

Higher Aspirations Lead to Higher Achievements..... Or Not?



A new study shows higher aspirations lead to higher achievements in the context of educational and occupational aspirations, but unrealistically high aspirations as a teenager could have a negative effect on wellbeing as an adult.

The study was conducted by Dr Reto Odermatt (University of Basel) and Prof Warn Lekfuangfu (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid) to investigate the relevance of career aspirations in social mobility and later life satisfaction. The results are in the journal *European Economic Review*.

In the study, the authors follow the lives of over 17,000 people in the U.K. born in the same week in 1958. The study continues to collect data. They gather information about each individual's childhood environment, abilities, aspirations in their youth, occupation, wellbeing, and professional and financial backgrounds of their parents. The authors then evaluate the following questions: how far did these individuals get in their education? What job did they hold with the highest prestige during their working life?

Their analysis showed that the educational and career aspirations of the participants as teenagers, along with cognitive skills, were among the most important predictors of their later success in education and career. This suggests that ambitious career goals motivate people to invest more in their future success.

However, people with unambitious career aspirations have limited social mobility. The study shows that individuals whose parents were less educated had less ambitious career goals. Hence, parental aspirations regarding their children's school and career performance can significantly impact how far a child would aim to go.

However, the authors caution that dreaming big may not always be good and could lead to disappointments. If people in early adulthood achieve less than they had aspired to when they were younger, this could negatively affect their life satisfaction. However, the negative effects may subside in their later lives if they achieve more than they had aspired to.

The findings also indicate that parents should not be the only ones deemed responsible for influencing children's career aspirations. Schools can also intervene, and teachers could make students aware of careers that might suit their abilities. This would encourage them to look beyond their horizons.

Overall, the findings show that ambitious career goals can be motivating but can also lead to disappointment. Hence, it is a double-edged sword. Therefore, the goal should not be to maximise young people's dreams but to optimise them.

Source: [University of Basel](#)

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