



## Career Consciousness Among The Urban/ Semi-Urban And Rural Students Of West Bengal: A Sociological Study

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### Abstract:

Career includes all roles that one undertakes throughout his/her life - education, training, paid and unpaid work, family, volunteer work, leisure activities and more. Today, the term career is viewed as a continuous process of learning and development. Though the presented Indian studies provide an insight into the career-related experiences of rural youth, yet further research on such issue is warranted. Against this backdrop, the objectives of this study are to explore the career aspirations of the urban/ semi-urban and rural students of West Bengal, especially in areas like Diamond Harbour, Beliaghata and College Street, Kolkata. It also finds out whether these adolescent college students receive support and guidance from their parents for their career aspirations. It attempts to explore whether the adolescent boys and girls have faced any challenge/ challenges while pursuing their career prospects and the ways by which they are able to overcome those challenges. The findings reveal that majority of students are rural and semi-urban who understand career consciousness as earning medium income and whose career goals include pursuing higher studies (Masters and Ph.D) and few of them also dream of becoming ~~an~~ engineers and doctors. Choosing such career prospect would help them to establish a good career goal. However, they also cited few challenges while pursuing their career, like, financial crisis as most students are socio-economically disadvantaged followed by their subjects being tough since most of the books of the subjects they studied were written in English which made it difficult for them to read and understand as they are from rural background. These college going adolescents also responded that their career goal of becoming an academician, engineer or doctor mismatched with their parents', as their parents have a different career goals which would make them more job oriented like starting business, joining the profession of law or becoming an entrepreneur. Such mismatch has been related to career aspirations and career choice theory by Guay and York where the influence of family and peers shape the career decisions of youngsters.

**Keywords:** Career, career planning, youth, urban, semi-urban, social cognitive career theory, rural, students, mixed methodology

### INTRODUCTION:

Nowadays, the term career is viewed as a continuous process of learning and development. Activities that contribute to a career can include training, education, employment, work experience, community activities, enterprise activities, employment, different life roles, voluntary work, and leisure activities (Kaur & Mehr, 2015).

Career planning is the continuous process of thinking about interests, values, skills and preferences, exploring the life, work and learning options available to them. Livelihood somehow carries connotations of rural, low economic-status occupational activities linked to survival. Livelihood is also linked to engagement with traditional occupations. Career, on the other hand, carries overtones of urban, higher-economic-status occupational activities related to high incomes and opportunities for potential realisation. (Kalyanram, Gopalan, & Kamakshi, 2014, p. 394)

UNESCO defines youth as "a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community" (<http://undesadspd.org/Youth.aspx>, United Nations Definition of Youth). Thus, youth refers to a more fluid category than a fixed age-group. The National Youth Policy (NYP) 2014 (Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, GoI) defines youth as those in the ages of 15-to-29 years.

In contemporary times, however, the lines between these concepts are becoming less distinct due to increased rural-urban mobility. Activities related to survival are now prevalent among the urban underprivileged, while opportunities for realization extend to rural areas. In our research with rural, urban and semi-urban youth, we adopt the term "career" to encompass broader meanings, including personal fulfilment in career development (Selvam, 2017).

A recent survey conducted by the Financial Express found that 80% youth in rural India are yet to pursue vocational training which leads to a significant skills gap. The survey further found out that Computer courses stand out as the top choice among those who have undertaken training. Notably, gender disparities exist, with 39% of young women opting for vocational training compared to 33% of males. Regional variations are apparent, with 96% of youth in Lunglei, Mizoram, lacking vocational training, while 44% and 43% in Solapur and Satara (Maharashtra) have pursued such

courses, according to 'The Voices Survey'.

A joint survey conducted by Life Skills Collaborative in partnership with Breakthrough, Quest Alliance and Pratham Education Foundation aims to understand the awareness and perceptions of life skills among youth, parents, schoolteachers/ ITI Trainers and trainers in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions. The survey was conducted across 11 districts in states such as Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand, Haryana, and Mizoram, the survey provides an understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by the youth with regarding life skills education.

The survey reveals a pronounced reliance on smartphones among rural youth, with 92% of those surveyed reporting the use of smartphones, particularly for communication (92%), entertainment (95%), and education (88%). Rural youth, especially older males, leverage smartphones not just for entertainment but also for educational purposes, emphasising the device's multifaceted role in their lives.

It is interesting to note a marked rise in the category of 'learning new things' among young women. Nearly 67% and 77% of 14-18 and 19-22 age group female youth, respectively, reported using their phones to learn new things as compared to 44% and 51% of male youth in the respective age group.

Around 90% of the sampled older youth (19-22 years) had access to mobile phones while only 71% of the younger youth (14-18 years) had access. There is a marked gender gap in access to mobile phones. Among the older youth, for example, just 5.5% of sampled males had no access to mobile phones, but the corresponding proportion among females was three times higher at 16.3%. Survey further revealed that the youth who own a mobile phone are around twice as aware of the term 'life skills' as compared to those without access to a mobile. Similarly, youths who know how to use a computer are around twice as much familiar with the term 'career' than those who don't.

The survey employed a multi-method approach, combining quantitative indicators with qualitative exploration through focus group discussions. A total of 15,856 youth and 13,806 parents were surveyed through questionnaire survey, providing a comprehensive understanding of their views on life skills.

#### **Exposure to news/mass media**

While almost 80% of rural youth engage rarely (49%) or never (31%) with news, older youth (19-22 years) show higher daily exposure (13%) compared to their younger counterparts (6%). However, gender differences in news engagement are marginal. There is an evident gap in news awareness among rural youth, suggesting an opportunity for targeted interventions to improve their access to current affairs and diverse information sources, to increase the adoption of life skills courses.

#### **Life skills awareness and perceptions among youth**

The study explores youth's awareness of life skills, revealing that approximately 4 in 10 youth have heard of the term 'life skills' or '21st-century skills.' Age, education level, and access to digital devices influence awareness. Overall, 41% of youth are aware of life skills or 21st Century Skills, with older individuals (50%) more informed than younger ones (38%). Awareness varies across districts, with Karnal (61%) and Jhajjar (55%) in Haryana showing the highest levels, while Gorakhpur (13%) in Uttar Pradesh has the lowest. There are no gender differences overall, but in Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh), males (42%) are more aware than females (28%), while in Satara (Maharashtra) and Dehradun (Uttarakhand), the reverse is true.

#### **Sources of life skills awareness**

Teacher guidance (65%) and school textbooks (36%) emerge as the primary sources of life skills awareness among rural youth. Variations across age groups highlight the importance of targeted educational strategies. Collaborations with educators and educational materials could enhance youth exposure to life skills concepts. Challenges in learning life skills include a lack of knowledge, materials, and limited discussions at home and school. A systematic approach to life skills education is needed, addressing challenges and tailoring content to the specific needs and perceptions of diverse youth groups.

#### **Life skills awareness among parents**

The surveyed parents, particularly mothers, demonstrate limited awareness of the term life skills. More than one-third of mothers had never been to school, and only 21% had heard of the term life skills. Fathers, with a higher education rate, showed a more significant awareness (over 35%). Parental awareness gaps underline the need for targeted awareness campaigns and inclusive family education programmes.

#### **Career Guidance in rural areas:**

In general, all youth go through phase(s) where they are expected to make important career-related decisions (e.g., the choice of an elective subject in school, which stream to select after Class 10/12, whether to continue schooling or exit education, and where to work). Like any youth, those from underprivileged and rural contexts also tread a similar journey of career decision-making, albeit at times with less conscious deliberation. Since the career prospects of youngsters are not similar to their parents at times, decision-making in career and preparation becomes critical for the youth due to which they need support and guidance to navigate their career journeys (Meher & Kaur, 2015).

However, selected career-related studies have been conducted in India with an emphasis on rural or under privileged groups which revealed that youth's career perceptions are shaped by their family, peer group, community, school and

college, media, career prospects and professional career guidance. (Joshi & Bakshi, 2016).

The rural underprivileged youths not only face career-related challenges that are rural in nature, but also encounters challenges similar to those of any youth in general, and underprivileged youth in particular. The findings of this study can be compared to different studies in literature. Overall, the most salient career-related challenges reported by rural underprivileged youth are lack of career-related guidance, limited/no information, and limited financial resources for further education. These findings also resonate with those of Badage and Karande's (2016) study with rural youth in eight districts of Maharashtra. However, their assertion that the effective use of ICT is the solution for these challenges is limited when considered by itself (Joshi & Bakshi, 2016).

Given the Indian context, it is expected that more girls than boys have reported the challenge of moving out of the village for career development.

#### **LITERATURE REVIEW:**

Since the rural sphere in Bengal aligns with the underprivileged circumstances, it makes literature on career prospects of underprivileged youth relevant for rural youth as well. In this section, selected studies emphasizing on the rural context of the students of India are being reviewed.

Various studies investigated the perceptions of rural youth regarding the impact of their family, community, peers, educational institutions and professional career guidance service on their career choices. The findings were compared across gender, social status, urban/ rural residence which revealed noteworthy differences. Both rural and urban underprivileged youth regard family socio-economic status as most important for their career choices while factors like education and media were considered least important. In comparison with urban youth, rural youngsters regarded factors like family, community, gender, peers, access to education, exposure to different forms of mass media like books, newspapers, articles and internet like google as highly influential in their career choices. (Bakshi and Maru, 2016).

The study conducted by Sangma and Arulmani (2013) explored the rural youth's career preparation status, their academic achievement motivation levels from the high schools of East Khasi Hill district of Meghalaya. The study revealed that the rural high school students expressed negative career beliefs coupled with lower achievement motivation from their family and peers as compared to urban counterparts. It also emphasized on the need to examine career preparation status of rural students along with their lower achievement motivation levels (Joshi & Bakshi, 2016).

Further, the study conducted by Badage and Karande (2016) explored the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for career development of rural youth. Their study in Uttar Pradesh summarized that ICT is underutilized in the career development of rural youth due to the challenge of digital divide which divides the population between the haves and have nots in terms of their access and use of technology due to the poor socio-economic background of rural youngsters. The study also proposed new future directions by emphasizing on the role of ICT in providing career guidance to rural youth.

#### **Theoretical overview:**

**Social Cognitive Career Theory:** This theory integrates academic and career related interests of students. It extends the Social Cognitive Theory to academic and career behavior. (Ryan, et.al. 2008) Social Cognitive Theory has a different perspective on motivation which is relevant to learning. (Lent, et.al. 2000) which explains a framework of Social Cognitive Career Theory that is inclusive of academic interest, preference, and performance. The framework explains the relevance of academic interests to career, development of career choices and actions towards choices. The Social Cognitive Career Theory has reflection on three aspects which are self efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals. Self-efficacy refers the beliefs of people on their ability to accomplish the necessary actions for a given task (Atagi, 2002). These beliefs get changed based on interactions with other people, environment, and one's own behavior. Outcome expectations are beliefs related to the consequences of performing a specific behavior. Extrinsic reinforcement, self-directed consequences and basic task understanding can be tied to outcome expectations. These expectations are influenced by self- efficacy (Lent, et.al. 2000). Finally, goal refers to success and outcome of actions (Shuck, et.al. 2008). A goal is defined as the decision to begin a particular activity or future plan (Gibbons, et.al. 2004).

**Self Determination Theory and Career Decision:** Self Determination Theory is an approach to human motivation. It explains the importance of three elements, which are psychological needs, namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

**Career Aspirations and Career Choices:** Guay, et al. (2003) found a negative relation between self-efficacy in career decision making and career indecision. Autonomy and control- orientations are positively related to self-exploration and career decision-making. It is also found that career decision making self-efficacy is more strongly associated with career indecision than career decision-making autonomy. York (2008) found that parents and peers behaviors strongly influence career decision making. Thus exercising theories and findings of various studies helped the present study to formulate concept and objectives.

#### **NATURE AND SCOPE OF RESEARCH:**

**The theme of the present paper explores the following objectives:**

a. It finds out the meaning of career consciousness among the rural students of West Bengal in selected areas/

localities.

b. It explores the career aspirations of the rural students of West Bengal, especially in areas like Diamond Harbour, Barasat and Hadia district.

c. It also finds out whether these adolescent college students receive support and guidance from their parents for their career aspirations.

d. It also attempts to explore whether the career goals of these college goers match/ mismatch with that of their parents along with the reasons behind it.

e. It dwells upon whether the adolescent boys and girls have faced any challenge/ challenges while pursuing their career prospect along with the ways by which they are able to overcome those challenges.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

The present research has been conducted by using Survey method (Questionnaire) amongst 50 male and female rural under-graduate college students aged within 19-25 years residing in Diamond Harbour, Barasat, Hadia towns of West Bengal. The sampling techniques used are Non-Probability Purposive and Snowball sampling techniques. Purposive sampling has been used as it is based on researcher’s judgement and Snowball sampling is used as it is chain based sampling where research continues until the total number of respondents are met and research criteria is fulfilled.

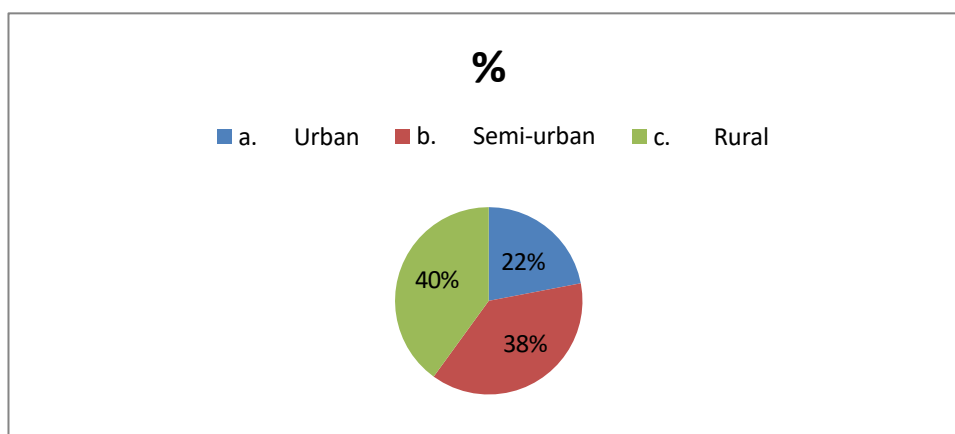
**FINDINGS:**

**DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS:**

<b>AGE</b>	19-25 years
<b>GENDER</b>	25 male and 25 female students
<b>FAMILY TYPE</b>	Nuclear family.
<b>INCOME GROUP</b>	Majority students are from middle and low income group.
<b>CLASS OF STUDY</b>	Most students are pursuing graduation in government colleges and universities.
<b>NAME OF COLLEGE</b>	Kanyashree College, Behala, Vedanta College, Belehata, The Neotia University, Diamond Harbour, Haldia Government College, Haldia, Calcutta University, Kolkata, West Bengal.

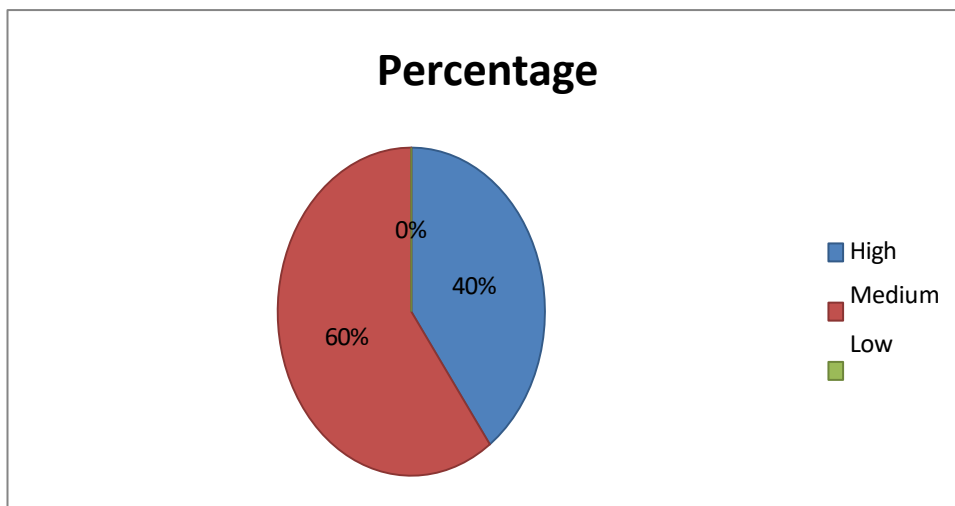
**Table 1. WHETHER STUDENTS ARE URBAN/ SEMI-URBAN/ RURAL:**

Urban/ Semi-Urban/ Rural	%
a. Urban	22
b. Semi-urban	38
c. Rural	40
Total	100



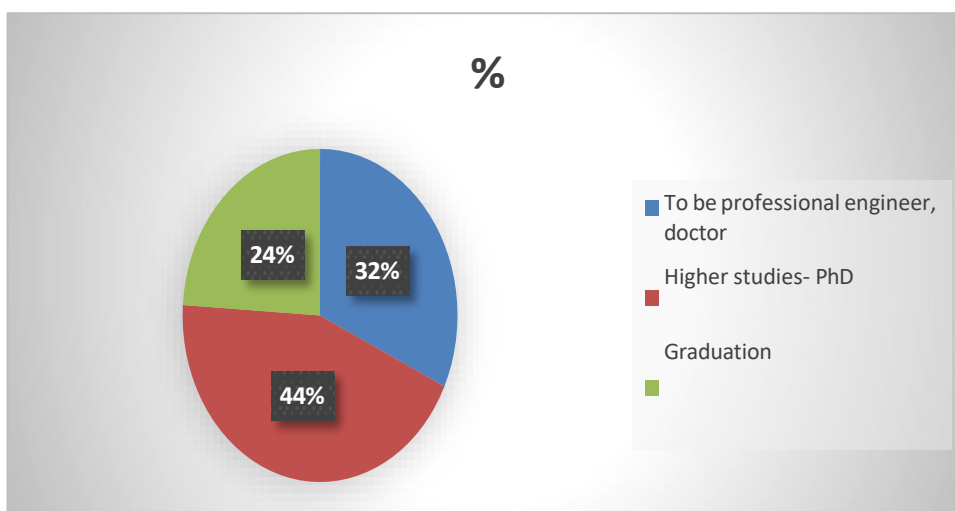
**Table 2. UNDERSTANDING OF CAREER CONSCIOUSNESS AMONG RURAL STUDENTS:**

What is your understanding of career consciousness?	%
High	40%
Medium	60%
Low	0
Total	100



**Table 3. REGARDING CAREER GOAL OF STUDENTS:**

CAREER GOALS OF STUDENTS	%
To be professional engineer, doctor	32%
Higher studies- PhD	44%
Graduation	24%
Total	100

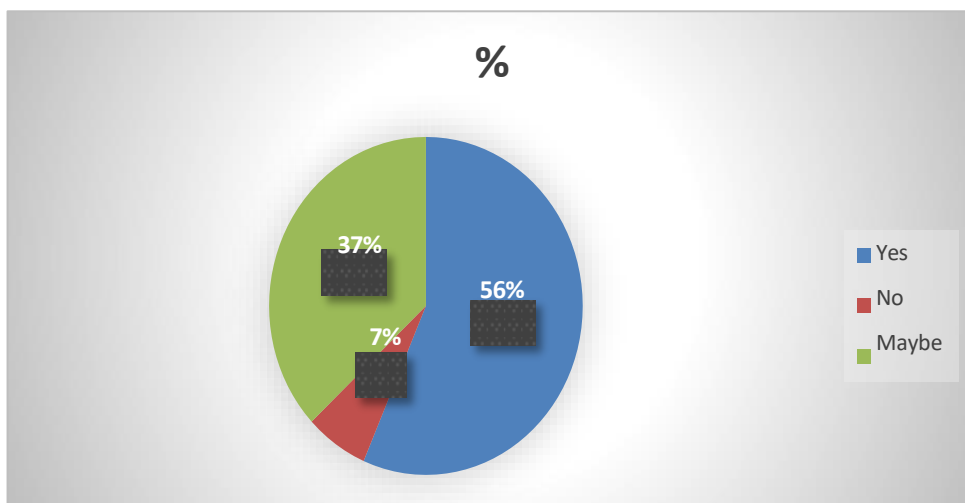


**Table 4. CAREER PROSPECT OF STUDENTS:**

What career prospect you like to choose After XII <sup>th</sup> standard?	Percentage (%)
Engineer	16.3
Medical profession	20.4
Lawyer	6.54
Entrepreneur	30.6
Pharmacist	6.54
Fashion designer	6.54
Manager	6.54
Doctor	6.54
Total	100

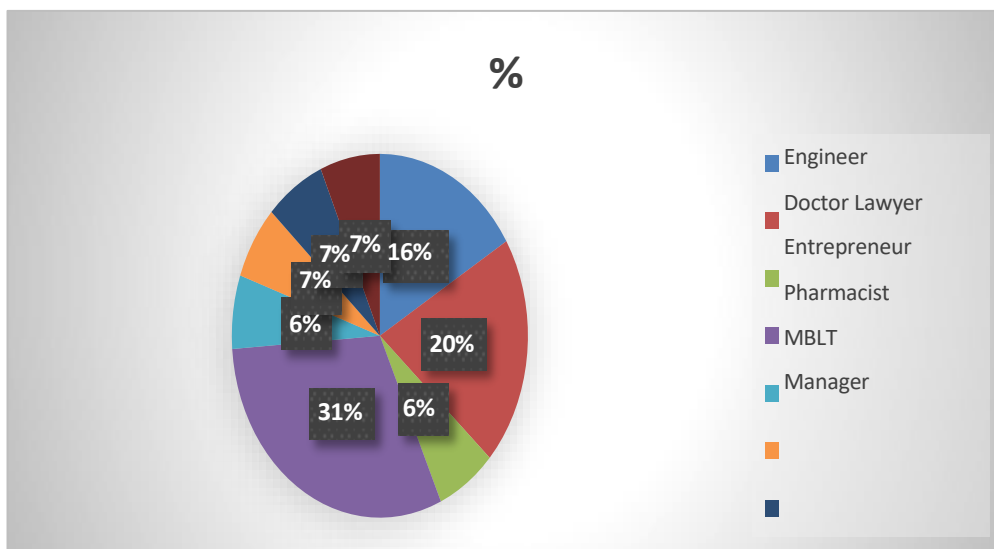
**Table 5. WHETHER THE CHOSEN CAREER PROSPECT WOULD PROVIDE A LUCRATIVE JOB IN FUTURE:**

Do you think the career prospect chosen by You will provide a lucrative job in future?	%
Yes	56.5
No	6.5
Maybe	37
Total	100



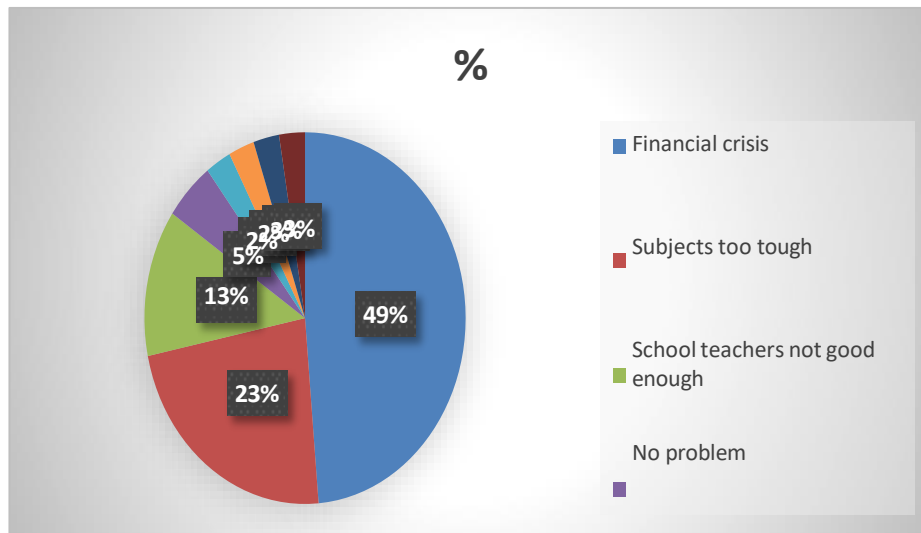
**Table 5. WHETHER THE CHOSEN CAREER PROSPECT WOULD PROVIDE A LUCRATIVE JOB IN FUTURE:**

Have you faced any challenges while pursuing your career prospect?	%
Yes	62.5
No	20.8
Maybe	16.7
Total	100



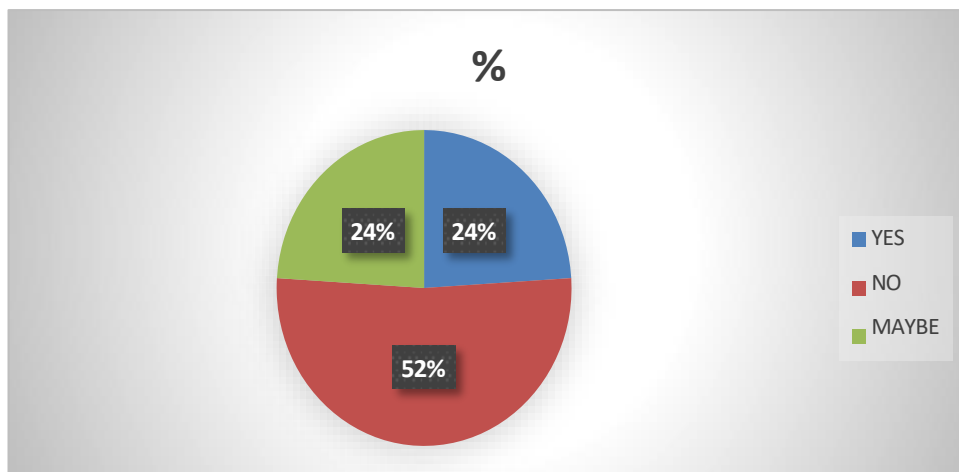
**Table 6. TYPES OF CHALLENGES FACED BY STUDENTS:**

If yes, what kind of challenges you have faced?	%
Financial crisis	48.7
Subjects too tough	23.1
School teachers not good enough	12.8
No problem	5.1
I was shy initially but now im constantly improving myself	2.6
Competitive exam	2.6
Family never understood the matter of my field of study so they always oppose.	2.6
Nothing	2.6
Total	100



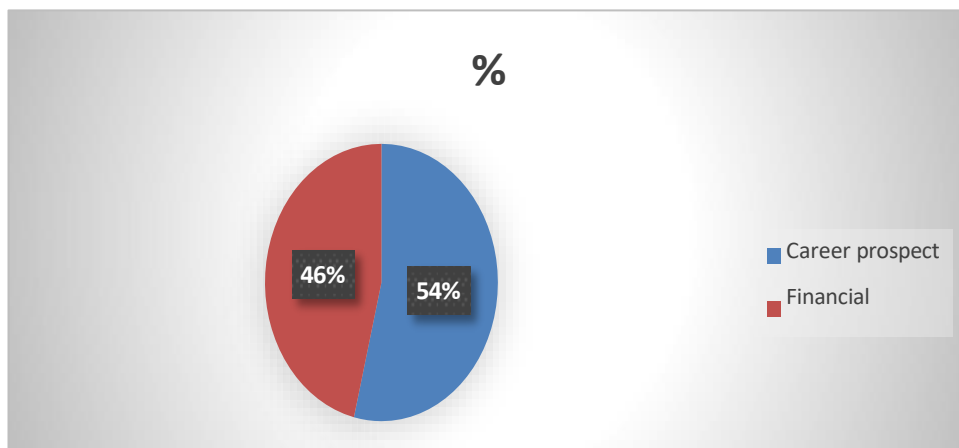
**Table 7. CAREER GOAL MISMATCH WITH PARENTS:**

Does your career goal mismatch with that of your parents?	%
YES	24%
NO	52%
MAYBE	24%
Total	100



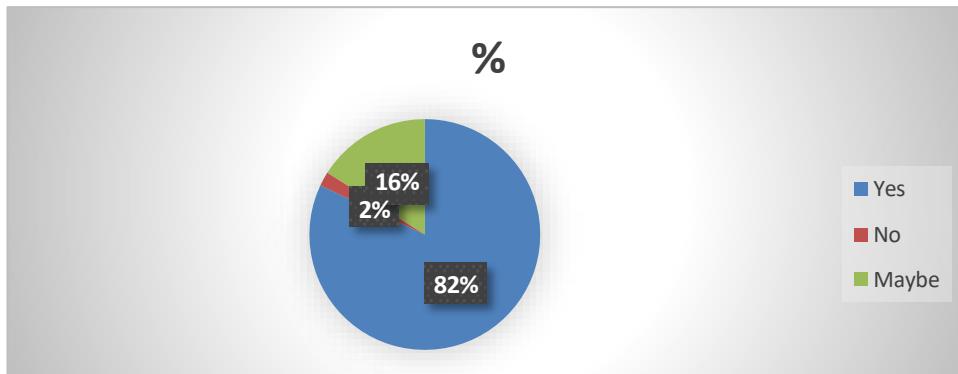
**Table 8. REASONS BEHIND CAREER MISMATCH:**

If yes, what is the reason behind the mismatch?	%
Career prospect	54
Financial	46
Total	100



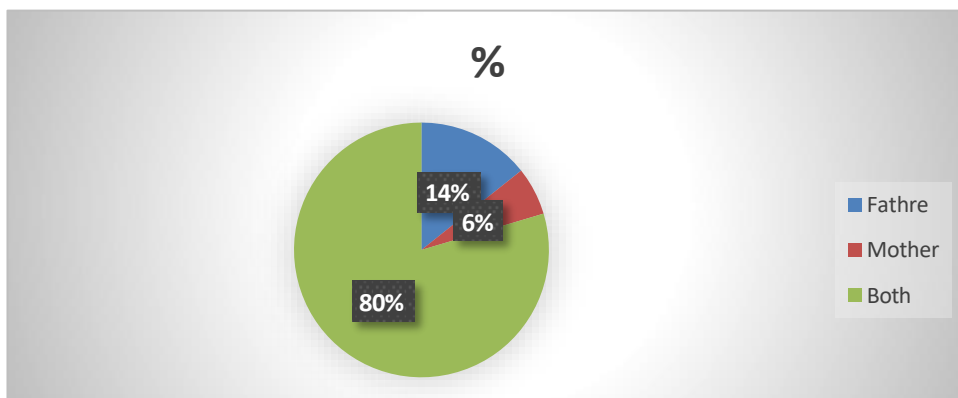
**Table 9. WHETHER STUDENTS RECEIVE SUPPORT FROM FAMILY:**

Do you get support from your family for your chosen career prospect?	%
Yes	82%
No	2%
Maybe	16%
Total	100



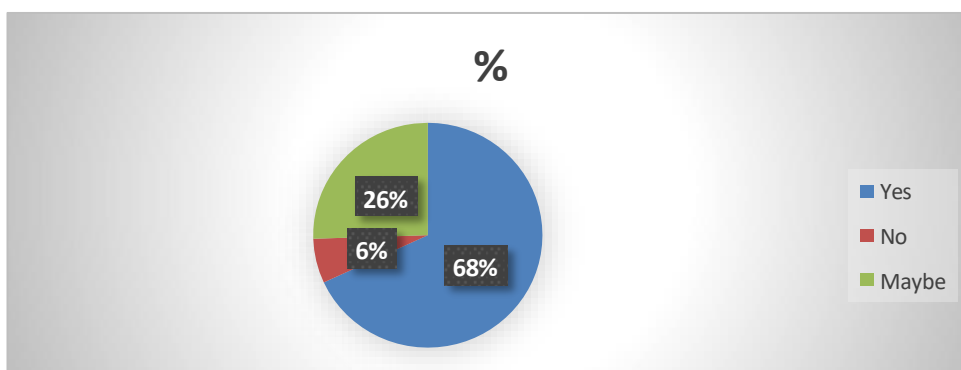
**Table 10. WHICH PARENT/ PARENTS SUPPORT THEM?**

If yes, who between your parents support you most?	%
Father	14.3
Mother	6.1
Both	79.6
Total	100



**Table 11. WHETHER STUDENTS ARE AWARE ABOUT PRESENT JOB SCENARIO:**

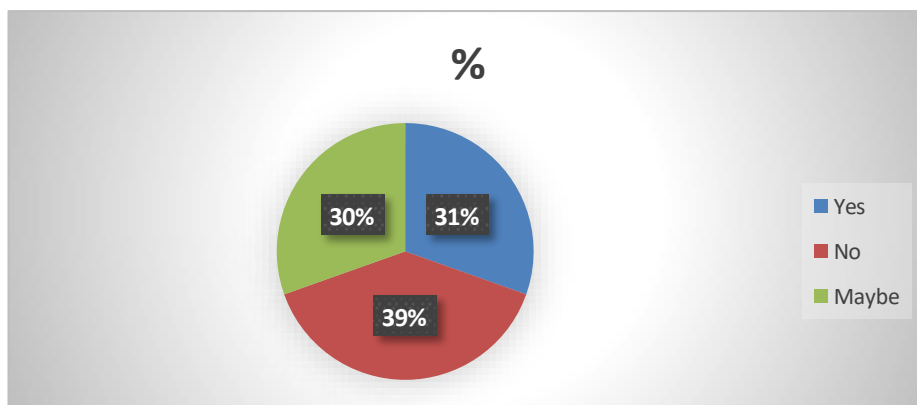
Are you aware about the present market scenario regarding the job prospects?	%
Yes	68.1
No	6.4
Maybe	25.5
Total	100





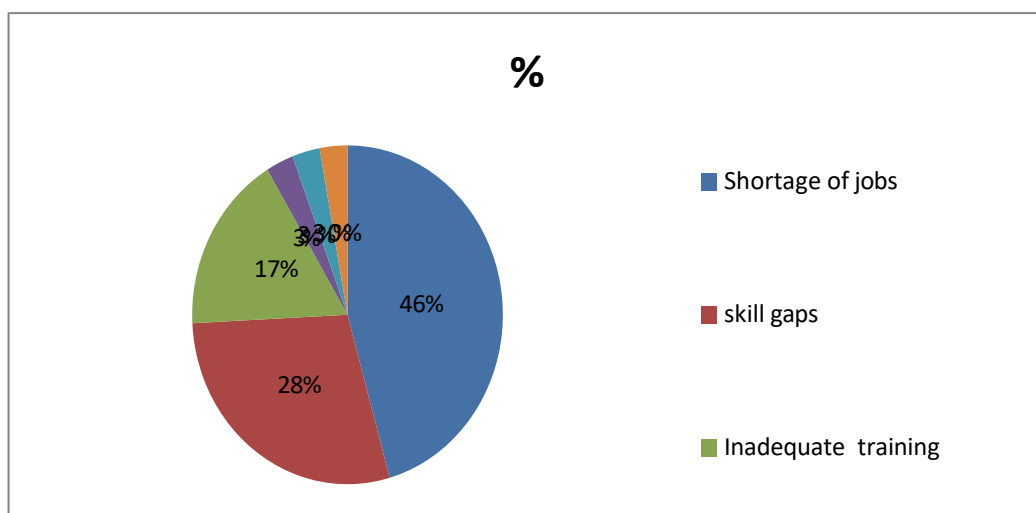
**Table 12. WHETHER PRESENT JOB SCENARIO IS ENOUGH TO SUPPORT THE CAREER PROSPECT OF YOUNGSTERS:**

Do you think the present job scenario in market is enough to support the career prospects of youngsters like you?	%
Yes	30.4
No	39.1
Maybe	30.4
Total	100



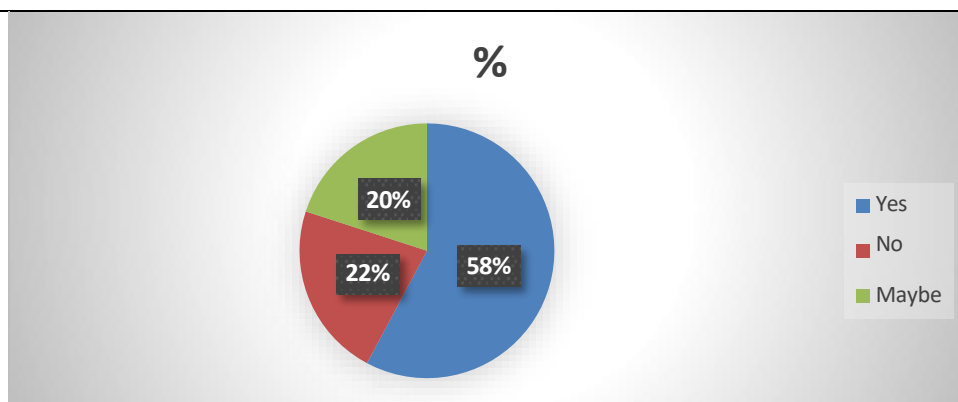
**Table 13. PROBLEMS THAT THE PRESENT JOB SCENARIO IS FACING IN MARKET AND SOCIETY:**

If no, what according to you are the problems that the present job scenario is facing in the market and society?	%
shortage of jobs	44.4
skill gaps	27.8
inadequate training	16.7
All of the above	2.8
Skills with knowledge are most important	2.8
All of the above are responsible including stereotype	2.8
Total	100



**Table 14. MEASURES TO IMPROVE JOB MARKET IN SOCIETY:**

Are you aware of any measure to improve the job market in present society?	%
Yes	57.8
No	22.2
Maybe	20
Total	100



### Conclusion:

The findings reveal that majority of students are rural and semi-urban who defined career consciousness defines earning medium income and whose career goals include pursuing higher studies (Ph.D) or becoming professionals like, engineers and doctors. They summarized that choosing such career prospect would help them to establish a good career goal which has been related with Social Cognitive and Self-Determination theory where outcome expectations are beliefs related to the consequences of performing a specific behavior. Extrinsic reinforcement, self-directed consequences and basic task understanding can be tied to outcome expectations. These expectations are influenced by self-efficacy (Lent, et.al. 2000). However, they also cited few challenges while pursuing their career like financial crisis as most students are socio-economically disadvantaged followed by their subjects being tough since most of the books of the subjects they studied were written in English which made it difficult for them to read and understand as they are from rural background and without enough exposure to English. These college going adolescents also responded that their career goal of becoming an academician, engineer or doctor mismatched with their parents as their parents have a different career goal which would make them more job oriented like starting business, joining the profession of labor becoming an entrepreneur. Such mismatch has been related with Career aspirations and career choice theory by Guay and York where the influence of family and peers shape the career decisions of youngsters. They summarized that the present job scenario is not enough to help them to develop good career due to reasons like shortage of jobs which is created by economic recession (post Covid-19 impact) followed by skill gap as in most organization, skilled candidates are hardly recruited but semi-skilled or low skilled employees are recruited due to personal contacts, social capital of candidates. They are also aware about the measures by which job market can be improved in society like providing training to candidates followed by practice, field-oriented and application-based knowledge along with internship to students in different corporate firms, NGOs provided by their respective colleges and universities.

This shows that the study focuses on the recent job scenario with empirical evidence about career aspiration among the rural, semi-urban and urban students of Kolkata, West Bengal. The study has been successful in analyzing the career aspiration of adolescents along with the support from their parents and career mismatch with their parents. The facts and figures used in the study depict the challenges faced by the youth while pursuing such career prospects followed by the ways by which the job market can be improved in society. Thus, the present research fulfils the objectives and other relevant information involved. The findings of the study would not only be fruitful for youngsters and organizations which works on career development of students, but it would also provide new avenues and career paths for further research in the field of career and its development among youngsters. The Governments, both states as well as central should develop and come out with appropriate schemes to identify and support the young rural talents to fit into appropriate profession and help build the nation.

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