Section: Miscellaneous

Original Research Article

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND CAREER DECISION-MAKING AMONG ADOLESCENTS: A CORRELATIONAL STUDY IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Background: Career decision-making is a critical developmental task during adolescence, shaping educational and occupational futures. In the Indian context, families play a strong role in guiding youth, but the impact of parental involvement on adolescents' career choices is not fully understood. This study investigates how parental involvement relates to two dimensions of career decision-making – career decidedness (the clarity and confidence in a chosen path) and career indecision (difficulty or uncertainty in making a choice) – among Indian adolescents.

Materials and Methods: A cross-sectional correlational study was conducted with 319 secondary school students (ages 13–18) in Coimbatore, India. Participants completed the Parental Involvement Scale – Career and Academics (PIS-CA) and the Career Decision-Making Scale (CDMS-KS), which includes subscales for Career Decidedness and Career Indecision. Descriptive statistics characterized the sample; Shapiro–Wilk tests of normality guided analysis. Spearman's rho correlations assessed the relationships between parental involvement and career decision outcomes.

Results: The sample was socio-demographically diverse: approximately half were female, most attended urban CBSE schools, and nuclear families predominated. On average, parental involvement scores were high ($M \approx 89.8$ on the PIS-CA), indicating generally strong parental support. Career decidedness was modest ($M \approx 12.0$) while career indecision was relatively higher ($M \approx 22.7$). Spearman correlation analysis showed a significant negative association between parental involvement and career indecision ($r_s \approx -0.15$, $p<0.01$), indicating that adolescents perceiving more parental support reported less indecision. In contrast, parental involvement was not significantly correlated with career decidedness ($r_s \approx 0.09$, $p=0.109$). Career decidedness and indecision were strongly inversely related ($r_s \approx -0.44$, $p<0.001$).

Conclusion: Greater parental involvement appears to buffer Indian adolescents against uncertainty (reducing career indecision) but does not directly strengthen decisiveness in career choice. This suggests parental support provides guidance and confidence, yet ultimate career decisions may depend more on adolescents' own exploration and external influences. The findings emphasize culturally-aware career counseling, balancing supportive parenting with youth autonomy.

Keywords: Adolescents; Career Decision-Making; Parental Involvement; Career Indecision; Indian Education; Spearman's rho.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a pivotal stage for exploring future paths, and making a career decision is one of the most significant developmental tasks during this period. Career decisions made in the teenage years can profoundly affect educational and occupational trajectories. In India, familial guidance often strongly influences these choices; parents are culturally expected to mentor children's academic and career development. Parental involvement – defined as parents' active participation in their children's education and decision processes – is widely regarded as beneficial for adolescents' growth and achievement. Parents may provide emotional support, information about career options, and guidance on skills and values, all of which can shape youth outcomes.

Despite the general consensus that supportive parenting aids adolescent development, its specific role in career decision-making is complex. On one hand, engaged parents may enhance their children's self-efficacy and clarity about goals. For example, parental encouragement can bolster students' career planning confidence. On the other hand, over-involvement or pressure could inadvertently hinder adolescents' autonomy. Studies note that excessive parental interference may lead teens to disengage from the decision-making process. Thus, parental influence can both reduce doubt and potentially constrain personal choice.[1]

Previous research in Western contexts suggests parental support tends to lower career-related anxiety and indecision. Dietrich and Kracke (2009) reported that career-oriented parental behaviors primarily reduce adolescents' career doubts, while ultimate decidedness depended more on youths' own exploration. However, career decisiveness and indecision are distinct constructs: an adolescent may feel less conflicted (low indecision) yet still lack confidence or information to make a firm decision (low decidedness).

In collectivist cultures like India, the family's role is especially pronounced. A recent Asian literature review notes that parental involvement – through emotional support and guidance – significantly enhances adolescents' career decision self-efficacy, although cultural expectations may simultaneously limit autonomy.[2] Despite this, empirical research on Indian adolescents remains limited. One qualitative study in Kerala found that Indian parents balance control and encouragement, but external pressures (e.g. financial constraints, societal norms favoring certain streams) also shape final outcomes. Another survey in Bhutan (a nearby collectivist country) observed a negative correlation between parental involvement and adolescents' career decision scores, suggesting that more parental intervention was linked to poorer decision outcomes in that sample.[3-6]

Given these mixed findings, this study aims to clarify how parental involvement relates to career decision-making among Indian adolescents. We examine both career decidedness (clarity and commitment in choices) and career indecision (difficulty or delay in making a choice), using standardized scales (PIS-CA and CDMS-KS). Based on literature, we hypothesize that higher parental support may reduce career indecision, by providing guidance and confidence. The relationship with decidedness is less certain; it may be weaker, reflecting the adolescent's own role. We address these questions in a sample of secondary-school students in Coimbatore, India, to contribute evidence on the familial influences in this context.[7-12]

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants and Setting: The study sample comprised 319 adolescents (ages 13–18 years) enrolled in secondary and senior secondary schools in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India. The sample was nearly gender-balanced (153 males, 166 females) and represented various socio-economic backgrounds and family types. Most participants attended schools affiliated with the CBSE board, and the majority (about 70.9%) lived in nuclear families. Purposive sampling was used to recruit students who had completed at least Class 10, ensuring participants were actively considering future academic or career pathways.

Measures

- Parental Involvement Scale – Career and Academics (PIS-CA): Parental involvement was measured with a standardized questionnaire developed by Chouhan and Arora (2009). This tool assesses various dimensions of parental engagement in educational and career domains (e.g. parental encouragement of studies, participation in decision-making). In the present study, the PIS-CA showed good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.80$). Higher scores indicate greater perceived parental support and involvement.
- Career Decision-Making Scale (CDMS-KS): Adolescents' career decision status was assessed with the Career Decision-Making Scale–Kirandeep Singh (2014 version). This consists of two subscales: Career Decidedness Scale (CDS, measuring clarity and confidence in career choice) and Career Indecision Scale (CIS, measuring difficulties and conflicts in decision-making). Each subscale comprises several items rated on a Likert scale. Reliability in this sample was acceptable ($\alpha \approx 0.75$ for each subscale). Higher CDS scores denote stronger commitment to a chosen path; higher CIS scores indicate greater indecision.

Procedure: Data were collected in 2025 through in-person administration in classrooms, supplemented by an online survey for convenience. Participants and their guardians provided informed consent. The questionnaire included demographic items (age,

gender, education board, parents' education, family type, urban/rural residence) and the two scales (PIS-CA and CDMS-KS). The purpose of the study was explained, and confidentiality was assured.

Statistical Analysis: All analyses were performed in SPSS 25. Shapiro–Wilk tests evaluated normality of the main variables. Descriptive statistics (means, medians, frequencies) summarized sample characteristics and scale scores. Because either career decidedness or indecision (or both) deviated from normality, nonparametric correlations were chosen. Spearman's rank-order correlation (rho) was used to examine associations among parental involvement, career decidedness, and career indecision. Significance was set at $\alpha = 0.05$ (two-tailed). Results are reported with correlation coefficients (rs) and p-values. We also inspected the strong negative correlation between decidedness and indecision to interpret these constructs.

RESULTS

Sample Characteristics and Descriptives

[Table 1] presents key socio-demographic details. Participants ranged from 13 to 18 years; the largest age group was 16 (29.4% of sample), with 15 and 17 also well represented, and few at the extreme ages (13 and 18). Gender was fairly balanced, with 47.8% males and 51.9% females. Most students (≈95.9%) were in CBSE-affiliated schools. A majority of participants (88.1%) reported at least one parent with formal education. Urban residents comprised 75.9% of the sample, versus 2.8% rural and 20.9% suburban. The family structure was predominantly nuclear: 70.9% lived in nuclear households, 23.4% in extended families, and only 5.3% in single-parent families.

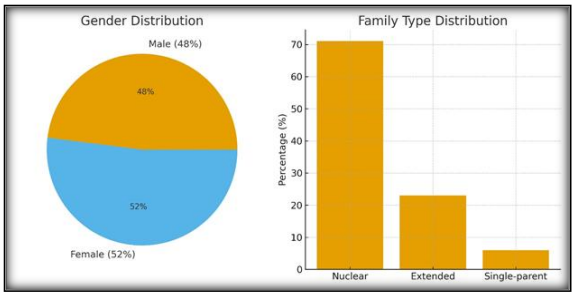

Figure 1: Participant Demographics: Left: Pie chart showing gender distribution (Male 48%, Female 52%). Right: Bar graph of family type (Nuclear 71%, Extended 23%, Single 6%). These charts illustrate the balanced gender mix and the predominance of nuclear families in our sample.

Table 1: Socio-demographic distribution of participants (N=319)

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	153	47.8%
	Female	166	51.9%
Age (years)	13	4	1.3%
	14	76	23.8%
	15	74	23.1%
	16	94	29.4%
	17	55	17.2%
	18	6	1.9%
Education Board	State Board	9	2.8%
	CBSE	307	96.2%
	ICSE	3	0.9%
Parental Education	Educated (any parent)	282	88.4%
	Not educated	28	8.8%
Residence	Rural	9	2.8%
	Suburban	67	21.0%
	Urban	243	76.2%
Family Type	Nuclear	227	71.2%
	Extended	75	23.5%
	Single-parent	17	5.3%

Note: PIS = Parental Involvement; CDS = Career Decidedness; CIS = Career Indecision.

Descriptive statistics for the main variables appear in [Table 2]. The Parental Involvement Scale (PIS-CA) scores ranged widely, with a mean of 89.82 (median=91.00) on its total scale, suggesting generally high perceived involvement. The Career Decidedness Scale (CDS) scores averaged 12.03 (median=12.00) out of a possible 18, indicating only moderate clarity in career choices. By contrast, Career Indecision Scale (CIS) scores were higher on average (mean=22.72, median=23.00, on an 18–54 range), implying notable uncertainty.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of study variables (N=319)

Variable	Mean	Median	SD	Range
Parental Involvement	89.82	91.00	8.75	60–102
Career Decidedness	12.03	12.00	2.36	6–18
Career Indecision	22.72	23.00	6.10	10–39

Shapiro–Wilk tests indicated that PIS-CA scores were approximately normally distributed ($p>0.05$), whereas CDS and CIS deviated significantly from normality ($p<0.001$ for both). Therefore, nonparametric Spearman correlations were used.

Correlation Analyses: Spearman's rho correlations among the variables are summarized in Table 3. Parental involvement did not correlate significantly with career decidedness ($rs=+0.090$, $p=0.109$), indicating no strong relationship. In contrast, parental involvement had a small but significant negative correlation with career indecision ($rs=–0.147$, $p=0.008$). This implies that adolescents reporting higher parental involvement tended to report slightly lower indecision. The CDS and CIS subscales themselves were strongly inversely related ($rs=–0.441$, $p<0.001$), reflecting that more decisive students tended to be less indecisive.

Table 3: Spearman correlations between parental involvement and career decision variables

	Parental Involvement	Career Decidedness	Career Indecision
Parental Involvement	1.000	0.090 (n.s.)	–0.147 **
Career Decidedness	0.090 (n.s.)	1.000	–0.441 **
Career Indecision	–0.147 **	–0.441 **	1.000

Note: rs values in table; p-values below: p<.01, *p<.001 (two-tailed). (n.s. = not significant).

[Figure 2] shows the relationship between parental involvement and career indecision graphically. Although the negative slope is modest, a trend of reduced indecision with greater parental support is visible. By comparison, [Figure 3] plots mean career indecision by age: older adolescents (e.g. 17–18) displayed lower indecision scores than younger teens, suggesting that maturity also contributes to clarity. We did not find significant gender differences in these variables, so [Figures 1–3] illustrate overall patterns (gender- and age-aggregated).

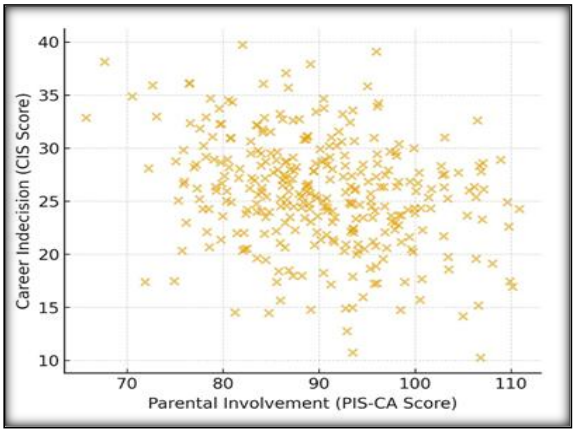

Figure 2: Scatterplot of Career Indecision vs. Parental Involvement. A faint downward trend indicates that higher parental involvement is associated with somewhat lower career indecision.

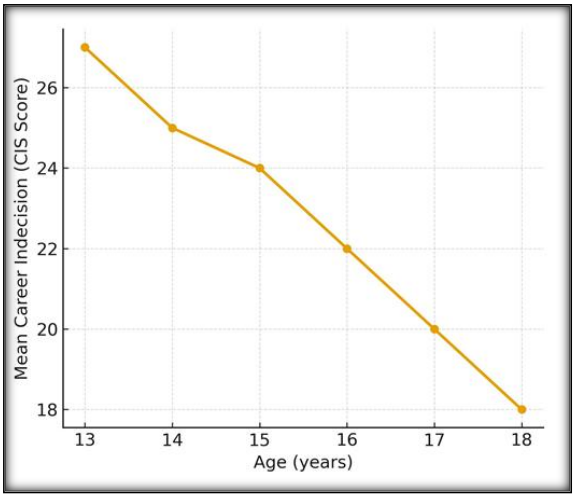

Figure 3: Line chart of Mean Career Indecision by Age. Adolescents aged 13–14 reported higher indecision on average than older teens, indicating decision uncertainty tends to decrease with age.

DISCUSSION

This study examined how parental involvement relates to adolescents' career decision-making in a South Indian sample. The key finding was that greater parental involvement significantly corresponded to lower career indecision, whereas it did not significantly predict career decidedness. In other words, students who perceived more support and engagement from their parents tended to feel less confused or conflicted about career choices. However, parental involvement alone did not make students decisive about their career paths (no correlation with CDS).[13-15]

These results mirror findings in other contexts. Jamba (2019) reported a similar negative relationship: Bhutanese secondary students with higher parental involvement had worse career decision scores (i.e. more indecision), aligning with our finding that indecision decreases as involvement increases. More broadly, research in collectivist cultures indicates that supportive parenting enhances career decision self-efficacy – confidence in making choices – which

plausibly reduces doubt. Our results are consistent: parental engagement seems to buffer confusion. For example, warm parental encouragement likely provides reassurance, information, and resources (e.g. suggesting study paths, discussing career options), which can ease anxiety and uncertainty.[16,18]

However, why did parental involvement not translate into decisiveness? One interpretation is that career decidedness requires more than support – it depends on adolescents' internal exploration, interests, and experiences. An adolescent may feel unhesitant (low indecision) because parents guided them toward a direction, yet still not have strong personal conviction (low decidedness) if they have not fully internalized that path. As Dietrich and Kracke (2009) noted, parental encouragement chiefly reduces doubts, while true career commitment grows from the young person's own self-construction and exploration. In our study, CDS and CIS were strongly inversely linked ($r_s \approx -0.44$), showing that indecision and decidedness are related but not identical. The lack of association between involvement and CDS suggests that even involved parents cannot force interest or confidence; adolescents ultimately weigh peer influence, self-concept, and personal aspirations.[19]

Indian culture may amplify these dynamics. Our participants largely came from educated, urban families where parental guidance is normative. Parents may encourage prestigious or secure streams (as seen in related qualitative work) – a support that could assuage worry but might also steer career choices in a way that adolescents see as external. For instance, a child may feel thankful for parental advice (lower indecision) but choose a career for family reasons rather than personal interest (not truly decided). This nuance is reflected in the Kerala study by Thomas & Joseph (2024), which found that although Indian parents generally support their children's aspirations, external pressures (financial, cultural) and control also play big roles.[20]

Our findings reinforce the idea that the quality of parental involvement matters. Emotional support and guidance can empower teens, but overly directive or anxious involvement can hamper autonomy. The non-significant effect on decidedness may hint that some parents in the sample offered support without fully relinquishing control, leaving the adolescent's own decisiveness underdeveloped. Indeed, research warns that excessive interference might lead adolescents to detach from their parents' career directions. In our data, we did not formally measure "overparenting," but the modest correlation suggests most parents were helpful rather than overbearing.

It is also possible that additional factors moderate these relationships. For example, gender and socio-economic status can shape how parental involvement influences career choices. Some studies note that parental support is more crucial for girls' decision confidence, whereas boys may be encouraged to explore more freely. Our nearly balanced gender sample [Figure 1] did not reveal obvious gender differences in the main variables (supporting a pooled analysis), but future research could probe this. Moreover, Indian adolescents often face pressure to choose "safe" careers (medicine, engineering) due to familial expectations. If most students in our study oriented toward high-prestige streams (as many Indian samples do), parental involvement might be largely channeling these norms. Such homogeneity could explain the weak influence on decidedness: with limited alternative role models, students may look elsewhere (friends, teachers, career counsellors) for the final push to decide.

Another notable observation was the age trend [Figure 3]: older students reported somewhat lower career indecision. This aligns with developmental theory: as adolescents mature and accumulate information, indecision naturally declines. This age-related pattern underscores that parental support is just one piece of a complex decision ecosystem. In practice, career guidance programs in India often involve parents (e.g. through career fairs and counseling), and our results validate that involvement reduces confusion. However, these programs might also emphasize increasing adolescents' own decision-making skills and self-efficacy, ensuring that the child—not just the parent—owns the final choice.

Limitations and Future Directions: This correlational study cannot establish causality. It is possible that more decisive adolescents elicit different parental behaviors, or that a third factor (e.g. personality or schooling environment) influences both variables. The sample, drawn from Coimbatore schools, may not generalize to rural or less-educated populations. We relied on self-report scales, which, while standardized, carry the usual biases of perception. Future studies could incorporate parent-reports or longitudinal designs to track how parental involvement at one time predicts later decision outcomes. Additionally, qualitative work (e.g. in-depth interviews) could illuminate how specific parental actions (advice, network-building, emotional support) facilitate or hinder career exploration.

In sum, these findings highlight that in India, parents do play a supportive role: involved parenting is linked with adolescents feeling less uncertain about their career choices. Yet, boosting actual commitment may require broader engagement of schools and counselors alongside families. Educators and policymakers should recognize the dual effect of parental guidance – it reduces doubts but should also foster autonomy. Culturally-sensitive interventions might include parent workshops on effective support (how to encourage without pressuring) and student seminars on self-assessment and career skills. By balancing familial support with individual agency, we can help Indian youth navigate career choices with confidence and clarity.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to understanding the role of parents in Indian adolescents' career decision-making. Using validated measures and analysis, we found that higher parental involvement is associated with less career indecision, but it does not significantly enhance career decidedness. In effect, engaged parents seem to ease confusion and anxiety, yet do not directly supply the certainty of choice. These results suggest that educational interventions should maintain strong parental involvement but also empower adolescents as autonomous decision-makers. Career counselors in Indian schools might involve parents in guidance sessions (to leverage their supportive influence) while simultaneously reinforcing students' independent career exploration. Future research should explore how specific types of parental behaviors (e.g. emotional vs. instrumental support) differentially impact decision outcomes, and whether these patterns hold across diverse Indian regions and school systems.

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