

Why do students aspire to an academic career? An empirical study on parents' impact on realistic career aspirations of students in eleventh grade

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Career decisions certainly depend on career aspirations. However, career aspirations or expectations still are relatively unexplored areas (Brown et al., 2010). This study focusses on idealistic and realistic career aspirations of students in grade 11 at secondary school (Gymnasium). With respect to career aspirations realistic and idealistic aspirations are differentiated. Realistic aspirations express people's beliefs about what they can reasonably expect to achieve (Wicht & Ludwig-Mayerhofer, 2014). Complementary to realistic career aspirations students are also often asked about their wishes. These idealistic aspirations reflect their preferences and wishes that are quite independent from existing opportunities (Stocké, 2012a, 2012b). Previous studies show certain predictors on students' career aspirations and decisions. Among those are studies on the impact of the social background of the family as an important predictor of both realistic and idealistic occupational aspirations (Wicht & Mayerhofer, 2014). Career aspirations and decisions may be shaped by parents as they usually build the child's primary social context (Luttenberger et al., 2014) and as they are major partners in helping adolescents prepare for a career choice (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009). Thus they can function as role models and be a source of (career) information. Hence, parents can influence their child's knowledge about careers and career aspirations by having conversations and by giving advice (Chhin et al, 2008; Tynkkynen et al, 2010). It is important to mention that additional influences like the school type may have a strong effect on students' realistic occupational aspirations and decisions (Wicht & Mayerhofer, 2014). For example, students seem to be aware of public labels that are associated to school types: attending a particular school type (i.e. Gymnasium) is associated with certain occupational prospects. The type of school as such has very strong effects on young people's aspirations. For example, the occupational aspirations of students attending a Hauptschule are below those of students attending a Gymnasium (Wicht & Mayerhofer, 2014). Therefore students in 11th grade are particularly interesting when investigating academic career aspirations because they meet the requirements for an academic track and they attend school for just one or two more years until they graduate, thus, the decision for the following career is momentous. Against this background the research questions are the following: How are students described who aspire to start an academic career? How much impact does the social background have on student's decision for an academic career? In a sample of the National Educational Panel Study (NEPS; Blossfeld, Rossbach, & von Maurice, 2011) of 11th graders (n=4.441), who started in grade nine as part of the starting cohort 4 (N=16.425), the aim is to identify those students who will probably decide to choose an academic career, and to analyze the predictors of academic career aspirations. To measure the realistic aspirations students were asked „Imagine you had all opportunities to become what you want. What would be your ideal occupation?“ The item for realistic career aspirations was „Consider everything you know right now. What will probably be your vocation in the future?“ (NEPS, 2013: 90 ff.). The occupations were classified with the German Classification of Occupations (KldB 2010) and with the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO 2008). Also the students' parents were asked which job their child should choose. Furthermore parents' latest occupation and familial social background were measured. Descriptive analyses and preliminary correlative results on social background, parents' occupations and students' career aspirations will be presented.