

Shooting for the stars: what drives the aspirations of young Australians?



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Realising our Potential Forum, April 2014



LONGITUDINAL SURVEYS OF AUSTRALIAN YOUTH
RESEARCH REPORT 66

The factors affecting the educational and occupational aspirations of young Australians

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Motivation

- Young people's ambitions directly linked to longer-term education and work outcomes



(Beal & Crockett 2010; Khoo & Ainley 2005; Lee 2010; Ou & Reynolds 2008; Sikora & Saha 2011).

- What is less well understood is:
 - ▶ Which factors most strongly drive the formation of occupational aspirations?
 - ▶ Do teenagers who 'shoot for the stars' actually end up working in high-status jobs?

Aims

1. What shapes young people's career aspirations?
2. How do the career aspirations of 15 year-olds compare to their actual occupational outcomes ten years later?



1. What shapes career aspirations?



Data

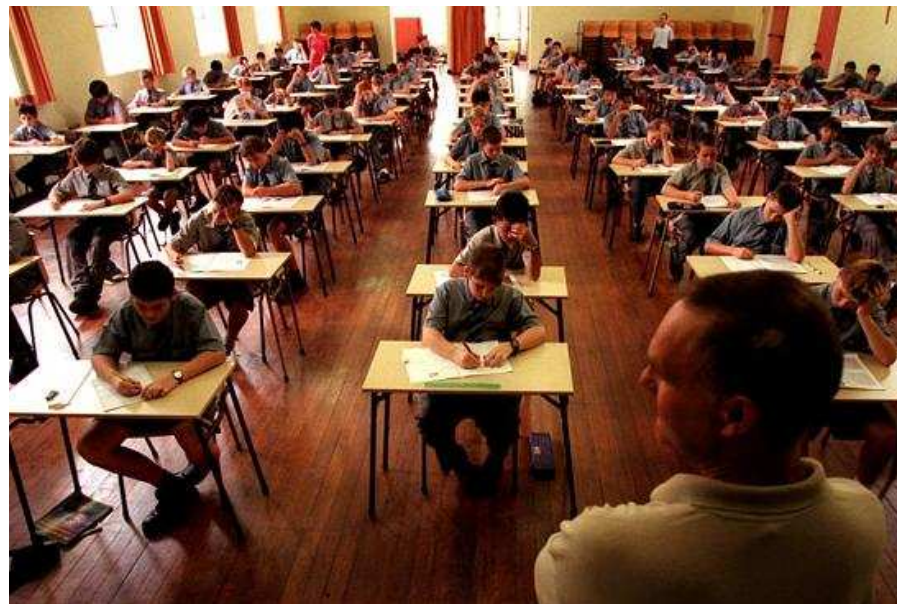
- Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth
- National dataset which surveys a cohort of young people from age 15 to age 25.
- Asks questions about:
 - school, school subjects, post-school plans,
 - employment,
 - university and TAFE study, apprenticeships,
 - living arrangements, well-being.

Data

- 2009 LSAY cohort
- Average age of 15 in 2009
- Sample size = 14,251



- LSAY students complete the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)



Research question

- *What influences young people's occupational aspirations at age 15 about the kind of job they expect to have at age 30?*



- Question from LSAY survey:

What kind of job do you expect to have when you are about 30 years old?

Model

Outcome

Expected
job at age 30



Predictors

- socio-demographic variables
- parental influences
- peer influences
- academic performance
- perceptions of school



Socio-demographic background

Predictor	Levels
Gender	Male, Female
Indigenous status	Indigenous, Non-indigenous
Socioeconomic status	Continuous (standardised)
Location	Metropolitan Regional/remote
Family structure	Nuclear family Non-nuclear family
Immigration background	Australian-born students First-generation students Foreign-born students

Parental influences



QU: In the year immediately after you leave school... What do your parents want you to do?

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 Go to University | 8 Don't know |
| 2 Get an apprenticeship | 9 Something else |
| 3 Get a traineeship | 10 Travel |
| 4 Go to a TAFE or VET (vocational) college | 11 Self-development in sports or performing arts |
| 5 Do some other study or training | 12 Defence force |
| 6 Look for work/get a job | 99 Missing/no response |
| 7 Gap year / time off | |

Parental influences



QU: In the year immediately after you leave school... What do your parents want you to do?

1 Go to University	8 Don't know
2 Get an apprenticeship	9 Self-employment
3 Get a traineeship	10 Self-development in sports or performing arts
4 Go to a TAFE or VET (vocational college)	12 Defence force
5 Do some other work	99 Missing/no response
6 Look for work	
7 Gap year / time off	

Not university

Peer influences



QU: In the year immediately after you leave school... What do most of your friends plan to do?

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 Go to University | 8 Don't know |
| 2 Get an apprenticeship | 9 Something else |
| 3 Get a traineeship | 10 Travel |
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Peer influences



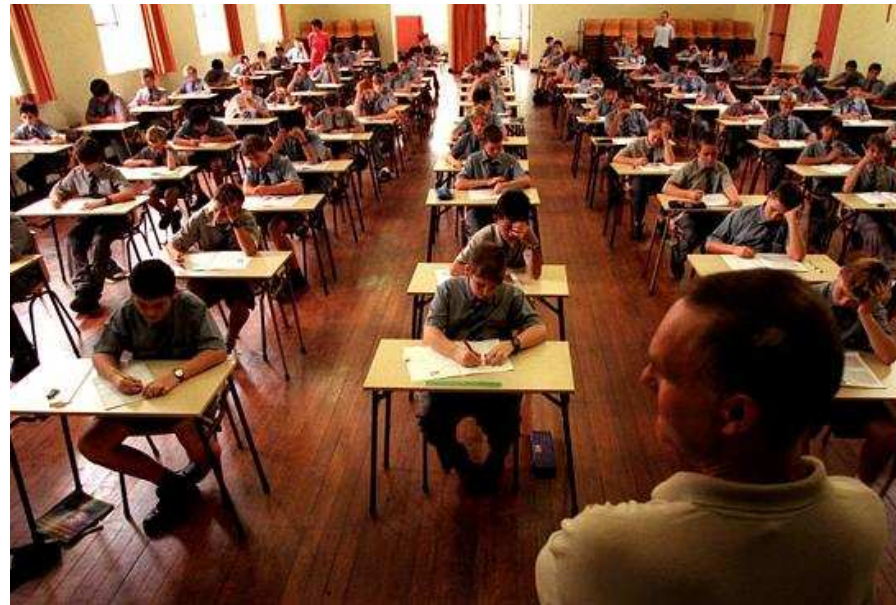
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Not university

Academic performance

- Average of students' reading and mathematics literacy scores from PISA
- Continuous variable, mean = 508, std dev. = 94



Perceptions of school

Attitudes to school	Continuous (scaled PISA score)
Teacher quality	Continuous (scaled PISA score)
Teacher-student relations	Continuous (scaled PISA score)
Disciplinary climate	Continuous (scaled PISA score)



Perceptions of school

Attitudes to school	
e.g. School helped give me confidence	(Strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree)
Teacher-student relations	
e.g. I get along well with most of my teachers	(Strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree)
Disciplinary climate	
e.g. There is noise and disorder [reverse-coded]	(Never or hardly ever, some lessons, most lessons, every lesson)
Teacher quality	
e.g. The teacher explains beforehand what is expected of students	(Never or hardly ever, some lessons, most lessons, every lesson)

Outcome: occupational status

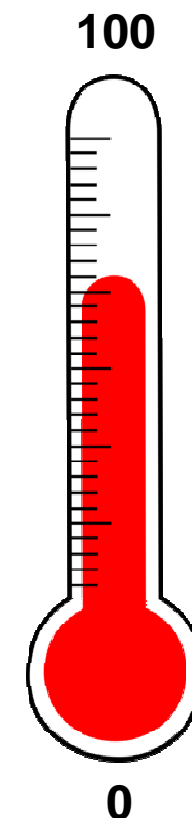
- Expected job at age 30 can be recoded to a continuous scale of occupational status
- Australian Socioeconomic Index 2006 (AUSIE06) scale
- Developed by Australian National University (McMillan, Jones & Beavis 2009)



Occupation	AUSEI06 score
Medical practitioners	100
University lecturers	92
Legal professionals	91
...	...
Agricultural and related workers	5
Labourers not elsewhere classified	0

Results

Predictor	Level	β	Std Error	Pr > t
Parents' higher ed. aspirations	University	12.0	0.6	<.001
	Not university [R]			
Academic performance	Continuous (per 100 points)	7.3	0.4	<.001
Gender	Male	-5.8	0.4	<.001
	Female [R]			
Immigration background	Foreign-born students	6.2	0.7	<.001
	First-generation students	2.1	0.5	<.001
	Australian-born students [R]			



Implications

- Policy interventions that concern the influence of parents and peers may provide a substantial pay-off in terms of raising aspirations.
- E.g. Parents as Career Transition Supports (PACTS) program (Youth Connect 2013).
 - ▶ Free advice about educational pathways and how to communicate with young people about their careers.
 - ▶ Operating since 2003
 - ▶ An evaluation of PACTS showed that the proportion of parents who discussed post-school options with their children increased significantly after participating in the program (Bedson & Perkins 2006).
- Expanding programs that actively engage parents in the career decision-making process may be an effective means for raising the educational and occupational aspirations of Australian youth.



2. Aspirations or delusions?



Data

- 1998 LSAY cohort
 - ▶ Only cohort for whom we have the full 10 years of data
 - ▶ Ages 15 – 25 years

- Sample size
 - ▶ Those who stayed in the survey for the full 10 years
 - ▶ Males = approx. 1000 respondents
 - ▶ Females = approx. 1000 respondents

Research question

- How close do young people come to meeting their occupational aspirations?
- How does this differ for males and females?
- Question from LSAY survey:

What job do you plan to work in when you have finished your studies? (after leaving school, or after finishing your further study or training)

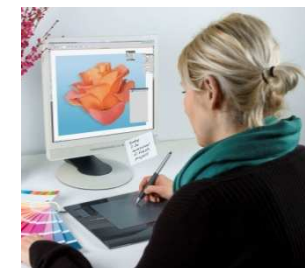
Aspirations, males, age 15

Occupation (ASCO 4-digit)	n	%
Computing Support Technicians	76	7.2
Motor Mechanics	47	4.4
Police Officers	41	3.9
Computing Professionals	40	3.7
Architects and Landscape Architects	37	3.5
Other Building and Engineering Professionals	37	3.5
Legal Professionals	37	3.5
Accountants	35	3.3
Carpentry and Joinery Tradespersons	33	3.1
Electrical and Electronics Engineers	30	2.8
Veterinarians	23	2.2
Electricians	23	2.2
Designers and Illustrators	22	2.1
Senior Non-Commissioned Defence Force Officers	22	2.1



Aspirations, females, age 15

Occupation (ANZSCO 4-digit)	n	%
Designers and Illustrators	55	5.0
Psychologists	52	4.7
Legal Professionals	47	4.3
Registered Nurses	44	4.0
Primary School Teachers	42	3.8
Children's Care Workers	40	3.6
Pre-Primary School Teachers	35	3.1
School Teachers – not further defined	34	3.1
Secondary School Teachers	31	2.8
Journalists and Related Professionals	30	2.7
Actors, Dancers and Related Professionals	30	2.7
Veterinarians	29	2.6
Accountants	27	2.5
Generalist Medical Practitioners	26	2.3



Actual jobs, males, age 25

Occupation (ANZSCO 4-digit)	n	%
Sales assistants (General)	37	3.5
Electricians	27	2.5
ICT Support Technicians	27	2.5
Retail managers	24	2.3
Plumbers	22	2.1
Carpenters and Joiners	22	2.0
Police Officers	20	1.9
Software and Applications Programmers	17	1.6
Accountants	16	1.5
Cafe and Restaurant managers	14	1.4
Motor Mechanics	13	1.3
Welfare Support workers	13	1.2
Contract, Program and Project Administrator	12	1.1
Secondary School Teachers	12	1.1



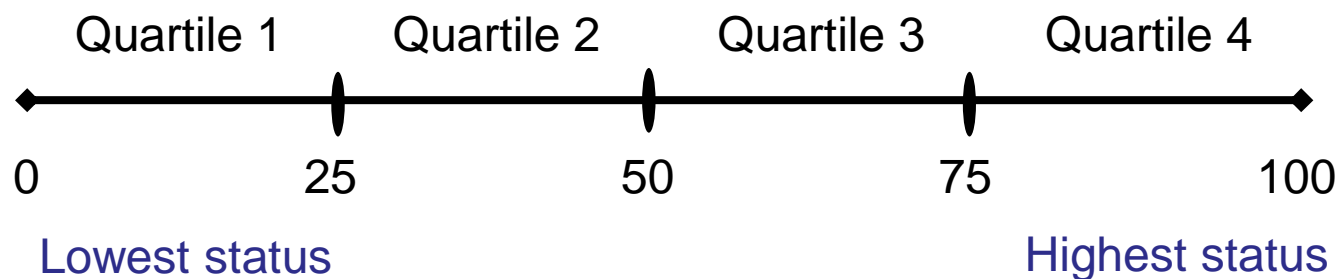
Actual jobs, females, age 25

Occupation (ASCO 4-digit)	n	%
Primary School Teachers	68	6.1
Sales assistants (General)	50	4.5
Registered Nurses	50	4.5
Child Carers	46	4.1
Secondary School Teachers	43	3.9
Retail managers	39	3.5
Accountants	31	2.8
General clerks	22	2.0
Office managers	21	1.9
Contract, Program and Project Administrator	17	1.5
Receptionists	17	1.5
Call or Contact Centre workers	17	1.5
Nursing Support and Personal Care workers	17	1.5
Advertising and Marketing Professionals	16	1.4



Tracking students

- Were those students who ended up in the highest status jobs actually aiming for those jobs?
- Divide the ANU occupational status scale into quartiles.



- Where did young people who aspired to a particular quartile at age 15 end up at age 25?

Who ends up where? (males)

Status of job aspired to at age 15 (ANU4)	Status of job held at age 25				
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total (%)
Q1 (lowest-status)	20	74	5	2	100
Q2	22	55	17	6	100
Q3	5	40	31	24	100
Q4 (highest-status)	7	30	24	39	100
All quartiles	13	42	22	23	100

Source: LSAY 1998 cohort, 1999 and 2009 surveys, weighted estimates.

Who ends up where? (females)

Status of job aspired to at age 15 (ANU4)	Status of job held at age 25					Total (%)
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
Q1 (lowest-status)	0	77	0	24	100	
Q2	6	57	19	19	100	
Q3	1	44	21	34	100	
Q4 (highest-status)	1	31	17	52	100	
All quartiles	2	41	18	39	100	

Source: LSAY 1998 cohort, 1999 and 2009 surveys, weighted estimates.

Limitations

- People change
- Career aspirations at age 15 may not have been given much thought.
- Age 25 may be too young for drawing meaningful conclusions about career attainment.
- May still be studying
- May not have attained their highest-status job by age 25



What can we conclude?

- There is a relationship between aspirations at age 15 and actual job at age 25, but it is not clear cut.
- Some young people fall short of their aspirations, whereas others achieve jobs that have a higher status than the ones they aspired to.
- Overall, the analysis suggests only a loose relationship between original aspirations at age 15 years and the actual job obtained at age 25 years.



Conclusion

- Parental influences critical in driving young people's occupational aspirations.
- Complements prior research which identified parents as the primary information resource for discussing career and post-school transition options (Russel & Wardman 1998; Whiteley 2004).
- Policy implications
 - ▶ Expanding programs that engage parents in the career decision-making process may be an effective means for raising the educational and occupational aspirations of Australian youth.



Thank you!



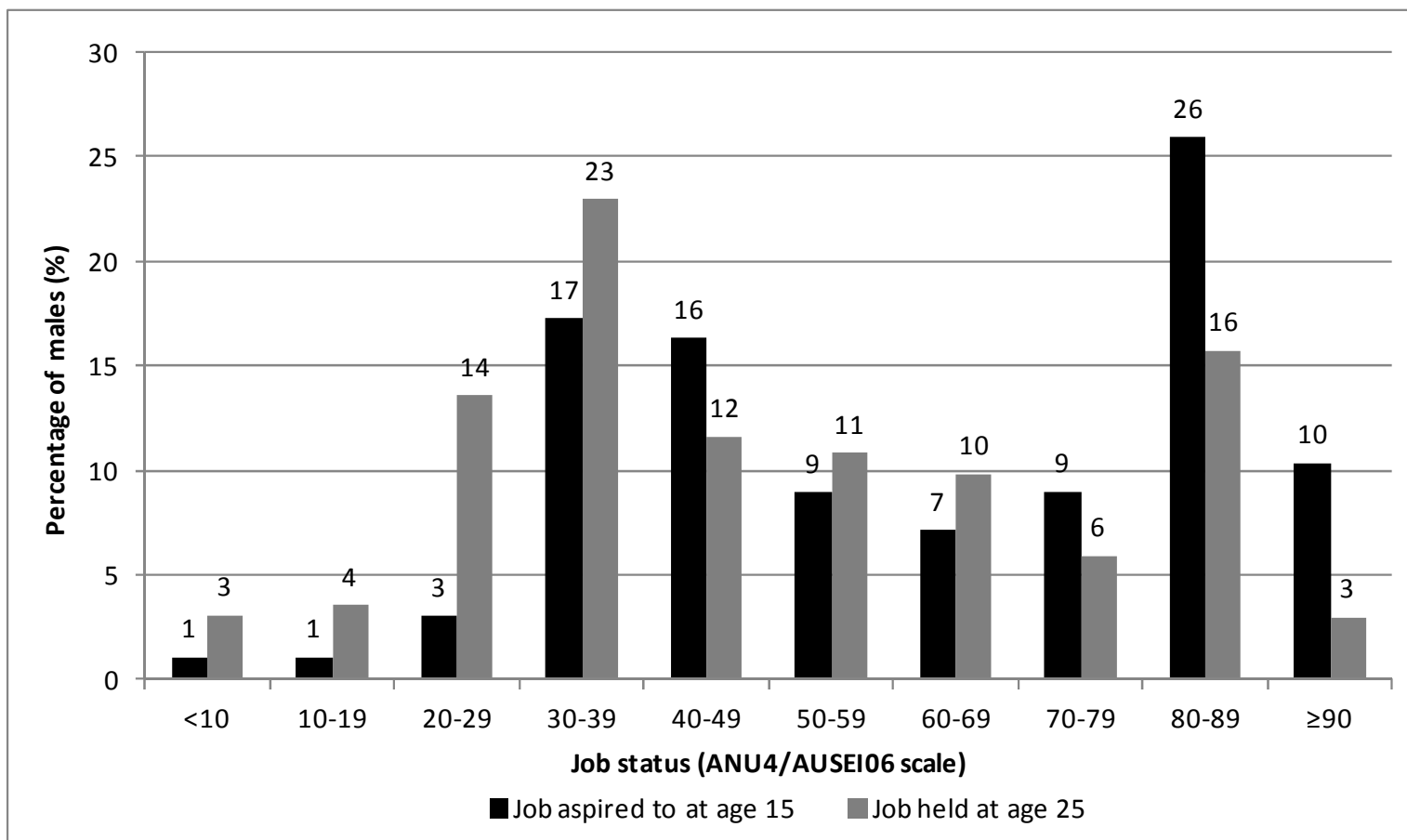
Additional slides



Results

Predictor	Level	β	Std Error	Pr > t
Gender	Male	-5.8	0.4	<.001
	Female [R]			
Immigration background	First-generation students	2.1	0.5	<.001
	Foreign-born students	6.2	0.7	<.001
	Australian-born students [R]			
SES	Continuous (std)	2.0	0.3	<.001
Attitudes to school	Continuous (std)	1.6	0.3	<.001
Teacher-student relations	Continuous (std)	0.9	0.3	0.003
Disciplinary climate	Continuous (std)	0.5	0.3	0.030
Academic performance	Continuous	7.3	0.4	<.001
Peers' higher ed. aspirations	University	1.5	0.6	0.013
	Not university [R]			
Parents' higher ed. aspirations	University	12.0	0.6	<.001
	Not university [R]			

Are aspirations achieved? (males)



Source: LSAY 1998 cohort, 1999 and 2009 surveys, weighted estimates

Are aspirations achieved? (females)

