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Positive parenting, career aspirations, and exploration: A study of third-year urban undergraduate students

Dian Ratna Sawitri

Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Diponegoro and Center for Career and Capacity Development Studies (CAREERS), dian.r.sawitri@gmail.com

D. V. S. Kaloeti

Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Diponegoro and Center for Career and Capacity Development Studies (CAREERS), veronikasakti@gmail.com

Erin R. Kustanti

Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Diponegoro and Center for Career and Capacity Development Studies (CAREERS), erinpsikologi@gmail.com

Novi Qonitatin

Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Diponegoro and Center for Career and Capacity Development Studies (CAREERS), qonitatin@gmail.com

Niken F. Nurhayati

Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Diponegoro and Center for Career and Capacity Development Studies (CAREERS), niken.fatimah@gmail.com

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Authors

Dian Ratna Sawitri, D. V. S. Kaloeti, Erin R. Kustanti, Novi Qonitatin, Niken F. Nurhayati, and Frieda N. R. Hidayati

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Dian R. Sawitri^{1*}, D. V. S. Kaloeti¹, Erin R. Kustanti¹,
Novi Qonitatin¹, Niken F. Nurhayati¹, Frieda N. R.
Hadiyati¹

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¹Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Diponegoro and Center for Career and Capacity Development Studies (CAREERS)

Abstract

Career exploration reflects activities conducted to collect information about oneself and potential occupations to become self-aware and understand the job market. Career exploration guides the realization of career aspirations and is thus crucial for young adults. It helps the youth make appropriate career-relevant decisions. However, it is unknown whether career aspirations mediate the links between positive parenting and career exploration activities undertaken by urban third-year undergraduate students. This study aimed to bridge this gap in the literature, and to this end, a survey was administered to 125 third-year undergraduate students attending a state university in Semarang, Central Java. The Career Exploration Scale, Career Aspirations Scale, Positive Parenting Subscale, and questions on demographic characteristics were employed for data collection. Structural equation modeling demonstrated that career aspirations fully mediated the path between positive parenting and career exploration. The findings of this study underline the importance of career aspirations in translating the effects of positive parenting into specific career exploration activities undertaken by college students. Finally, suggestions based on the study results are offered for third-year undergraduate students, parents, and practitioners.

Keywords

Career aspirations, Career Explorations, Positive Parenting, Undergraduate Students, Career Development, Parental Influences

Career exploration activities involve the collection of information, both on oneself and work-related matters. It is usually undertaken by individuals to enhance their understanding of themselves, the job market, and job characteristics to make career-related advances (Jiang et al., 2019). Engaging in career exploration enables individuals to consider and pursue personal career aspirations and interests. This process should help individuals crystallize areas of inquiry (Zikic & Hall,

2009), and the resources obtained from the undertaken activities inculcate resilience in job seekers faced with the difficulties and challenges associated with career-related transitions (Sharf, 2010).

Career exploration encompasses explorations of the self and the environment. Self-exploration includes the investigation of personal preferences, experiences, and values that represent one's career-related goals. Career exploration incorporates the scrutiny of the job market and is influenced by numerous factors that function in the decision-making process of career selection: for example, available career choices, existing job vacancies, current job requirements, the expectations of significant others, and personal networking circumstance (Zikic & Klehe,

Corresponding Author:

Dian Ratna Sawitri

Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Diponegoro, Jl.
Prof. Soedarto, S.H., Tembalang, Semarang, 50275

Email: dian.r.sawitri@gmail.com

2006). Therefore, career exploration activities allow individuals to keep current with rapidly changing job markets. Research has also evidenced that people who actively think about, look for, and examine career-related information are more likely to imbibe effective coping behaviors and evince higher levels of career adaptability when faced with career-related changes (Jiang et al., 2019).

The pursuit of career exploration activities has been documented and examined in students in both rural and urban contexts (e.g., Guan et al., 2015; Olle & Fouad, 2015; Sawitri & Dewi, 2015). However, most studies conducted in urban contexts have focused on middle and high school students (e.g., Cadaret & Hartung, 2020; Malin & Hackmann, 2017). Urban youth generally face more complex challenges than young people in rural areas. Navigating the job market and actualizing career plans exemplify the socio-economic difficulties urban youth must confront (Conkel-Ziebell et al., 2018). Urban adolescents are not always accorded with opportunities to use the situations of urban settings, such as more educational facilities, more career role models, to support their career development. Previous scholarly investigations (e.g., Brown et al., 1999) have demonstrated that students in urban environments display a greater degree of engagement in career exploration activities than their suburban counterparts. However, other researchers have found that urban youngsters, especially the less socio-economically privileged, often face several obstacles to career development and to the forging of a career identity (Conkel-Ziebell et al., 2018). Studies must thus probe career development efforts undertaken by undergraduate students in urban contexts to better understand the dynamics of career development among youth populations.

Third-year undergraduate students begin crystallizing their educational and career interests. By the third-year, undergraduate students are usually enrolled in several elective courses, have attained internship experience, and become members of student organizations dedicated to career exploration activities. This period of active individual contemplation of educational options and career-related paths before making actual career decisions is an essential step for undergraduate students. After their third year, undergraduate students are expected to have

built an extensive network that can offer them wide access, robust support systems, and role models from various work domains. However, their immediate environment comprising parents, friends, families, and academic environment may not always be conducive to the exploration of personal competence and the pursuit of career exploration activities. Under such stressful circumstances, positive parenting, family support, and constructive interactions with peers may help urban youth cope better with career challenges and imbibe greater degrees of adaptability. Support from parents and family may help consolidate a student's future orientation through positive encouragement. The presence of positive role models, assistance in alleviating anxieties, and easy access to a greater number of career role models can encourage students to explore career options and can help them frame career aspirations (Fletcher et al., 2020).

Social cognitive career theory (SCCT; Lent et al., 1994) regards career-related activities such as career exploration as an individual effort undertaken to establish career aspirations or achieve career goals. Career aspirations are defined as career goals set by individuals assuming an ideal situation (Rojewski, 2005). Contextual variables can determine the formulation of career aspirations. Favorable contextual influences motivate career actions in the pursuit of career aspirations. Contextual influences can represent distal as well as proximal affordances. Distal influences are environmental affordances that predate the stage of active career-related decision-making. They include elements such as parenting style and the availability of career-related role models. Proximal variables occur during the active phase of career decision-making and include factors such as the availability of jobs in the individual's preferred domains, access to financial support to embark on specific career-related paths, and parental agreement and expectations (Lent et al., 1994).

Bandura (2000) suggested that the effects of contextual variables, distal or proximal, on career-related actions or exploration are primarily indirect and are manifested via their influence on self-efficacy, aspirations, or other person variables. Therefore, career goals or aspirations are robust mediators of contextual variables and career actions. Previous studies based on the

social cognitive career choice model have evidenced such relationships, testing how proximal contextual variables are linked to career aspirations and actions (Rogers et al., 2008). For example, Rogers and Creed (2011) demonstrated a strong relationship between family and peer support and career exploration via career aspirations. The findings of previous studies also support Bandura's (2000) model, elucidating that supports and barriers were indirectly related to career exploration through career aspirations. Sawitri et al. (2014) used adolescent-parent career congruence and parental career expectations as proximal contextual variables to predict career planning and exploration. They found that the link between adolescent-parent career congruence and career exploration was fully mediated by career decision-making self-efficacy. Conversely, the connection between parental career expectation and career planning was fully mediated by career aspirations. Sawitri et al. found a direct path from parental career exploration to career exploration, but not from adolescent-parent career congruence. These findings partly corroborate Bandura's (2000) proposition.

The above discussion suggests that the role of parental proximal contextual influences on career aspirations and actions has been widely investigated. However, the contribution of parental predictors such as positive parenting as distal influences toward career aspirations and actions has not been adequately explored (Rogers et al., 2011). The present study seeks to bridge this research gap and to apprehend the role of positive parenting as a form of distal influence manifested on career exploration through career aspirations.

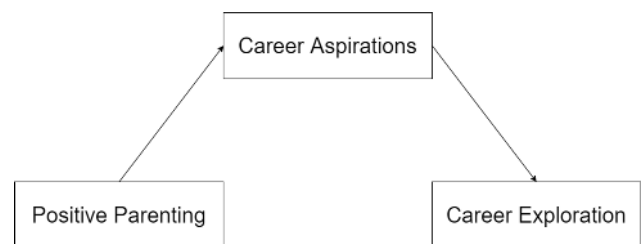
Positive parenting is beneficial to individual psychosocial development (Miconi et al., 2017). However, the role of positive parenting in career development has not been extensively explored, and extant studies on this issue have reported inconsistent results. Lease and Dahlbeck (2009) demonstrated that positive parenting in the form of emotional support and the appropriate granting of autonomy facilitated career decision-making in male undergraduate students. However, the results differed for female undergraduate students, who were found to benefit more from controlling parents. Additionally, positive parental encouragement was correlated with career decision-making self-efficacy in French

students but not in Korean students (Sovet & Metz, 2014). Previous investigations have also explored the role of parenting practices on career exploration. For example, Kracke (1997) demonstrated that expressions of positive parenting such as openness and concern exercised distal influence and were positively associated with the engagement of German students in career exploration. However, Vignoli et al. (2005) failed to demonstrate a similar relationship in a sample of French students. More recently, Guan et al. (2015) revealed that high parental support and low parental interference were predictors of career exploration. These findings reflect the need for a more comprehensive examination of the functioning of distal parental contextual variables such as positive parenting on career exploration. The role of career aspirations in mediating the link between these variables also warrants further investigation.

Therefore, the current study seeks to examine whether career aspirations function as full mediators in the relationship between positive parenting and career exploration in third-year undergraduate students in an urban context. It is posited that positive parenting and career explorations performed by third-year undergraduate students in an urban context evince an indirect relationship wholly through career aspirations.

Figure 1 illustrates the hypothesis established for this study.

Figure 1. *Positive parenting is indirectly associated with career exploration wholly via career aspirations.*



Methods

Participants

The convenience sampling technique was employed to recruit 125 third-year undergraduate students (88.3% female, Mage = 20.17 years, SD age = .86, M GPA = 3.40) majoring in psychology at a state university in urban Semarang in

Central Java. Participants volunteered to engage in this study. The survey package was distributed by the first author and two research assistants during class hours.

Most (63.2%) participants expressed a desire to work after graduation, 33.6% wanted to pursue academics, and 3.2% reported having other plans. In terms of career choices, 39.2% of the participants expressed the desire to become psychologists, 10.4% had entrepreneurial aspirations, 2.4% wanted to teach, 12.8% aimed to become human resource specialists, and 33.6% named myriad other professions. Asked to compare their perceived financial circumstances against the economic condition of their peers, 25.6% indicated their financial status was much better, 23.2% said they were a little better off, 35.2% specified the situations were around the same, 15.2% claimed their circumstances were a little worse, and two participants (0.8%) reported being much worse off.

Instruments

The survey package for this study comprised scales on positive parenting, career aspirations, and career exploration along with questions on gender, age, grade point average (GPA), socioeconomic status, career goals, and plans after graduation. The backward translation procedure was deployed to translate the survey items from their original versions to Bahasa Indonesia (Brislin, 1986).

Positive Parenting. Elgar et al. (2007) developed the Positive Parenting Subscale of the Short Form Alabama Parenting Questionnaire to examine positive parenting. Participants were asked to respond to three items (e.g., "Your parents praise you for behaving well") on six-point Likert-like scales ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6). Higher scores were indicators of greater degrees of positive parenting. Gross et al. (2017) found that the scale exhibited a coefficient of reliability of .81. The internal consistency for the current study was calculated at .92.

Career Aspirations. This study used O'Brien's (1996) Career Aspirations Scale of ten items to assess participant aspirations of taking leadership positions, ascertain participant passions of

becoming trainers or managers, and determine participant motivations for higher education. Respondents registered their views on items such as, "I think I'd like to pursue graduate training in my area of work interest" on a six-point Likert-like scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6). Higher scores were reflective of higher degrees of individual ambition to engage in each career path. Internal consistencies for this instrument were demonstrated at .71 and .78 (Sawitri et al., 2015). Construct validity of this scale was established through expected associations with self-efficacy in determining career options, the career-related expectations of parents, and career congruence between adolescents and parents (Sawitri et al., 2014). The reliability coefficient of .75 was reported for the current study.

Career Exploration. This study used Stumpf et al.'s (1983) Career Exploration Survey to examine participant involvement in career exploration activities over three months. Participants were asked to respond to 11 items (e.g., "In the last three months, I have been contemplating my past life and experiences in relation to my career"). Responses were recorded on a six-point Likert-like scale ranging from almost never (1) to very often (6). Greater total scores indicated greater degrees of involvement in career exploration actions during the specified period. Tests revealed that the scale exhibited internal consistencies of .83 and .85 in reliability coefficients determined six months apart (Sawitri et al., 2015). The scale demonstrated positive associations with self-efficacy in making career decisions and career expectations of parents (Sawitri et al., 2014). The internal consistency of the scale was found to be .89 for the present study.

Results

The data collected for this study were analyzed using AMOS V24. Three single items were used as observed variables to represent the positive parenting variable. Also, three sets of three to four items represented each latent variable designated for career aspiration and career exploration (Kline, 2015). The scales were related by subject via exploratory analyses conducted to make the bundles. Items were then rank-ordered according to the factor loadings, and a combina-

Table 1. Zero-Order Correlations (Above Diagonal), Correlations Among Latent Variables (Below Diagonal), and Summary Data; N = 125

Variables	1	2	3	M	SD
1. Positive parenting	-	.17*	.21*	12.60	3.30
2. Career aspirations	.19*	-	.47**	47.82	4.90
3. Career exploration	.19*	.58***	-	47.73	8.18

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

tion of high loading and low loading items was allocated to formulate each bundle (Hau & Marsh, 2004; Little et al., 2002).

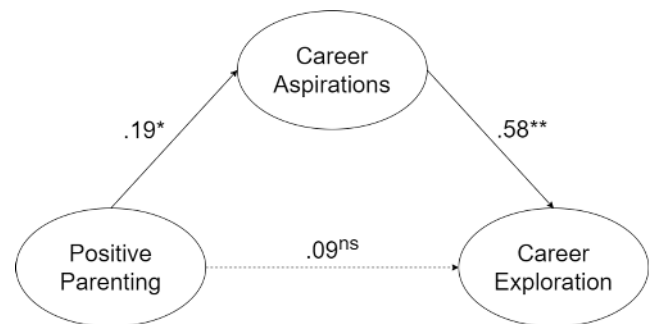
The measurement model used for this study was examined to confirm that all latent variables corresponded to their respective items and bundles. This step was taken to ensure the independence of the latent variables. ShROUT and Bolger's (2002) study was referenced to examine direct and indirect associations displayed in Figure 2. The 90% bias-corrected confidence intervals were utilized to detect significant indirect effects when the 90% confidence intervals for the indirect effect did not consist of zero (Hair et al., 2010; Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Hair et al.'s (2010) practice for less than 250 participants and less than 12 observed variables was followed and the model fit was evaluated by considering the χ^2 with insignificant p -value (χ^2/df with a value of < 3.0 demonstrates an acceptable fit), the CFI ($> .97$), and the RMSEA ($< .08$). As expected, the fit indices of the measurement model were all acceptable ($\chi^2/df = 1.35$, $\chi^2(24) = 32.35$, $p = .12$; RMSEA = .07, and CFI = .98). All factor loadings were found to be significant, ranging from .21 to .98. Table 1 displays bivariate correlations comprising zero-order correlations and associations between latent variables. It also presents the summary data.

Initially, the related structural model presented in Figure 1 was examined, and it demonstrated a good fit to the data ($\chi^2/df = 1.65$, $\chi^2(25) = 33.22$, $p = .13$; RMSEA = .08, CFI = .98). Positive parenting was found to be correlated with career aspirations ($\beta = .19$, $p < .05$). Career aspirations were found to be associated with career exploration ($\beta = .58$, $p < .001$).

Subsequently, significant direct link was determined from positive parenting to career exploration ($\beta = .20$, $p < .05$). Standard errors were estimated at 90% bias-corrected confidence intervals using the AMOS bootstrapping proce-

dure. The direct and indirect effects were simultaneously assessed using 1,000 bootstrapped samples and a set maximum likelihood estimator. The assessment of a model comprising direct and indirect effects revealed that the direct link from positive parenting to career exploration was no longer significant ($\beta = .09$, $p = .29$). The indirect association was significant as demonstrated by the standardized indirect effect of .11, and the 90% confidence interval ranged from .01 to .21. It was hence concluded that the indirect effect worked wholly through career aspirations. This result is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Final Structural Model



Additionally, a positive relationship was found between GPA and career aspirations, $r = .20^*$ ($p < .05$). Thus, participants evincing higher GPAs were more likely to harbor superior career aspirations.

Discussion

The present study intended to investigate whether the link from positive parenting to career exploration was fully mediated by the career aspirations of third-year students in an urban context. It was posited that career aspirations would wholly mediate the relationship between positive parenting and career exploration. The findings validated the study hypothesis.

This outcome suggests that students who perceive greater degrees of positive parenting tend to formulate more challenging career aspirations, which encourages them to become more involved in career exploration activities.

This finding is congruent with Lent et al.'s (1994) SCCT, which asserts that career aspirations can steer the effects of contextual variables and guide actual career choice actions. It also endorses Bandura's (2000) proposition of the link from the proximal contextual variable (in this case, positive parenting) to career actions (in this case, exploration) was mediated by career-related goals (in this case, career aspirations).

Positive parenting is characterized by affirmative reinforcement when children demonstrate certain promising results, traits, or manners. It takes the form of encouraging communication and compliments when children evince specific accomplishments or engage in expected behaviors. It creates favorable environments in which children perceive they are loved and believed (Elgar et al., 2007). Positively parented children can easily articulate their feelings, develop elevated aspirations, and let their imaginations soar as high as possible. For instance, they can securely develop career interests and dreams and are accorded the chance to demonstrate their effort to achieve their aspirations by engaging in various career exploration activities (Sovet & Metz, 2014).

Locke and Latham's (1990) goal-setting theory and Ajzen's (1988) theory of reasoned action demonstrate the hypothesized link between goals or aspirations and actions. The present study's findings align with these theories and are also congruent with the results of Creed et al.'s (2011) investigation, which reported that career aspirations motivate individuals to increase their engagement in career exploration activities. The current study's outcomes also support Olle and Fouad's (2015) demonstration of positive connections from parenting variables to career-related aspirations and decision-making processes. Additionally, the results obtained by the present study endorse Sawitri et al.'s (2014) study, which evinced the positive associations between career aspirations and the career action behaviors of exploration and planning.

The present study's results suggest that third-year students must be made aware of the

connections between their perceptions of positive parenting practices and their career aspirations. The career-related goals they establish will predict their levels of engagement in activities to obtain comprehensive information on their career values, preferences, competence, and the job market. Similarly, professionals working with third-year university students must explore the student perceptions of parental practices they have experienced and their career aspirations in revealing problems with the career exploration activities undertaken by the students. Thus, interventions to increase the levels of engagement of students in career-related explorations could emphasize positive parenting and encourage parents to apply this practice more frequently. Also, parents should expose their children to an increasing number of career role models to broaden their career knowledge base so they can develop more challenging career aspirations.

Intervention programs may be devised to achieve career goals. For example, career training workshops may be conducted to inculcate in students the wherewithal to develop beneficial interpersonal skills, maintain good relationships with their parents, or create career networks enabling them to gain access to successful role models in their environments. Such interventions should offer students, especially those with higher GPAs, opportunities of developing more aspirational career goals. In turn, challenging career aspirations are expected to motivate students to more intensively explore possibilities of achieving their desired careers via engagement in activities exploring career-related domains.

The extant body of research has evidenced numerous positive consequences of career education during college years. For instance, career education has been found to enhance the involvement of students in career exploration activities and to encourage them to make more accurate career decisions (Cheng & Jin, 2016; Cheung & Arnold, 2014).

The present study's results also suggest that parents must be conscious of the effects of their positive parenting practices in their daily lives on the career aspirations harbored by their children. Career aspirations tend to direct children to career exploration activities that allow them to obtain information relating to themselves and to the job market (Guan et al., 2015). For exam-

ple, parents can show gratitude when their children perform well, compliment children for good deeds, or praise them for good conduct. Additionally, parents should help their children build career aspirations that will foster increased engagement in career exploration activities. In turn, these activities will help illuminate career choices, assess capacities, determine gaps in related competencies and capacities, and lead students to related environments and people (Sovet & Metz, 2014).

Finally, some limitations of the present study must be acknowledged. First, it involved third-year students from a single faculty in a state university in Semarang in Central Java. Thus, the findings of this investigation must be tested on wider populations. The data for this study were gathered at a singular point in time. Prospective investigations could focus on longitudinal associations among the testing variables to obtain causal relationships.

Conclusions

Career aspirations serve as full mediator in the relationship between positive parenting and career exploration. Those who perceive higher levels of positive parenting are more likely to develop more challenging career aspirations, which leads them to demonstrated higher level of engagement in career exploration activities.

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