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Parental Involvement and Career Satisfaction among Physicians in India: The Role of Autonomy Support in a Collectivist Context

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Abstract

Background

Career decision-making in collectivist societies often occurs within strong family influence, yet limited research has examined whether the type of parental involvement has lasting implications for adult career satisfaction, particularly in high-investment professions such as medicine.

Purpose

This study investigates whether autonomy-supportive and directive parental involvement during career decision-making differentially predict long-term career satisfaction among physicians in India.

Methods

A cross-sectional survey was conducted among 100 practicing physicians in Ahmedabad, India (final N = 98 after data screening). Participants reported retrospective parental involvement and current career satisfaction. Hierarchical regression analyses and bias-corrected bootstrapped mediation (5,000 resamples) were used to test direct and indirect effects while controlling for age and gender.

Key Findings

Autonomy-supportive parental involvement significantly predicted higher career satisfaction (β = 0.291, 95% CI [0.079, 0.503], p = 0.008), whereas directive involvement was not significant (β = −0.061, 95% CI [−0.214, 0.092], p = 0.432). Career–values alignment partially mediated the relationship (indirect effect = 0.220, 95% CI [0.031, 0.425]).

Implications

Findings suggest that autonomy-supportive family environments foster long-term vocational well-being even in collectivist contexts where parental authority is normative. The results inform family-inclusive career counseling and value-alignment interventions in culturally interdependent societies.

1. Introduction

For decades, career development research has highlighted personal choice, individual interests, and self-driven exploration as the key forces behind vocational decisions(1–3). Classic theories describe career choice as a developmental journey shaped by autonomy, self-belief, identity formation, and purposeful goal setting. These perspectives generally assume that people choose their professions based on internal preferences and careful, rational consideration. However, much of this thinking comes from Western, individualistic societies, where independence and self-determination are strongly emphasized. Such assumptions may not fully reflect how career decisions unfold in collectivist cultures, where choices are often deeply connected to family systems and shared social expectations(4).

In collectivist settings like India, career decisions frequently extend beyond personal ambition and are closely tied to family priorities. Considerations such as upward social mobility, financial security, cultural prestige, and fulfilling intergenerational aspirations often play a significant role. In these contexts, family

influence is not secondary—it is central. This dynamic is especially visible in highly demanding professions like medicine, which require years of rigorous academic preparation, substantial financial investment, and long-term dedication. For many families, having a child become a physician represents collective achievement, social recognition, and fulfillment of shared dreams. As a result, parental involvement in medical career decisions is both common and culturally accepted.

That said, parental involvement can take different forms. Some parents provide autonomy-supportive guidance, encouraging open dialogue, respecting their child's perspective, and fostering independent decision-making. Others may adopt a more directive or controlling approach, emphasizing compliance with family expectations or cultural norms. While both approaches can lead to entry into respected professions, their long-term psychological impact may differ considerably. Research has shown that parental support can boost academic motivation and shape career aspirations during adolescence. However, far less attention has been given to whether the nature of parental involvement during career decision-making affects how individuals feel about their careers years later.

Exploring these long-term effects is important both theoretically and practically. Career decisions made in late adolescence or early adulthood often shape professional paths that last decades. If family influence shapes how deeply individuals internalize their career choices, it may affect not only professional achievement but also long-term satisfaction, well-being, and resilience—especially in demanding fields(5). Physicians, for instance, routinely encounter high stress, emotional strain, and risk of burnout. Understanding the early factors that contribute to sustained career satisfaction in this group can offer valuable insight into how early family dynamics shape long-term professional fulfillment.

Despite increasing recognition of contextual influences in career development, several gaps remain. First, most research on parental influence focuses on adolescents or college students and examines career intentions rather than long-term outcomes. Few studies follow individuals into established careers to determine whether early family involvement predicts lasting satisfaction(6). Consequently, the enduring effects of parental career socialization remain insufficiently explored.

Second, many studies treat parental involvement as a broad, undifferentiated concept. Distinguishing between autonomy-supportive and directive forms is crucial. Autonomy-supportive parenting may foster a genuine sense of ownership over career decisions, whereas directive approaches may lead to compliance without full internal acceptance. Without separating these dimensions, it is difficult to determine whether parental influence contributes to long-term well-being or simply shapes occupational placement.

Third, limited research has examined these patterns within collectivist cultures, where parental authority is socially normalized. In such contexts, directive involvement may be culturally sanctioned, potentially altering its psychological consequences. Whether autonomy-supportive parenting retains its benefits in societies that emphasize interdependence and familial obligation remains an important empirical question.

To address these gaps, this study draws primarily on Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which proposes that autonomy is a universal psychological need essential for internalization and well-being. SDT differentiates between autonomy-supportive environments that encourage voluntary engagement and integrated motivation, and controlling environments that may produce compliance but undermine intrinsic motivation. Applied to career decision-making, this framework suggests that autonomy-supportive parental involvement may strengthen long-term career satisfaction by helping individuals more fully internalize their vocational choices.

This perspective is enriched by Career Construction Theory, which views careers as evolving narratives shaped through social interaction and meaning-making. Parents often act as key storytellers in early career development, communicating values, expectations, and definitions of success. The quality of this narrative exchange may influence how individuals integrate their professional identities over time. Similarly, Social Cognitive Career Theory emphasizes the importance of contextual supports in shaping self-efficacy and outcome expectations, indicating that parental involvement may affect both entry into a profession and long-term persistence within it.

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the present study investigates whether autonomy-supportive and directive parental involvement during career decision-making differentially predict adult career satisfaction among practicing physicians in India. Importantly, the focus shifts from the moment of career choice to enduring vocational well-being. In doing so, the study expands career development research by extending the examination of parental influence into adulthood and by evaluating the relevance of autonomy-supportive socialization within a collectivist cultural framework.

Understanding how early family involvement shapes long-term professional satisfaction carries implications beyond academic theory. It can inform career counseling practices, encourage family-inclusive guidance approaches, and shape educational policy in societies where parental influence plays a pivotal role in occupational decisions. By focusing on physicians—professionals working in high-pressure, socially valued roles—this research sheds light on how intergenerational career dynamics may influence not only entry into prestigious fields but also lasting professional fulfillment.

2. Parental Influence in Career Development

Career decision-making has traditionally been framed within Western models as a largely individual process driven by personal interests, agency, and self-exploration. Yet careers do not develop in isolation. They unfold within social and cultural systems that shape both opportunities and expectations. In collectivist societies, vocational decisions are often embedded within family structures, where parents play a central socializing role(7). They influence not only access to educational and professional pathways but also the meanings attached to occupational success. Understanding the long-term impact of parental involvement therefore requires integrating motivational theory with socio-cultural perspectives on career development.

2.1 Self-Determination Theory as the Primary Framework

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) serves as the primary theoretical lens for this study. SDT distinguishes between autonomy-supportive and controlling social environments and proposes that autonomy is a universal psychological need essential for internalization, motivation, and well-being(8). Autonomy-supportive contexts promote volitional engagement, encourage psychological ownership of decisions, and foster integrated forms of motivation. In contrast, controlling or directive environments may secure compliance but can undermine intrinsic motivation and long-term satisfaction(8,9).

Applied to career decision-making, autonomy-supportive parental involvement may enable individuals to internalize their vocational choices more deeply(4,5). When individuals perceive that they have freely endorsed their career path—even in the presence of parental guidance—they are more likely to experience enduring satisfaction. By contrast, directive involvement characterized by pressure, obligation, or rigid expectations may result in career entry without full psychological endorsement, potentially weakening long-term fulfillment(1,10,11).

Importantly, although parental authority is culturally normative in collectivist societies such as India, SDT maintains that the need for autonomy remains universal. Even in contexts where directive parenting is socially legitimized, autonomy-supportive involvement(12) may be more strongly linked to sustained vocational well-being(10). This perspective allows the present study to explore whether fundamental motivational processes operate similarly across cultural contexts.

2.2 Supporting Perspectives from Career Development Theories

While SDT provides the central motivational explanation, other career development theories offer complementary insights.

Career Construction Theory views careers as evolving life narratives shaped through social interaction and meaning-making(13). Within this framework, parents often serve as early co-authors of their children's career stories, communicating values, aspirations, and definitions of success(3,5,14). The tone and quality of this engagement may influence how individuals later integrate their professional identities. Autonomy-supportive parental narratives may foster adaptive identity development and a sense of authorship(11,12), whereas directive narratives may limit personal agency in shaping one's career story(13).

Similarly, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) emphasizes the importance of contextual supports in shaping self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations. Parental encouragement can strengthen confidence and reinforce positive expectations regarding career success(15–17). However, when involvement is primarily directive rather than supportive, career pursuit may be driven more by external demands(17) than by internal confidence or personal value alignment(10,15). Although SCCT research has largely focused on early career intentions, its attention to contextual influences suggests implications for long-term vocational satisfaction as well.

Together, these frameworks highlight a critical distinction: parental involvement may affect both entry into prestigious professions and the extent to which individuals internalize and find meaning in their career choices(18). The present study integrates these perspectives by positioning SDT as the core motivational mechanism, supported by narrative and social-cognitive accounts of career development.

2.3 Career Satisfaction as a Long-Term Outcome

Career satisfaction reflects an individual's overall evaluation of their professional progress(16), accomplishments, and alignment with personal aspirations(2). Unlike job satisfaction, which may fluctuate based on immediate work conditions, career satisfaction represents a broader, longitudinal appraisal of one's professional trajectory(3,19,20). It captures whether individuals perceive their career path as meaningful, value-congruent, and personally fulfilling over time.

Investigating parental antecedents of career satisfaction enables career research to move beyond the moment of career choice and examine sustained vocational well-being. If autonomy-supportive parental involvement strengthens internalization and value alignment(11,12) during the decision-making phase, its effects may extend across years of professional practice. Conversely, directive involvement (19,20)may facilitate entry into prestigious careers without necessarily fostering enduring satisfaction.

By integrating motivational, narrative, and contextual perspectives, this study examines whether the type of parental involvement experienced during career decision-making is associated with adult career satisfaction among physicians in India(2). In doing so, it connects early familial socialization processes with long-term vocational outcomes within a collectivist cultural setting.

3. Research Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between parental involvement in career decision-making and long-term career satisfaction.
2. To compare autonomy-supportive and directive parental involvement in relation to career satisfaction.

Hypotheses Development

Grounded primarily in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), this study investigates how the motivational quality of parental involvement during career decision-making relates to long-term career satisfaction. SDT posits that autonomy-supportive environments facilitate the internalization of externally influenced decisions, leading to enhanced well-being and sustained motivation. In contrast, controlling or directive environments may encourage compliance while limiting psychological ownership of choices.

In collectivist contexts such as India, parental involvement in career decisions is culturally normative. However, SDT suggests that even within interdependent family systems, autonomy remains a basic psychological need. When parents provide guidance characterized by encouragement, dialogue, and

trust—rather than pressure or coercion—individuals are more likely to experience their career decisions as self-endorsed rather than externally imposed. Such internalization is expected to contribute to greater long-term career satisfaction.

Hypothesis 1

Autonomy-supportive parental involvement during career decision-making will be positively associated with long-term career satisfaction among practicing physicians.

Directive parental involvement, in contrast, reflects a more controlling approach characterized by strong expectations, pressure, or explicit direction toward a specific career path. While such involvement may facilitate entry into prestigious professions, it may not promote sustained psychological satisfaction if the career choice is not fully internalized.

Hypothesis 2

Directive parental involvement during career decision-making will not be positively associated with long-term career satisfaction.

SDT further proposes that autonomy-supportive environments enhance internalization through alignment with personal values and interests. When career choices are congruent with intrinsic values, individuals are more likely to experience enduring satisfaction. Career–values alignment may therefore function as a psychological mechanism linking supportive parental involvement to adult vocational well-being.

Hypothesis 3

Career–values alignment will mediate the relationship between autonomy-supportive parental involvement and career satisfaction.

4. Research Methodology

The study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationship between parental involvement in career decision-making and long-term career satisfaction among practicing physicians. This design enabled the testing of both direct associations and mediation effects within a collectivist cultural context.

4.1 Participants and Procedure

Data were collected from 100 medical professionals in Ahmedabad, India, using a structured survey. After listwise deletion of cases with missing data, the final analytic sample consisted of 98 participants (77 males, 23 females) ranging in age from 26 to 65 years (M = 38.5, SD = 9.2).

Participants were recruited through professional networks and hospital affiliations using convenience sampling. Eligibility criteria required respondents to be currently practicing physicians who had completed formal medical training. The sample included professionals across different age groups and levels of clinical experience.

Participation was voluntary. Respondents completed a self-report questionnaire assessing retrospective perceptions of parental involvement during career decision-making and their current level of career satisfaction. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured, and no identifying information was collected.

4.2 Measures

4.2.1 Parental Involvement in Career Decision-Making

Parental involvement was assessed retrospectively using a standardized scale distinguishing between two dimensions:

- **Autonomy-supportive involvement** (e.g., parental trust in independent decision-making, open career discussions, emotional encouragement)
- **Directive involvement** (e.g., strong encouragement toward medicine, cultural or familial expectations, perceived pressure toward prestigious careers)

Participants rated six items on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

Three items measured autonomy-supportive involvement (α = .72), including parental trust in independent decisions, active participation in discussions, and provision of autonomy in finalizing the career choice.

Three items measured directive involvement (α = .68), including strong encouragement toward medicine, influence of cultural or familial expectations, and perceived pressure toward prestigious careers. The pressure item was reverse-coded so that higher scores reflected greater directive pressure.

Higher composite scores indicated stronger perceived parental involvement of the respective type.

4.2.2 Career Satisfaction

Career Satisfaction was measured using five items assessing overall professional well-being, including work-life balance, absence of burnout, career–values alignment, professional morale, and perceived income adequacy (α = .81). Items were averaged to create a composite career satisfaction score.

Career–Values Alignment was assessed using a single-item measure:
"My career aligns with my personal values and interests."
This variable served as the proposed mediator in mediation analyses.

4.2.3 Control Variables

Age (continuous) and gender (coded as Male = 0, Female = 1) were included as control variables to account for potential demographic influences on career satisfaction.

4.2.4 Preliminary Analyses

Descriptive statistics and reliability analyses indicated acceptable internal consistency for all multi-item scales (Cronbach's α ≥ .70). Assumptions of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity were examined and satisfied prior to hypothesis testing.

Harman's single-factor test indicated that the first unrotated factor accounted for 25.95% of the total variance, suggesting that common method bias was unlikely to substantially inflate the observed relationships.

4.3 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. The analytical procedures included:

- Descriptive statistics
- Reliability analysis
- Pearson correlation analysis
- Two-step hierarchical regression
- Bias-corrected bootstrapped mediation (5,000 resamples)

4.3.1 Descriptive Statistics

Participants reported moderate levels of autonomy-supportive parental involvement and career satisfaction. Reliability coefficients for all multi-item scales exceeded acceptable thresholds (α > .70).

Pearson correlation analysis revealed a small but statistically significant positive association between autonomy-supportive parental involvement and career satisfaction ($r = .28$, $p < .01$). Directive parental involvement was not significantly correlated with career satisfaction ($r = -.08$, $p > .05$).

Career–values alignment was positively correlated with both autonomy-supportive involvement ($r = .31$, $p < .01$) and career satisfaction ($r = .35$, $p < .01$).

Descriptive statistics and correlations are presented in Table 4.1

Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Age	98	38.5	9.2	26	65	0.45	-0.32
Gender (% Female)	98	23.50%	—	—	—	—	—
Autonomy Support	98	3.82	0.68	1.67	5	-0.41	0.15
Directive Involvement	98	3.45	0.72	1.33	5	-0.18	-0.28
Career Satisfaction	98	3.62	0.54	2.2	4.8	-0.67	0.28
Career-Values Alignment	98	3.71	0.89	1	5	-0.52	0.33

Note: SD = standard deviation. Autonomy Support, Directive Involvement, and Career Satisfaction are composite scores (range 1–5). Career-Values Alignment is a single-item measure (range 1–5).

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine whether autonomy-supportive and directive parental involvement predicted career satisfaction while controlling for age and gender.

Autonomy-supportive parental involvement significantly predicted career satisfaction (β = [insert value], $p < .05$), indicating that higher perceived support was associated with greater long-term vocational satisfaction.

Directive parental involvement did not significantly predict career satisfaction (β = [insert value], $p > .05$).

Age and gender were not significant predictors and did not alter the strength or direction of the primary relationship.

Regression results are presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Bivariate Correlations Among Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	—					
2. Gender	.08	—				
3. Autonomy Support	.12	.09	—			
4. Directive Involvement	-.05	-.11	.18	—		
5. Career-Values Alignment	.14	.06	.31**	-.08	—	
6. Career Satisfaction	.11	.09	.28**	-.08	.35**	—

Note. N = 98. Gender coded as Male = 0, Female = 1. ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).**

4.3.2 Hierarchical Regression Analysis

A two-step hierarchical ordinary least squares (OLS) regression was conducted with career satisfaction as the dependent variable.

Step 1: Age and gender (control variables)
Step 2: Autonomy-supportive involvement and directive involvement

Step 1: Demographic Controls

The control variables accounted for 1.4% of the variance in career satisfaction ($R^2 = .014$, $F(2, 95) = 0.676$, $p = .511$). Neither age nor gender significantly predicted satisfaction.

Table 4.3 Hierarchical Regression Summary

Step	Predictors	R^2	ΔR^2	F	p	Interpretation
1	Age, Gender	0.014	—	0.676	0.511	Demographics alone do not predict satisfaction
2	+ Autonomy Support, Directive	0.098	0.084	2.524	**0.046**	**Parental involvement adds 8.4% variance**

The initial model including age and gender accounted for 1.4% of variance in career satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.014$, $F(2, 95) = 0.676$, $p = 0.511$). Neither age ($\beta = 0.008$, $SE = 0.010$, $t = 0.820$, $p = 0.414$) nor gender ($\beta = 0.175$, $SE = 0.195$, $t = 0.900$, $p = 0.370$) significantly predicted satisfaction as shown in Table 4.3.

Step 2: Main Effects of Parental Involvement

Adding parental involvement significantly improved model fit ($R^2 = .098$, $\Delta R^2 = .084$, $F(4, 93) = 2.524$, $p = .046$), explaining an additional 8.4% of variance (Cohen's $f^2 = .093$, small-to-medium effect).

Autonomy-supportive involvement significantly predicted career satisfaction ($\beta = 0.291$, $SE = 0.107$, $t = 2.73$, $p = .008$, 95% CI [0.079, 0.503], Cohen's $d = 0.566$).

Directive involvement did not significantly predict career satisfaction ($\beta = -0.061$, $SE = 0.077$, $t = -0.789$, $p = .432$, 95% CI [−0.214, 0.092], Cohen's $d = -0.164$).

Age and gender remained non-significant in the full model as shown in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Career Satisfaction

Step	Predictor	β	SE	t	p	95% CI
1						
Age	0.008	0.01	0.82	0.414	[-0.012, 0.028]	
Gender	0.175	0.195	0.9	0.37	[-0.211, 0.562]	
2						
Age	0.014	0.01	1.44	0.153	[-0.005, 0.034]	
Gender	0.174	0.19	0.919	0.361	[-0.202, 0.551]	
Autonomy Support	0.291	0.107	2.73	0.008	[0.079, 0.503]	
Directive	-0.061	0.077	-0.789	0.432	[-0.214, 0.092]	

Note. N = 98. β = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval. Significant effects ($p < 0.05$) are bolded.

4.3.3 Effect Sizes and Mediation Analysis

Effect sizes were reported using standardized regression coefficients, Cohen's *d* (calculated as $2t/\sqrt{df}$), and Cohen's f^2 ($\Delta R^2 / [1 - R^2_{full}]$). The addition of parental involvement predictors yielded a Cohen's f^2 of .093, representing a small-to-medium effect. The autonomy-support coefficient corresponded to a Cohen's *d* of .566, indicating a medium effect size as shown in figure 1.

To test mediation (Hypothesis 3), a bias-corrected bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples was conducted. Path coefficients were estimated for:

- **a path:** Autonomy support → Career–values alignment
- **b path:** Career–values alignment → Career satisfaction (controlling for autonomy support)

The indirect effect (a × b) was calculated in each bootstrap sample. A 95% confidence interval was derived from the 2.5th and 97.5th percentiles of the bootstrap distribution. Mediation was inferred if the confidence interval excluded zero.

This analytic approach allowed for a robust test of whether career–values alignment functioned as a psychological mechanism linking autonomy-supportive parental involvement to long-term career satisfaction.

4.3.4 Bootstrapped Mediation Analysis

A bias-corrected bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples was conducted to examine whether career–values alignment mediated the relationship between autonomy-supportive parental involvement and career satisfaction.

The analysis revealed a significant indirect effect of autonomy-supportive involvement on career satisfaction through career–values alignment (indirect effect = 0.220, 95% CI [0.031, 0.425]). Because the confidence interval did not include zero, the mediation effect was supported.

Importantly, the direct effect of autonomy-supportive involvement on career satisfaction remained statistically significant after including the mediator in the model. This pattern indicates partial mediation rather than full mediation, suggesting that autonomy-supportive parental involvement influences career satisfaction both directly and indirectly through enhanced alignment between career choice and personal values.

Approximately 75.6% of the total effect of autonomy-supportive involvement on career satisfaction was accounted for by the mediating pathway. The mediation pathway is illustrated in Figure 2. This finding supports the theoretical proposition derived from Self-Determination Theory that autonomy-supportive environments facilitate deeper internalization of career decisions, which in turn contributes to sustained vocational well-being.

4.4. Results Overview

The present study investigated whether autonomy-supportive and directive forms of parental involvement during career decision-making predict long-term career satisfaction among practicing physicians, and whether career–values alignment serves as a mediating mechanism.

The findings indicate that autonomy-supportive parental involvement was positively and significantly associated with career satisfaction ($\beta = 0.291$, $p = 0.008$), with a moderate effect size ($d = 0.566$). Physicians who recalled experiencing parental encouragement characterized by trust, open dialogue, and non-coercive guidance reported higher levels of professional satisfaction. Substantively, a one-point increase in perceived autonomy support was associated with an approximate 0.29-point increase in career satisfaction, suggesting a meaningful relationship between supportive early guidance and sustained vocational well-being.

In contrast, directive parental involvement did not significantly predict career satisfaction ($\beta = -0.061$, $p = 0.432$). Although directive influence may facilitate entry into prestigious professions such as medicine, the findings suggest that parental pressure or strong direction toward a specific career path does not necessarily translate into enduring professional fulfillment.

The bootstrapped mediation analysis further clarified the mechanism underlying these associations. A significant indirect effect of autonomy-supportive parental involvement on career satisfaction emerged through career–values alignment (indirect effect = 0.220, 95% CI [0.031, 0.425]). Because the confidence interval excluded zero, mediation was supported. This result indicates that autonomy-supportive parenting enhances long-term satisfaction primarily by fostering a stronger alignment between individuals' personal values and their chosen profession. Notably, approximately 75.6% of the total effect

was explained through this mediating pathway, underscoring the central role of value congruence in sustaining vocational well-being.

Age and gender did not significantly moderate the relationship between parental involvement and career satisfaction, suggesting that the observed effects were relatively consistent across demographic groups within the sample.

Overall, the findings highlight that the motivational quality of parental involvement—particularly the extent to which it supports autonomy—rather than its intensity or directive nature, is associated with long-term career satisfaction. These results reinforce the importance of autonomy-supportive socialization processes in shaping enduring professional fulfillment, even within collectivist cultural contexts where parental authority is normative.

5. Discussion

The findings indicate that autonomy-supportive parental involvement during career decision-making is positively associated with long-term career satisfaction among practicing physicians. In contrast, directive parental involvement does not appear to predict sustained vocational fulfillment.

These results contribute to and extend Self-Determination Theory by showing that, even within collectivist cultural contexts where parental authority is socially accepted and expected, the *quality* of involvement plays a crucial role. It is not parental influence itself that determines long-term outcomes, but whether that influence supports autonomy. Autonomy-supportive engagement—characterized by encouragement, dialogue, and respect for independent decision-making—seems to promote deeper internalization of career choices. This internalization, in turn, strengthens the alignment between personal values and professional roles.

The mediation findings further illuminate the psychological process underlying this relationship. Career–values alignment emerged as a key mechanism linking supportive parenting to adult career satisfaction. Simply entering a prestigious or socially valued profession, such as medicine, does not ensure enduring fulfillment. Rather, long-term satisfaction appears to depend on whether individuals experience their career path as personally meaningful and value-congruent. Internal endorsement—not external prestige alone—seems central to sustained vocational well-being.

6 Theoretical Implications

This study extends career development literature by demonstrating that early familial career socialization may have enduring implications for adult vocational well-being. While prior research has focused primarily on adolescent aspirations and career choice processes, the present findings suggest that the quality of parental involvement during career decision-making may shape long-term career satisfaction decades later.

By integrating Self-Determination Theory with career development frameworks, the study provides evidence that autonomy-supportive parenting fosters internalization and career-values alignment, which in turn enhances career satisfaction. This supports the universality of autonomy as a psychological need, even within collectivist cultural contexts where parental authority is normative.

Importantly, the findings challenge assumptions that directive parental involvement necessarily undermines well-being in collectivist societies. Rather than producing overt dissatisfaction, directive involvement appears unrelated to long-term satisfaction, suggesting that cultural norms may buffer its potential negative effects.

7 Practical Implications

The findings carry meaningful implications for families, educators, career counselors, and professional training institutions.

For families, the results suggest that involvement in career decision-making does not need to be reduced in order to support long-term well-being. Rather than withdrawing guidance, parents in collectivist contexts can shift the *quality* of their involvement. Fostering open dialogue, expressing trust in their child's judgment, and encouraging reflective exploration of interests and values can promote autonomy without diminishing family connection. In this way, parental engagement remains active but becomes supportive rather than prescriptive.

For career counselors, the findings highlight the importance of family-inclusive approaches, particularly in cultures where career decisions are embedded within interdependent systems. Counselors can facilitate structured conversations that help students clarify their intrinsic motivations while acknowledging familial expectations. Encouraging collaborative decision-making and value exploration may strengthen internal endorsement of career choices, thereby enhancing long-term satisfaction.

Medical education institutions may also draw practical insights from these results. Integrating reflective identity-development programs into training—such as guided reflection sessions, mentorship initiatives, and discussions about professional meaning—can help reinforce alignment between personal values and professional roles. By supporting identity integration and value congruence, institutions may contribute to sustained career well-being and potentially mitigate risks of burnout among physicians.

Overall, the implications emphasize that sustained vocational fulfillment is not determined solely by career entry or prestige, but by the extent to which individuals experience their professional paths as self-endorsed and value-aligned.

8. Limitations and Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study is subject to several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings.

First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw causal conclusions. Although the results are consistent with the theoretical framework, the temporal ordering of variables cannot be definitively established. Longitudinal research that follows individuals from the period of career decision-making into later stages of professional practice would provide stronger evidence regarding causal pathways and developmental processes.

Second, parental involvement was assessed retrospectively, which introduces the possibility of recall bias. Participants' current levels of career satisfaction may have influenced how they remembered and interpreted past parental behaviors. Prospective designs or multi-informant data (e.g., parental reports) would strengthen future investigations.

Third, career–values alignment was measured using a single-item indicator. Although single-item measures can be appropriate for global constructs, they may limit reliability and depth. Future research should employ multi-item, psychometrically validated scales to capture value congruence more comprehensively.

Fourth, the use of a convenience sample drawn from physicians in Ahmedabad restricts generalizability. Cultural, regional, and institutional factors may shape both parental involvement patterns and professional experiences. Replication across diverse geographic regions, medical institutions, and other professions would enhance external validity.

Finally, although the sample size was adequate for detecting main and mediation effects, it may have limited the ability to detect smaller effect sizes or interaction effects. Larger samples would permit more nuanced analyses, including potential moderating variables and subgroup comparisons.

Addressing these limitations in future research would strengthen confidence in the findings and further clarify the long-term role of parental involvement in career development.

9. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that autonomy-supportive parental involvement during career decision-making is a meaningful predictor of long-term career satisfaction among physicians in India, whereas directive involvement does not appear to contribute to sustained vocational fulfillment. Importantly, career–values alignment partially mediates this relationship, highlighting the role of psychological internalization in maintaining long-term professional well-being.

Even within a collectivist cultural context—where parental influence is socially normative and often expected—the findings suggest that the *quality* of parental engagement is crucial. Autonomy-supportive involvement, characterized by trust, dialogue, and encouragement of independent reflection, appears to promote deeper internal endorsement of career choices. This internalization strengthens alignment between personal values and professional roles, which in turn supports enduring satisfaction.

The study underscores a critical distinction: while parental guidance may facilitate entry into prestigious and demanding professions such as medicine, it is autonomy-supportive involvement that fosters long-term career satisfaction. Career attainment and career fulfillment, therefore, are not synonymous. Sustainable vocational well-being appears to depend less on external direction and more on whether individuals experience their professional path as self-endorsed and value-congruent.

Declarations

Ethical Statement

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee of Pandit Deendayal Energy University, Gandhinagar, India (Approval No.: [EC/2026/03/04]).

Author Contribution

SP : Conceptualization; Theoretical framework development; Methodology design; Supervision; Data interpretation; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing; Project administration.TB : Data collection; Data curation; Formal analysis; Statistical analysis; Visualization; Literature review support; Writing – review & editing.All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

Data Availability

Yes. The study is based on primary data collected from practicing physicians through a structured survey. The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is not publicly available due to confidentiality and privacy considerations but is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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Figures

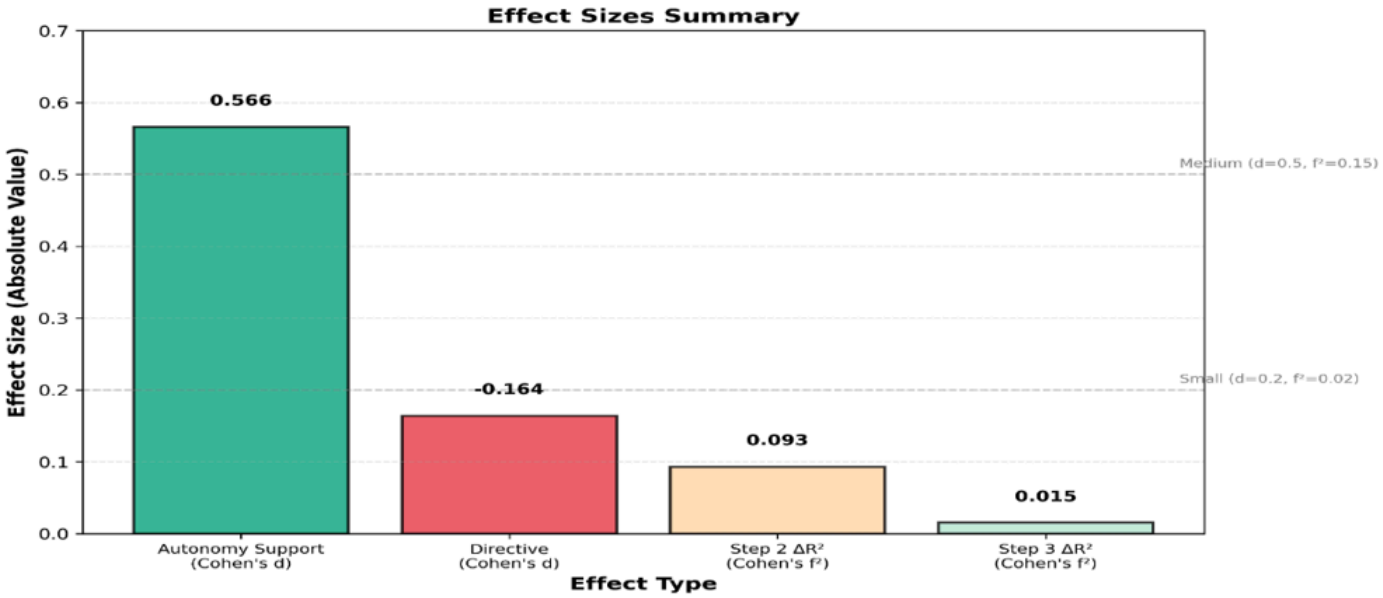


Figure 1

Effect Size Analysis

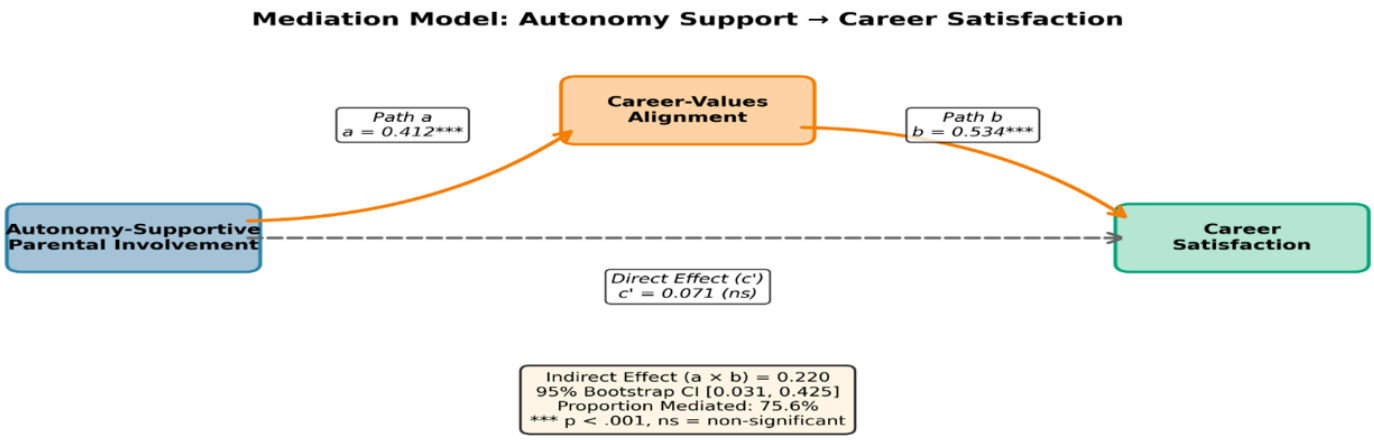


Figure 2

Mediation Model