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Echoes of Family Expectations: How Parental Career Intrusion Shapes Workplace Fulfilment

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Abstract

Background: Parents strongly influence career decisions, especially in collectivistic societies such as India. When involvement becomes pressure, control, or substitution of the young person's choices, it is termed *parental career intrusion*. Its consequences for adult workplace fulfilment are theorised widely but rarely measured directly.

Objective: To synthesise theory and empirical evidence on how parental career intrusion relates to career development and workplace fulfilment, and to appraise the strength and limits of that evidence.

Method: A narrative review based on a targeted search (December 2025) of meta-analyses and primary studies on parenting, career decision-making, person-environment fit, and career regret. Effect sizes were extracted as reported by the original authors and re-expressed as shared variance (r^2).

Results: Meta-analytic correlations between parenting and youth outcomes cluster between r = .20 and r = .33. Autonomy-supportive parenting relates positively to well-being (r = .30), psychological control relates to ill-being (r = .26), and parental variables relate to career decision-making self-efficacy at r = .26 to .31. Person-job fit relates strongly to job satisfaction (r ≈ .56). Indian medical-student data show 16.2% citing parental pressure as a reason for entry and 32.0% regretting their choice. Evidence on parental interference is not fully consistent.

Conclusions: The evidence supports a plausible, modest, multi-pathway link between intrusion and reduced fulfilment, but direct adult-workplace evidence is thin. Guidance that widens choices appears beneficial, whereas control appears costly. Longitudinal and India-focused studies are needed.

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KEYWORDS: parental career intrusion; autonomy support; psychological control; person-job fit; job satisfaction; career regret; self-determination theory

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1. INTRODUCTION

Work occupies much of adult life, and satisfaction with it is linked to health, performance, and overall life satisfaction (Judge et al., 2001). Fulfilment at work depends not only on the job itself but also on how the career began: whose goals shaped it, how freely it was chosen, and whether the person experiences it as self-expressive.

Families are the first context in which career ideas form. Parents provide role models, resources, networks, and beliefs about which occupations are respectable and secure (Whiston & Keller, 2004). In many Asian and Middle Eastern societies, parents also help to select subjects, entrance examinations, institutions, and even employers. This involvement is usually motivated by care and by concern for security.

The same involvement can become problematic. This review uses the term **parental career intrusion** for parental behaviours that pressure, direct, or control a son's or daughter's career decisions beyond what the individual welcomes or what is developmentally appropriate. Typical examples are insisting on a degree, vetoing a career change, monitoring performance, comparing the child with peers, and linking family honour to occupational status.

India offers a revealing setting. Medicine, engineering, and civil service carry high prestige, and career choice is often treated as a family decision. Reports that many Indian medical students enter the profession under parental pressure, and that a sizeable fraction later regret it, make the topic practically important (Choice of medical profession, 2023).

Three questions guide this review. First, how is intrusion distinguished from supportive involvement? Second, what does empirical evidence, including effect sizes, show about its links with career development and workplace outcomes? Third, how strong is the evidence for each proposed mechanism, and where are the gaps?

The contribution of this review is threefold. It consolidates scattered meta-analytic evidence into a single comparable set of effect sizes; it distinguishes direct evidence from inference when moving from youth career decision-making to adult workplace fulfilment; and it adds Indian survey data that are usually absent from international syntheses. The result is a calibrated, not an alarmist, account of what is and is not known.

2. REVIEW APPROACH

This is a narrative review with quantitative synthesis; it is not a PRISMA-style systematic review. Targeted searches in December 2025 covered meta-analyses and primary studies on parental autonomy support and psychological control, career-specific parental behaviours, helicopter parenting, career decision-making self-efficacy, career adaptability, person-environment fit, and career regret among Indian students.

Priority was given to meta-analyses and large samples. Effect sizes (Pearson r, confidence intervals, sample sizes) are reported exactly as published. Where r values are squared to indicate shared variance, this is a transparent derivation by the reviewer and is labelled as such. Cohen's conventional benchmarks (about .10 small, .30 medium, .50 large) are used for interpretation. Classic theoretical sources were drawn on for the conceptual framework.

Sources were retained when they reported a quantitative relationship between parental behaviour, cognition, or pressure and a career, well-being, or work-related outcome. Opinion pieces, commercial surveys, and studies without extractable statistics were excluded. Because several retrieved items were abstracts, theses, or conference reports, evidence quality is graded in Section 6 rather than assumed.

3. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

3.1 Intrusion within a continuum of involvement

Parental involvement ranges from autonomy-supportive (providing information, encouraging exploration) through directive (strong advice) to intrusive (parental preference replaces the child's). Dietrich and Kracke (2009) operationalised career-specific parental behaviour as support, interference, and lack of engagement. Intrusion corresponds to the interference end. It overlaps with, but is narrower than, helicopter parenting (general over-involvement; Schiffrin et al., 2014; Segrin et al., 2012) and psychological control (guilt induction, love withdrawal, shaming; Barber, 1996; Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010).

3.2 Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory proposes that well-being depends on satisfying needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Goals pursued under pressure or to avoid guilt represent *controlled* motivation, which predicts weaker vitality, persistence, and satisfaction. Importantly, autonomy means volitional endorsement, not independence from family, so a family-endorsed path can be fulfilling when its reasons are internalised. Kagitcibasi's (2005) autonomous-relational self expresses the same idea for relational cultures.

3.3 Career theories

Social Cognitive Career Theory holds that interests and choices develop through self-efficacy and outcome expectations, shaped by contextual supports and barriers (Lent et al., 1994). Career construction theory and Super's (1980) life-span approach treat careers as expressions of an evolving self-concept (Savickas, 2005). Intrusion may cause identity foreclosure, commitment without exploration, which is fragile when interests later diverge.

3.4 Fit and strain frameworks

Person-environment fit theory predicts satisfaction when interests, values, and abilities match job demands. The Job Demands-Resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and work-family conflict theory (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) explain how ongoing parental criticism or monitoring can function as an extra demand that spills into work.

3.5 Working propositions

Drawing these frameworks together, four propositions organise the evidence that follows. **P1:** Intrusion frustrates autonomy and thereby lowers autonomous work motivation. **P2:** Intrusion increases the probability of person-job misfit by reducing exploration. **P3:** Intrusion is internalised as introjected pressure that persists into employment. **P4:** Intrusion generates family-

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to-work strain. Each proposition is later rated for evidential support.

4. Synthesis of Evidence

4.1 Parenting style and youth well-being: cross-cultural meta-analysis

The most comprehensive recent test of Self-Determination Theory's dual-process model is the meta-analysis by Bradshaw et al. (2025). In univariate models, parental autonomy support correlated positively with child well-being (r = .30, 95% CI [.26, .33]), and psychological control correlated positively with child ill-being (r = .26, 95% CI [.23, .28]). When both predictors were entered together, autonomy support still predicted well-being (r = .26, [.20, .31]) and psychological control still predicted ill-being (r = .20, [.17, .23]). The authors reported that these patterns held across regions, levels of national individualism and cultural hierarchy, developmental periods, and sexes.

Two observations follow. The two parenting dimensions have distinct, not merely mirror-image, effects, so reducing control and adding support are separate tasks. And the cost of control is not confined to Western settings, which is directly relevant to cultures that regard parental direction as normal.

4.2 Career-specific meta-analyses

To et al. (2022) pooled studies on parental variables and youth career decision-making self-efficacy. All three categories showed low-to-medium associations: parental cognitions (r = .312, 95% CI [.217, .407]), parenting behaviours (r = .303, [.248, .359]), and parent-child relationships (r = .255, [.226, .284]).

Wang and Dong (2024) meta-analysed 24 studies (from 1,684 records, published 1981-2024) on family variables and career adaptability. Supportive parental career behaviour had the largest effect (r = .325). Notably, the correlation for parental interference was non-significant. This finding qualifies the simple claim that interference lowers adaptability: the harm of intrusion may operate through other variables, such as decision difficulty or well-being, rather than through adaptability directly.

4.3 Primary studies in collectivistic contexts

In a sample of 1,592 Chinese high school students, parental support negatively predicted career decision-making difficulties, whereas interference and lack of engagement predicted them positively (Su et al., 2025). Career decision self-efficacy partially mediated the effect of support, but not of interference or lack of engagement, suggesting that interference harms through a different route than support helps.

Guan et al. (2016) followed 731 Chinese undergraduates over 18 months. Parental support predicted later career adaptability through career decision-making self-efficacy, and this indirect effect was stronger among students with low traditionality beliefs. Culture therefore appears to moderate, not simply determine, parental influence.

A study of 450 final-year university students in Istanbul reported a correlation of about -.46 between parent-individual career-goal incongruence and self-efficacy (Impact of parent-individual career goal incongruence, 2024). This is the largest negative coefficient in the reviewed set, but it comes from a single conference-reported sample and should be treated cautiously.

4.4 Helicopter parenting

A meta-analysis of 53 studies and 111 effect sizes found that perceived helicopter parenting was associated with more internalising symptoms and with lower academic adjustment, self-efficacy, and regulatory skills among emerging adults (Parenting in overdrive, 2024). A separate meta-analysis of 14 studies (N = 6,286) reported a pooled effect of -0.201 for self-efficacy (Relationship between helicopter parenting and self-efficacy, n.d.). Some individual studies, however, find no association or even better adjustment, a heterogeneity acknowledged in the 2024 meta-analysis itself.

A Korean study summarised in the Nature Index literature indicates a dual pattern: pressure from parental career expectations was linked with depressive symptoms, whereas parent-child affection was linked with higher life satisfaction (Perceived helicopter parenting and Korean emerging adults, n.d.). Warmth and pressure can coexist and carry opposite consequences.

4.5 Fit, stress, and adult workplace outcomes

The link to adult work is most credible through person-job fit. Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) meta-analysed 172 studies (836 effect sizes) and reported that person-job fit related most strongly to job satisfaction, at a corrected correlation of about .56. If parentally directed careers raise the probability of misfit, even a modest intrusion-fit association could translate into meaningful satisfaction differences.

On strain, a South Korean graduate thesis found that socially prescribed perfectionism fully mediated the relationship between parental achievement pressure and university students' employment stress, with similar paths for fathers and mothers (Sogang University, n.d.). This supports the introjection pathway: pressure becomes an internal demand to meet others' standards.

4.6 Evidence from India

A cross-sectional survey of 1,060 Phase I MBBS students across India found that 172 (16.2%) cited parental expectation or pressure as a reason for choosing medicine. The proportion was higher among female students (18.4%) than male students (12.4%), $\chi^2 = 6.42$, $p = .012$ (Choice of medical profession, 2023). From the reported percentages, the reviewer calculates that the odds of citing parental pressure were roughly 1.6 times higher for women than for men.

A mixed-methods study of 1,060 Phase I MBBS students reported that 32.0% regretted their decision to study medicine, citing societal pressure, a demanding curriculum, and related factors (Regret among Phase I MBBS students, n.d.). A smaller survey of 300 students in Tamil Nadu found 18% regret, of whom 76% cited stress (Reasons for choosing medical profession, n.d.). These samples are limited to first-year or early students and medicine, but they show that regret and pressure are measurable in India and not uncommon.

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4.7 Moderators: gender, relationship quality, and developmental stage

Three moderators recur in the evidence. First, gender: the Indian MBBS data show women more often citing parental pressure, in line with the argument that daughters face distinct expectations about field, mobility, and marriage. Second, relationship quality: the Korean findings suggest that affection and pressure can have opposite associations with well-being, so a warm relationship may buffer some of the cost of pressure. Third, developmental stage: Bradshaw et al. (2025) reported that the pattern held across developmental periods, while helicopter-parenting reviews stress that over-involvement is especially mismatched with emerging adulthood, when autonomy is a central task (Arnett, 2000).

The evidence on socioeconomic context is thinner. Theory suggests that families with limited resources may push for secure occupations out of genuine economic anxiety and sacrifice, creating strong obligation, but the studies reviewed here do not test this directly, so it remains a hypothesis.

Table 1. Summary of key quantitative findings reviewed

Source	Design and sample	Principal result
Bradshaw et al. (2025)	Cross-cultural meta-analysis, parenting	Autonomy support–well-being r = .30; psychological control–ill-being r = .26
To et al. (2022)	Meta-analysis, parental variables and career decision self-efficacy	r = .312 (cognitions), .303 (behaviours), .255 (relationships)
Wang & Dong (2024)	Meta-analysis, 24 studies, career adaptability	Support r = .325; interference non-significant
Su et al. (2025)	1,592 Chinese high school students	Interference and disengagement predicted decision difficulty
Guan et al. (2016)	731 Chinese undergraduates, 18-month design	Support effect stronger at low traditionality
Istanbul study (2024)	450 final-year students	Goal incongruence–self-efficacy r ≈ −.46
Helicopter meta-analyses (2024)	53 studies (111 effects); 14 studies (N = 6,286)	Higher internalising, lower self-efficacy (ES = −0.201)
Kristof-Brown et al. (2005)	172 studies, 836 effect sizes	Person-job fit–job satisfaction ≈ .56
Indian MBBS survey (2023)	1,060 Phase I students	Parental pressure cited by 16.2%; women 18.4% vs men 12.4%
Indian mixed-methods study	1,060 Phase I students	32.0% regretted choosing medicine

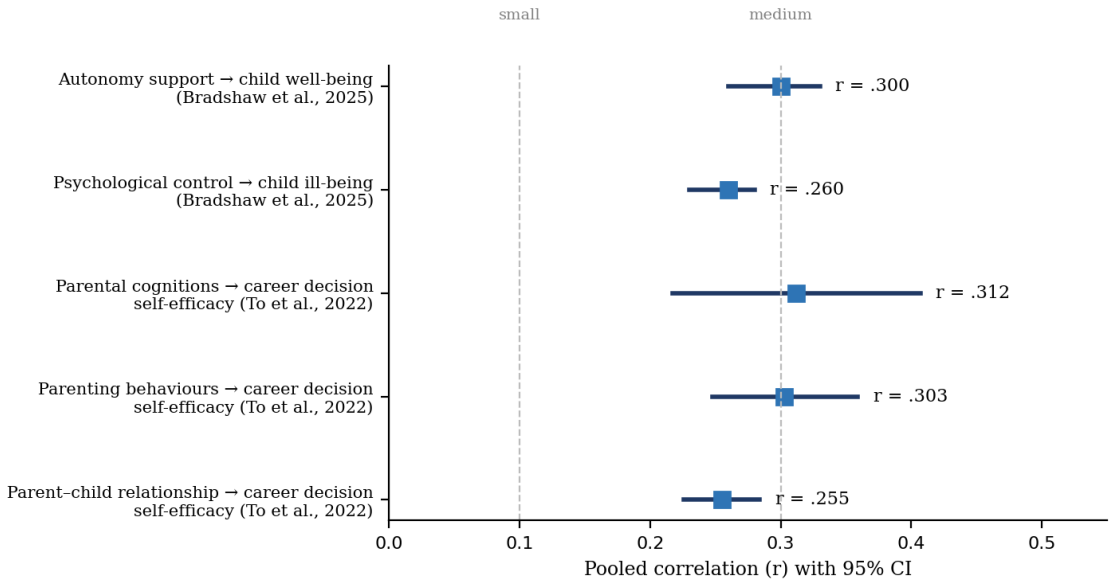


Figure 1. Pooled correlations (95% CI) from the meta-analyses reviewed. Values are as reported by the original authors; the figure was drawn by the reviewer.

5. Critical Analysis and Observations

5.1 Direction is consistent; magnitude is modest

Every meta-analytic coefficient points in the theoretically expected direction, yet none is large. Squaring the correlations gives a sense of shared variance: r = .30 corresponds to about 9% of variance, r = .26 to about 7%, and the career self-efficacy correlations (.255 to .312) to roughly 6.5% to 9.7%. Parenting therefore matters, but it is one influence among many, and most variation in outcomes is explained by other factors such as ability, labour-market conditions, and personality.

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5.2 Support is better evidenced than intrusion

The evidence for the benefits of support is stronger and more consistent than for the harms of interference. Wang and Dong (2024) found no significant interference-adaptability correlation, and Su et al. (2025) found that self-efficacy mediated support but not interference. The most defensible reading is that support and intrusion are not simple opposites: intrusion may act through need frustration, strain, and introjected pressure rather than through reduced efficacy.

5.3 The workplace link is inferred, not measured

Most primary data come from adolescents and university students and measure decision-making variables, not adult job satisfaction. The bridge to workplace fulfilment relies on the strong fit-satisfaction relationship ($r \approx .56$, about 31% shared variance) and on stress findings such as the perfectionism mediation. As a thought experiment only, if the intrusion-to-misfit path were $r = .30$, a product-of-paths estimate with the .56 fit-satisfaction path would give an indirect association near .17 (about 3% of variance). No study has estimated the first path, so this number is illustrative and not a finding.

5.4 Culture moderates but does not remove the pattern

Bradshaw et al. (2025) found the benefits of autonomy support and costs of psychological control across levels of national individualism, while Guan et al. (2016) found that traditionality changed the strength of an indirect effect. Taken together, culture changes *how much* and *through what route*, but there is little evidence that pressure experienced as imposed is harmless in collectivistic settings. Chao's (1994) point that control may be read as care, however, implies that perceived meaning matters and should be measured.

5.5 Indian data show pressure is one factor among several

That 16.2% of Indian MBBS students cited parental pressure indicates that most reported other primary reasons, such as interest in the profession. Yet 32.0% regret and the elevated report of pressure among women suggest that pressure and gender expectations deserve targeted attention. Because students rarely volunteer pressure when asked directly, self-reported percentages are probably conservative.

5.6 Methodological cautions

- **Causal direction.** Parents may become more directive when a young person appears indecisive, so correlations may partly reflect reverse causation.
- **Shared-method bias.** Most studies use self-reports from the same respondent, inflating correlations.
- **Construct overlap.** Control, interference, pressure, and helicopter parenting are measured differently, complicating pooling.
- **Selective samples.** Medical students are academically successful and may under-represent those who left.

5.7 Competing explanations

Several alternative readings deserve attention. Self-Determination Theory predicts that people can come to endorse parentally chosen careers, so intrusion at entry need not mean dissatisfaction later; if internalisation is common, simple cross-sectional comparisons will understate the benign cases. Selection is also possible: students who stay in a demanding course such as medicine may differ from those who leave, so surveys of enrolled students may understate harm. Finally, satisfaction can be sustained by status and security, and a person may report contentment while still experiencing low intrinsic engagement. Future work should therefore measure several facets of fulfilment, not satisfaction alone.

6. Integrative Model and Strength of Evidence

Parental career intrusion is proposed to influence workplace fulfilment through four pathways, moderated by culture, gender, socioeconomic context, relationship quality, developmental stage, and personal resources such as job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Table 2 rates the evidence available for each pathway in this review.

Table 2. Pathways from intrusion to workplace fulfilment and strength of evidence

Pathway	Direct evidence reviewed	Supporting evidence	Strength
Need frustration (controlled motivation)	Psychological control–ill-being $r = .26$	SDT dual-process meta-analysis	Moderate
Misfit and low efficacy	Goal incongruence–self-efficacy $r \approx -.46$ (single study)	Fit–satisfaction $r \approx .56$; efficacy meta-analyses	Moderate (indirect)
Introjected pressure	Perfectionism fully mediated pressure–employment stress	Korean helicopter-parenting findings	Limited
Family-to-work spillover	None directly on parental career pressure	Work-family conflict theory	Theoretical

7. Implications

- **Counsellors and schools:** Provide structured exploration, aptitude assessment, and family-inclusive sessions. Since support and control have separate effects, help parents both increase support and reduce control.
- **Parents:** Share information and concerns, but leave final decisions to the young adult. The evidence favours autonomy-supportive guidance, and warmth appears protective.
- **Employers:** Recognise that some employees' commitment reflects obligation. Mentoring, job crafting, and internal mobility can help them build intrinsic meaning, and low turnover should not be read as fulfilment.
- **Policy and institutions:** Universities and coaching systems could provide early, low-stakes career exploration and publish information on career regret and attrition, so that families decide with evidence and not only reputation.

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- **Individuals:** Distinguish endorsed goals from inherited ones, and negotiate with evidence, trial periods, or mediators rather than silent compliance.

8. LIMITATIONS

This review is narrative and based on a targeted, not exhaustive, search, so relevant studies may be missing. Some sources were available only as abstracts, conference reports, or theses, and a few lack full author details; effect sizes were taken as reported without independent verification. Pooled correlations come from parenting and youth populations, not from adults whose careers were chosen under pressure. The review's conclusions about workplace fulfilment are therefore inferential, as noted in Section 5.3.

9. Directions for Future Research

- Develop and validate a culturally sensitive scale of parental career intrusion distinguishing support, directive advice, and control.
- Run longitudinal studies from career choice into mid-career, measuring need satisfaction, fit, and job satisfaction directly.
- Estimate the missing intrusion-to-misfit path and test all four pathways in one structural model.
- Sample Indian and regional-language populations beyond medicine: engineering, commerce, arts, first-generation professionals, women in male-dominated fields, and family-business successors.
- Evaluate family-inclusive career counselling and parent workshops with experimental designs.

10. CONCLUSION

Across meta-analyses, autonomy-supportive parenting is consistently beneficial and psychologically controlling parenting is consistently costly, with correlations of roughly .20 to .33. Career-specific evidence, Indian survey data, and fit research make it plausible that intrusion lowers workplace fulfilment through need frustration, misfit, and introjected pressure. The effects are modest, culturally moderated, and largely inferred rather than directly measured in adults. Practitioners can act now on the consistent finding that autonomy support helps and control costs, while researchers should close the gap between youth decision-making studies and adult workplace outcomes. Guidance is most helpful when it widens a person's choices instead of replacing them.

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