and there is evidence that the OAs of students can be affected by the type of school (private or government) they go in (Malema, 2004), their peer group, friends and familial factors. The studies with respect to OA also indicate that the parental education can be a determining factor in shaping the OA of students (Kariuki, 2008). Jodl et al. (2001) studied seventh grade African American and European American students belonging to two non-divorced parents. The total sample consisted of 444 students with approximately equal number of African American and European American males and females. The overall findings of the research has highlighted that parents have a potential role as socializing agents of achievement related values and ultimately, their children's occupational visions of themselves. Dubow, Boxer & Huesman (2009) conducted a research on the role of parents' education on their children's future educational and

occupational success. Higher levels of parental education indicated higher levels of educational aspirations in adolescence and subsequently to more prestigious occupational status in adulthood. Kariuki (2008) studied the role of parents' education and their occupational status on the educational and occupational aspirations of the children. The results showed that the gender of the subjects was significantly related to their educational and occupational aspirations. Similarly, the level of education attained was related to their occupational and educational aspirations. The results also indicated that the level of occupational aspirations and educational attainment of the respondents was significantly related to their parents' occupational status and educational attainment. Father's education emerged as the most significant factor in overall relationship of educational and occupational aspirations of the respondents. In a quantitative paradigm, Shumbal & Naong (2012) conducted a research on second year South African university undergraduates. The results quoted that the familial influences were the most significant factor in affecting the career aspirations of the undergraduates. Kisilu et al. (2012) carried on a study on Kenyan girls and their occupational aspirations. The results revealed that the major factors that affect secondary school girls' aspirations were grounded on family settings, parenting, siblings and other relatives.

Some studies also indicate that the gender of student can have a varying effect on the OA and masculinity can have a positive effect on students' aspirations (Karami, Ismail & Sail, 2011). In a German research conducted by Constant and Zimmerman (2003), occupations are considered as the indicators of socio-economic standing. This research analyses the occupational discrepancy between males and females and between emigrants and natives along with their familial backgrounds. The study employed multinomial logistic model to investigate the occupational choices of emigrant and natives. The findings of the study indicated that gender is an important factor in male and female occupational choice discrepancy. In contrast, research conducted by Ashby and Schoon (2010), Tali & Rosy (2012) and Andleeb & Ansari (2016) found no significant influence of gender on occupational aspirations of adolescents as well as young adults. It is evident from the review of related literature that the educational level of parents seems to be very important in shaping the career aspirations of students (Kariuki, 2008) and so is gender. Consequently, high aspirations can result in high status attainment in future and have a potential to impact job earnings. There has been a scarcity of studies with respect to above-mentioned observations in Indian context. Moreover, relation between gender and aspiration level has mixed findings, thus there is a need to look into these research questions.

3. Methods

3.1. Measures

a) *Occupational Aspirations*: Operationally, Occupational Aspiration is defined as long run, short run, ideal and realistic job preference interval score measured on a standardized occupational aspiration inventory. Occupational Aspiration was measured using a standardized tool prepared by Prof. N.P.S. Chandel in the year 2012. The inventory was administered on

a group of 334 undergraduates in order to establish its reliability and validity. Cronbach's alpha was calculated before assessing item-total correlations. Its value came out to be 0.746 which is within an acceptable range. Item-total correlations were also within the acceptable ranges.

b) *Parental education:* Parental education can be defined as the level of education obtained by both of the parents. Operationally, it is defined as an ordinal score measured on a five option list with 1 assigned to 'no formal education', 2 assigned to '0 to 5th grade', 3 assigned to '6th to 10th grade', 4 assigned to '11th to graduation' and 5 assigned to 'masters and above'. In the current study the parental education construct is measured separately for both father and mother.

3.2. Data collection

With the help of survey method the questionnaires were distributed among 700 undergraduate students out of which 551 responses were finally used after preliminary screening. The respondents belonged to Moradabad, Bareilly, Aligarh, and Gautambudh Nagar areas of Uttar Pradesh. The students were from both public as well as private universities such as Amity University, Sharda University, Aligarh Muslim University, Galgotia University, TMU, TMIIT, Gagan college, Muslim Degree College, Invertis University, Bareilly college and Wilsonia College.

3.3. Distribution of Age of undergraduates

Before proceeding for the data analysis, the data was checked for normality. As a rule of thumb, skewness values between -0.5 and 0.5 indicate that the data has no skewness issues and hence can be considered as normally distributed. Similarly, if the kurtosis values are between -0.2 and 0.2, the data can be considered as normal with kurtosis issues. Looking at table 1.1 it is quite evident that there is no problem with the age variable as far as the skewness and kurtosis is considered. The bell shaped curve in figure 1.2 indicates that the data distribution curve is bell shaped.

Table. 1.1 Frequency distribution of Age of undergraduates

| | | |
|----------------|---------|-------|
| N | Valid | 551 |
| | Missing | 0 |
| Mean | | 19.34 |
| Median | | 19 |
| Mode | | 19 |
| Std. Deviation | | 1.48 |
| Skewness | | 0.456 |
| Kurtosis | | -0.14 |

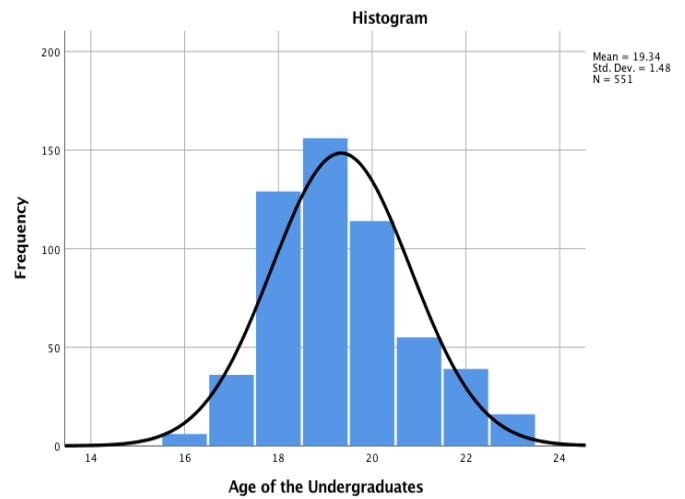


Figure 1.2 Frequency distribution of Age of undergraduates

3.4. Probability distribution of Occupational Aspiration (OA) of undergraduates

The results of frequency distribution for OA of undergraduates also indicate that the data is normally distributed with skewness value of -0.089 and kurtosis value of -0.082. The values of mean, median and mode are almost same and the bell shaped distribution curve provides further evidence to the same. The results are presented in table 2.1 and figure 2.2

Table 2.1 Frequency distribution of OA of undergraduates

| | | |
|----------------|---------|--------|
| N | Valid | 551 |
| | Missing | 0 |
| Mean | | 49.34 |
| Median | | 50 |
| Mode | | 53 |
| Std. Deviation | | 11.758 |
| Skewness | | -0.089 |
| Kurtosis | | -0.082 |

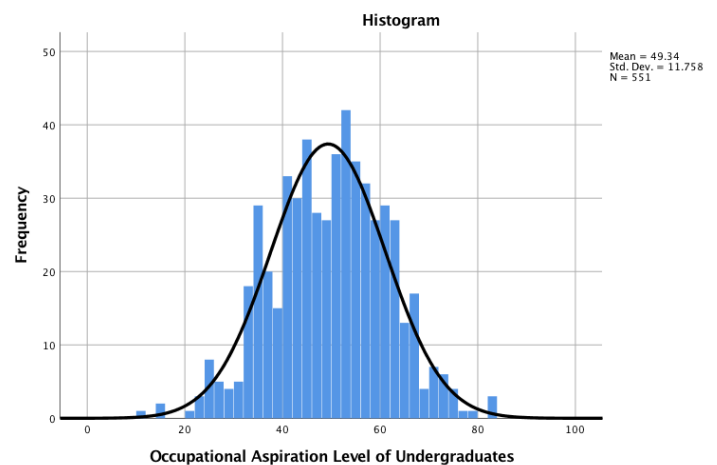


Figure 2.2 Frequency distribution of OA of undergraduates

3.5. Level of Occupational Aspirations (OA)

Since the primary objective of this study was to find the level of Occupational aspirations of the undergraduate students, the same was examined with the help of percentage

analysis. Table 3.1 was used as reference guideline to label the levels of occupational aspirations of undergraduates.

Table 3.1 Norms for interpretation of raw scores on OA Scale

| S.no. | Range of z scores | Range of raw scores | Level of Occupational Aspiration |
|-------|-------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 | +1.81 and above | 74 and above | Very high |
| 2 | +1.80 to +0.61 | 60 to 73 | High |
| 3 | +0.60 to -0.60 | 46 to 59 | Average |
| 4 | -0.61 to -1.80 | 32 to 45 | Low |
| 5 | -1.81 and below | 31 and below | Extremely low |

The table 3.2 and figure 3.3 illustrate the results with respect to levels of occupational aspirations of undergraduates and it can be seen that most of the respondents have an average level of OA in current sample where as there are very few students with very high OA level.

Table 3.2 Level of OA for undergraduates

| Level of OA (Inference) | Number of undergraduates | % age |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------|
| Very High | 9 | 1.633 |
| High | 103 | 18.69 |
| Average | 227 | 41.19 |
| Low | 183 | 33.21 |
| Extremely low | 29 | 5.26 |

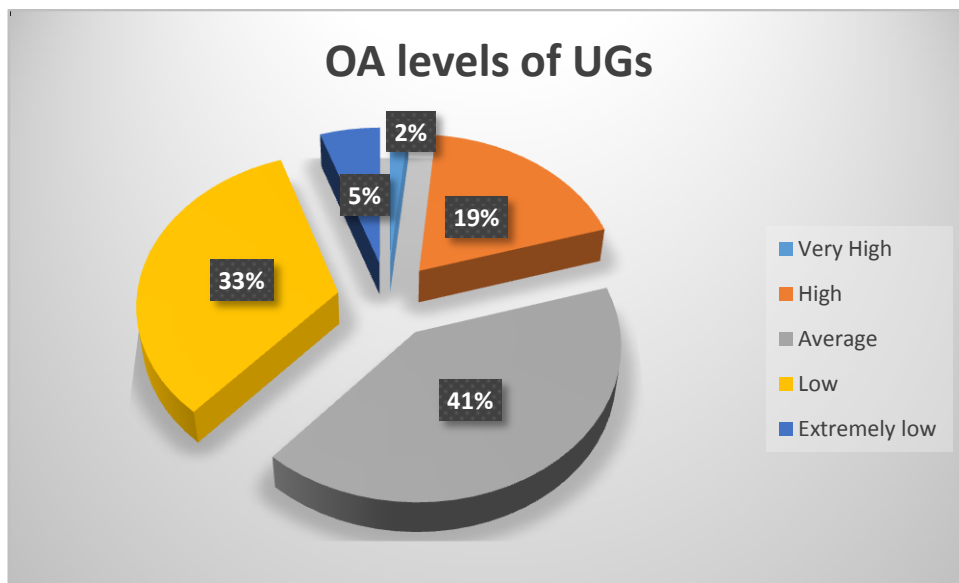


Figure 3.3 OA of undergraduates

3.6. Level of Occupational Aspirations (OA) of males

The sample for this study included both male (n=366) and female (n=185) respondents. In line with the above-mentioned way the Occupation Aspirations for the males was determined separately to get deeper insights. The results show that a large

chunk of male respondents have an 'average' level of occupational aspiration, whereas there are also some respondents who fall in the 'very high' OA category. The results of OA for boys are summarized in table 4.1 and figure 4.2

Table 4.1 Level OA for males

| Level of OA (Inference) | Number of males | % age |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-------|
| Very High | 9 | 2.45 |
| High | 80 | 22 |
| Average | 154 | 42 |
| Low | 110 | 30 |
| Extremely low | 13 | 3.55 |

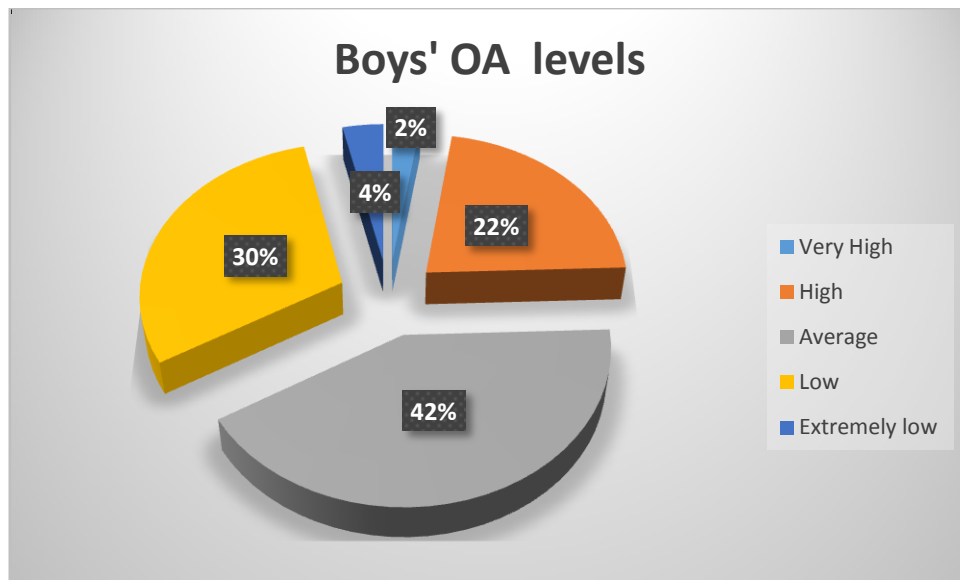


Figure 4.2 OA of boys

3.7. Occupational Aspirations (OA) of females

The examination of the data showed that in current sample no female respondent had a 'very high' OA level.

However, just like male counterparts majority of the females had an 'average' level of OA. Table 5.1 and figure 5.2 summarize the results for OA of females.

Table 5.1 Level OA for females

| Level of OA (Inference) | Number of females | % age |
|-------------------------|-------------------|-------|
| Very High | 0 | 0 |
| High | 23 | 12.45 |
| Average | 73 | 39.45 |
| Low | 73 | 39.45 |
| Extremely low | 16 | 8.65 |

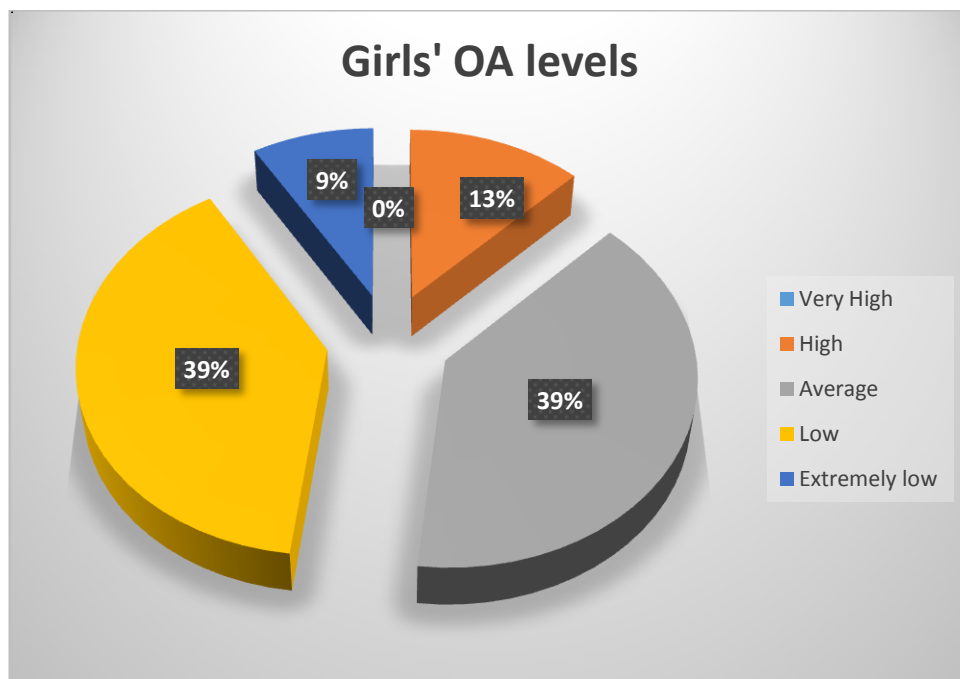


Figure 5.2 OA of girls

The descriptive analysis depicts that majority of the undergraduate students fall in the 'average' level of

occupational aspirations and a bird's eye examination also reveals that the OA of males is slightly higher than females.

3.8. Difference between OA of males and females

In order to examine that whether there is a significant difference between the OA of males and females, one way-

ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) test was used. The results of the ANOVA are presented in table 6.1 and means for males and females are given in table 6.2.

Table 6.1 ANOVA : Occupational Aspiration Level of Undergraduates

| | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|----------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|------|
| Between Groups | 3200.748 | 2 | 1600.374 | 12.041 | .000 |
| Within Groups | 72835.422 | 549 | 132.911 | | |
| Total | 76036.171 | 551 | | | |

Table 6.2 Means of OA for males and females

| | N | Mean |
|--------|-----|-------|
| male | 366 | 50.87 |
| female | 185 | 46.18 |

As indicated in the table 6.1, the significance value is below 0.5, it can be ascertained that the means of males and females for level of OA differ significantly. While looking at the means of OA for both the genders there is clear evidence that OA of males is significantly higher than the OA of females.

3.9. Relationship between Parental Education and Occupational Aspirations

As this study also attempts to investigate the relationship between the Occupational Aspirations and the level of Parental Education (PE) of undergraduate students, correlation analysis was used to achieve this objective. In the first case the father's education was taken into consideration. The results of the correlation showed that there is weak but significant correlation between the PE (father) and OA of undergraduates($r=0.084$, $p=0.049$). The results are presented in table 7.1

Table 7.1 Spearman Brown correlation analysis between OA and father's educational level (undergraduates)

| | OA Level of undergraduates | Father's educational level |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| OA Level of undergraduates | 1.000 | 0.084 |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | | 0.049 |
| N | 551 | 551 |
| Father's educational level | 0.084 | 1.000 |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.049 | |
| N | 551 | 551 |

Similarly, Spearman Brown correlation analysis was used to check the relationship between OA of undergraduates and their mother's educational level. However, in this case no

significant correlation was found ($r=0.032$, $p=0.45$). The results of the Correlation analysis between OA and mother's educational level are presented in table 7.2

Table 7.2 Spearman Brown correlation analysis between OA and mother's educational level (undergraduates)

| | OA Level of undergraduates | Mother's educational level |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| OA Level of undergraduates | 1.000 | 0.032 |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | | 0.45 |
| N | 551 | 551 |
| Mother's educational level | 0.032 | 1.000 |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.45 | |
| N | 551 | 551 |

4. Discussion and conclusion

The current study was undertaken to look into the levels of Occupational Aspirations of Indian adolescents. The study also aimed at examining the relationship between Occupational Aspirations and Parental education besides looking into the gender differences with respect to OA. The results of this study indicate that there is a significant difference between the Occupational Aspiration of male and female undergraduate students and the male undergraduates have higher Occupational Aspirations than their female counterparts. This result conforms to the results of the studies conducted by Constant & Zimmerman (2003), Petters et al. (2015), Karami, Ismail & Sail (2011) and Kisilu et al. (2012) which quote that

gender is an important factor in occupational aspiration discrepancy. Though the research conducted by Ashby and Schoon (2010), Tali & Rosy (2012) and Andleeb & Ansari (2016), revealed no significant role of gender in affecting occupational aspirations. The results also show that there is a positive and significant relationship between the parental education and Occupational aspiration of students, however the strength of relationship between the two seems to be on a lower end. In a South African research on undergraduate university students, Shumbal and Naong (2012) also quoted that familial influences were the most prominent factors to influence students' career aspirations. Uka (2015) also reported that parental education predicted adolescents' occupational aspiration most significantly and other factors

entered in the analysis such as age, gender and parental occupation level did not significantly predict occupational aspirations. Sharma's(1997) findings clearly indicated that graduate level parents provided a more enriched home environment than less educated and illiterate parents. Sharma (1997) further indicated that the stimulation in the growth of language and learning stimulation was significantly greater among graduate parents. Mothers encouraged their children to speak correctly, whereas illiterate mothers did not realize the importance. Father's education level was also found to be the most significant factor in overall relationship of educational and occupation aspirations of respondents in a research conducted by Kiriuka (2008). Conforming to the results of the above studies, the present research further indicates that the mothers' educational level doesn't play a role in determining the Occupational Aspirations of undergraduates. It is father's education level that is found to be related to occupational aspirations of undergraduates.

5. Limitations and directions for future research

The cross sectional sample remains as one of the limitations of the study and future research could be carried out with more representative sample covering more geographical locations of India. Further, the future studies could focus on examining the impact of more variables on Occupational Aspirations. Also, this study only focused on checking the gender differences with respect to Occupational Aspirations and more research is needed with examination of differences in terms of stream of study, socio-economic background, family background, parental status, self-concept and locus of control. There still lacks consensus on the role of gender in shaping occupational aspirations. Some research provides evidence in significant role of gender while some state that there is insignificant role of gender. Further research in this direction is needed clear the picture. The role of mother's education level and father's education level on occupational aspirations of male and female students can be examined separately. Besides this the techniques employed for the present research are simple correlation analysis and one way Anova. Structural equation modelling, multinomial logistic regression model, analysis of co variance, multiple regression analysis and multiple correlations can be used to identify the moderating, intervening effect of variables on occupational aspirations of students. Parental occupation can also be studied as an independent variable and in some studies educational aspirations are also found to have an impact on occupational aspirations of students. A study with occupational aspirations as dependent variable and parental occupation, educational aspirations of students, academic achievement of students and family SES as independent variables can be conducted to get deeper insights into the topic.

6. Educational Implications

Based on the findings and conclusions of the research, some educational implications are suggested. The compared results of average level of occupational aspirations of males and females have indicated that males have significantly higher aspirations than females. This finding takes the focus towards Linda Gottfredson's circumscription and compromise theory of occupational aspirations. Her theory is a developmental theory of occupational aspirations which is

based on the 'process' of career development. It states that career development happens over a period of time. The factors that affect career development are multifaceted and parental SES, career maturity, education, skills and opportunities determine career choice along with personality factors. Gottfredson states that in girls' lives, self-concept plays an important role in role in seeking those occupations that are compatible with their self-image. In case of girls, compromise is happening quiet early when they give up settling for higher status occupations due to personal and familial factors. They settle for good enough jobs, regardless of their interests and abilities, rather than choosing a best possible occupation. Their interests and personality are compromised the most. Career circumscription is happening before career compromise in case of females. They eliminate occupational alternatives that are conflicting with their self-image and instincts quiet earlier than their male counterparts. Some would prefer jobs at a female-dominated industry while some would prefer giving more time to family than career. Which is the reason of lowered occupational aspiration level of females. In case of boys, career compromise and career circumscription is happening later in their lives. If everything works out smoothly, males settle for jobs that they prefer the most. As per the theory, circumscription and compromise do happen in case of males, but mostly later in their lives. But the descriptive analysis shows that most males also have an average level of occupational aspirations. Indian undergraduate males might have slightly higher aspirations than females but most males also settle for average level of occupations due to personal, familial and societal factors. Most students settle for occupations that are chosen by their friends or parents. Some occupations such as medicine and engineering are considered prestigious and children are forced to qualify for such occupations irrespective of their interests. This highlights the fact that occupational information should be made available to both male and female students quiet early in their lives. It will assist young adults in finding career options as per their interests and explore high status jobs in their respective fields of interests.

Career motivation as early as school level is required. The threshold when students decides about their specific streams of study or subjects in their school is the right time to motivate and counsel students about varied career options. The Indian schools still lack the facility, infrastructure and personnel for career guidance and counseling. A specific and consistent career guidance and counseling cell should be present in all senior secondary schools or undergraduate colleges.

It is an undeniable fact that parents play an important role in shaping their children's lives. Parents' are primary and continuing educators of their children. Their involvement is present both in home and school activities of their children. A child's growth and development is highly related to how they are treated at home. They get inspired by the activities, behaviors, temperaments and motivation level of their parents. It is important to note that the home environment of illiterate parents differs from that of literate parents. Literate mothers correct their children's language, pronunciations and give directions regarding etiquettes and mannerisms. It is a fact that literate parents treat their children well when it comes to

educating and guiding them. Children growing in illiterate homes are deprived of early joys of reading, learning and writing skills which later impact their mental abilities. Research has shown that high level of education among parents motivate their children also to have high level of education. Such children possess books and visit libraries on a regular basis. They are inspired and enlightened and have broader perspective of job environment and occupational interests. In Indian homes fathers' have a dominating role. Their education impacts the occupational aspirations of children of both sexes. A highly educated father creates an inspiring environment in Indian homes and both male and female child gets inspired by his personality. Fathers are motivated to provide better opportunities to their children than they have experienced in their lives. Children learn to become more serious and responsible when they have highly educated father as their role model. His education level is identified as a strong factor in influencing academic success, occupational aspirations and

subsequent status attainment of children. Mother's education level is important but to a lesser degree. The question arises here that what should be done to raise the occupational aspiration level of students coming from illiterate parental background? Adult illiteracy exists and it does impact children in a negative way. In order for children to have high aspirations it's important that we should not ignore parents who are unable to read or have little knowledge of reading and writing. Such parents can motivate their children to have some extra assistance from different sources such as media, highly qualified personnel or highly educated parents of friends and peer groups. They should allow their children to attend tutorial sessions for career awareness and competitions. Even adults can contact adult literacy agencies located in different cities for parental awareness. When adults become literate they will experience new things and expand their opportunities. This will in turn improve and enhance their academic and non-academic parent-child interaction which will benefit both in the future.

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