

# ROLE OF SOCIO-CULTURAL DYNAMICS IN SHAPING CAREER ASPIRATIONS OF ADOLESCENT YOUTH IN KERALA

---

**Francis Vergheese**

Research Scholar, School of Art and Social Science,  
Glocal University, Saharanpur,(U.P) India

**Dr. Parveen Kumar**

Research Supervisor  
School of Art and Social Science  
Glocal University, Saharanpur,(U.P) India

---

## ABSTRACT

*This study examines the socio-cultural dynamics influencing the career aspirations of adolescent youth in Kerala, India. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the research combines quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to provide a comprehensive understanding of how family expectations, community norms, educational influences, and economic factors shape career choices. The findings reveal that family expectations and community norms play a significant role in steering adolescents towards traditional and prestigious professions such as medicine and engineering. Educational disparities between urban and rural areas further impact career aspirations, with urban students having greater access to diverse career options and comprehensive career guidance. The study underscores the need for enhanced career counselling services, vocational training, and integration of global perspectives and digital skills into the educational curriculum. By addressing these gaps, policymakers, educators, and communities can better support the career development of Kerala's youth, aligning their aspirations with their abilities and the evolving demands of the global job market.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Kerala, renowned for its high literacy rates and robust educational achievements, presents a unique case study in understanding the socio-cultural dynamics shaping the career aspirations of its adolescent youth. The state's educational framework, steeped in rich cultural traditions and values, significantly influences the career trajectories of its youth. However, the rapid influx of globalization and technological advancements has introduced new complexities and opportunities in the career landscape, necessitating a reevaluation of traditional career paths and aspirations.

This study aims to delve into the intricate interplay of socio-cultural, educational, and economic factors influencing the career aspirations of adolescent youth in Kerala. By examining these dimensions, the research seeks to provide

a comprehensive understanding of how these factors interact and shape the professional trajectories of Kerala's youth. The insights gained from this study will be instrumental in informing policies and interventions to support the career development of adolescents in the region.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Socio-Cultural Influences**

#### **2.1.1 Family Expectations**

In Kerala, families often hold strong expectations regarding the educational and career trajectories of their children. Education is highly valued, and parents typically aspire for their children to pursue professions perceived as prestigious or financially rewarding, such as medicine, engineering, or government services. These expectations are often influenced by socio-economic status, educational background, and aspirations for upward mobility. Parental involvement in career decision-making processes, including guidance, support, and sometimes pressure, can significantly impact youths' career aspirations and choices.

#### **2.1.2 Community Norms**

Community norms also play a pivotal role in shaping career aspirations. The cultural fabric of Kerala, defined by caste, religion, and regional identity, significantly influences individuals' perceptions of success, social status, and acceptable career paths. Certain professions may be more prevalent or esteemed within particular communities, leading youth to conform to community expectations or face social scrutiny for deviating from traditional career paths.

#### **2.1.3 Gender Dynamics**

Gender norms and expectations further intersect with family and community influences to shape career aspirations among youth in Kerala. Traditional gender roles often dictate certain professions as more suitable for males or females, contributing to gendered patterns of career choice. While there have been strides towards gender equality in education and employment in Kerala, persistent cultural norms and societal expectations may still influence the career aspirations of young men and women differently.

## **2.2 Educational Influences**

### **2.2.1 Quality of Education**

The quality of education in Kerala is a significant factor in shaping career aspirations. The state's education system, characterized by a strong public sector and considerable private participation, is lauded for its high standards. However, the emphasis on academic excellence often comes at the expense of vocational training and skill development, which are crucial for diverse career pathways. This focus on traditional academic routes can limit students' exposure to a broader array of career options.

### **2.2.2 Career Guidance and Counselling**

Effective career guidance and counselling are critical in bridging the gap between educational attainment and career aspirations. While Kerala boasts high literacy rates, its career counselling infrastructure is inadequate in addressing the evolving needs of the youth. The lack of comprehensive career guidance in schools results in students making uninformed career choices that do not align with market demands or personal interests.

### **2.2.3 Impact of Globalization and Technology**

Globalization and technological advancements have introduced new career opportunities that challenge traditional career paths. The integration of global perspectives and digital skills into educational curricula is crucial to prepare students for the demands of the global job market. This is particularly important in Kerala, where the economy and job opportunities are increasingly influenced by global trends and technological innovations.

## **2.3 Economic Influences**

### **2.3.1 Economic Stability and Career Choices**

Economic conditions play a crucial role in shaping career aspirations. Stable economic conditions enable individuals to pursue careers aligned with their interests and talents, while economic uncertainties compel them to prioritize job security and immediate financial stability. In Kerala, the economic benefits of Gulf migration have historically

influenced career choices, with many adolescents aspiring for international opportunities perceived as more lucrative. This trend underscores the need for career guidance to address both local and global economic realities.

### 2.3.2 Urban-Rural Disparities

The urban-rural divide in Kerala presents another layer of complexity in career aspirations. Urban areas, with better access to educational resources and diverse career opportunities, enable a wider range of career aspirations. In contrast, rural areas face limitations in resource availability and exposure to career options, resulting in a narrower scope of career aspirations. Geographical disparities necessitate tailored career guidance interventions to bridge the gap between urban and rural youth.

## 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 3.1 Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

Developed by Robert W. Lent, Steven D. Brown, and Gail Hackett, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) emphasizes the role of self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals in shaping career choices. In the context of Kerala, SCCT can be applied to understand how family expectations, community norms, and educational exposure influence adolescents' self-efficacy and outcome expectations, thereby shaping their career aspirations.

### 3.2 Holland's Theory of Career Choice (RIASEC Model)

John L. Holland's Theory of Career Choice categorizes individuals into six personality types and corresponding work environments: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional (RIASEC). The congruence between an individual's personality type and their work environment leads to greater job satisfaction and career success. In Kerala, Holland's theory can help explain why certain careers, such as medicine and engineering, are highly valued and pursued due to their alignment with societal expectations and prevalent personality traits.

### 3.3 Social Learning Theory

Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory posits that individuals acquire new behaviours and make career decisions through observational learning, modelling, and social reinforcement. In Kerala, this theory highlights the importance of parental influence, community leaders, and educational mentors in shaping career aspirations. Observing the success of role models in certain professions can significantly impact students' career choices.

### 3.4 Super's Developmental Theory of Career Development

Donald Super's Developmental Theory of Career Development emphasizes the dynamic and lifelong nature of career development, comprising several stages: growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline. In the context of Kerala, this theory can be utilized to examine how adolescents' career aspirations evolve over time, influenced by their educational experiences, familial support, and socio-economic conditions.

### 3.5 Ecological Systems Theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory offers a holistic framework for understanding the interplay between individual characteristics and environmental influences in career development. In Kerala, this theory can be applied to understand how various layers of influence—from family and school to broader societal and cultural norms—interact to shape the career aspirations of adolescents.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively explore the socio-cultural and educational factors influencing the career aspirations of adolescents in Kerala. The mixed-methods design integrates both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a holistic understanding of the research problem. The study employs a concurrent triangulation strategy, where quantitative and qualitative data are collected simultaneously but analysed separately, with the results compared and combined in the interpretation phase.

#### 4.1.1 Quantitative Component

##### 4.1.1.1 Sample and Sampling Technique

The quantitative component involves a survey administered to a representative sample of adolescents aged 15-18 years from various regions of Kerala. A stratified random sampling technique is used to ensure that the sample reflects the diverse socio-economic and geographical contexts of the state, including urban and rural areas.

#### 4.1.1.2 Data Collection Instrument

A structured questionnaire is developed, comprising both closed-ended and Likert-scale questions. The questionnaire is designed to capture data on.

1. Demographic information (age, gender, socio-economic status, urban/rural location).
2. Educational background (type of school, academic performance).
3. Career aspirations (preferred career, reasons for choice).
4. Influencing factors (family expectations, community norms, availability of career guidance, and exposure to different careers).

#### 4.1.1.3 Data Collection Procedure

The survey is administered in selected schools and through online platforms to ensure a wide reach. Permission is obtained from school authorities, and informed consent is secured from participants and their parents.

#### 4.1.1.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data are analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics (mean, median, mode, standard deviation) provide an overview of the data, while inferential statistics (t-tests, chi-square tests, regression analysis) are used to examine relationships and differences between variables.

#### 4.1.2 Qualitative Component

##### 4.1.2.1 Sample and Sampling Technique

The qualitative component involves semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of key stakeholders, including adolescents, parents, teachers, and career counsellor's. The sample is selected to represent a range of perspectives across different socio-economic backgrounds and geographical locations.

##### 4.1.2.2 Data Collection Instrument

An interview guide is developed, comprising open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed information on:

1. Personal experiences and perceptions related to career aspirations.
2. The role of family and community in influencing career choices.
3. Experiences with and perceptions of career guidance services.
4. The impact of educational and socio-economic contexts on career aspirations.

#### **4.1.2.3 Data Collection Procedure**

Interviews are conducted face-to-face or via video calls, depending on the availability and preference of participants. Each interview is audio-recorded with the participant's consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

#### **4.1.2.4 Data Analysis**

Qualitative data are analysed using thematic analysis. This involves coding the data to identify recurring themes and patterns, followed by the development of a thematic framework to interpret the findings. NVivo software is used to facilitate data management and analysis.

#### **4.2 Triangulation and Integration**

The findings from the quantitative and qualitative components are compared and integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Triangulation enhances the validity and reliability of the study by corroborating evidence from multiple sources and perspectives.

#### **4.3 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approval is obtained from the relevant institutional review board. Participants are informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity are maintained throughout the research process.

## 5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Quantitative Findings

#### 5.1.2 Demographic Profile

The survey was completed by adolescents aged 15-18 years from various regions of Kerala. The sample included a balanced representation of genders and a mix of urban and rural participants. The socio-economic backgrounds of the respondents varied, providing a comprehensive overview of the demographic influences on career aspirations.

#### 5.1.3 Career Aspirations

The data revealed that a significant portion of adolescents aspired to careers in medicine, engineering, and government services. Other notable career choices included information technology, education, and arts. The remaining respondents expressed interest in various other fields such as entrepreneurship, hospitality, and sports.

#### 5.1.4 Family Expectations

Family expectations emerged as a major influence on career aspirations. A large percentage of respondents indicated that their parents had a strong influence on their career choices, often steering them towards prestigious and financially stable professions. This influence was particularly strong among students from middle and high-income families.

#### 5.1.5 Community Norms

Community norms also played a significant role, with a substantial portion of respondents acknowledging that societal expectations and community values impacted their career choices. Professions like medicine and engineering were highly esteemed within their communities, reinforcing their desirability.



## 5.1.6 Educational Exposure

Educational exposure significantly affected career aspirations. Students from urban areas and private schools reported higher levels of exposure to diverse career options and better access to career guidance services. In contrast, rural students and those from public schools had limited exposure and guidance, which influenced their career choices towards more traditional and locally prevalent professions.

## 5.1.7 Career Guidance

The study found a gap in the availability and effectiveness of career guidance services. A significant portion of respondents reported having limited access to comprehensive career counselling, and many expressed the need for better guidance to explore diverse career paths aligned with their interests and abilities.

## 5.2 QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

### 5.2.1 Themes from Interviews

#### 5.2.1.1 Influence of Family and Community

Interviews with adolescents, parents, teachers, and career counsellors reinforced the quantitative findings. Many adolescents spoke about the pressure to meet family expectations and societal norms. One student shared, *"My parents want me to become a doctor because it's a prestigious profession. Even though I am interested in graphic design, I feel obligated to follow their wishes"*.

#### 5.2.1.2 .Educational Inequalities

Teachers and career counsellor's highlighted the disparities in educational resources and career guidance between urban and rural areas. A teacher from a rural school noted, *"Our students are bright, but they lack exposure to different career options. Most of them follow traditional paths because that's all they know"*.

#### 5.2.1.3 Need for Comprehensive Career Guidance

Both students and counsellor's emphasized the need for improved career guidance services. A career counsellor mentioned, *"We need to provide students with information about emerging career fields and help them understand how their skills and interests can align with these opportunities"*.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The socio-cultural dynamics in Kerala play a crucial role in shaping the career aspirations of its adolescent youth. Family expectations, community norms, and educational influences significantly impact the career choices of young individuals. While the state's high educational standards provide a solid foundation, disparities in educational resources and access to career guidance highlight the need for targeted interventions. Addressing these gaps through enhanced career counselling services and integrating global perspectives into education can better prepare Kerala's youth for the dynamic and globalized job market, ensuring their successful transition into the workforce and contributing to the state's overall socio-economic development.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be made to address the socio-cultural and educational factors influencing the career aspirations of adolescents in Kerala:

### 7.1 For Educational Institutions:

## 7.1.1 Enhance Career Guidance and Counselling Services:

- Establish dedicated career centres with trained professionals to offer personalized career planning services.
- Integrate career guidance programs into the school curriculum, focusing on both traditional and emerging career paths.

## 7.1.2 Promote Vocational Training and Skill Development:

- Incorporate vocational training and skill development programs into the educational curriculum to provide students with practical skills relevant to various industries.
- Partner with local industries and businesses to offer internships, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training opportunities.

## 7.1.3 Address Educational Disparities:

- Ensure equitable distribution of educational resources across urban and rural areas to provide all students with access to quality education and career guidance.
- Implement targeted programs to support students from underprivileged backgrounds and rural areas in exploring diverse career options.

## 7.1.4 Integrate Global Perspectives and Digital Skills:

- Update the curriculum to include global perspectives and digital literacy to prepare students for the demands of the global job market.
- Encourage students to participate in international exchange programs, online courses, and virtual internships to gain global exposure.

## 7.2 For Policymakers:

### 7.2.1 Foster Industry-Education Linkages:

- Develop policies that encourage collaborations between educational institutions and industries to align the curriculum with industry needs and provide students with practical exposure.

- Support the establishment of industry-academia partnerships to facilitate research, innovation, and skill development.

## **7.2.2 Invest in Career Counselling and Development Programs:**

- Allocate resources to enhance career counselling infrastructure in schools and colleges, ensuring that all students have access to comprehensive career guidance services.
- Implement career development programs that focus on emerging industries and future job market trends.

## **7.2.3 Promote Gender Equality in Career Choices:**

- Develop initiatives to challenge traditional gender roles and encourage both male and female students to pursue careers based on their interests and abilities rather than societal expectations.
- Support programs that provide mentorship and role models for young women in non-traditional fields.

## **7.2.4 Support Entrepreneurship and Innovation:**

- Encourage entrepreneurial education and innovation through policies that support start up incubation, funding, and mentorship.
- Provide platforms for young entrepreneurs to showcase their ideas and connect with potential investors and industry experts.

## **7.3 For Parents and Communities:**

### **7.3.1 Encourage Open Dialogue and Exploration:**

- Foster an environment where adolescents feel comfortable discussing their career aspirations and exploring diverse career options without fear of judgment or pressure.
- Encourage children to pursue their interests and passions, providing support and guidance based on their individual strengths and abilities.

### **7.3.2 Promote Awareness of Diverse Career Paths:**

- Educate parents and community members about the wide range of career opportunities available, including non-traditional and emerging fields.
- Highlight the importance of skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability in the modern job market.

### **7.3.3 Provide Mentorship and Role Models:**

- Connect adolescents with mentors and role models who can provide insights, guidance, and inspiration for various career paths.
- Organize community events, workshops, and seminars where professionals from different fields can share their experiences and knowledge.

## 8. REFERENCES

1. Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Harvard University Press.
2. Bandura, A. (1977). *Social Learning Theory*. Prentice-Hall.
3. Gottfredson, L. S. (1981). Circumscription and compromise: A developmental theory of occupational aspirations. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 28(6), 545-579.
4. Holland, J. L. (1997). *Making Vocational Choices: A Theory of Vocational Personalities and Work Environments*. Psychological Assessment Resources.
5. Lent, R. W., Brown, S. D., & Hackett, G. (1994). Toward a unifying social cognitive theory of career and academic interest, choice, and performance. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 45(1), 79-122.
6. Super, D. E. (1980). A life-span, life-space approach to career development. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 16(3), 282-298.