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ARTICLE

## The Relationship between Parenting Styles, Parental Career Support, and Career Exploration in Junior High School Students

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between parental rearing styles, career support, and career exploration among junior high school students. Parental career support is closely related to parental rearing styles and children, and both have significant correlations with career exploration of junior high school students. Based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, this paper analyzes the microsystem, that is, the impact of the family on students. Previous studies have shown that, in addition to gender, grade, and self-development level, which are important factors affecting career exploration of junior high school students, environmental factors also play a strong role. Compared with environmental factors such as school and peers, family has a greater impact on individual career development. For example, parental support, parent-child career consistency, or parental expectations can all affect the career development of junior high school students. It can be concluded that the resources in the micro-circle of family are supportive factors for individuals to achieve their goals and can help individuals transition from study to work. This study was conducted in a public middle school in Beijing, with a total of 158 students participating in the questionnaire. The online questionnaire was used, and 150 valid questionnaires were obtained after collection and screening. This study used three questionnaires, including the \*Parental Rearing Style Scale\*, for data analysis. The final results are as follows: (1) There is a significant correlation between authoritative

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parental rearing style and career exploration of junior high school students; (2) There is a significant correlation between parental career support and career exploration of junior high school students; (3) Parental career support can have a positive impact on the level of career exploration of junior high school students; (4) For authoritative parental rearing style and career exploration of junior high school students, the effect is the best under the mediating effect of parental career support.

**Keywords:** Career Exploration; Parental Career Support; Parenting Style; Junior High School Student

## 1. Introduction

Career exploration is not merely a matter of personal planning and effort; it is also an intrinsic part of individual development. Early adolescence, a pivotal phase in the formation of career awareness, represents a critical window for cultivating occupational understanding. During this stage, career exploration education has the most profound and lasting impact on secondary school students, significantly shaping their cognitive frameworks and future decision-making.

Existing research suggests that, in addition to individual factors such as gender, grade level, and self-development, environmental influences play a crucial role in shaping students' career exploration behaviors<sup>[1]</sup>. Among these, the family environment exerts a more substantial influence than school or peer contexts. Elements such as parental support, alignment between parent-child career expectations, and parental aspirations significantly affect students' career development trajectories<sup>[2]</sup>. Career construction theory emphasizes that individuals must effectively mobilize and develop personal resources to attain their goals<sup>[3]</sup>. In this regard, family resources function as a key support system, facilitating the transition from education to employment<sup>[4]</sup>. Thus, the family stands as the most fundamental and enduring influence on adolescents' career exploration.

Parental support is operationalised as a cluster of caregiving behaviours that include empathic understanding of the adolescent, respect for the youngster's emerging ideas and emotions, encouragement of autonomous self-expression, and validation of independent decision-making. It plays a significant role in executive function, academic motivation, and initiative in children and adolescents<sup>[5]</sup>. By supplying tangible resources while simultaneously reinforcing self-efficacy and motivation, such support enables teenagers to translate career aspirations into concrete academic plans and to refine their vocational goals<sup>[6]</sup>. Collectively, these processes position parental support as a potent catalyst in

secondary-school students' career exploration.

The broader parenting style within which this support is embedded is equally consequential. Although adolescents from permissive households report comparatively high career-development satisfaction<sup>[7]</sup>, they still turn reflexively to parents when vocational uncertainties arise—a behavioural pattern that peaks in early adolescence<sup>[8]</sup>. Crucially, authoritative parenting—warm, responsive, and appropriately demanding—has emerged as the most consistent predictor of robust career-exploration competencies, underscoring the differential influence of distinct child-rearing approaches<sup>[9]</sup>.

That career exploration is pivotal for secondary-school students is no longer contested; a substantial body of work has linked both parenting styles and parent-supplied career support to adolescents' exploratory behaviours. Yet these two strands of research have proceeded in parallel, leaving the three-way interplay among parenting style, career-specific support, and students' exploration largely uncharted and the potential mediating role of career support untested. The present study addresses this gap by simultaneously modelling how parenting styles relate to career support and, in turn, how both factors jointly shape secondary-school pupils' career exploration.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Preliminary Collection and Compilation of Scale Questions

#### 2.1.1. Open Questionnaire Survey

The research instrument was administered to participants through an online questionnaire platform. The survey consisted of three sequentially ordered sections:

- (1) The Parental Career Education Behaviour Scale,
- (2) The Parental Parenting Style Scale, and
- (3) The Career Exploration Questionnaire.

After dissemination, questionnaires were collected class-by-class by trained research assistants. During the screening phase, each returned questionnaire was inspected for response authenticity and completeness; instruments exhibiting systematic omissions or other indicators of compromised data quality (e.g., >20% missing items, straight-line responding) were classified as invalid and removed prior to statistical analysis.

### 2.1.2. Referring to Relevant Items in Similar Scales

Data were collected with three validated instruments that were merged into a single online survey: the Parental Ca-

reer Education Behaviour Scale (formal, author-developed version), the Parental Parenting Style Scale, and the Career Exploration Scale for Secondary-School Students (CES–Secondary). Responses to all three measures were pooled for subsequent analyses.

## 2.2. Participants

The study was carried out in a public secondary school in Beijing. An online questionnaire was administered to 158 students in Years 7–9; after data cleaning, 150 cases (94.9%) were retained for analysis. Sample details are summarised in **Table 1**.

**Table 1.** Distribution of Participants.

		Number of Participants (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	boys	54	36
	girls	96	64
Grade	7th Grade	7	4.7
	8th Grade	83	55.3
	9th Grade	60	40
Total		150	100

### 2.2.1. Parental Career Education Behaviour Scale (Self-Developed Formal Version)

Parental career support was assessed with the 20-item Parental Career Education Behaviour Scale developed by Ge Tingshan (Fujian Normal University)<sup>[10]</sup>. The instrument captures three first-order factors—supportive encouragement, resource provision, and communication

guidance—on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = completely disagree, 5 = completely agree). A typical item reads, “My parents supported me in undertaking an internship”. Previous work has established satisfactory internal consistency (see **Table 2**) and sound construct validity (CFA: CFI > 0.95, RMSEA < 0.06), rendering the scale appropriate for the present investigation.

**Table 2.** Reliability Analysis Results for the High School Students’ Parents’ Career Education Behaviour Scale.

Dimension	Cronbach’s $\alpha$ Coefficient	
Career Support	Support and Encouragement	0.80
	Resource Provision	0.87
	Communication and Guidance	0.84
Total Score of Career Support	0.92	
Career Interference	0.75	
Career Absence	0.75	

### 2.2.2. Questionnaire of Parental Rearing Styles (S-EMBU-C)

Parenting style was measured with the abbreviated Parental Child-Rearing Practices Questionnaire, a 42-item Chinese adaptation by Jiang and colleagues of an established international inventory<sup>[11]</sup>. The scale retains the original six-factor structure and is administered in parallel father and

mother versions; each item is rated on the same Likert metric, and the two versions yield comparable sub-scores. The six subscales are: authoritative (7 items, e.g., #2, 6, 9), authoritarian (8 items, e.g., #3, 5, 8), and neglectful (6 items, e.g., #1, 4, 7), along with three additional stylistic dimensions. Sub-dimension scores are computed by summing the relevant items separately for each parent; higher values denote a

stronger endorsement of that style. Extensive local validation shows high internal consistency ( $\alpha \geq 0.80$ ) and robust construct validity: CFA  $\chi^2/df = 2.48$ , NNFI = 0.98, CFI = 0.99<sup>[11]</sup>, meeting stringent psychometric criteria.

### 2.2.3. Career Exploration Scale for Middle School Students (CES–Middle School Version)

Career exploration was assessed with the Career Exploration Scale for Secondary-School Students (CES–Secondary), a 63-item Chinese adaptation by Zheng Jiuhua et al. of Stumpf's (1983) original instrument<sup>[12]</sup>. Items are rated on a 5-point frequency/intensity scale (1 = very little, 5 = very much); a representative item reads, "How much information do you have about the occupational fields you have looked into?" The scale shows excellent psychometric properties: internal-consistency  $\alpha = 0.75$ – $0.91$ , split-half reliability = 0.77–0.89, and test-retest  $r = 0.75$ – $0.90$ . Inter-correlations among the three subscales range from 0.58 to 0.92 (all  $p < 0.001$ ), attesting to robust construct validity.

## 2.3. Statistical Analysis

All analyses were performed with SPSS 25.0 and the PROCESS macro (Models 1 and 4). Correlation and hierarchical regression were used to test bivariate associations and direct effects; Model 4 evaluated the mediating role of parental career support, while Model 1 probed any moderated pathways. Bias-corrected bootstrapping (5000 samples) set the criterion for indirect effects.

## 3. Result

### 3.1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis of the Relationships between Parental Rearing Styles, Career Support, and Career Exploration among Junior High School Students

Pearson correlations revealed that parental career support was positively linked to all three parenting styles—authoritative ( $r = 0.370$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), authoritarian ( $r = 0.299$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and neglectful ( $r = 0.234$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Support was also robustly associated with every dimension of career exploration: cognitive ( $r = 0.363$ ), affective ( $r = 0.265$ ), behavioural ( $r = 0.317$ ), and total CES score ( $r = 0.371$ ; all  $p <$

0.01).

Among the parenting styles themselves, authoritative and authoritarian did not correlate significantly ( $r = 0.083$ ), whereas authoritative and neglectful styles were inversely related ( $r = -0.270$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), confirming that high parental acceptance (authoritative) contrasts sharply with the low acceptance seen in both neglectful and authoritarian rearing.

Consequently, they display a significant positive correlation, with a correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.510$  ( $p < 0.01$ ). Further analysis of parenting styles and career exploration revealed that authoritative parenting was significantly positively correlated with cognitive, affective, and behavioural career exploration, as well as total career exploration scores, with correlation coefficients of  $r = 0.380$  ( $p < 0.01$ ),  $r = 0.242$  ( $p < 0.01$ ),  $r = 0.253$  ( $p < 0.01$ ),  $r = 0.341$  ( $p < 0.01$ ).

Authoritarian and neglectful parenting styles were both unrelated to every dimension of career exploration: for authoritarian,  $|r| \leq 0.026$ , n.s.; for neglectful,  $|r| \leq 0.086$ , n.s. Within the exploration domain, cognitive career exploration was strongly associated with affective ( $r = 0.630$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), behavioural ( $r = 0.667$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and total CES scores ( $r = 0.897$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

Affective career exploration covaried moderately with behavioural exploration ( $r = 0.534$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and strongly with the total CES score ( $r = 0.770$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ); behavioural exploration, in turn, showed the tightest linkage with the overall scale ( $r = 0.896$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), underscoring the synergistic overlap among the three dimensions (Table 3).

### 3.2. Authoritative Parenting Style and Career Exploration among Junior High School Students: The Mediating Effect of Parental Career Support

Mediation was tested with Hayes' PROCESS Model 4. Regression coefficients were evaluated with 5000 bootstrap samples; a 95% bias-corrected CI that does not straddle zero signifies a significant indirect effect.

As shown in Tables 4 and 5, authoritative parenting reliably predicted higher levels of career exploration ( $\beta = 1.445$ ,  $t = 4.42$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and simultaneously boosted parental career support ( $\beta = 0.521$ ,  $t = 4.85$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). When both predictors were entered together, the direct effect of authoritative parenting remained significant ( $\beta = 1.000$ ,  $t = 2.95$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and parental career support also emerged as a signifi-

cant predictor ( $\beta = 0.854, t = 3.54, p < 0.001$ ). Thus, parental career support partially mediates the linkage between authoritative parenting and students' career exploration.

Bootstrap results corroborated partial mediation: the 95% CI for the direct effect of authoritative parenting was

[0.330, 1.671] and for the indirect effect via parental career support [0.168, 0.804], neither bracketing zero. The direct path accounted for 69.2% (1.00/1.445) of the total effect, whereas the mediator accounted for 30.8% (0.445/1.445) (see **Table 6**).

**Table 3.** Dimensions and Descriptive Statistics of the Relationships between Parental Rearing Styles, Career Support, and Career Exploration among Junior High School Students (N = 150).

Dimensions		M	SD
Parental Career Support		67.140	10.659
Parental Rearing Styles	Authoritative Parenting Style	39.973	7.577
	Authoritarian Parenting Style	32.820	7.179
	Neglectful Parenting Style	16.627	5.605
Career Exploration among Junior High School Students	Cognitive Career Exploration	92.220	13.415
	Affective Career Exploration	51.133	7.945
	Behavioral Career Exploration	83.247	15.542
	Total Score of Career Exploration among Junior High School Students	226.600	32.077

**Table 4.** Pearson Correlations between Parental Rearing Styles, Career Support, and Career Exploration among Junior High School Students (N = 150).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Parental Career Support	1							
Authoritative Parenting Style	0.370**	1						
Authoritarian Parenting Style	0.299**	0.083	1					
Neglectful Parenting Style	0.234**	-0.270**	0.510**	1				
Cognitive Career Exploration	0.363**	0.380**	-0.007	-0.086	1			
Affective Career Exploration	0.265**	0.242**	0.026	0.013	0.630**	1		
Behavioral Career Exploration	0.317**	0.253**	-0.026	-0.063	0.667**	0.534**	1	
Total Score of Career Exploration among Junior High School Students	0.371**	0.341**	-0.009	-0.063	0.897**	0.770**	0.896**	1

Note: \*\*: The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

**Table 5.** Test of the Mediating Model of Parental Career Support.

Regression Equation (N = 150)			Fit Indices		Significance of Coefficients	
Outcome Variable	Predictor Variable	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	$\beta$	T
Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	0.341	0.117	19.519	1.445	4.418
Mediating Variable	Independent Variable	0.370	0.137	23.527	0.521	4.850
Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	0.431	0.186	16.787	1.000	2.950
	Mediating Variable				0.854	3.540

**Table 6.** Decomposition Table of Total Effect, Direct Effect, and Mediating Effect.

	Effect Size	Boot SE	Lower Bound of Bootstrap CI	Upper Bound of Bootstrap CI	Relative Effect Size (Proportion of Effect)
Total Effect	1.445	0.327	0.799	2.092	
Direct Effect	1.000	0.339	0.330	1.671	69.20%
Mediating Effect	0.445	0.161	0.168	0.804	30.80%

In short, authoritative parenting is the only style that systematically fosters adolescents' career exploration. Its impact is exerted through two concurrent channels: a strong direct link and an additional indirect route furnished by heightened parental career support. Authoritarian and neglectful styles, in contrast, show no reliable association with any

exploration dimension.

## 4. Conclusions

Integrating data on parenting styles, parental career support, and secondary-school students' career exploration, this

study tested a mediation model with bootstrapped regression. Four findings emerged:

- (1) Authoritative parenting uniquely predicts higher career-exploration scores ( $\beta = 1.45, p < 0.001$ ); authoritarian and neglectful styles are unrelated.
- (2) Parental career support is equally predictive ( $\beta = 0.85, p < 0.001$ ), correlating with all three exploration dimensions.
- (3) Parental career support partially mediates the authoritative–exploration link: indirect effect = 0.45, 95 % CI [0.17, 0.80], accounting for 31 % of the total effect.
- (4) Thus, authoritative parenting exerts its strongest influence on students’ career exploration when it simultaneously generates high levels of career-specific support.

Parental support—defined as empathic, autonomy-granting engagement with adolescents’ ideas and feelings<sup>[13]</sup>. It has garnered widespread attention and influences executive function, academic motivation, and initiative in children and adolescents<sup>[14]</sup>. In the present sample, the link between support and exploration was not uniform. Monthly household incomes ranged from ¥4000 to ¥200,000, and this 50-fold disparity partly accounts for the wide scatter in parental-career-support scores. Higher-income parents more often “strongly agreed” to every item on the five-point scale, whereas low-income parents clustered at the “strongly disagree” extreme, producing the characteristic response-style pattern in which extreme option–users are consistent across items. The reason why family SES colours career development through differential parenting practices: ample economic capital appears to amplify the frequency and quality of career-specific behaviours measured by the Parental Career Education Behaviour Scale, whereas economic constraint restricts them across all three sub-dimensions (encouragement, resource provision, and communication guidance).

In recent years, an increasing number of studies have found that social cognition is variable<sup>[15]</sup>; therefore, parents who supply tangible career experiences and scaffold autonomous decision-making cultivate proactive exploration and an early grasp of the competencies future careers demand. Among the three stylistic variants, only authoritative parenting delivered this benefit. By inviting adolescents to voice feelings and ideas—and listening responsively—authoritative parents create a secure base from which young

people can sample diverse vocational possibilities, a pattern consistent with Shen<sup>[9]</sup> and Super<sup>[16]</sup>. Conversely, authoritarian parents, who equate guidance with unquestioned obedience, strip adolescents of discretionary power and thereby suppress exploratory initiative. As primary caregivers of adolescents, authoritarian parenting styles exert multifaceted negative impacts on individual mental health<sup>[17]</sup>.

Mediation modelling showed that authoritative parenting boosts secondary-school pupils’ career exploration chiefly by raising parental career support; It also plays an important role in the initiative and exploration ability of teenagers<sup>[18]</sup>. No comparable pathways emerged for authoritarian or neglectful styles. Authoritative parents who combine warmth with structure—and who explicitly supply resources, encouragement, and dialogue—simultaneously elevate scores on all three exploratory facets (cognitive, affective, and behavioural)<sup>[19]</sup>. These traits also result from parental support for children’s autonomy, emotional warmth, and cognitive guidance during the parenting process<sup>[20]</sup>. Parents’ greater investment in their children’s well-being can help prevent adolescent misconduct. A high-quality parent-child relationship can motivate adolescents to improve their academic performance, while maintaining positive relationships with parents also contributes to adolescents’ psychological well-being<sup>[21]</sup>. Parents play an important role in the development of adolescents’ social psychology. Parenting style and parent-child relationship are very important to the future development and success of adolescents<sup>[22]</sup>. Adolescents who are regularly supported and encouraged by their family members and who share and care for each other within the family are more satisfied with life and have better mental health<sup>[23]</sup>. The quality of parent-child relationship and the promotion of parent-child communication can improve the adolescent career exploration ability, learning perseverance, school integration, and open ability, and promote the adolescent social and psychological health development<sup>[24]</sup>. Schools should therefore disseminate brief, evidence-based guidance that steers parents toward authoritative practices and coaches them in concrete career-support behaviours (e.g., internship leads, emotion-focused conversations, goal-mapping exercises). If possible, it indicates that an authoritarian parenting style has many negative effects on adolescent mental health<sup>[25]</sup>. Such targeted family-focused interventions are likely to yield the largest return in pupils’

scientifically grounded career planning.

## Author Contributions

Conceptualization, S.L.; methodology, S.W. and Z.Z.; validation, S.W., Z.Z., and S.L.; formal analysis, S.W. and S.L.; investigation, S.W., Z.Z., and S.L.; data curation, S.W., Z.Z., and S.L.; writing—original draft preparation, S.W. and S.L.; writing—review and editing, S.L.; supervision, S.L. and Z.Z. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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## Institutional Review Board Statement

Ethical review and approval were waived for this study due to the exclusive use of anonymized, non-identifiable human data, no intervention or interaction with participants, no collection of sensitive personal information or involvement of commercial interests, and no foreseeable risk of physical or psychological harm.

## Informed Consent Statement

We confirm that written consent was obtained from all participants prior to the study.

## Data Availability Statement

Data will be available on request from the authors.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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