

Aspirations of adolescents

Adolescence is a time when aspirations and expectations of boys and girls begin to crystallise, especially in the domains of education and occupation. Aspirations provide a yardstick to help adolescents weigh different choices and assess whether they will help or hinder their chances of achieving their desired goals. They also serve as a motivational force to work towards achieving their goals. The two waves of the UDAYA survey, completed in 2015–16 (wave-1) and 2018–19 (wave-2), sought to assess adolescents' aspirations with respect to education and the profession or vocation they would like to follow in their adult years and the shift in their aspirations. We bring insights on the shifting aspirations of this cohort of adolescents in this newsletter.

Adolescents have high educational aspirations

In 2015–16, half of the younger adolescent boys and girls (aged 10–14) who were enrolled in schools aspired to complete a graduate or post-graduate course or a professional course. A larger proportion of older boys and girls (aged 15–19)—over 80 percent—aspired to do so. The proportion of boys and girls expressing such high educational aspirations increased over time—over 60 percent of boys and girls in the younger cohort and over 90 percent of the older cohort in the second wave reported so.

High career aspirations were, likewise, expressed by many boys and girls

As many as 61 percent of younger boys and 53 percent of girls wanted to pursue a professional career (that is, become a teacher, doctor, engineer, scientist, or lawyer or join the police or armed forces) in the first wave, as did about half of the older boys and girls. However, these aspirations became variable over time and decreased significantly in light of realities and experiences of

adolescents as they grew older. By 2018–19, fewer boys and girls—33–50 percent and 29–39 percent, respectively—reported a desire to pursue a professional career. Indeed, three years later, many more expressed a desire to start a small business or pursue a technical job (plumber, electrician, driver, tailor, beautician, and so on). The proportion who wanted to be self-employed or go for a technical job, for example, almost doubled (20% to 34%) among older boys and increased threefold (11% to 33%) among older girls between the two rounds of the UDAYA surveys.

There were many adolescents who did not have any dreams about the profession or vocation that they wish to pursue when they reach adulthood, although this proportion came down as boys and girls grew older. More girls than boys fell into this group. In 2015–16, more than a fourth of the younger boys and a fifth of the older boys reported that they have not thought about what profession or vocation they wanted to follow in the future, as did two-fifths of younger girls and a third of older girls. Three years later, this proportion declined to one in seven among younger boys and one in 10 among older boys. Among girls it declined to a fourth of the younger cohort and only one in 20 for older girls.

Girls have higher educational aspirations than boys, while boys have higher career aspirations than girls of the same age.

At the same time, the aspiration-attainment gap is wider for girls, most notably for girls who got married in their adolescence. Four in five or more of younger boys and two-thirds of the older boys had realized their educational aspirations or were on the path to achieve them when they were interviewed in the second wave. Among girls, four in five of younger girls and three in five of older girls who were unmarried when interviewed in wave-1 had realized their educational aspirations or were on the path to achieving them by the time of wave-2. In contrast, only one in four girls who were married in their adolescence could do so.



Adolescents need support from their parents, schools and the wider community to overcome both attitudinal and practical barriers to high aspirations. They also need easy access to career advice and guidance.