

Why do students aspire to an academic career?

An empirical study on parents' impact on realistic career aspirations of students in eleventh grade

Theoretical background

This study focusses on realistic career aspirations of students in grade 11 at secondary school in Germany. The eleventh graders attend school for one or two more years until they graduate, thus, the decision for the following career is momentous. Career aspirations or expectations still are relatively unexplored areas (Brown et al., 2010). Therefore the present study aims on gaining information about students who desire to start an academic career in the future. With respect to career aspirations we differentiate between realistic and idealistic aspirations. Realistic career aspirations express people's beliefs about what they can reasonably expect to achieve (Wicht & Ludwig-Mayerhofer, 2014). Idealistic career aspirations in contrast give expression to people's desires and wishes (Stocké, 2012a, 2012b). Career aspirations and decisions may be shaped by parents as they are major partners in helping adolescents prepare for a career choice (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009). They function as role models with their job (Beinke, 2000) and provide important sources of career, informational and emotional support for young adults (Direnzo et al., 2013). We assume that children whose parents have an academic occupation are more likely to choose an academic career themselves.

Methods

The study draws on data coming from a nationally representative sample of 11th graders collected for the National Educational Panel Study (NEPS). We obtained a final sample of 4.437 students. First we included just students attending higher school track (Gymnasium). Regarding both realistic and idealistic career aspirations, we split the sample into students who aspire to an academic career and students who do not. The answers of the occupations were already classified with the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08). To answer the first research question we looked at student's gender, migration background, grades (math, English and German language) and the academic or non-academic occupation of their parents. A limitation in this study to gain more information about the student is the missing data of the parents' educational background. Therefore we did not include these data into our analyses. Furthermore, the information on parents' occupation was limited. To answer the second research question we estimated a logistic regression model.

Research question

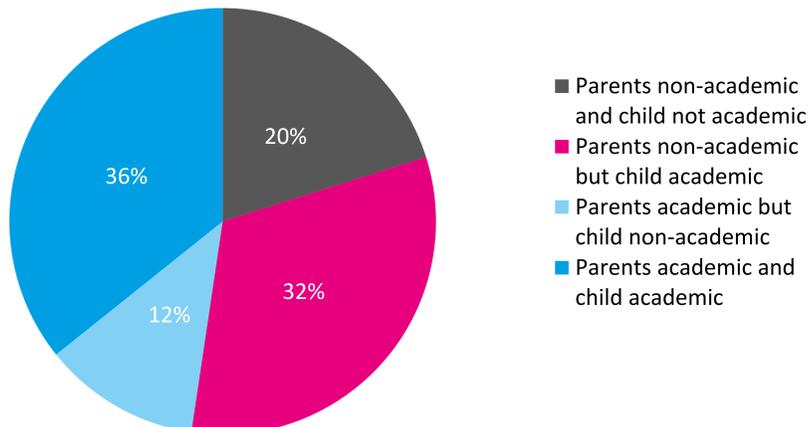
- 1) How are students described who aspire to start an academic career?
- 2) How much impact does a parent's occupation have on its child's decision for an academic career?

Realistic and idealistic career aspirations (NEPS)

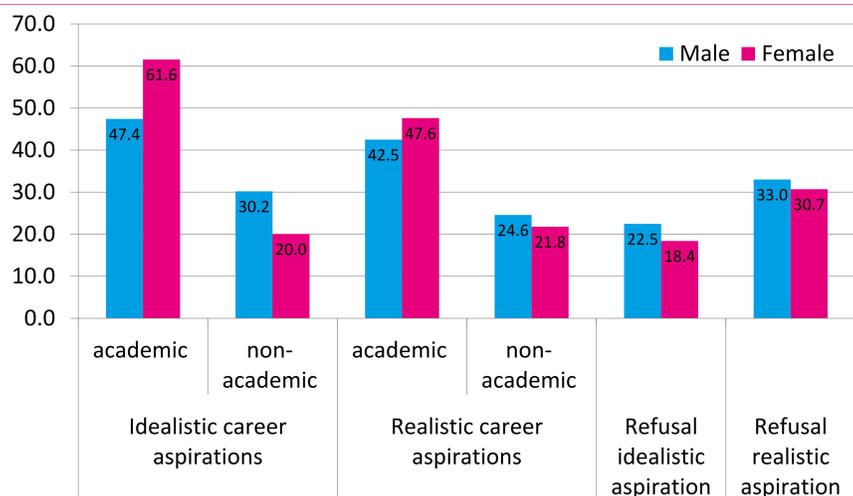
Item for idealistic career aspiration:	Item for realistic career aspiration:
„Imagine you had all opportunities to become what you want. What would be your ideal occupation?“ (NEPS, 2016)	„Consider everything you know right now. What will probably be your vocation in the future?“ (NEPS, 2016)

Results

Students' realistic career aspiration and their parents' occupation (N = 1.319)



Students' idealistic and realistic aspirations for an academic or non-academic career (Male: N = 1.999, Female: N = 2.424) in %



First results show that students whose parents pursue an academic occupation (35.7%) are the biggest group of students who desire having an academic job someday. Still it is surprising that 32.2% of eleventh graders whose parents don't practice an academic occupation nevertheless aspire to an academic career. Similar results were found for the students idealistic career aspiration. The descriptive results show that there are more female students who desire to have an academic career. Regarding the logistic regression, under control of parents occupation and school grades, gender as well as migration background do not exert significant influence on students realistic career aspiration. The main findings are that the better the grades (in math, English and German language) the more the students are likely to aspire to an academic career. Finally we can say that with including further variables the goodness of fit increases from .003 (Model 1) to .063 (Model 3).

Logistic regression model

	Model 1 (N = 1,996)	Model 2 (N = 1,876)	Model 3 (N = 1,004)
Intercept	0.308* (0.127)	2.415*** (0.273)	-2.481*** (0.380)
Determinants			
Migration Background	0.027 (0.094)	0.113 (0.097)	0.117 (0.149)
Gender	0.237* (0.078)	0.120 (0.081)	0.118 (0.113)
School Grades		0.668*** (0.059)	0.642*** (0.083)
Parents' Occupation			0.539*** (0.114)

Level of significance: ***: p<0.001; **: p<0.01; *: p<0.05.

Conclusion and prospective

The aim of the present study was to describe students in 11th grade who consider an academic career after graduation. We were especially interested in the impact of parents' occupation on their child's realistic career aspiration. To this end, our analyses provide evidence that students aspirations are influenced by school grades and their parents occupation. Our main findings support the results from previous research. As a next step the focus will be on the personality of the students who aspire to an academic career measured in the NEPS with the five factors of personality traits (Big Five).