



Career-Related Challenges of Rural Underprivileged Youth in Western India

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine the career-related challenges of rural underprivileged youth specifically from two regions, one each from Gujarat and Maharashtra in Western India, and elicit youths' perceptions regarding the nature of need for professional career guidance in rural areas. Data were collected from 150 literate boys and girls (14-to-20 years old) using individual questionnaires administered in small groups. Quantitative analyses included descriptive and advanced statistics; theme extraction was the principal data analytic strategy for qualitative data. Similar to the profile of youth in general, rural youth reported that limited information about various career options and lack of guidance were their top-most career-related challenges. Like any underprivileged youth, the rural youth reported challenges such as limited financial resources for further education, poor academic performance, lack of proficiency in the English language, and fear of failure. Specific to their rural residence, were challenges such as limited experience as a result of living in a rural area. Unanimously all participants affirmed a felt need for professional career guidance in rural areas. Their expectations regarding such guidance were to gain information about careers and financial resources for career development, and to receive guidance on how to achieve goals. Implications are drawn for career guidance and counselling in rural settings.

Keywords: career-related challenges, guidance and counselling, rural, underprivileged, youth

Career selection and progression is a major challenge for all youth, and rural youth are not an exception. In fact, career-related challenges are magnified in the context of the poverty/disadvantage that characterise rural India. Thus, the aim of this study was to examine the career-related challenges of rural underprivileged youth, specifically from two regions, one each from Gujarat and Maharashtra, in Western India. The study intention was also to clarify the

nature of need for professional career guidance services in rural areas in India such as those represented by the two selected regions.

While a preponderance of the reports in the literature pertain to the career development needs of urban youth and to some extent adults, there is still a substantial segment of the population, namely rural youth, whose career-related needs are under-examined.

The rural population in India, 833.1 million, is 68.84% of the total population (Census of India, 2011), a large part of which is constituted of youth. Career guidance for rural youth is essential not only for their individual development but also for community development (see Bakshi & Joshi, 2014) and economic development of the country.

Career Development of Rural Youth: Key Constructs and Approaches

Youth

UNESCO (n.d.) defines youth as “a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community” (para. 1). Thus, youth refers to a more fluid category than a fixed age-group. The National Youth Policy (NYP) 2014 (Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, n.d.) defines youth as those in the ages of 15-to-29 years, comprising 27.5% of the population. Amongst the priority areas of NYP 2014 are education, employment and skill development, and entrepreneurship.

Community-Based Youth-Serving Organisations

The community is a major setting for positive youth development, which “is a specific approach/orientation within youth development aimed at (working toward) ensuring that youth choose and thrive on positive developmental trajectory” (Bakshi & Joshi, 2014, p. 175). Various communities in India provide youth services, including career-related support/services (see Bakshi & Joshi, 2014) such as: organising career guidance programmes, providing mentoring, creating tie-ups for job placements, initiating and supporting self-help groups, enabling opportunities to learn about oneself, and offering loans/scholarships. Community-based youth services have an advantage over school- or college-based services as

the community setting is open to *all* youth, including those who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET). Further, it also allows for sustained and longer-term interventions with youth, thereby potentially fostering positive youth development, including career development.

Career Development in the Rural Context

Bakshi (2016) contrasted the differences in career development in developed versus developing countries. Developing countries are characterised by greater degrees of heterogeneity and inequitable differences such as those across regions, communities, privilege status, urban/rural residence. Therefore, notions of career and career-related challenges are expected to differ within and across contexts.

Meanings of career. Livelihood somehow carries connotations of rural, low-economic-status occupational activities linked to survival. Livelihood is also linked to engagement with traditional occupations. Career, on the other hand, carries overtones of urban, higher-economic-status occupational activities related to high incomes and opportunities for potential realisation. (Kalyanram, Gopalan, & Kamakshi, 2014, p. 394)

Today however, the boundaries are blurring and there is wider rural-urban mobility. Thus, notions such as “activities linked to survival” are also present amongst the urban underprivileged and potential realisation is also possible in a rural area. Thus, we have used the term “*career*” in our research with rural youth to encompass wider meanings, including personal fulfilment in career development.

Career Guidance in rural areas. In general, all youth go through phase(s) where they are expected to make important career-related decisions (e.g., the choice of an elective subject in school, which stream to select after Class 10/12, whether to

continue schooling or exit education, and where to work). Like any youth, those from underprivileged and rural contexts also tread a similar journey of career decision-making, albeit at times with less conscious deliberation. Given that youths' career choices are not always similar to those of their parents (see Bakshi, Bhartia, & Shah, 2016), career decision-making and preparation becomes critical for youth. Thus, rural youth, like any youth need support in navigating their career journeys.

Relevant Researches

The rural context frequently coincides with the underprivileged context. Thus, literature on career-related experiences of underprivileged youth has relevance for rural youth as well. In the following subsections, selected studies of the underprivileged context in general and rural context specifically are reviewed.

Non-Indian Studies

Blustein and others (2002) examined the impact of social class on the school-to-work transition of young adults in a selected region of the United States. They found that young adults from lower socioeconomic status (LSES) backgrounds viewed work primarily for economic survival, while those from higher socioeconomic status (HSES) backgrounds associated work with personal satisfaction and personal meaning. Secondly, young adults from LSES backgrounds were less likely to manifest their self-concepts (e.g., interests, goals, and aspirations) in the world of work unlike their counterparts from the HSES backgrounds. Moreover, barriers experienced by the LSES cohort were more pervasive and less easily remedied (for example, being forced to drop out of school to help the family financially). In many ways, social class impacted the school-to-work transition of these young adults.

Ball (2009) investigated the career development and college planning needs of rural high school students using archival data previously collected in a rural school district in Northeastern United States. The results indicated that rural high school students needed more knowledge about career opportunities, college requirements, and an understanding of financial aid. Secondly, it is also important to examine where rural youth go for career guidance. Griffin, Hutchins, and Meece (2011) conducted a study with 8,000 rural youth in the United States and found that most of the students went to their teachers to obtain information about their careers and found them to be the most useful source of career information as well. In another U.S. study, Schaefer and Meece (2009) investigated influences on rural youths' educational expectations and achievements. They found community and social support to be an important influence on rural youths' self-efficacy, which further had an influence on their educational expectations and achievements. These findings are important in determining rural youths' developmental needs in general, and career developmental needs specifically.

Juma (2007) writing from a developing world context on promoting livelihood opportunities for rural youth in Tanzania affirmed the importance of more comprehensive and culturally-relevant interventions. Juma highlighted the need for (an extrinsically) holistic approach, collaborative efforts, reforms in policies and laws, strengthening institutional linkages, and increasing employment opportunities to address rural (career) and livelihood issues in a developing world context.

Indian Studies

Very few career-related studies have been conducted in India with an inclusive (if not exclusive) focus on rural or other underprivileged groups (see for example, Bakshi & Maru, 2016; Bakshi, Bhartia, &

Shah, 2016; Sangma & Arulmani, 2013). Bakshi and Maru (2016) researched youth perceptions regarding importance of influence of community, family, peers, self, school and college, media, job attributes or career prospects, and professional career guidance services on their career choice. The findings were contrasted across gender, privilege status, urban/rural residence of youth, and two cities. Multiple findings are relevant here: Underprivileged youths' (both, urban and rural) highest mean rating for importance was for income/salary. Unlike privileged youth, underprivileged youth rated family SES as a very important influence on their career choice and factors related to education and media (e.g., academic performance, Internet) as less important influences on their career choice. In contrast to urban youth, rural youth considered certain factors as more important influences on their career choice such as community, gender, various family-related factors (i.e., mother's education, mother's occupation, mother's involvement, father's occupation, and the overall role of the family), peers, access to education for a particular career, academic performance, and books/newspapers/TV. Across the urban/rural residence and privilege status, youth did not consider professional career guidance services as having played an important role in making a career choice. This study provides an important direction for understanding underprivileged and rural youths' career-related perceptions.

Sangma and Arulmani (2013) explored the career preparation status, career belief patterns, and academic achievement motivation level of high school students in rural and urban areas of the East Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya. They found that high school students in rural areas had significantly higher career preparation status, greater negativity of career beliefs, and lower achievement motivation than their urban counterparts. As they have pointed out, the higher career

preparation status of rural high school students must be examined alongside their lower achievement motivation levels.

Interestingly, rural youths' career guidance needs are studied not only by psychological and developmental researchers, but also by those from other disciplines. Badage and Karande (2016) explored the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), specifically the use of computers for career planning and development of rural youth. Using empirical data from 1,000 rural respondents and interviews with 800 government officials from 80 villages in Maharashtra, they concluded that ICT is poorly used in career planning and development of rural youth. In providing new directions, Badage and Karande have discussed the role of using ICT for career guidance in rural areas.

The few Indian studies reported here provide some insight into the career-related experiences of rural youth in India, yet it is clear that more work is needed. The objectives of this study were to: (a) examine the career-related challenges of rural underprivileged youth in Western India, (b) contrast the career-related challenges across gender and region of youth, (c) explore the nature and extent of professional career guidance services accessed by rural underprivileged youth, and (d) elicit rural underprivileged youths' perspectives regarding the nature of need for professional career guidance services in rural areas.

Method

Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select 150 rural underprivileged youth from two youth-serving organisations in rural areas of the states of Gujarat and Maharashtra in Western India. Across organisations youth from different faiths

were accessed. The participants were Ismaili Muslim girls and boys from Amreli, Junagadh, Porbandar, and Gir Somnath districts (collectively part of Saurashtra region) in Gujarat; Hindu, Muslim, and Buddhist girls and boys from Kedgaon and nearby villages in Ahmadnagar district in Maharashtra. Kedgaon and all the nearby villages are within 8 kilometres from Ahmadnagar town unlike the rural areas of Saurashtra where villages are far more distant from towns.

Inclusion criteria for youth were age (14-to-20 years), ability to read and write in English and/or Gujarati/Marathi, and representation of both sexes. The participants were 91 girls (60.7%) and 59 boys (39.3%) in the age range of 14-to-20 years ($M = 16.6$ yr, $SD = 2.06$ yr). See Table 1 for distribution of youth by region. The highest educational qualification ranged from Std. 7 to an undergraduate college degree. Family income ranged from Rs.1000 to Rs.15000/month; most were in the Rs. 2000-5000 income bracket.

Table 1
Sample Size by Gender and Region of Rural Underprivileged Youth

Sample Size	Saurashtra ($n=100$)	Ahmadnagar ($n=50$)	Total ($N=150$)
Girls	59	32	91
Boys	41	18	59

Procedure and Measures

A list of youth-serving organisations was created and organisations that were actively working with rural youth for educational/career-related support/service (in some form at least) were approached. Thus, two organisations were selected keeping in mind consent/feasibility/faiths, one each from Gujarat and Maharashtra to examine regional differences as well. Consent was obtained from the youth-serving organisations as well as rural youth. Data was collected by visiting 11 villages (six in Saurashtra and five in Ahmadnagar) and meeting youth in small groups.

An individually-administered questionnaire was developed to elicit rural youths' background information, contact details, and mainly their career-related challenges and perceptions regarding the nature of need for professional career guidance services for rural youth. This

questionnaire was developed in English, and translated into local languages (i.e., Gujarati and Marathi). The translations were verified by back translations into English by a third person to ensure that the meanings were conceptually and contextually accurate. Bilingual questionnaires (English and Gujarati/Marathi) were used and participants were free to answer in the language of their choice (see Appendix 1 for sample questions). *Career* was conceptualised and explained as any or all of the following: income-related activities, what one wants to do in work life, that which allows one to contribute to the family, community, and society at large, and is personally fulfilling.

Next, the rural youth were asked to list their top three career-related challenges. An open-ended approach was taken and the youth were free to share any challenges as far as they saw them as career-related. The other questions examined whether or

not rural youth had ever sought professional career guidance services, and whether or not they would like to receive career guidance from a professional. Rural youth also rated the importance of professional career guidance services on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 for *not at all important* to 5 for *extremely important*, and wrote down justifications for their ratings. The questionnaire also had other sections which are not the focus of this paper.

Plan of Analysis

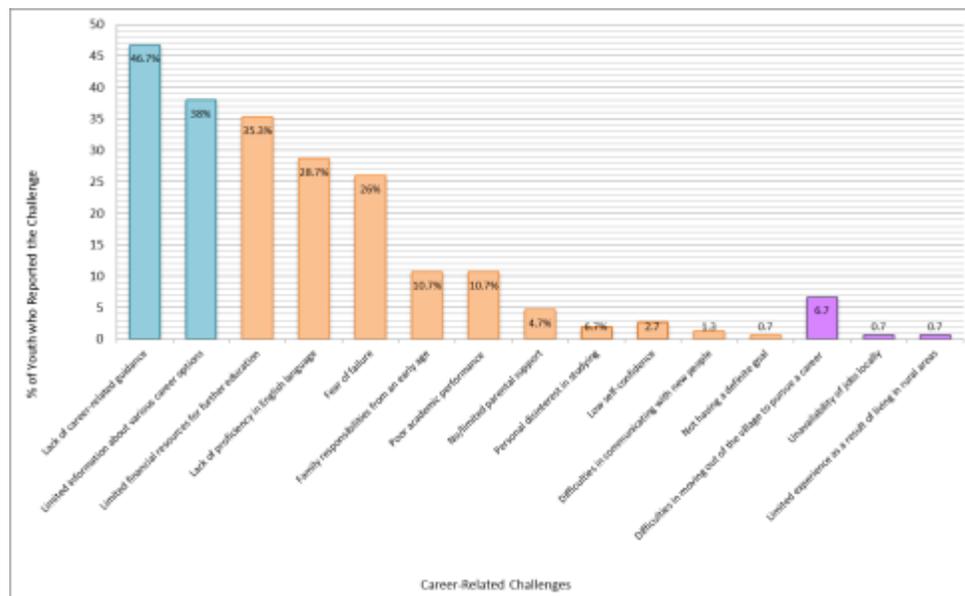
Data were analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative analysis included descriptive statistics such as percentages, mean, and SD, as well as advanced statistics such as bivariate chi square. Qualitative data was examined using theme extraction. Responses received in the local language (Gujarati/Marathi) were translated into English and the accuracy of translations was verified.

Results

Career-Related Challenges of Rural Underprivileged Youth in Western India (Objective 1)

We organised the career-related challenges reported by rural underprivileged youth in this study into three types: those that appeared to be similar to the challenges that any youth faces (regardless of rural/urban and privilege status), those that appeared especially relevant to the underprivileged context, as well as those that seemed to be exclusive to youths’ rural residence (see Figure 1). Similar to the challenges faced by any youth, rural underprivileged youth in this study reported lack of career-related guidance (46.7%) and limited information about various career options (38%) as the top-most career-related challenges.

Figure 1
Career-related challenges of rural underprivileged youth in Western India



- Challenges that appeared similar to those of any youth
- Challenges that seemed especially relevant to the underprivileged context
- Challenges that appeared exclusive to the rural residence

A bulk of the challenges reported by rural underprivileged youth in this study appeared characteristic of any underprivileged youth, regardless of their rural or urban residence. These included: having limited financial resources for pursuing further education/training (35.3%), perceived limitations in career options due to lack of proficiency in English language (28.7%), having family responsibilities from an early age (10.7%), poor academic performance (10.7%), overall no/limited support from parents (4.7%), personal disinterest in studying (2%). Rural underprivileged youth also reported self-development challenges that impacted career development such as: the fear of failure (26%), lack of/low self-confidence (2.7%), difficulties in making new friends and communicating with new people (1.3%), and not having a definite goal (0.7%).

Challenges that appeared exclusive to their rural residence included: difficulties in moving out of the village to pursue a career (n=10, 6.7%), unavailability of jobs locally (n=1, 0.7%), and limited experience as a result of living in rural areas (n=1, 0.7%).

Comparison of the Career-Related Challenges across Gender and Region of Youth (Objective 2)

There were observable differences with regard to the career-related challenges across gender and region of youth (see Table 2). As far as gender was concerned, only one statistically significant difference was observed. The challenge of moving out of the village was reported only by girls across both the regions ($\chi^2=6.947$, $p=.007$). There were two significant regional differences in the career-related challenges of rural youth in this study. Limited information about various career options was reported as a career-related challenge by a far higher number of youth from Saurashtra (49%) as compared to youth from Ahmadnagar (16%) ($\chi^2=15.407$, $p<.0001$). In contrast, the fear of failure was

reported in greater percentages by youth from rural areas of Ahmadnagar (36%) as compared to those in Saurashtra (21%) ($\chi^2=3.898$, $p<.05$).

Nature and Extent of Professional Career Guidance Services Accessed by Rural Underprivileged Youth (Objective 3)

Predictably, most of the rural underprivileged youth in this study (96%) had never accessed professional career guidance services or sought any form of career support. Only six out of 150 youth (4%) had accessed at least some form of career guidance/support, all of whom were from Saurashtra. Of these six rural youth, a majority (four boys and one girl) had attended the *Jiva* Programme for Career and Livelihood Planning (see Arulmani, 2009) organised at their community centre. They reported benefits such as getting detailed career information, receiving guidance, gaining clarity about which career to choose, and clarity on how to make a career plan. One rural girl had sought career support from her community for availing a financial scholarship to pursue higher education.

Rural Underprivileged Youths' Perspectives Regarding the Need for Professional Career Guidance Services in Rural Areas (Objective 4)

Almost all rural underprivileged youth in this study (96.7%) stated that they would like to receive career guidance from a professional and justified their position. Five out of 150 youth (3.3%) said that they did not require professional career guidance because they knew what they wanted to do. Of these five, three 20-year-old boys were pursuing their bachelor's degree (two were pursuing Arts [Humanities], and one was pursuing Science). Their goal was to get their bachelor's degree in the chosen fields. An 18-year-old boy wanted to get into the army, and a 15-year-old girl studying in Class 9 wanted to complete higher

Table 2
Career-Related Challenges of Rural Underprivileged Youth in Western India: Percentage of Occurrence for All Individuals, By Gender, and By Region

Career-Related Challenges of Rural Underprivileged Youth in Western India	All Cases % (N=150)	By Gender		By Region	
		Girls % (n=91)	Boys % (n=59)	Saurashtra % (n=100)	Ahmadnagar % (n=50)
Challenges that appeared similar to those of any youth					
• Lack of career-related guidance	46.7	50.5	40.7	45	50
• Limited information about various career options	38	33	45.8	49	16
Challenges that seemed especially relevant to the underprivileged context					
General career-related challenges					
• Limited financial resources for further education	35.3	38.5	30.5	33	40
• Lack of proficiency in English language	28.7	33	22	26	34
• Family responsibilities from an early age	10.7	12.1	8.5	12	8
• Poor academic performance	10.7	9.9	11.9	13	6
• No/limited parental support	4.7	5.5	3.4	4	6
• Personal disinterest in studying	2	0	5.1	1	4
Self-development challenges that extend to career development					
• Fear of failure	26	26.4	25.4	21	36
• Low self-confidence	2.7	4.4	0	2	4
• Difficulties in making new friends/communicating with new people	1.3	2.2	0	2	0
• Not having a definite goal	.7	1.1	0	1	0
Challenges that appeared exclusive to the rural residence					
• Difficulties in moving out of the village to pursue a career	6.7	11	0	4	12
• Unavailability of jobs locally	.7	1.1	0	1	0
• Limited experience as a result of living in rural areas	.7	1.1	0	1	0

secondary education, and not pursue anything further.

Reasons Why Rural Underprivileged Youth Would Like to Seek Professional Career Guidance: Qualitative Findings.

The reasons provided by rural underprivileged youth to explain the need for professional career guidance were also examined through the same three levels of analysis: (a) reasons similar to those given by any youth, (b) reasons that seemed specific to the underprivileged context, and

(c) reasons that appeared exclusive to the rural context.

Similar to any youth, rural underprivileged youth justified that professional career guidance will allow them to get complete information about various careers, develop clarity about what they can do further, help them to achieve their goals, and support them to grow in life. To illustrate in their words:

'If I can get to know something from a professional counsellor, then I will definitely

want it so that I can know through that what should I do and what should I not do regarding my career.’ (14-year-old girl from Saurashtra).

‘(I need career guidance) because I can’t understand what to do after 10th.’ (15-year-old boy from Saurashtra).

‘(I want career guidance) because I never want to fail in my career. With proper guidance, I will achieve my aim in right time.’ (20-year-old boy from Ahmadnagar).

‘When you get career guidance, it becomes easy to achieve goals’. (19-year-old boy from Saurashtra).

‘If I get career information, then I can grow in life’. (14-year-old boy from Saurashtra).

Specific perhaps to the underprivileged context, rural youth justified the need for professional career guidance by using words such as ‘to overcome the sense of being less than others’, ‘to overcome the fear of failure’. For example:

‘Through this, it helps to go ahead in this world and we won’t feel a sense of being less.’ (16-year-old girl from Ahmadnagar).

‘(I want professional career guidance) to overcome the fear of failure from my mind.’ (18-year-old girl from Ahmadnagar).

Particularly relevant to the rural context, were reasons like ‘to help other rural youth with their careers’ and ‘in order to know home-based options’, and because there was no expert in rural areas. To illustrate,

‘Here, there is no one to give guidance. There is no expert.’ (20-year-old girl from Saurashtra)

‘Through career guidance, I will get information about my education. And I will also be clear on how to teach other rural

students for their career.’ (16-year-old girl from Ahmadnagar).

‘I want to gain knowledge about different careers. I want to have the knowledge also so that I can give it to others.’ (15-year-old boy from Ahmadnagar).

In summarising, rural youth have reasons that are similar as well as those that are distinct from their urban counterparts, and other underprivileged youth.

Importance Ratings for Career Guidance Provision. As measured by a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all important*) to 5 (*extremely important*), the importance ratings given by rural underprivileged youth for professional career guidance ranged from 3 (*important*) to 5 (*extremely important*) with a mean score of 4.37 ($SD = 0.79$). A large majority of rural underprivileged youth rated career guidance provision as extremely important (56%) or very important (24.7%). The justifications for these ratings are presented in Box 1.

What Do Rural Underprivileged Youth Want from Professional Career Guidance Services? Qualitative Findings. Rural underprivileged youths’ expectations from professional career guidance services again appeared similar to those of any youth, as well as overlapping with their underprivileged status, and also exclusive to their rural status.

Apparently similar to youth in general, a large majority of the participants in this study wanted career-related information and direction from a professional and guidance on how to achieve one’s goals. To illustrate some responses:

‘I would like to get more information about which (career) fields are there in which cities and good colleges’. (17-year-old youth from Saurashtra).

'I would like to get knowledge of all the courses and I also want to know how to achieve my goal'. (18-year-old girl from Ahmadnagar).

'What (are) the steps to achieve my goal'? (18-year-old boy from Ahmadnagar).

'What to do after completing Std.12?' (16-year-old girl from Saurashtra).

Box 1

Rural Underprivileged Youths' Justifications for Considering Professional Career Guidance Services 'Extremely Important' or 'Very Important' in Rural Areas

Reasons for considering professional career guidance 'extremely important' (rating of '5')

Reasons similar to those provided by any youth

- Because of incomplete information and not knowing, professional counsellor's guidance is necessary. (17-year-old girl from Saurashtra).
- We will get to know how to grow in life. (17-year-old boy from Saurashtra).

Reasons specific to youths' rural residence

- For rural youth, they need some job or some way through which they can stand on their own feet. Make available some occupations through which they can earn something. (20-year-old girl from Ahmadnagar).
- Because in our village, (many) boys and girls do not go to school. Career guidance will help them to know the importance of education. (14-year-old boy from Ahmadnagar).

Reasons for considering professional career guidance 'very important' (rating of '4')

Reasons similar to those provided by any youth

- It is very important because we do not have information. (14-year-old boy from Saurashtra).
- They have limited knowledge of education, profession so they don't know how to choose any goal and how to achieve any goal. (20-year-old girl from Saurashtra).

Reasons specific to youths' rural residence

- (It is important for) for rural development and for people in the village to get information. (17-year-old girl from Ahmadnagar).
- As rural youth have limited knowledge, they need information about what is needed in the coming future. This is needed because youth here, don't keep any goals except getting into army. (20-year-old boy from Ahmadnagar).

Some of the rural underprivileged youth also shared specific information that they would like from a career guidance professional. These included details about careers or career fields that are practiced in both rural and urban areas: Handicrafts, Anganwadi Sevika (an Early Childhood Education and Healthcare Worker in rural areas), Tailoring, Beauty Parlour (Beauty Salon), Nursing, Teaching, Police, Banking, Fashion Designing, Company Secretary, Airport Management, Engineering, Business Administration, Doctor. These expectations indicate that rural underprivileged youth have aspirations for careers which were urban and not available in these rural regions (e.g., Airport Management, Company Secretary).

Rural underprivileged youth also had questions that resonate with those of any youth from an underprivileged context, regardless of their urban or rural residence. These included questions about ways to become successful, how to do a job, and information on financial resources for career development. Illustrative responses include:

'How to become a successful person?' (15-year-old boy from Ahmadnagar).

'I want to learn how to do a job.' (14-year-old girl from Ahmadnagar).

'I want information on courses and loan facilities at low interest.' (19-year-old boy from Saurashtra).

'I want knowledge from the counsellor and if they can provide financial help for my career, then I need that so that my father's tension can be reduced.' (17-year-old boy from Ahmadnagar).

Two of the responses were highly specific to the rural context and represented the need for rural and home-based career options. A 17-year-old girl from Ahmadnagar said, *'(I want) guidance about*

computer course, about job/career options in the village'. Another 18-year-old girl also from Ahmadnagar stated, *'I want home-based work options'*.

In conclusion, rural youths' needs from professional career guidance involve those that are similar to their urban counterparts, as well as those that are specific to their underprivileged and rural status.

Discussion

Career-Related Challenges of Rural Underprivileged Youth: Three Levels of Classification and Examination

The rural underprivileged youth in this study not only faced career-related challenges that are *rural* in nature, but also encountered challenges similar to those of any youth in general, and underprivileged youth in particular. The findings of this study can be compared to different studies in literature. Overall, the most salient career-related challenges reported by rural underprivileged youth in this study were lack of career-related guidance, limited/no information, and limited financial resources for further education. Similarly, Ball (2009) reported that rural high school students in Northeastern United States had expressed a need for greater knowledge about career opportunities, college requirements, and an understanding of financial aid. These findings also resonate with those of Badage and Karande's (2016) study with rural youth in eight districts of Maharashtra. However, their assertion that the effective use of ICT is the solution for these challenges is limited when considered by itself.

With regard to the other challenges which were specific to the underprivileged and rural contexts (like poor academic performance, limited access to education for a particular career), the findings of this study corroborate Bakshi and Maru's (2016) finding that underprivileged youth

considered income or salary as a significantly more important influence on their career choice than privileged youth. Also in their study, as compared to urban youth, rural youth considered gender, community, academic performance, and access to education for a particular career as more important influences on career choice.

Specific to the underprivileged context, limited parental support was reported as another career-related challenge in this study. Likewise, Blustein and others (2002) found that young adults from lower socioeconomic status families talked about the lack of agentic support from parents (e.g., job leads, specific ideas about where to receive training, and advice about vocational options) especially because the parents were not college-educated. Bakshi (2016) points out that in developing countries, children in poor families are frequently first-generation schoolgoers and have inadequate instrumental support from family members right from preschool years. Factors such as these exemplify underprivileged and rural youths' challenges in navigating their career journey.

The challenges that were exclusive to the rural context such as difficulties in moving out of the village to pursue a career, unavailability of jobs locally imply that rural underprivileged youth possibly consider "career" as an urban phenomenon. It is important to address the role of rural occupations, innovative practices in rural occupations, strategies regarding community-based management of resources, and modern skills in managing traditional occupations (see Arulmani, 2014; Kalyanram et al., 2014).

Lastly, the self-development challenges reported by rural underprivileged youth in this study have an additional value for the career literature and practice. It is imperative to address rural youths'

challenges such as the fear of failure, low self-confidence, difficulties in communicating with new people, and not having a definite goal as their career-related challenges. Self-development impacts career development and it is essential to build career readiness of (rural) youth through self-exploration and self-development (Bakshi & Joshi, 2014).

Gender and Regional Differences in Career-Related Challenges of Rural Underprivileged Youth

Given the Indian context, it is unsurprising that more girls than boys have reported the challenge of moving out of the village for career development. Yet, the aim of career guidance in rural areas is neither to inspire rural youth to move out of their villages, nor to insist that they stay only within the villages. Clearly, the design and delivery of career guidance programmes must help youth in considering multiple viable options including those that are local as well as those that require migration to urban areas.

The differences in career-related challenges across regions are examined through the lens of geography and community to which the youth belongs. Less number of youth from villages in and around Kedgaon in Ahmadnagar reported the challenge of no/limited careers information. This can be explained by ease of access to Ahmadnagar town which is 8 kilometres away from the city unlike the rural areas of Saurashtra where villages are far more distant from towns.

The other significant finding across regions was that the fear of failure was reported in greater percentages by rural underprivileged youth from Ahmadnagar as compared to Saurashtra. Youth in Saurashtra are from the Ismaili community, which provides a wide range of services through community-based initiatives. Thus,

Ismaili youth have greater opportunities to participate in developmental programmes like youth camps which aim to build their self-confidence and aspirations. They also have more support for career development, for example, financial scholarships, tie-ups with organisations for courses/job openings, as well as positive role models (Bakshi & Joshi, 2014).

Nature of Career Guidance Services Requested by Rural Underprivileged Youth

Rural underprivileged youths' expectations from professional career guidance services were classified under either of the three categories: those that appeared similar to the responses of any youth (e.g., receiving career-related information and guidance), those that seemed specific to the underprivileged youth (e.g., gaining information about loans, getting clarity on how to do a job and how to be successful), and those that seemed exclusive to rural youth (e.g., receiving information about career options in the village). All of these expectations are bound by a common thread—rural youth expect to be recipients of what a career guidance professional would “tell” or “give” them. In this limited view, career guidance is seen as diagnostic and prescriptive in nature (medical model).

The finding that rural youth in this study did not state anything about exploring their own interests or knowing their aptitudes, may also point to their limited idea of career guidance. It may also be because factors such as interests, talents, and aspirations are considered less important influences in career decisions of underprivileged youth. In the Bakshi and Maru (2016) study, the mean rating for importance given by the underprivileged rural youth to income/salary was highest as compared to that for factors such as the role of self, goals, interest, or ability. Blustein and others (2002) also found financial

survival as the main function of work reported by young employed adults from lower socioeconomic status (LSES) whereas the higher socioeconomic status (HSES) group stated personal satisfaction and personal meaning derived from work as the most important reasons for working.

Some of the career-related challenges reported by rural youth in this study possibly suggest their underlying career beliefs; for example, when a youth says that poor academic performance is her career-related challenge, it could indicate her perception that due to poor academic scores, one cannot have a good career. The other possible beliefs that could underlie their career-related challenges are: ‘*Lack of proficiency in English hinders career development*’, ‘*A good career requires one to move out of the village*’. Such career beliefs can be examined in further researches and interventions with rural youth using the Cultural Preparedness Approach (Arulmani, 2014), which is a useful conceptual framework in designing culturally-resonant career guidance programmes. An important element of this approach is the recognition of social cognitive environments of a culture and their role in forming career beliefs, which in turn impact career development.

Once again, the objective of career guidance in rural areas is not to replace traditional occupations, nor on the other hand, to restrict youth to rural careers. The NYP 2014 (Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, n.d.) clarifies that the objective is “to create a productive workforce that can make a sustainable contribution to India’s economic development” (p. 6). In addressing the tensions in rural livelihoods, Kalyanram and others (2014) have highlighted why rural youth must make a well-informed decision about staying close to their roots or moving out of their villages for “better” careers. In their view, rural youth must not only acquire technical skills and knowledge, but also understand

themselves and their role as a worker. Sangma and Arulmani (2013) have noted, “career success, without academic success as it is commonly understood, may be a career guidance objective for rural youth” (p. 39). From our study, we draw the following objectives for career guidance in rural areas: (a) enabling opportunities for self-exploration and self-development such that rural youth can explore and build on their strengths, overcome their fears and limitations, and develop necessary skills for career success, (b) providing an exposure to a wide range of career pathways including those that can be pursued locally and from home, and (c) expanding notions of “career” and “career guidance”, thereby promoting a shift from being in a recipient

mode to embracing an active participative approach for career guidance.

Conclusion

Career guidance programmes across contexts definitely have common principles and a shared focus in general. However, any career guidance programme must address the needs specific to the context. In case of rural underprivileged youth, the contexts are multiple, and each context poses challenges. Sensitivity to these challenges will allow career guidance professionals to design and deliver impactful career guidance programmes that bolster the career development of youth in rural areas such as those examined in the Western Indian context in this study.

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Appendix 1: Sample of Questions

Sample Question from the English and Gujarati Questionnaire

1. List the top three career-related challenges that you are facing.

કારકિર્દી સંબંધિત તમને થતી હોય એવી ૩ મુશ્કેલી કઈ છે?

i.

ii.

iii.

Sample Question from the English and Marathi Questionnaire

2. Have you ever sought any professional career guidance services in your life? Yes No

તુમच्या कारकिर्दी संबंधी प्रोफेशनल कॉन्सेलरची मुलाखत/मदत घेतली आहे का? होय नाही

If yes, please provide the following details: हो, असेल तर खाली विचारलेली माहिती भरा

Type of service accessed कोणत्या प्रकारे मदत घेतली	Where कुठे	When (In which year) केव्हा (कोणत्या वर्षी)	Name of the institute/ organization संस्थेचे नांव	What did you gain from it? तुम्हाला कोणत्या पध्दतीने फायदा झाला	How satisfied were you with the service? Rate from 1 to 5: (1 = low; 5 = high) त्याच्या मधून तुम्हाला किती समाधान मिळाले - १ ते ५ पासून रेटिंग द्या (१=अजिबात नाही, ५=भरपूर समाधाने झाले)
					1 2 3 4 5
					1 2 3 4 5

