

Indian Parental Perceptions of New-Age Careers: A Qualitative Study of Urban Families in Bengaluru

Soumya Sandeep

SEMESTER 3, Department of Psychology, JAIN (Deemed to be University), Centre for Distance and Online Education, Bengaluru

Abstract: Background: India's career landscape has expanded rapidly with the growth of technology-driven and non-traditional occupations, yet parents remain central to their children's career decisions. Little is known about how urban Indian parents perceive these new-age careers. This study explored parents' awareness, perceptions, beliefs and concerns regarding selected new-age careers, and developed a preliminary typology of parental orientations. Methods: A qualitative descriptive-typological design was used. Semi-structured interviews, guided by a 15-question protocol, were conducted with urban parents in Bengaluru whose children were in Grades 8 to 12. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis supported by Commacad's Thematique qualitative research software. Results: Five themes were generated: Awareness and perception of career opportunities; Influence of social, cultural and generational viewpoints; Impact of technological advancements; Navigating career uncertainty; and Supportive career environments. Parents were largely open to new-age careers, but their support was conditional on long-term viability and a traditional degree as a safety net. Three orientations emerged: Open Co-Explorer, Cautious Supporter and Concerned Guardian. Conclusions: Parents negotiate between inherited beliefs about career security and a rapidly changing labour market. The typology offers career counsellors a preliminary framework for tailoring parent engagement.

Keywords: New-age careers; parental perceptions; career counselling; reflexive thematic analysis; typology

1. Introduction

Career is a path travelled over time. In the pre-1970's, career was a sequence of positions held within an organization or occupation. Success meant upward vertical mobility like promotions, titles and seniority. Donald Super broadened this to a sequence of occupations, jobs and positions occupied during the course of a person's working life, embedded within the person's roles as a son, daughter, student, citizen, worker (Super, 1980). In another contemporary view by Savickas (Savickas, 2023) careers are now understood as subjectively constructed narratives, the meaning a person makes of their work-life experiences. The 'boundaryless career' and 'protean career' concepts (Hall, 2023) (Jeffrey & Callanan, 2008) reflect that careers no longer follow a single-employer and liner trajectory.

India is in the midst of profound occupational transformation. The contemporary career landscape in India has undergone rapid transformation due to globalization, technological advancement and the expansion of the digital economy. Traditional career paths such as engineering, medicine and government services have long been considered stable and prestigious within Indian society. The twenty-first century has introduced a new ecosystem of careers, in digital content creation, user experience design, data science, financial technology, esports, behavioral economics, sustainable architecture and many such non-traditional careers that did not exist when today's parents were themselves navigating stream selection in school. Despite the rapid expansion of the labor market, the overwhelming majority of Indian families continue to funnel aspiration into the well-worn grooves of medicine, engineering, civil services and law.

This phenomenon is not simply a matter of ignorance. It reflects a deeply layered cultural logic in which career choice is inseparable from family honor, economic security, social respectability and the management of intergenerational anxiety. As Leppard and Dufur (2025) argue, family social capital continues to shape young adult career goals (Leppard & Dufur). Indian parenting, particularly within the urban middle class, operates within a collectivist framework where decisions about a child's future are legitimately understood as family decisions rather than individual ones (Sondhi, 2017). Parents who resist so-called "new-age" careers are not merely uninformed; they are operating from a coherent, culturally embedded system of meaning that career counsellors and educators rarely acknowledge in their practice.

2. Review of Literature

Parental influence on career choices operates through multiple dimensions, extending beyond simple directive guidance to encompassing emotional support, modeling, and the transmission of values regarding work, achievement, and social standing. Research on secondary school students in rural India found that although only 7% explicitly cited parental influence as decisive, parental educational background strongly shaped students' perceptions of higher education's value and their likelihood of engaging in career discussions with teachers (Vyas.K, 2025). This indirect influence, operating through the cultural capital and social positioning that educated parents possess, proves more powerful than overt parental pressure in determining career trajectories.

The Indian middle-class family's relationship with career choice is fundamentally shaped by aspirations for upward mobility and fear of downward mobility. Financial security

and job stability emerge as paramount concerns for middle-class parents, reflecting their precarious positioning within the social hierarchy and their dependence on educational credentials and professional employment for maintaining class status. Employment uncertainty and financial stress among middle-class adolescents in China (a comparable context with similar collectivist values) demonstrates how economic insecurity shapes career planning, pushing students toward financially secure fields like STEM and business often under intense parental pressure (Shi.J, 2024). The psychological toll of these pressures includes significant anxiety, burnout, and concerns about future employment prospects.

Economic resources fundamentally constrain which career pathways families can afford to support. Particularly for skill development and entrepreneurship initiatives aimed at India's youth, obstacles persist including limited access to capital, infrastructural deficiencies, and the necessity for robust mentorship networks (Kumar.k, 2024). While government initiatives like Skill India and Startup India attempt to democratize career pathways, significant disparities remain based on family economic resources.

Despite economic transformation, traditional professional preferences persist prominently among Indian families. Among medical students in Jammu and Kashmir, the majority of students' fathers (16.6%) and mothers (5.9%) possessed professional education, yet nearly 47.6% of students preferred traditional medicine or allied specialties, with 43.4% wanting public sector employment and 30.8% preferring private sector positions (Kataria.G, 2023).

3. Research Gap

While substantial research exists on parental influence on traditional career choices, there is virtually no qualitative literature specifically examining how urban middle-class Indian parents perceive and react to emerging, non-traditional, new-age careers such as content creation, gig economy work, digital entrepreneurship, freelancing, gaming, AI/machine learning specialization, and creative industries. The existing literature predominantly focuses on conventional careers (engineering, medicine, law, civil service) or broad STEM fields (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018). Research on Indian career expectations has concentrated on established sectors without capturing parental attitudes toward careers that are economically viable but lack the traditional markers of prestige and job security that define middle-class respectability in India. Prior research on parental career expectations has documented the influence of perceptions regarding reward/prestige and comfort/stability on parenting behaviors (Zhu et al., 2023). However, no qualitative research specifically examines the distinctive anxieties parents experience when children pursue careers lacking clear social prestige markers or income guarantees. For new-age careers (particularly freelancing, content creation, gaming, and startup ventures), the ambiguity surrounding success metrics, earning potential, and social legitimacy likely generates unique parental concerns distinct from anxiety about traditional career paths. The mechanisms through which parents evaluate and communicate their

reservations remain unstudied in the Indian middle-class context.

4. Research Design

As established in the research gap, no prior empirical study has systematically documented the perceptions of urban middle-class Indian parents specifically toward new-age careers. The design is further characterized as descriptive qualitative in its first three objectives, producing a rich, detailed account of the awareness, beliefs, and concerns parents hold. Its fourth objective is, typology-building, moving from description toward pattern recognition and categorization.

The descriptive-typological design is the most direct fit for these objectives that together asks: what do parents perceive and what kinds of parents are there? The findings will themselves lay the groundwork for any future quantitative phase. The research will use Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) to analyze the qualitative interview data, proposed by Braun and Clarke. The approach will be inductive coding allowing codes and themes to be generated from participants verbatim rather than being predetermined by existing theories. The analysis will focus on identifying patterns in parent's awareness, perceptions, beliefs, concerns and orientations toward new-age careers.

5. Research Methodology

Objectives

- 1) To explore urban Indian parents' awareness of a defined set of new age careers.
- 2) To explore urban Indian parents' perceptions and beliefs about a defined set of new age careers.
- 3) To understand urban Indian parents' concerns about a defined set of new age careers.
- 4) To develop a preliminary typology of urban Indian parents' orientations towards new-age careers, that may inform career counselling practice.

Data Collection and Sample Size

The target population is urban Indian parents or legal guardians in Bengaluru who have at least one child currently enrolled in Grades 8 through 12 in a school within an Indian Tier-1 urban center. The decision to focus on parents of children in this grade range is deliberate: Grades 8–12 represent the period during which career conversations are most active and consequential in Indian family life, encompassing the critical junctions of stream selection.

A purposive sample of 6 to 12 participants will be recruited. This sample size is consistent with established qualitative descriptive research norms. Guest, Bunce and Johnson demonstrated that thematic saturation is commonly achieved between 12 and 20 interviews (Guest et al., 2006) in relatively homogeneous samples. A sample of 6 to 12, provides sufficient depth to extract information while remaining feasible within the study's resource and timeline constraints.

Data were collected through online semi-structured interviews with urban parents in Bengaluru. This format was

chosen because it combines a consistent framework with the flexibility to probe individual responses, allowing parents to express views freely on career choice in their own words. This suited the study's descriptive-typological design. The interview guide comprised 15 open-ended questions organized into four domains aligned with objectives; awareness of new-age careers, perceptions and beliefs, concerns, and parental orientations. Questions moved from general, low-threat topics to more reflective ones and parental orientation was inferred from cumulative responses rather than asked directly. Each question was supported by follow-up probes to clarify meaning. Informed consent was obtained before each interview, and all sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

6. Findings and Discussion

Interview transcripts were analysed using Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis, supported and organised by Commacad's Thematique qualitative research software. Coding produced 15 codes and 145 coded extracts, which were organised into five themes (Table 1).

Table 1: Themes

Theme	Codes
Awareness and Perception of Career Opportunities	Career awareness; Career beliefs and perceptions
Navigating Career Uncertainty	Concerns; Economic attitudes; Job stability concerns
Influence of Social, Cultural and Generational Viewpoints	Cultural and generational viewpoints; Social status; Value of education
Supportive Career Environments	Support for career choices; Innovation and creativity
Impact of Technological Advancements	Technology impact

Awareness and Perception of Career Opportunities. Parents' awareness was uneven and shaped by their occupational and social networks. Some knew of fields linked to their own industry, such as EdTech, FinTech and design, while others had heard of few ("Not heard of many," P05). Children's viewpoints are accepted with due diligence. One mother described "learning with him" about meteorology (P02). Parents did not treat new-age careers as a single group. They viewed content creation as unstable but saw design, data science and agriculture-related fields as promising.

Influence of Social, Cultural and Generational Viewpoints. Parents described their own career choices as predefined and limited to engineering or medicine ("not much of a choice," P04). This pushes for a strong preference for a traditional degree, even among parents who otherwise welcomed new-age careers. Social circle and their opinion, carried little weight. Parents stated that relatives would not influence their decision.

Impact of Technological Advancements. Parents saw artificial intelligence as reshaping which careers would last. Some viewed conventional fields as oversaturated and emphasised skills "which AI can't do" (P04).

Navigating Career Uncertainty. The most prominent concern was long-term sustainability rather than starting income ("Not sure how long they will be there," P05). Parents balanced passion against financial security and treated a formal degree as protection against volatility.

Supportive Career Environments. Parents described supporting their child's choice, but conditionally: "we will do our research first and then support him" (P05). Exposure and skill development were valued over theory alone. This remained consistent across most of the parents

Typology of Parental Orientations: Cross-case comparison of awareness, values, concerns and conditions for support identified three orientations (Table 2).

Table 2: Parental orientations towards new-age careers

Orientation	Defining pattern
Open Co-Explorer	Values interest and skills over certificates; learns alongside the child; open to exploring new careers
Cautious Supporter	Open in principle; accepts change as generational; supports after research and proof of viability.
Concerned Guardian	Low awareness; views new-age careers as volatile; degree non-negotiable and worries about the child's focus rather than the career

Discussion

The findings suggest that urban parents are not rejecting new-age careers. Instead, they are negotiating between the age-old ingrained belief in security and a labour market they see as changing rapidly. This supports the view that career decisions in Indian families are shaped by culturally held beliefs about work (Arulmani, 2014). The degree-as-safety-net pattern captures generational and social mindset. Parents endorse their child's interest while keeping a traditional fallback. For career counsellors, each orientation calls for a different approach. Co-Explorers need structure; Cautious Supporters need evidence on long-term viability and Concerned Guardians need exposure to real examples and need help assessing their child's readiness.

7. Conclusion and Limitations

This study explored how urban Indian parents in Bengaluru perceive selected new-age careers. The findings show that parents are not opposed to these careers. Most welcomed the wider range of options now available to their children, while their own career choices had been limited to a few predefined paths. Their support, however, was rarely unconditional. Parents weighed their child's interest against long-term viability and commonly treated a traditional degree as a safety net. This reflects a negotiation between an inherited belief in career security and the labour market that parents recognize is changing rapidly. The study identified three parental orientations: the Open Co-Explorer, the Cautious Supporter and the Concerned Guardian. These orientations suggest that parents cannot be treated as a single group in career guidance. Counsellors may need to offer structure to Open Co-Explorers and evidence of long-term viability to Cautious Supporters. Concerned Guardians may benefit from accurate information and real-world examples of new-age careers, pathways that combine these careers with a formal degree and support in assessing their child's

readiness and commitment. Engaging parents directly, rather than only through the student, may strengthen career counselling outcomes. As an exploratory study conducted in a single urban setting, these findings should be treated as preliminary. Future research could test the typology with larger and more diverse samples, including semi-urban and rural families and examine how parental orientations influence students actual career decisions.

Limitations

- Limited generalizability due to small sample.
- Lack of student/counsellor perspectives
- Urban middle-class focus only
- Online format may reduce depth

References

- [1] (n.d.).
- [2] (n.d.). Retrieved from Cambridge Dictionary: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/career-counsellor#google_vignette
- [3] (2019). Retrieved from Mindler Education: <https://www.educationworld.in/helping-children-choose-new-age-career-pathways/>
- [4] Akosah-Twumasi, P., Emeto, T. I., D. Lindsay, K. T., & Malau-Aduli, B. S. (2018). A Systematic Review of Factors That Influence Youths Career Choices—the Role of Culture. *Frontiers in Education*. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2018.00058>.
- [5] Arulmani. (2014). Handbook of career development: International perspectives. *Springer Science*. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-9460-7_6
- [6] Braun, & Clarke. (2006). Qualitative Research in Psychology. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>
- [7] (2022). *Career Development and Related Roles*. Career Development Institute.
- [8] *Career Development Outlook for 2026-30: Skills, Employment and Transitions*. (2025). Retrieved from CII Skills: <https://ciiskills.in/blog/career-development-outlook-for-2026-30>
- [9] Guest, Bunce, & Johnson. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *APA PsycInfo*. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903>
- [10] Hall. (2023). *Understanding Careers Around the Globe*. Edward Elgar. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035308415>
- [11] Jeffrey, & Callanan. (2008). *Handbook of Organizational Behavior*. Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849200448.n16>
- [12] Kataria.G. (2023). Future career aspiration and specialty choices among undergraduate medical students of a medical college in jammu and kashmir, india – a cross-sectional study. *MRIMS journal of health sciences*. https://doi.org/10.4103/mjhs.mjhs_175_22
- [13] Kosine, N. R., & Lewis, M. (2008). Growth and Exploration: Career Development Theory and Programs of Study. *Career and Technical Education Research*, 227-243.
- [14] Kumar.k. (2024). Skill development programmes nurture entrepreneurial spirit and enhance employability among youth. *International Journal For Multidisciplinary Research*. <https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2024.v06i03.23755>
- [15] Leppard, & Dufur. (n.d.). Emerging Adulthood. *13(5)*, 1219–1227. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21676968251352009>
- [16] Ndhlovu, D., & Mwangilwa, C. (2025). Parental expectations, learner autonomy, and career pathways: A qualitative study in zambian secondary schools. *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education*. <https://doi.org/D.Ndhlovu.and.C.Mwangilwa.2025>
- [17] Savickas, M. (2023). Career Construction Theory and Counseling Model. *Career Development and COunselling*, 165-199. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781394258994.ch6>
- [18] Shi.J. (2024). How do financial stresses and concerns about future employment prospects influence the career aspirations of chinese middle-class adolescents??. *Interdisciplinary Humanities and Communication Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.61173/e72a6005>
- [19] Sondhi, R. (2017). Parenting Adloescents in India: A Cultural Perspective. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.5772/66451>
- [20] Super. (1980). Life-Space approach to Career Development. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 282–298.
- [21] Thomas, A., & Joseph, S. (2024). Parental Involvement in Career Decision-Making After Class 10: A Qualitative Exploration. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 12(4). <https://doi.org/10.25215/1204.192>
- [22] Vyas.K. (2025). Roots of ambition: Career aspirations among rural secondary school students in Banswara,Rajasthan, India. *International Journal of Social Science Research and Review*. <https://doi.org/10.47814/ijssrr.v8i8.2938>
- [23] Zhu, J., Hou, Z., J., X., L., C., & S., Z. (2023). Parental Career Expectations and Chinese Undergraduates' Career Indecisiveness across Gender. *Journal of Career Development*, 674–689.