

Self-aspiration, perceived other' aspirations and academic performance among rural adolescents

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ABSTRACT

Aspirations place a critical influence on the behaviors and academic outcomes of adolescents. The present study examines the role of students' self-aspirations and perceived other' aspirations on academic achievement among rural adolescents. A convenient sample of 200 students (Males=100, Females=100) in the age group 15 to 18 years was recruited for this study from a rural public school located in south India. The participants completed self-report measures of students' self-aspirations, and others' aspirations for them in terms of perceived parents' aspirations, perceived teachers' aspirations and perceived friends' aspirations. The academic performance of the students was taken from school records. The self-aspirations and perceived others' aspirations measured pertained to career aspiration. Analysis of variance was used to examine gender differences in self-aspirations and perceived others' aspirations. Multiple regression was used to examine the relationship between aspirations of self, parents, teachers, and friends on the one hand and academic performance on the other. The findings of the study revealed that females have higher self-aspirations, perceived parents' and teachers' aspirations, and are better in academic achievement than males. Being a male negatively predicted self-aspiration, i.e., males have lower aspirations than females. Both parents' aspirations and teachers' aspirations positively predicted students' self-aspiration. Friends' aspiration did not significantly predict students' self-aspiration. Gender and not self-aspirations emerged as a significant predictor of academic achievement; Being a male negatively predicted academic achievement. The findings have implications for research, policy, and practice in the area of youth development.

Keywords: *Self-aspiration, Aspirations, Academic Performance, Rural Adolescents*

As per the 2011 Census of India, nearly 83.3 crore Indians reside in rural areas, and 37.7 crores reside in urban areas. A wide degree of diversity in development between the rural and urban areas is reported, with rural areas showing very little progress in development (Deaton & Dreze, 2002; Pingali & Aiyar, 2018). The development of the country cannot be achieved unless the rural sector gets the attention it rightly deserves. Leaving the rural sector

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underdeveloped can stand as a major challenge to the progress of the country (Ranvir, 2019). Hence, studying the rural population and improving their quality of life will aid in bringing the social and economic balance in the country. Academic achievement is higher in high facility urban schools compared to low facility rural schools (Srivastava & Joshi, 2011). Some studies indicate that urban students have higher self-esteem compared to rural students (Alam, 2013; Farid & Akhtar, 2013). On the other hand, there is a considerable body of literature reporting that rural students perform poorly on standardized tests of educational achievement compared to urban students (Fan & Chen, 1998; Reeves & Bylund, 2005; Joshi & Srivastava, 2009). The literacy rate in rural areas was 64.7% compared to 79.5% in urban areas (Ministry of Human Resource and Development, 2018). Further, in rural areas, the literacy rate among females is 56.8%, and among males is 72.3%, while in urban areas it is 74.8% among females and 83.7% among males.

Academic achievement refers to the knowledge achieved or skills developed in academics that is reflected by test scores or by marks obtained by school students after evaluation by their teachers (Carter's dictionary of education, 1969). It is the quality and quantity of learning attained in the subject of study or a group of subjects, and the amount of information and technique developed as a result of this learning. Many rural adolescents in India fail to develop important social and emotional competencies due to lack of adequate resources in their environment. They are confused and anxious regarding the biological, psychological, and social challenges they confront in their lives (Dryfoos, 1990). The socio-emotional adjustment among rural adolescents is low when compared to urban students, and it has a strong influence on academic outcomes (Gul, 2015). Due to factors like limited resources, curricular options, and teacher shortages, rural youth are often less prepared than non-rural youth for the transition to work or post-secondary education (Provasnik, KwealRamani, Coleman, Gilbertson, Herring, & Xie, 2007). There is a considerable body of literature stating that the academic performance of rural students is lower when compared with their urban counterparts (Fan & Chen, 1999; Young, 1998; McCracken & Barcinas, 1991).

Poor academic performance of children is a big concern among parents and teachers in today's competitive world. It is reported that around 20% of school children have scholastic backwardness (Karande & Kulkarni, 2005). Academic achievement is influenced by school level and family level factors such as socioeconomic status, parental involvement, teaching style, and school atmosphere (Sirin, 2005; Marchant, Paulson, & Rothlisberg, 2001). Student's effort, parent-child relationship, academic engagement, and associations with positive peers are some of the important factors that predict student's achievement (Stewart, 2008). Factors such as intelligence, personality, self-efficacy, and motivation also affect academic achievement (Laidra, Pullmann, & Allik, 2007; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Singh, Granville, & Dika, 2002). Academic achievement was found to have a significant effect on career aspirations (Danziger, 1983).

During the adolescent period, education and occupation were the most prominent domains of identity exploration (Kalakoski & Nurmi, 1998). Occupational aspiration was found to be an important factor in predicting adolescent's career development and career-related behavior in the future (Schoon & Parsons, 2002; Rojewski, 2005). Studies show that an individual's self-efficacy and academic achievement are important predictors of career aspiration (Bandura et al., 1996; Danziger, 1983).

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Studies show that there is a close relationship between parents' perceptions of their children's academic achievement and adolescents' self-concepts of such achievements (Alexander, Entwisle, & Bedinger, 1994). Children's educational expectations and academic performance are influenced by the expectations their parents hold for them (Halle, Kurtz-Costes, & Mahoney, 1997). Parents who held high expectations for their children and provided them with nurturing support were perceived by the children to have an important influence on their motivation and achievements (Urduan, Solek, & Schoenfelder, 2007).

Like parents, teachers are viewed as key players and role models who shape the career path that young people pursue (Barnett, 2007). Perceived teacher support has a significant effect on career decision-making, self-efficacy, vocational outcome, expectations, and career optimism (Metheny, McWhirter, & O'Neil, 2008; Garcia, Restubog, Bordia, Bordia, & Roxas, 2015). Instrumental school support has a direct effect on vocational expectations (Deimer, 2007). Adolescents refer to their peers for social decision making (Bednar & Fisher, 2003). Studies showed that peers play a significant role in shaping career choice and intensification of career exploration (Bojuwoye & Mbanjwa 2006; Kracke, 2002). Perceived peer relationship was also found to be associated with achievement motivation of students (Nelson & DeBacker, 2008).

Individual level, family level, and school level factors play a key role in rural student's career aspirations (Young, Fraser & Woolnough, 1997). McCracken and Odell (1998) found that rural parents have higher educational expectations for their children than their own educational attainments. Rural students are found to rely more on parents and teachers for career decision making in comparison to their urban counterparts (Osoro, Amundson, & Borgen, 2000). School valuing and school belongingness were important factors predicting academic achievement and aspirations in rural adolescents (Irvin, Meece, Byun, Farmer, Hutchins, 2011). Peer group has a very crucial influence on aspiration of rural youth since rural peer groups are homogenous and more stable (Picou & Carter, 1976).

Aspirations are considered to be an expression of individuals' ideal career goals (Rojewski, 2005). The theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) recognizes two aspects of aspiration, namely, belief and behavior. The belief aspect of aspiration refers to an individual's perceived or expected responses to the achievement of aspiration. The behavior aspect of aspiration refers to an individual's observable responses towards the achievement of aspiration. The theory of planned behavior has been widely used to explain individual behavior in a variety of contexts. The theory of planned behavior proposes that the proximal predictors of behavior are intention to perform that behavior, and the extent to which individuals believe that the behavior in question is under their control, i.e., perceived behavioral control. Perceived behavioral control influences behavior, both directly and indirectly, through intentions; in turn, the intentions are influenced by attitude. The intentions are also influenced by subjective norms, which reflects a person's perception of significant others' evaluation of the behavior, weighted by the extent to which the person wishes to comply with the significant others' wishes. The overall theory of planned behavior has undoubtedly been quite successful in explaining variance in intention and behavior (Sutton, 1998). More recent work on the theory of planned behavior suggests that it may also help in understanding vocational and career choices (Hooft, Born, Taris, & Flier, 2006).

Education gives a new and refined life for human beings. It develops thinking and reasoning power. Educational aspiration is considered as a significant factor that can have an effect on academic achievement. Studies indicate that adolescents' educational aspirations are strongly

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linked to future educational attainment, occupational aspirations, and career choices (Bandura, 1986; Bandura et al., 1996; Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994; Rojewski, 1999). Career aspiration is an individuals' sense of direction toward a desired career goal under optimal conditions. A number of studies have examined the relationship between career aspiration and academic performance. The studies that examined the relationship between test achievement and career aspiration found that these two variables were weakly correlated (Rojewski & Yang, 1997; Byrns, 1939; Moser, 1949).

Rural adolescents expressed more worry and lower motivation towards further education and ambitious aspiration (Hektner, 1994). It is found that the breadth of curricular and extracurricular offerings in rural schools was also found to be low (McCracken & Barcinas, 1991). Hence improving the school facilities and students' aspirations will prepare the rural youth by honing their skills for their future occupational roles, which can have an impact on the country's economy. Enhancing the aspirations of rural adolescents will lead to the development of India, which is predominantly a rural nation.

The present study aimed at investigating the gender differences among rural students on self-aspirations, perceived parents' aspirations, perceived teachers' aspirations, and perceived peer aspirations. In addition, the study also examined the predictors of self-aspirations among rural adolescent students in addition to investigating how aspirations predicted academic achievement among them. The findings of this study will be of immense value to educators and counselors who work with rural youth and also in policy formulation for development.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample for this study consisted of 200 students (Males = 100, Females = 100) in the age range of 15 - 18 years ($M = 16.58$, $SD = 0.86$). The sample was recruited from a rural public higher secondary school in a southern state of India. The majority of the participants in the sample were Muslims (72.5%) and belonged to backward class (80%). The majority of parents (75.2% of fathers and 78.6% of mothers) had a high school level of education. Most of the fathers (83.8%) had blue-collar jobs, and most of the mothers (95.7%) were unemployed.

Instruments

- 1. Student's aspiration scale.** This scale, adapted from the parental aspiration scale (Gayotri, 2015), purports to measure students' career aspirations. The scale consists of 25 items distributed across two subscales, namely, belief subscale and behavior subscale. The belief subscale was used to measure the beliefs held by the subjects related to their career aspirations. It consisted of 12 items. Behavior subscale was used to measure student's overt responses towards the achievement of career aspirations. It consisted of 13 items. The respondents' self-aspiration score was obtained by adding the scores they obtain on belief subscale and behavior subscale. Students responded using a five-point Likert scale ($1 = strongly disagree$; $2 = disagree$; $3 = neutral$; $4 = agree$; $5 = strongly agree$). The reliability of the student's aspiration scale was 0.80. The reliability of the belief subscale and behavior subscale on the present sample was found to be 0.56 and 0.79, respectively. Since the reliability of the belief subscale was not adequate, the item-sum correlations were analyzed, and one item (Item 7) that had poor item-sum correlation was removed. The belief subscale that was finally used in the study hence had 11 items, and the Cronbach's alpha of this version of the subscale

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was 0.59. The reliability of the student's aspiration scale with the final 24 items on the present sample was found to be 0.81.

2. **Perceived parental aspiration scale.** This scale was adapted from the parental aspiration scale (Gayotri, 2015). The scale measures perceived parental career aspiration as reported by the adolescent students. The scale consisted of 25 items distributed across two subscales, viz., belief subscale, and behavior subscale. The belief subscale with 12 items measured perceived parental beliefs regarding career aspiration. The behavior subscale with 13 items measured perceived parental overt responses towards the achievement of aspiration. Perceived parental aspiration score was obtained by adding the scores obtained by a respondent on belief subscale and behavior subscale. Students responded using a five-point Likert scale (*1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree*). The scale was found to have a reliability of 0.86 on the sample of the present study. The reliability of the belief subscale was 0.73, and the reliability of the behavior subscale was 0.86 on the present sample.
3. **Perceived friends' aspiration scale.** This scale was adapted from the parental aspiration scale (Gayotri, 2015). The scale consisted of 25 items distributed across two subscales, namely, belief subscale and behavior subscale. The belief subscale with 12 items measured perceived friends' responses towards the achievement of aspiration. The behavior subscale with 13 items measured perceived friends' overt responses towards the achievement of aspiration. Perceived friends' aspiration score was obtained by adding the scores obtained by the respondent on belief subscale and behavior subscale. Students responded using a five-point Likert scale (*1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree*). The scale was found to have a reliability of 0.90 on the sample of the present study. The reliability of the belief subscale was 0.83, and the reliability of the behavior subscale was 0.86 on the present sample.
4. **Perceived teachers' aspiration scale.** This scale was adapted from the parental aspiration scale (Gayotri, 2015). The scale consisted of 25 items with two subscales, namely, belief subscale and behavior subscale. The belief subscale with 12 items measured perceived teachers' responses towards the achievement of aspiration. The behavior subscale with 13 items measured perceived teachers' overt responses to the achievement of aspiration. Perceived teachers' aspiration score was obtained by adding the scores obtained by the respondent on belief subscale and behavior subscale. Students responded using a five-point Likert scale (*1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree*). The scale was found to have a reliability of 0.91 on the present sample. The reliability of the belief subscale and behavior subscale on the present sample was found to be 0.85 and 0.88, respectively.

The record of the marks of students in the midterm examination was taken as an index of academic performance and was obtained from the school records.

Procedure

The questionnaires were distributed to higher secondary students of a rural public school in a southern state of India, after getting institutional approval from the school principal to carry out the study in the school. Before administration, the students were provided brief information about the aim of the study and were assured confidentiality. Written informed consent was obtained from the participants. Questionnaires were group administered to intact groups of students in their classrooms during the working hours of the school.

RESULTS

Analysis of variance was used to examine gender differences in self-aspiration and other aspirations. Multiple regression was used to determine predictors of student's self-aspiration and academic achievement.

Table 1. ANOVA comparing girls (n =100) and boys (n =100) on self-aspiration and other aspirations

Variables	Group	Mean	SD	F	p
Student Belief	Female	44.72	4.33	5.50	0.02
	Male	43.18	4.94		
	Total	43.95	4.94		
Student Behavior	Female	44.73	7.74	32.10	0.001
	Male	38.62	7.51		
	Total	41.68	7.63		
Perceived Parent Belief	Female	43.93	6.30	10.39	0.001
	Male	40.84	7.22		
	Total	42.39	6.76		
Perceived Parent Behavior	Female	41.81	10.00	3.43	0.07
	Male	39.35	10.00		
	Total	40.58	10.00		
Perceived Teacher Belief	Female	33.79	7.8	7.59	0.01
	Male	30.29	10.00		
	Total	32.04	9.00		
Perceived Teacher Behavior	Female	38.90	7.95	26.62	0.001
	Male	31.77	11.31		
	Total	35.34	9.63		
Perceived Friend Belief	Female	39.00	4.33	0.55	0.46
	Male	38.09	4.33		
	Total	38.55	4.33		
Perceived Friend Behavior	Female	44.36	4.33	0.71	0.40
	Male	43.16	4.33		
	Total	43.76	4.33		

One-way ANOVA was carried out to study gender difference in self and other aspirations. There was a significant effect of gender on belief aspect of self-aspiration, $F(1,198) = 5.50$, $p = 0.02$, with females ($M = 44.72$, $SD = 4.33$) having higher belief aspect of self-aspiration than males ($M = 43.18$, $SD = 4.94$). There was also significant effect of gender on behaviour aspect of self-aspiration, $F(1,198) = 32.10$, $p = 0.001$, with females ($M = 44.73$, $SD = 7.74$) having higher behaviour aspect of self-aspiration than males ($M = 38.62$, $SD = 7.51$).

Also, there was a significant effect of gender on perceived parental belief, $F(1,198) = 10.39$, $p = 0.001$, with females ($M = 43.93$, $SD = 6.30$) having higher perceived parental belief than males ($M = 40.84$, $SD = 7.22$). There was also significant effect of gender on perceived teachers' belief, $F(1,198) = 7.59$, $p = 0.01$, with females ($M = 33.79$, $SD = 7.8$) having higher perceived teachers' belief than males ($M = 30.29$, $SD = 10.00$). There was a significant effect of gender on perceived teachers' behavior, $F(1,198) = 26.62$, $p = 0.001$, with females ($M = 38.90$, $SD = 7.95$) having higher perceived teachers' behavior than males ($M = 31.77$, $SD = 11.31$). There was no significant effect of gender on perceived parental behavior, perceived friends belief and perceived friends behavior.

Table 2. Predictors of students' self-aspiration

Variables	Unstd. Coeff		Std. Coeff Beta	t	Sig.
	B	SE			
Gender	-4.99	1.48	-0.2	-3.38	0.001
Parents' Aspiration	0.18	0.05	0.2	3.32	0.001
Teachers' Aspiration	0.14	0.04	0.2	3.22	0.001
Friends' Aspiration	0.07	0.04	0.1	1.46	0.15

$R^2 = 0.260$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.245$, $F(4,194) = 17.06$, $p < 0.001$

Multiple regression analysis was carried out to find the predictors of student's self-aspiration. Gender, parents' aspiration and teachers' aspiration ($R^2 = 0.260$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.245$, $F(4,194) = 17.06$, $p < 0.001$) significantly predicted student's self-aspiration. Gender ($\beta = -0.2$, $p < 0.001$) emerged to be a negative predictor of student's self-aspiration. Being a male negatively predicted self-aspiration i.e. males have lower self-aspirations than females. Both parents' aspiration ($\beta = 0.2$, $p < 0.001$) and teachers' aspiration ($\beta = 0.2$, $p < 0.001$) emerged to be positive predictors of student's self-aspiration. Friends' aspiration did not significantly predicted student's self-aspiration.

Table 3. Student's self-aspiration as a predictor of academic achievement

Variables	Unstd. Coeff		Std. Coeff. Beta	t	Sig.
	B	SE			
Gender	-25.5	2.2	-0.68	-11.84	0.001
Belief aspect of student's self-aspiration	-0.2	0.2	-0.05	-0.76	0.45
Behavior aspect of student's self-aspiration	-0.1	0.2	-0.05	-0.75	0.45

$R^2 = 0.44$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.43$, $F(3,196) = 50.96$, $p < 0.001$

Multiple regression was carried out to examine if students' career self-aspirations predict academic achievement. Only gender ($R^2 = 0.44$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.43$, $F(3,196) = 50.96$, $p < 0.001$) significantly predicted academic achievement. Gender ($\beta = -0.68$, $p < 0.001$) emerged to be a negative predictor of academic achievement. Being a male negatively predicted academic achievement, i.e., males have lower academic achievement than females. Both student's belief aspect of self-aspiration ($\beta = -0.05$, $p < 0.45$) and student's behavior aspect of self-aspiration ($\beta = -0.05$, $p < 0.45$) were not found to be significant predictors of academic achievement.

DISCUSSION

In this study, females were found to be significantly higher than males on belief and behavior aspects of self-aspiration. It should be noted that the self-aspirations and others' aspirations measured in this study were pertaining to career. This finding is in line with another study that reported that young rural women maintained higher career aspirations than their male counterparts (Agger, Meece, & Byun, 2018; Apostol & Bilden, 1991; Haller & Vickler, 1993; McCracken & Odell, 1998). Girls systematically report more positive educational attitudes and aspirations than boys (Rampino & Taylor, 2013). Patton and Creed (2007) on the other hand reported that male students tend to hold higher aspirations for education level and position in the labor force, while other studies have found that girls are more likely to hold higher aspirations than boys (Anisef, Sweet, Plickert & Tom-kum, 2001;

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Clift & Vaughan 1997; Gutman & Akerman, 2008; Mau & Bikos, 2000; Perry, Przybysz, & Al-Sheikh, 2009). In a traditional patriarchal society like the one in India, female adolescents are prescribed several restrictions while more autonomy is provided for male adolescents. Perhaps, adolescent girls respond to such cultural norms that set low expectations from them by aspiring higher than their male counterparts. Career aspirations in adolescent girls can be seen as reflecting a need for autonomy and viewing career as empowerment.

Adolescent girls were higher than boys on perceived parental belief in this study. This is in line with the findings of an earlier study by Galambos and Silbereisen (1987), who reported that parental pessimism was related to adolescent daughters' lower expectancy for job success. They reasoned that because parents have lowered expectations for the success of their daughters than for their sons, the females in their study also tended to carry these lowered expectations. In traditional rural families, parents have different aspirations for daughters and sons. Parents in rural families expect their adolescent daughters to get married soon after their schooling but aspire their sons to go for higher education that can help him get a good job. However, in this study, we find that girls perceive higher parental belief in them compared to boys. One possible reason for this is changing societal attitudes towards educating a girl child. Several initiatives are taken by the government to promote schemes and policies for a girl child. Some of them are 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao,' 'Balika Samridhi Yojna,' 'Sukanya Samridhi Yojna' (Ministry of women and child development, 2015). Media also places a significant role in improving the lives of women and girls. The outcomes of these efforts may be seen as a rise in parental aspiration for their daughters. It is also possible that adolescent girls are more responsible and hence more conscious of their parents' aspirations for them.

Perceived teacher aspiration was higher for females compared to males in this study. Adolescent girls perceived higher levels of both belief and behavior aspects of teacher aspiration. Teachers view boys as dependent, idle, and unmotivated (Ahslund & Bostrom, 2018). Teachers also believe that boys are less able to concentrate, are less determined to solve difficult problems, and are less productive (MacDonald, Saunders, & Benfield, 1999). Teachers' belief that boys have characteristics that are negative for learning could influence their aspirations for boys. Girls' interactions with the teachers is found to support their learning (Younger, Warrington & Williams, 1999), but boys' interactions with teachers are more to correct their undesirable behaviors (Jones & Dindia, 2004). Barnett (2007) stated that girls are more likely to view teachers as role models in the career paths, whereas, boys are more negative about school, see homework as less useful, are less likely to seek help and are more reluctant to do extra work (Barnett, 2007). All the above could lead to teachers holding differential aspirations for adolescent boys and girls. Thus, girls may perceive higher aspirations from their teachers than boys. Moreover, teachers also believe that boys are less able to concentrate, are less determined to solve difficult problems, and are less productive (MacDonald et al., 1999).

Being a male negatively predicted self-aspiration in this study. Negative attitudes towards school and teachers are associated with lower achievement and lower expectations of future success (Baker, 1999; Brier, 1995). Boys are reported to struggle more to pay attention (Zill & West, 2001), and engage in more disruptive classroom behavior (Downey & Yuan, 2005; Schaefer, 2004), which in turn is seen to predict poor academic achievement (Georges, Brooks-Gunn & Malone, 2012). These gender differences in classroom behavior may be invoked to explain the gap in males' and females' educational outcomes (Pahlke, Cooper, &

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Fabes, 2013). Since males are at-risk for academic achievement due to several factors just cited, they may be seen to have lower academic and career aspirations.

In this study, we find that parental aspiration and teacher aspiration were positively predicting students' aspiration. This is in line with the findings of a few previous studies (Khallad, 2000; Watson, Quatman, & Edler, 2002). Along with parents' occupation and educational level, parental expectations were found to influence students' aspirations. Several studies provide support to the fact that parental aspirations and expectations significantly predict student expectations and aspirations (Benner & Mistry, 2007; Goyette & Xie, 1999; Hossler & Stage, 1992; Jodl, Michael, Malanchuk, Eccles & Sameroff, 2001). Parents' expectations for their children and children's expectations for themselves were found to be positively correlated (Davies & Kandel, 1981; Hossler et al., 1992). Mothers were reported to influence adolescents' career choices, aspirations, and apprehensions (Muthukrishna & Sokoya, 2008; Hairston, 2000). A teacher is the most important factor influencing student's learning and development (Loeb, Kalogrides, & Béteille, 2012). In general, teacher expectations influence teacher behavior and the subsequent performance of students (Bennet, Gottesman, Rock, & Cerullo, 1993). Teachers set high expectations and encourage students, thereby making them believe in themselves and set aspirations.

Friends' aspirations did not predict students' self-aspirations. In another study, the family was perceived to have a more significant influence on adolescents than peers (Annalakshmi, 2019). In India, the family plays a very significant role. The adolescents in this culture may look up to adults for setting up their aspirations while preferring to spend their discretionary time with their peers (Quaglia & Perry, 1995). It is possible that adolescents set their aspirations, aligning it with that of the adults in their lives like family and teachers.

Gender, parents', and teachers' aspirations accounted for 26% of the variance in students' aspirations. Interestingly, friends' aspirations did not significantly predict students' self-aspirations. In general, adolescents are easily influenced by their peers because they rely on their friends to provide validation of their choices. Peers may influence several areas of development in an adolescent, including their aspirations (Felsman & Blustein, 1999; Kracke, 2002). Peers play a major role in the career choice of students (Bojuwoye et al., 2006). However, we find that aspirations are least influenced by peers. In the case of rural adolescents, most of them may not be aware of the opportunities and resources available. Thus, they may have lower aspirations that could be due to limited knowledge on how to build a future using the resources they have in life. Adults in the school and family may serve as social and cultural capital in their lives that can have a significant influence on the adolescents' aspirations.

Both students' belief and behavior aspects of self-aspiration did not predict academic achievement. The aspirations measured in this study were pertaining to career choices. Rural students' aspirations are not backed up with knowledge about resources. Adolescents' aspirations are initially vague representations of possible future outcomes (Nurmi, 2004), and these aspirations gradually get refined as the adolescent gains experience and self-knowledge. This, however, may not be easy for rural adolescents. It is possible that their aspirations are not well defined, and they do not have clear career plans or route maps to reach their goal. Thus, we find that there is no academic achievement proportionate to their aspirations. Other studies have found that test achievements to career aspirations were not related (Creed, Conlon, & Zimmer-Gembeck 2007) and that academic achievement had a minimal effect on the career aspirations of teenage students (Rojewski & Yang, 1997). It

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may be worth examining the dynamics between aspirations and achievement among rural adolescents.

In this study, it was found that being a male negatively significantly predicted academic achievement. Gender as a single factor explained 44% of the variance in academic achievement. Girls do better in school than boys, get higher grades and complete high school at a higher rate compared to their male counterparts (Jacobs, 2002). Standardized achievement tests also show females to be better at spelling in addition to performing better on tests of literacy, writing, and general knowledge (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). A study on educational achievement levels of 1.5 million 15-year olds from around the world using data collected between 2000 and 2010 in 74 countries found that girls, regardless of political, economic, social or gender equality issues and policies, were outperforming boys in reading, mathematics, and science literacy by age 15 (Stoet & Geary, 2015). Many studies have shown boys to be less motivated than girls and to have less positive attitudes towards school (Davies, 1984; Darom & Rich, 1988; Cox, 2000; Francis, 2000; Warrington, Younger & Williams, 2000), even though the difference is not always that big (Keys & Fernandes, 1993; Blatchford, 1996). In general, it is reported that girls spend more time doing homework, display less disturbing behavior in the classroom, and play truant less often (Houtte, 2004). Girls have higher expectations on themselves and are more enthusiastic about continuing their studies. Boys take it easier, work less hard, and are distracted more quickly (Warrington et al., 2000). Hence, we find that being a male predicted a lower level of academic achievement.

The study aimed to examine the relationship between self-aspiration and academic performance, and how self and perceived others' aspiration predicted academic performance. One limitation of the study was that only self-report measures completed by students were used. Multiple sources of data could provide better insight into the aspirations, particularly the behavior aspect of aspirations better. The study was conducted on students from a single school and hence may have limited generalizability.

The present study suggests that students' self-aspirations are influenced by perceived parents' and teachers' aspirations, and that there exists gender difference in aspiration. Family and teachers' support to students appear to play a significant role in shaping the aspirations of the students, which in turn influences their academic achievement and career choices. It was found that males had lowered aspirations compared to females. More attention should be paid to male students from rural backgrounds since they are at-risk for educational success, which may be influenced by their lowered aspirations.

The findings of the study have important implications for policymakers of secondary school education. Further, rural students may have limited knowledge regarding career choices, and this could result in a gap between their academic aspirations and career aspirations. Policies on youth development and programs for school children should devote adequate attention to provide the rural adolescents with access to career counseling. The involvement of school and family is essential in shaping the educational and occupational aspirations of the students. Hence, interventions provided to students must involve school administrators, teachers, and parents. Since male students were found to have lowered aspirations compared to their female counterparts, male students may be provided "extra" attention in schools considering their risk status.

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