CAREER PATHWAYS AND LIFESTYLE VARIATIONS: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF NORTH AND SOUTH CHENNAI'S STUDENT POPULATION

***Ms. S. Bharani Lakshmi*[1]**, Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, Shrimathi Devkunvar Nanalal Bhatt Vaishnav College for Women, Chromepet.

***C.K. Sharmista*[2] *& Vidhyashree.D*[3]**, B. Com (General) SFS – D batch, Department of Commerce, Shrimathi Devkunvar Nanalal Bhatt Vaishnav College for Women, Chrompet.

ABSTRACT

Lifestyle variations majorly affect the career choices of north and south Chennai students, which majorly highlights the cultural influences and their surroundings which shape career aspirations and their daily lives. Chennai, a metropolitan city with distinct disparities, presents a contrasting landscape of north and south Chennai. South Chennai is known for its affluent neighbourhoods and better access to educational institutions. While north Chennai is known for its industrial zones and working-class communities. Through qualitative and quantitative research methods, this study explores the factors influencing students career choices. This research contributes to the broader understanding of social stratification and educational inequalities in urban settings. The findings reveal the significant disparities in career aspirations, access to higher education and lifestyle preferences between the two regions. It bridges the educational economic divide ensuring the equal opportunities among Chennai.

KEYWORDS: Lifestyle variations, career choices, economic divide.

INTRODUCTION

Urban sociology offers a rich canvas for examining the intersections of geography, culture, and socio-economic factors. Within the city of Chennai, the distinct differences between its northern and southern regions present a fascinating lens through which to explore these dynamics. While both areas share a common metropolitan identity, they diverge significantly in terms of historical development, economic opportunities, cultural practices, and social stratification. These disparities shape the career aspirations and lifestyle choices of the city's student population, making it an intriguing area for sociological inquiry. The ***urban divide*** in Chennai affects ***student career*** prospects significantly, shaping access to opportunities and resources across different regions.

North Chennai, historically an industrial hub, is characterized by working-class neighbourhoods with deep-rooted community ties. This region is often perceived as less affluent, with limited access to elite educational institutions and fewer high-paying job opportunities.

South Chennai has developed into a commercial and residential hub, benefiting from IT parks, prestigious schools, and an affluent population. These structural differences have direct and indirect implications for the students living in these areas, influencing their educational choices, career aspirations, and broader lifestyle factors such as leisure activities, consumption patterns, and social networks.

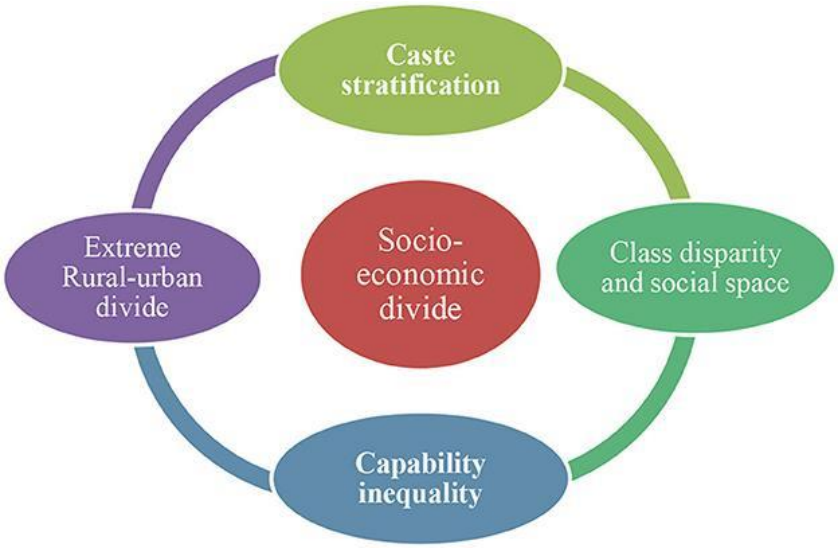
CHENNAI: "A CITY OF CONTRASTS"

The capital city of Tamil Nadu now has a population of more than 7 million people, holding 5th position in terms of largest cities in India. Chennai which was called Madras in the past holds an important position in cultural and educational background. It is a metropolitan city named for its booming educational system and diverse economy. Chennai is well popular for its all kinds of aspects like food, education especially it holds a major part for the medical Centre. It is also named as the **Detroit of India**, as it holds a major part of the automobile industry. In October 2017, this place was added into the **UNESCO** creative cities network list. Chennai is the major information technology for (IT). The presence of government policies and SEZs have contributed to India in many aspects. More than 35% of India's overall automotive components are from the Chennai automotive industry.

As for career opportunities, Chennai offers various job opportunities especially in the fields like IT sectors, manufacturing industries, teaching, entertainment sectors, healthcare. This city is home to many prestigious institutions like IITs madras and Anna University, which nurture the skilled professionals who contribute to the workforce.

INTEGRATION OF THEORY:

This theory generally involves combining variables and many other concepts from different experiments of theories involved to create a clear idea of concepts and comprehensive study of the phenomenon. To broadly analyse the urban divide and how that affects the students' career choices. This study has three main theories that explains this urban divide in more theoretical perspectives: **URBAN SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY, SOCIAL STRATIFICATION THEORY AND HUMAN CAPITAL THEORY.** This combination of theories gives you the multi-dimensional guidance of how geography and socio-economic status collectively shape students' future.



Source: Google images

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION THEORY:

Social stratification theory" refers to a sociological concept that explains how a society categorizes its people into hierarchical layers based on factors like wealth, income, education, occupation, and social status, resulting in some groups having more power, prestige, and privileges than others. As such stratification is the relative social position of persons within a social group, category, geographic region or social unit.

Source: Google images

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study is based on how lifestyle variations and career aspirations make difference for students to choose their career opportunities based on their geographical scope and their environmental surroundings.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To analyze disparities in access to education and resources.
- To examine the socio-economic differences between North and South Chennai.
- To assess the level of accessibility to career-related opportunities

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Research design – Descriptive research design
2. Sample design – Convenience sampling technique
3. Sample size – 260 Respondents
4. Data collection 1. Primary data – Structured questionnaire
   2. Secondary data – Interviews and websites

TOOLS OF ANALYSIS

Analytical techniques were used to obtain the findings and conclusion of the information in logical sequence. The techniques that are used for the study are percentage analysis, factor analysis and one-way ANOVA.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The study is restricted to the North and South regions of Chennai, which may not capture the full diversity of students' career choices and lifestyle factors in other parts of Chennai or different cities.
- The selected sample may not adequately represent the entire student population of North and South Chennai.
- The study relies on self-reported data, which may be influenced by social desirability bias or inaccurate responses.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- **Maxwell Kontor Owusu, Abraham Owusu and et.al (2021)** The study investigated the impact of peers, teachers, and parents on the career aspirations of students in

public Senior High Schools. The research was guided by three research questions and three hypotheses. A descriptive survey design was employed, and the sample consisted of 196 students, 30 teachers, and 50 parents, selected using stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Participants responded to self-designed questionnaires, and the collected data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The findings revealed that teachers do not have a significant influence on students' career aspirations. However, parental influence plays a crucial role in shaping students' career choices. Additionally, peer influence affects male and female students' career aspirations differently, but this influence does not vary based on age or academic program. Overall, peers and parents largely determine the career decisions students make. As a result, it is recommended that school administrators collaborate with school counseling units to organize career workshops to help reduce the external influences on students' career aspirations.

- **Aftab Alam and Naheed Zahoor (2020)** The present study aims to explore the educational and career aspirations of undergraduate students. The research was designed with specific objectives: to examine the levels of educational and career aspirations among students enrolled in different courses (B.A, B.Com., and B.Sc.) and to analyze these aspirations based on gender (male and female students). The hypotheses proposed that there would be no statistically significant relationship between students' educational and career aspirations and their courses or gender. To collect data, two questionnaires were adapted and administered to a randomly selected sample of 150 undergraduate students, with equal representation from each course and gender. The responses were coded and analyzed using SPSS software, and statistical tests such as the t-test and F-test were employed. The findings indicated no statistically significant relationship between students' educational and career aspirations and their courses or gender. The paper includes an introduction, problem statement, background and rationale for the study, research questions, hypotheses, aims and objectives, and research methodology. Additionally, it presents the key findings, educational implications, and recommendations for future research in this field.
- **Kazi Afaq Ahmed, Nimra Sharif and Nawaz Ahmad (2017)** An incorrect career choice can lead to wasted efforts, frustration, and drained resources. This study aimed to identify the factors influencing career selection among MBA/BBA students in

Karachi and align their preferences with institutional offerings. A structured questionnaire was distributed to 120 students, and the data were analyzed using SPSS, with correlation and multiple regression applied to test the hypotheses. The results showed that "interest in the subject" was the most significant factor influencing career choices ($f(1,118) = 12.304$, $p < 0.05$, $R = .307$), while financial outcomes, subject ease, and future job opportunities had minor impacts. The study also highlighted that a mismatch between personality type and interest in the subject can lead to dissatisfaction, demotivation, and career failure. Counseling sessions and updated information are crucial in helping students make informed career choices, influenced by their social class, financial resources, and employability.

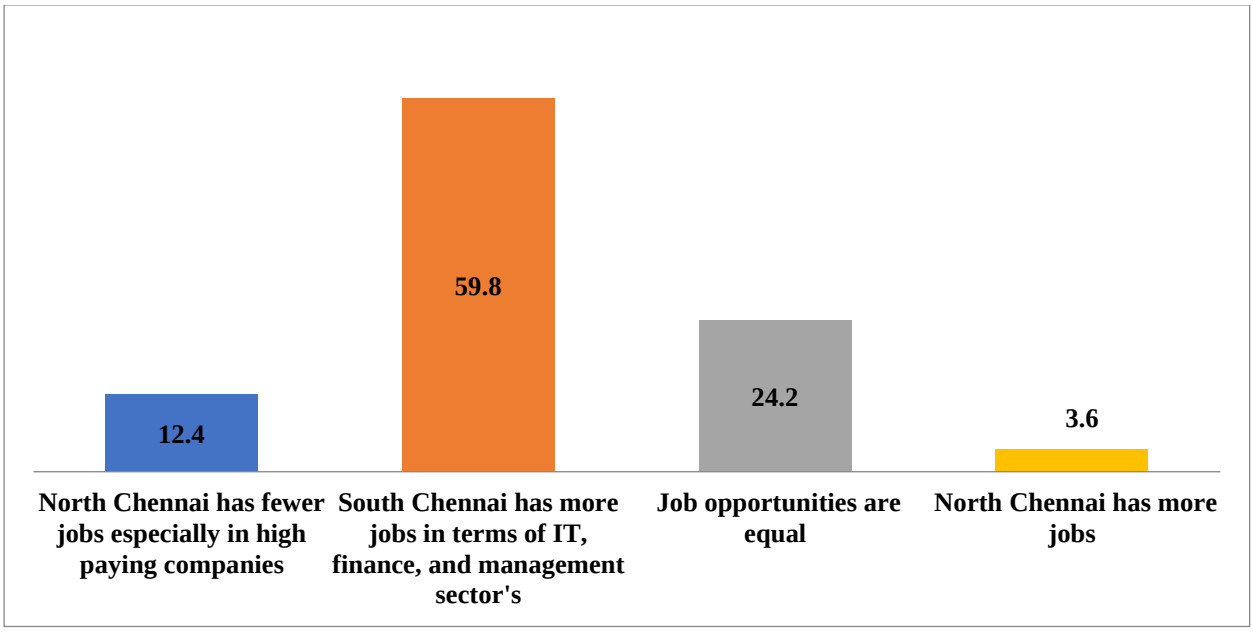
DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1- DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Demographic variable	Particulars	No of respondents	Percentage
Gender	Male	73	28%
	Female	187	72%
	Total	**260**	**100.00%**
Age group	Below 15	7	2.70%
	15-18	115	44.22%
	19-22	100	38.46%
	Above 22	38	14.62%
	Total	**260**	**100%**
Locality	North Chennai	79	30%
	South Chennai	161	62%
	Others	20	8%
	Total	**260**	**100.00%**
Area of residence	Urban	167	64.20%
	Semi-Urban	61	23.50%
	Rural	32	12.30%
	Total	**260**	**100.00%**
Type of school/ institute do you attend	Government	54	20.80%
	private	204	78.50%
	International	2	0.80%
	Total	**260**	**100%**
Educational background	High School	45	17.30%
	UG	191	73.50%
	PG	21	8%
	Vocational	3	1.20%

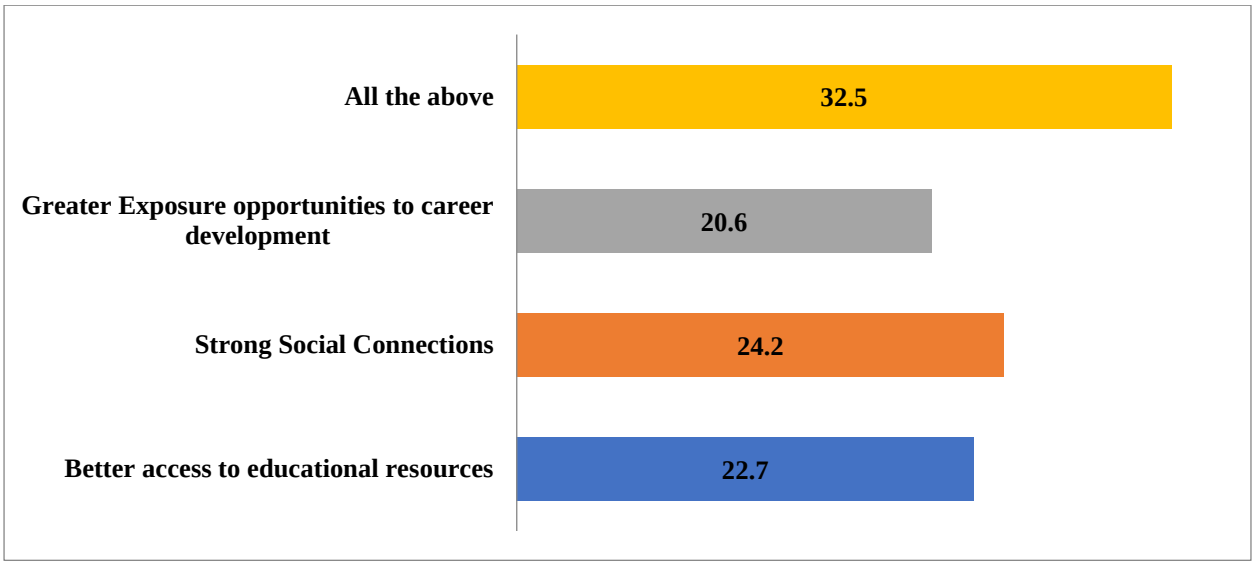
	Training		
	Total	**260**	**100.00%**

Chart 1 - North vs South Chennai: Perspectives on Job Opportunities



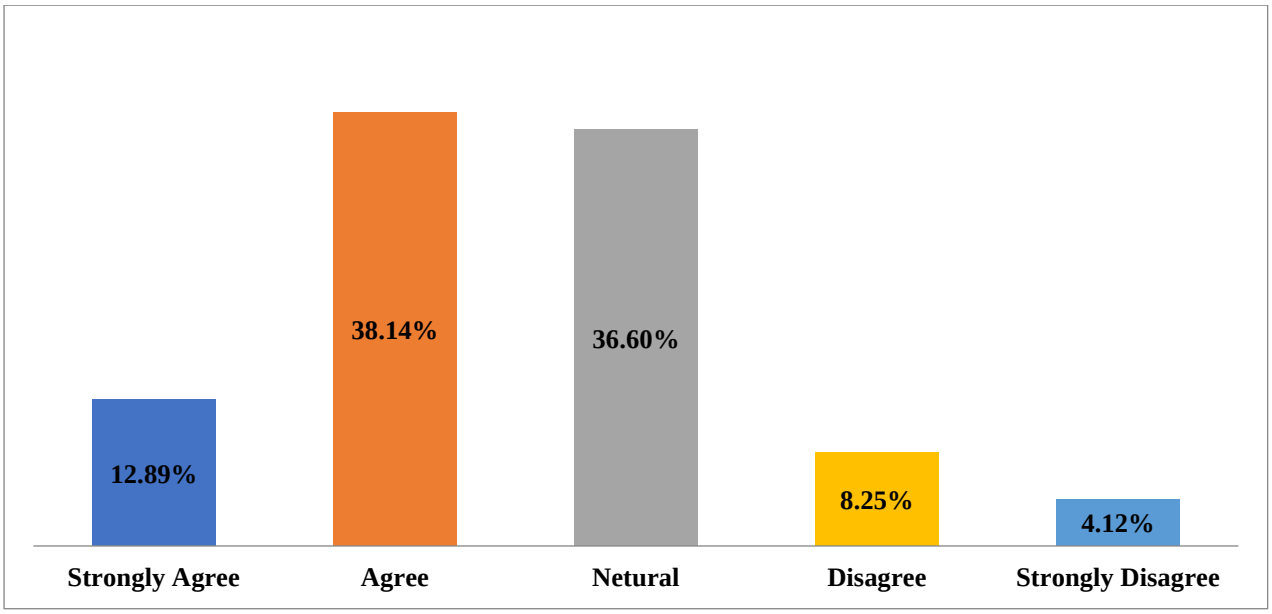
Inference: 59.8% of respondents indicate that South Chennai offers more job opportunities in the IT, finance, and management sectors compared to North Chennai.

Chart 2- Career Edge: Advantages for Students in South Chennai



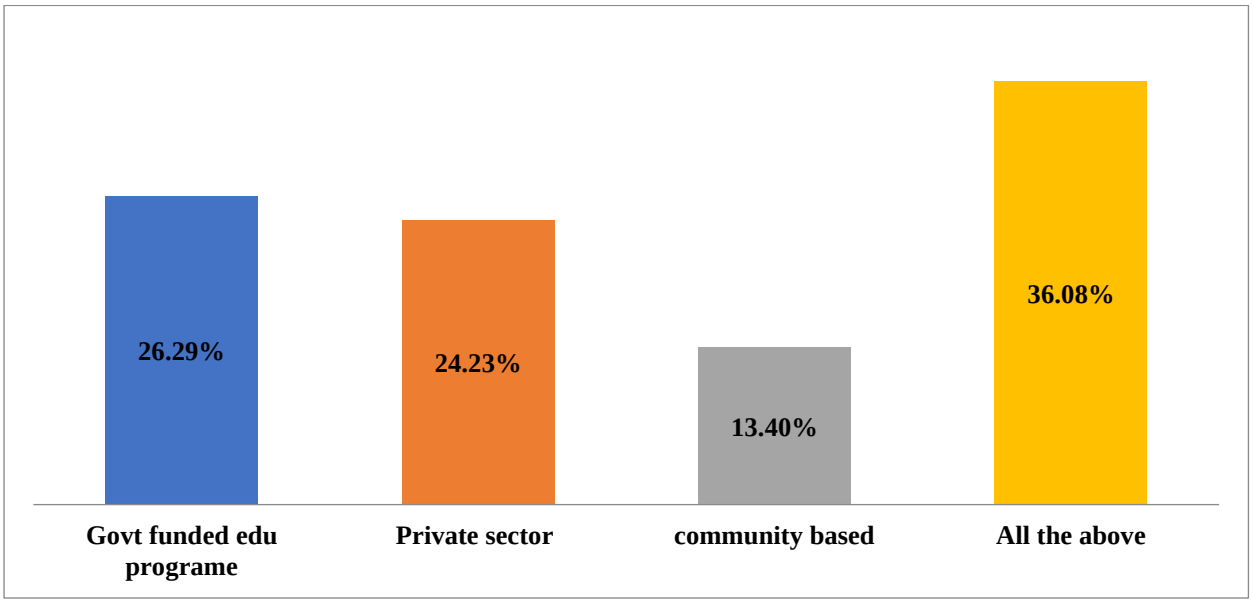
Inference: 32.5% of respondents highlight that student in South Chennai benefit from strong social connections, better access to educational resources, and greater exposure to career development opportunities, providing them with an advantage in their career prospects.

Chart 3- Locality and Opportunity: How Where You Live Shapes Education and Career Paths



Inference: 38.14% of respondents agree that locality plays a role in shaping educational and career opportunities.

Chart 4- Empowering North Chennai: Key Initiatives to Boost Lifestyle and Career Growth



Inference: 36.08% of respondents suggest that government-funded education programs, private sector initiatives, and community-based programs are essential to improving lifestyle and career prospects in North Chennai.

ONE WAY ANOVA

H_0 :There is no significant variation in the level of accessibility to career-related opportunities (e.g., internships, workshops) between students residing in North and South Chennai.

H_1 : There is A significant variation in the level of accessibility to career-related opportunities (e.g., internships, workshops) between students residing in North and South Chennai.

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Access to the internet for educational purposes	Between Groups	0.59	1	0.59	**1.06**	**0.31**
	Within Groups	106.879	258	0.56		
	Total	107.469	259			
Transportation	Between Groups	1.781	1	1.78	**3.16**	**0.08**
	Within Groups	108.162	258	0.56		
	Total	109.943	259			
Access to career-related opportunities	Between Groups	1.028	1	1.03	**2.02**	**0.16**
	Within Groups	97.631	258	0.51		
	Total	98.66	259			

Since the asymptotic values are more than the table value 0.05, H_0 is accepted and H_1 is rejected. Hence, there is no significant variation in the level of accessibility to career-related opportunities (e.g., internships, workshops) between students residing in North and South Chennai.

FACTOR ANALYSIS: NORTH VS SOUTH CHENNAI: KEY FACTORS SHAPING STUDENT JOB OPPORTUNITIES

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.932
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3929.554
	df	276
	Sig.	.000

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measures the sampling adequacy which should be greater than 0.5 for satisfactory factor analysis. Kaiser recommends **0.5 as minimum** (barely

accepted), **values between 0.7-0.8 are accepted** and values above **0.9 are super**. Bartlett's test is the indication of strength of relationship among variables. The associated probability should less than 0.50. From the table, it is clear that the value of KMO ***0.932*** is more than the prescribed value i.e. 0.5. Therefore **the test satisfied the first condition to proceed with the factor analysis**. By seeing Bartlett's test the significant value 0.000 is less than 0.05. Hence this perspective also, it is significant to apply factor analysis.

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Analysis N
Urban vs. Rural Areas	1.8077	.95938	260
Proximity to Industrial or Tech Hubs	2.1577	.86219	260
Quality of Schools and Colleges	2.2192	1.00674	260
Access to Extracurricular Learning	2.3923	1.17566	260
Parental and Social Expectations	2.5115	1.36838	260
Gender Norms	2.5385	1.12983	260
Financial Stability	2.3385	1.08734	260
Need to Work Part-Time	2.2269	.96585	260
Digital Literacy and Tools	2.1808	1.02950	260
Knowledge of Emerging Trends	2.1500	1.00414	260
Multilingual Capabilities	2.2308	1.00607	260
Soft Skills and Communication	2.2385	1.11711	260
Mental and Physical Health	2.2846	1.21595	260
Work-Life Balance	2.2692	1.03071	260
Access to Professional Networks	2.1462	.99117	260
Participation in Professional Events	2.1577	.96769	260
Commute Time to Job Hubs	2.2000	1.02780	260
Access to Public Transport	2.1577	.98352	260
International Experience	2.4154	1.04556	260
Diversity of Experiences	2.4500	1.11215	260
Productive Use of Free Time	2.4154	1.17755	260
Extracurricular Involvement	2.3077	1.01225	260
Access to Career Services	2.2115	.98906	260
Mentorship Opportunities	2.2077	1.03002	260

The above table shows descriptive statistics for variables under investigation of all the mean values given; According to the respondents, these are the major factors shaping student job opportunities include - ***Parental and Social Expectations, Gender norms and Diversity of Experiences*** whose mean values are more or less equal to ***2.45 to 2.50***

TOTAL VARIANCE EXPLAINED

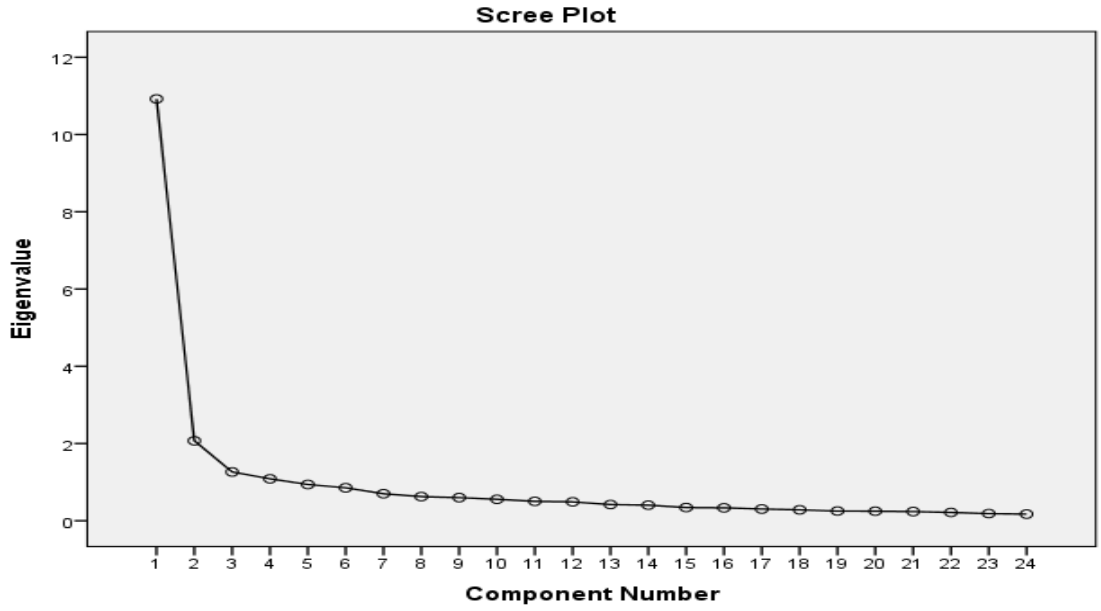
This shows all the factors extractable from the analysis along with their Eigen value, the present of variance attributable to each other and the cumulative variance of the factor and the previous factors. It explains rotated components of the variables. Factors extractions should be more than 1.

Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	10.922	45.506	45.506	10.922	**45.506**	**45.506**	**5.275**	**21.980**	**21.980**
2	2.070	8.627	54.133	2.070	**8.627**	**54.133**	**3.845**	**16.023**	**38.003**
3	1.263	5.265	59.398	1.263	**5.265**	**59.398**	**3.750**	**15.626**	**53.629**
4	1.086	4.523	63.921	1.086	**4.523**	**63.921**	**2.470**	**10.292**	**63.921**
5	.939	3.913	67.834						
6	.852	3.552	71.386						
7	.700	2.915	74.301						
8	.625	2.605	76.906						
9	.598	2.493	79.398						
10	.555	2.314	81.712						
11	.503	2.097	83.810						
12	.489	2.037	85.846						
13	.420	1.751	87.597						
14	.403	1.679	89.276						
15	.341	1.422	90.698						
16	.335	1.397	92.096						
17	.304	1.267	93.363						
18	.283	1.181	94.544						
19	.251	1.045	95.589						
20	.248	1.033	96.622						
21	.238	.993	97.615						
22	.215	.896	98.510						
23	.185	.772	99.282						
24	.172	.718	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

The total variance Table explains that the **24** factors exhibit **63.921%** of total variance with **4** factors i.e...**5.275, 3.845, 3.750 and 2.470**. All these values are strictly greater than one. This shows the existence of four major factors. Individually these factors possess the Variances i.e. **21.980, 16.023, 15.626 and 10.292** . Among these values the first factor possesses the highest variance and the last factor has the smallest variance. This leads to the conclusion that the factor segregation is perfect and that they can be named with respect to the variables within them



The screen plot clearly shows that the curve begins to flatter between the factors 5 and 6. It has also been noted that factor 5 has Eigen value of less than '1'. Hence, only 4 factors have to be retained.

NAMING OF VARIBALES

Factors	Variables	Factor loading values
Socio-Cultural and Developmental Factors	Soft Skills and Communication	.775
	Parental and Social Expectations	.771
	Mental and Physical Health	.722
	Access to Extracurricular Learning	.696
	Gender Norms	.683
	Multilingual Capabilities	.607
	Financial Stability	.595
	Quality of Schools and Colleges	.574

	Work-Life Balance	.573
Career Accessibility and Development Factors	Commute Time to Job Hubs	.814
	Mentorship Opportunities	.681
	Access to Public Transport	.625
	Digital Literacy and Tools	.592
	Access to Career Services	.556
	Participation in Professional Events	.555
	Knowledge of Emerging Trends	.494
Experiential and Networking Growth Factors	Productive Use of Free Time	.793
	Diversity of Experiences	.728
	Extracurricular Involvement	.688
	International Experience	.647
	Access to Professional Networks	.441
Location and Employment Accessibility Factors	Urban vs. Rural Areas	.835
	Proximity to Industrial or Tech Hubs	.705
	Need to Work Part-Time	.500

- The most dominant factor is **Socio-Cultural and Developmental Factors** and it includes 9 variables viz, Soft Skills and Communication, Parental and Social Expectations, Mental and Physical Health, Access to Extracurricular Learning, Gender Norms, Multilingual Capabilities, Financial Stability, Quality of Schools and Colleges and Work-Life Balance and it explains 21.980 % of variance
- The second factor is **Career Accessibility and Development Factors** and it includes 7 variables viz, Commute Time to Job Hubs, Mentorship Opportunities, Access to Public Transport, Digital Literacy and Tools, Access to Career Services, Participation in Professional Events, Knowledge of Emerging Trends and it explains 16.023% of variance.
- The third factor is **Experiential and Networking Growth Factors** and it includes 5 variables viz, Productive Use of Free Time, Diversity of Experiences, Extracurricular Involvement, International Experience, Access to Professional Networks and it explains 15.626% of variance.
- The fourth factor is **Location and Employment Accessibility Factors** and it includes 2 variables viz, Urban vs. Rural Areas, Proximity to Industrial or Tech Hubs, Need to Work Part-Time and it explains 10.292% of variance.

SUGGESTIONS

- 46.4% of respondents recommend enhancing job opportunities and improving career guidance in schools and colleges.
- 33.5% of respondents suggest that career counseling would be beneficial in helping them achieve their career goals.

CONCLUSION

The study on "Career Pathways and Lifestyle Factors: A Sociological Study of North and South Chennai's Student Population" highlights important differences in the career aspirations and lifestyle choices of students from these two regions. The findings suggest that students from South Chennai tend to have greater access to career-related opportunities, such as internships and workshops, possibly due to better educational infrastructure and socio-economic advantages in the area. In contrast, students from North Chennai face more challenges in accessing such opportunities, which may affect their career choices and aspirations. In conclusion, while students across North and South Chennai are driven by similar career aspirations, their pathways are shaped by varying lifestyle factors and resource availability, highlighting the importance of addressing these disparities to ensure equal career opportunities for all.

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