

Indicators of a successful career: perspective of Pakistani parents

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Abstract

Introduction: People who choose to work in an environment similar to their basic personality type are more likely to be successful and satisfied. Similarly, theories of Roe and Super also emphasized the early child-parent relationship in career development process and recognized the significance of family as a source of influence on child's self-concept and career maturity. Apart from theories, literature provides evidence to support the dominance of parents in shaping adolescents' career aspirations. Objective of the study is to identify the perceptions of parents about a successful career for their children in a developing country such as Pakistan.

Material and Methods: It was a qualitative study and parents of FSc and A-Level students were selected for semi-structured interviews. Purposive sampling was done for inclusion of participants and grounded theory approach was used for data collection and analysis. Constant comparative method was used for thematic content analysis. Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software NVIVO was used for data management and analysis.

Results: Four major themes including, personal satisfaction, fame, good job and moral values emerged from the data. Themes were broadly classified as sociocultural, socioeconomic and personal themes. Majority of parents perceived medical profession as having more social value, respect, fame, earning and career progression.

Conclusions: In developing countries such as Pakistan, indicators of a successful career are predominantly socioeconomic factors including fame, societal respect and earning. Parents overwhelmingly prefer medical profession as a career for their children, comprising of maximum indicators of a successful career.

Keywords: Perceptions; successful career; developing country

Introduction

Both theory and empirical research highlight to varying degrees the family's role in influencing children's occupational aspirations.¹ For example Holland's theory of career choice focus on the importance of environment that parents create for their children and which automatically effects development of basic personality type.

Theory further states that people who choose to work in an environment similar to their basic personality type are more likely to be successful and satisfied.² Similarly theories of Roe and Super also emphasized the early child-parent relationship in career development process and recognized the significance of family as a source of influence on child's self-concept and career maturity.^{3, 4} Apart from theories, empirical literature also provide evidence to support the dominance of parents in shaping adolescents' career aspirations.^{5, 6}

Since parents were ranked the most influential in career development and choice followed by friends, teachers, counselors and siblings⁷ it was deemed important to understand their perceptions about a

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successful career. Majority of parents perceive their child getting education to choose a career for economic progress and their own well-being.⁸ They usually want their children to aspire to occupations that will help them achieve a 'better' lifestyle and better position in society, while small numbers of parents wish their children to get education for values and service purpose, and as a source to bring positive change in the society for improvement of overall discipline.⁹ Some parents encourage their children by giving financial and moral support to explore career options available and find out the best satisfying career for them, while others try to live out their own unfulfilled career dreams through their children.¹⁰ It has also been observed that in developing countries such as Pakistan, majority of parents like their child to pursue any one of the five major professions, i.e. medicine, engineering, management, pharmacy and agriculture.¹¹ Parents here are sometimes authoritative and play a critical role in career choices even against the will of their children. They often foist their ideals and ambitions on their children, which can affect children's academic achievements on one hand and may prevent them enrolling in a program according to current trends on the other hand.

As a result few professions get over saturated and gaps in job saturation could not be found, ending up in joblessness. Objective of the present study was to identify the views of parents about a successful career in perspective of their children and to develop an understanding of latent insecurities about their children's potential careers. This understanding will help to develop a system model upon which career counseling sessions for students and parents could be planned and based. It is assumed that results and predictive information from this study would be used for supporting and advising students and families, to get enrolled in nontraditional professions according to modern career drifts.

Material and Methods

This study utilized qualitative grounded theory research approach. The study was ethically approved from an institutional review board (IRB). Duration of study was eight months starting from December 2014 to August 2015. Purposive sampling was done initially and parents of FSc and A-Levels students living in Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Lahore and Mirpur Azad Kashmir were included in the study. A sample size of 18 was completed based on data saturation from parents of students studying in eight different schools.

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were used as data collection instrument. A mix of both in person and telephonic interviews were conducted with parents of students studying in different Pakistani schools including, Roots IVY School Rawalpindi, City School Islamabad, Beacon house School system Islamabad, Federal College Islamabad, Sir Syed College Rawalpindi, Kashmir model College Mirpur, Army public School Rawalpindi and Lahore grammar School. The duration of interviews ranged from 15 to 30 minutes. A set semi-structured question guide was drawn up to obtain pertinent opinions from participants. To ensure internal validity and reliability semi-structured qualitative interview guide was developed using "AMEE guide 87 developing questionnaire" as reference.¹² We pilot tested questions with faculty members of our institute before commencement of study for clarity and unambiguity.

Participants were interviewed in both English and Urdu languages according to their comfort level. Interviews were done in confidentiality and field notes were also maintained to increase credibility of data. Afterwards the data in Urdu was transcribed in English language by us, having command on both languages. Data collection procedure took three months and included interviews followed by transcription of each interview.

Grounded theory approach¹³ was used for thematic content analysis, so data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously. Initially data analysis was done manually using open, axial and selective codes. Data was reduced further by creating internal coherence, strong distinction between sub-themes and finally themes were refined.

After getting basic idea about categories and themes, data was entered in Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software NVIVO for data management and analysis.

Presentation and visualization of results was ensured using NVIVO data tables, flow charts, models and group queries. Qualitative summaries were generated to help interpret the data according to issues and themes analyzed.

Results

Of the 18 survey participants, most respondents aged from 33 to 52 years. Both males and females belonged to middle and high socioeconomic status. All of the men surveyed were employed and generally belonged to professions including army, law, education and business. Whereas 40% of women surveyed were employed and associated with teaching profession. All participants were Muslims by religion and they were not asked to specify their nationality/caste etc.

A total of 118 codes were created from data. Thirteen categories and five subcategories were identified initially as a result of open and axial coding (Table I, figure 1). Categories were further interlinked in the process of selective coding and finally led to the emergence of four themes and eight sub-themes based on the shared views from the participants (Table II). Themes were personal satisfaction, fame, good job and moral values, and were broadly classified as sociocultural (fame), socioeconomic (good job) and Personal (moral values and personal satisfaction) themes. Each theme consisted of

two sub themes and was presented as a successful career model (Figure 2).

Most frequently discussed theme was personal satisfaction as an important indicator of a successful career. Sub-themes in this category were choice of children and parents satisfaction. A representative statement from one of the interviews is as follows:

“First thing regarding successful career is the choice of children. Definitely when children get career of their choice, parents also have satisfaction in that” (Participant 1)

The second most important theme was fame, and sub themes were top position in profession and respect in society. A representative statement from one of the interviews is as follows:

“You want them to be successful having achievement which is better than other family members and you want them to be famous and brighten your family’s name in a better way positively in educational field.” (Participant 2)

The third commonly found theme was good job that is related to the socioeconomic status within the society. Sub-themes were reasonable earning and comfort in life. A representative statement from one of the interviews is as follows:

“Successful career is a career path which gives them reasonable earning so that they can manage day to day expenditures properly, gives them good job, comfort and social security” (participant 4)

The fourth and final theme emerged was moral values. Almost 40% of the participants considered good moral values as an important indicator of a successful career. They believed that good moral values are further based on good education and family environment and training as good human being. A representative statement from one of

the interviews is as follows.

“As far as career success is concerned the first thing I think is moral values. Moral values are very important. So successful career for me is moral values, then set up of home. How you train your children and third thing is education” (Participant 15)

“Exactly I say we should make our children educated and taking values along them and only then they can be actually successful.” (Participant 10)

Majority of the participants considered medicine, engineering and civil superior services (CSS) as examples of successful career. A small number of participants also described business administration and information technology as good careers. There was no significant difference between the views and opinions of male and female participants in the study.

Results of group query, word frequency query and word tree query further confirmed categories and themes embedded in data (Figure 3,4,5).

Discussion

All above-mentioned themes were constantly compared and interlinked, and helped conceptualizing and generating a thematic representation of parental perceptions: the successful career model (Figure 2). Model is having a diamond shaped outline with four themes at each corner. In between four corners, are subthemes reflecting smooth transition from one theme to other.

Parents generally want their child to have the best place in the society; they wish them to be at the top of the pyramid, a finding in accordance with one of the previous studies.¹⁴ The present study looked at the views of parents about indicators of a successful career in perspective of their children. Parents recognized personal satisfaction of the child as the most significant measure of a

successful career. This finding supports Holland's theory of career choice which demonstrates that choosing a career that fits one's personality and basic traits is a vital step towards success.¹⁵ Another study reviewed research on person-environment congruence in the light of Holland's theory of career choice and showed significant, positive relationship between congruence and job performance.¹⁶ Our study also highlighted personal satisfaction and choice of children followed by parent's satisfaction as most frequently perceived indicator of a successful career.

Second most important indicator of successful career according to interviewees was fame in the society by securing top position in one's profession, having full command on ones work and earning respect in the society. The lust for fame in multiple cultures is evident from many studies^{17, 18} focusing on human hopes to rise to reputation, seeking discrimination from others and wishing recognition by excellence. Current study found fame and societal respect as preferred criteria of successful career in a developing country like Pakistan and more than 40% of parents pointed out that they want their child to be famous in family and society by securing good name in any chosen career path. At the same time majority of parents also confessed their influence for choosing medicine as a career to acquire positive popularity in family and society.

Third most important concept while choosing any career was reasonable earning or economic factor. Different studies have explored this factor as an indicator of successful career.^{19, 20} The present study also found this factor an important constituent of career choice decision. These findings support determining salaries and promotions as important objective indicators of successful career.²¹ It is also pertinent to mention here that in developing countries, socioeconomic aspects like reasonable earning is a central factor while choosing any profession.²²

Another majority of parents emphasized on moral values and believed that being a good human being is actual success. The literature also mentions moral goodness as basic principle of successful career and above all successful life.²³ Some participants' views from the present study were influenced by their spiritual values. They mentioned that a successful career is not in this life but actual success is after this life, so values are more important than material things.

It was important to understand perceptions of parents first about a successful career in general and then about best professions available in Pakistan. Indicators identified by parents proved to be the logic behind preference of medicine and engineering as a career for their children.

Slight differences were found between perceptions of participants demographically. Parents living in Mirpur (a small city in peripheral Pakistan) did not appreciate current trends and options in career choice, while parents living in Rawalpindi and Islamabad (major cities) perceived latest

careers as need of hour.

This research helped to understand parental perceptions and insecurities about successful careers that influence career choice decisions. The results of this study cannot be generalized due to its contextual and qualitative nature. However these uncertainties could be first addressed by conducting career counseling sessions followed by vocation awareness programmes at institutional and Government level.

Conclusions

It is concluded from the present research that parents perceived successful career as a career with self-satisfaction, fame, good earning and moral values. They further perceived medical profession fulfilling the abovementioned criteria to the maximum, followed by engineering and civil superior services. Further quantitative studies needs to be done on the model that we have developed to establish the truth within it and to increase generalizability of the present study.

Table I: Perception about successful career and number of interviewees who cited each theme

Name	Interviewees	References
Successful career	18	118
Top position in profession	3	4
Respect in society	2	2
Reasonable earning	7	8
Personal satisfaction	2	2
Parent's satisfaction	3	5
Moral values	6	14
Good job	3	4
Full command on your work	7	14
<i>focused</i>	3	6
<i>knowledge</i>	1	1
<i>working hard</i>	4	4
Fame	8	8
Education	6	11
Finding the Gap in Job Saturation	3	8
<i>scope</i>	1	2
Comfort in life	2	2
Choice of children	10	30
<i>not imposed by parents</i>	4	10

Table II: Description of themes and sub-themes in successful career

S No	Themes	Sub themes
1	Personal satisfaction (personal)	Choice of child Parents satisfaction
2	Fame (sociocultural)	Respect in society Top position in profession
3	Good job (socioeconomic)	Reasonable earning Comfort in life
4	Moral values (personal)	Good human being Education

Top position in society	Respect in society	Reasonable earning	Self-satisfaction	Parents satisfaction	Good moral values	Good job
Choice of children Not imposed by parents	Education	Comfort in life	Finding gap in job saturation Scope	Fame	Full command on work Focused Knowledge Working hard	

13 categories and 5 sub-categories



Personal choice/satisfaction	Fame	Good job	Moral values
42	36	14	14

4 themes

Figure 1: Description of sub-themes and themes in data analysis

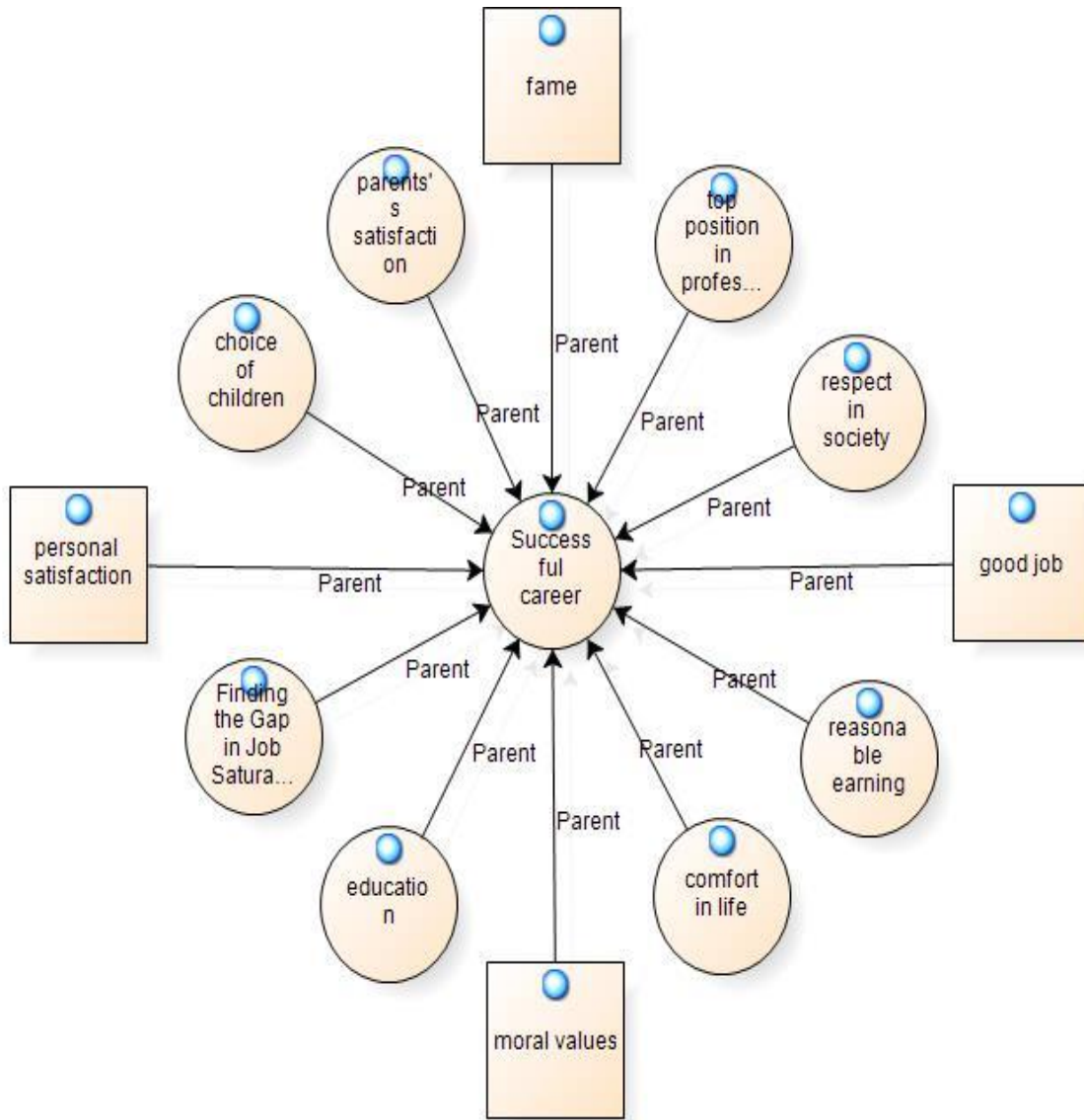


Figure 2: Emergence of the successful career model using the grounded theory approach

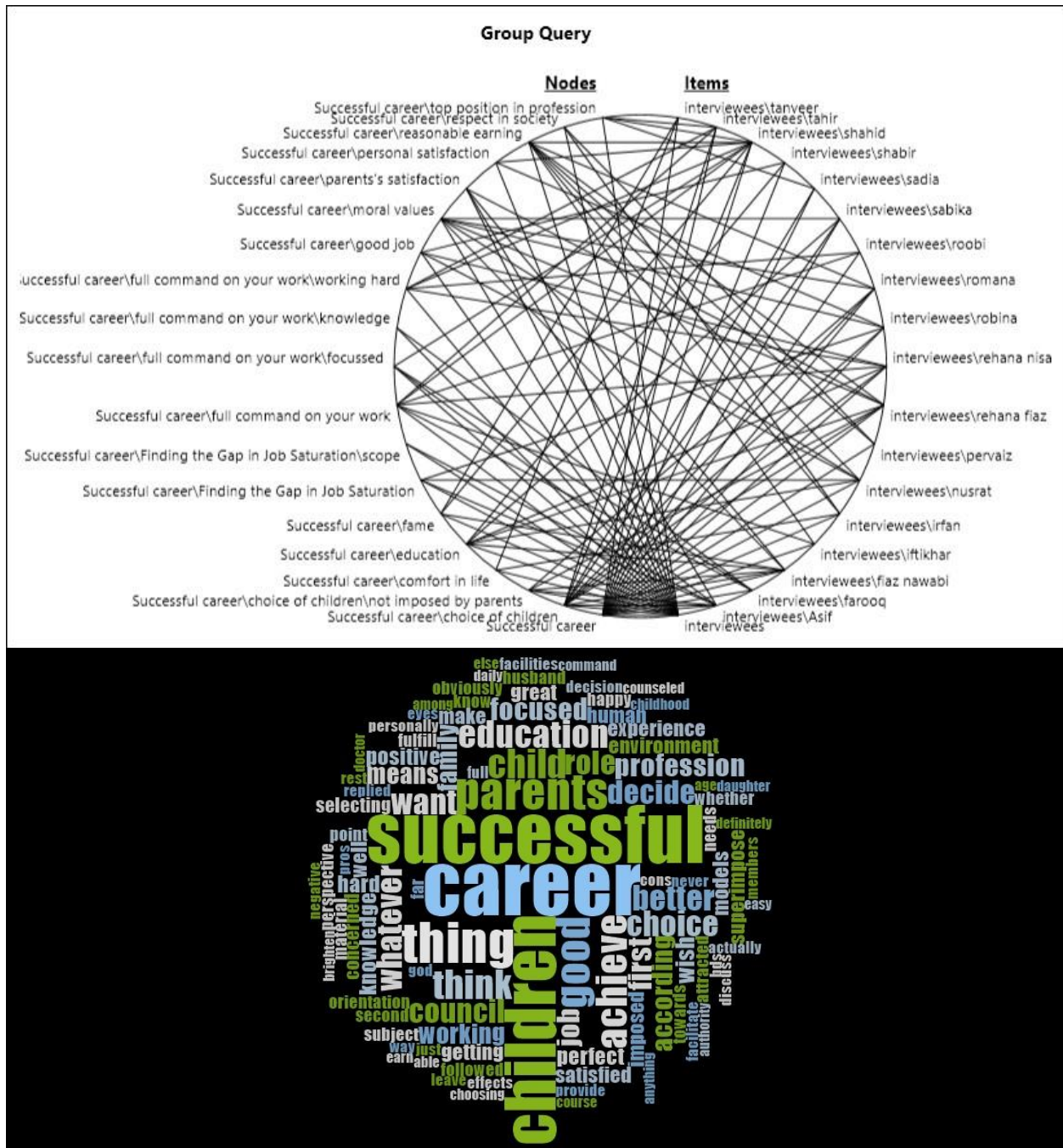


Figure 4: Word frequency query on nodes from sources (word cloud)

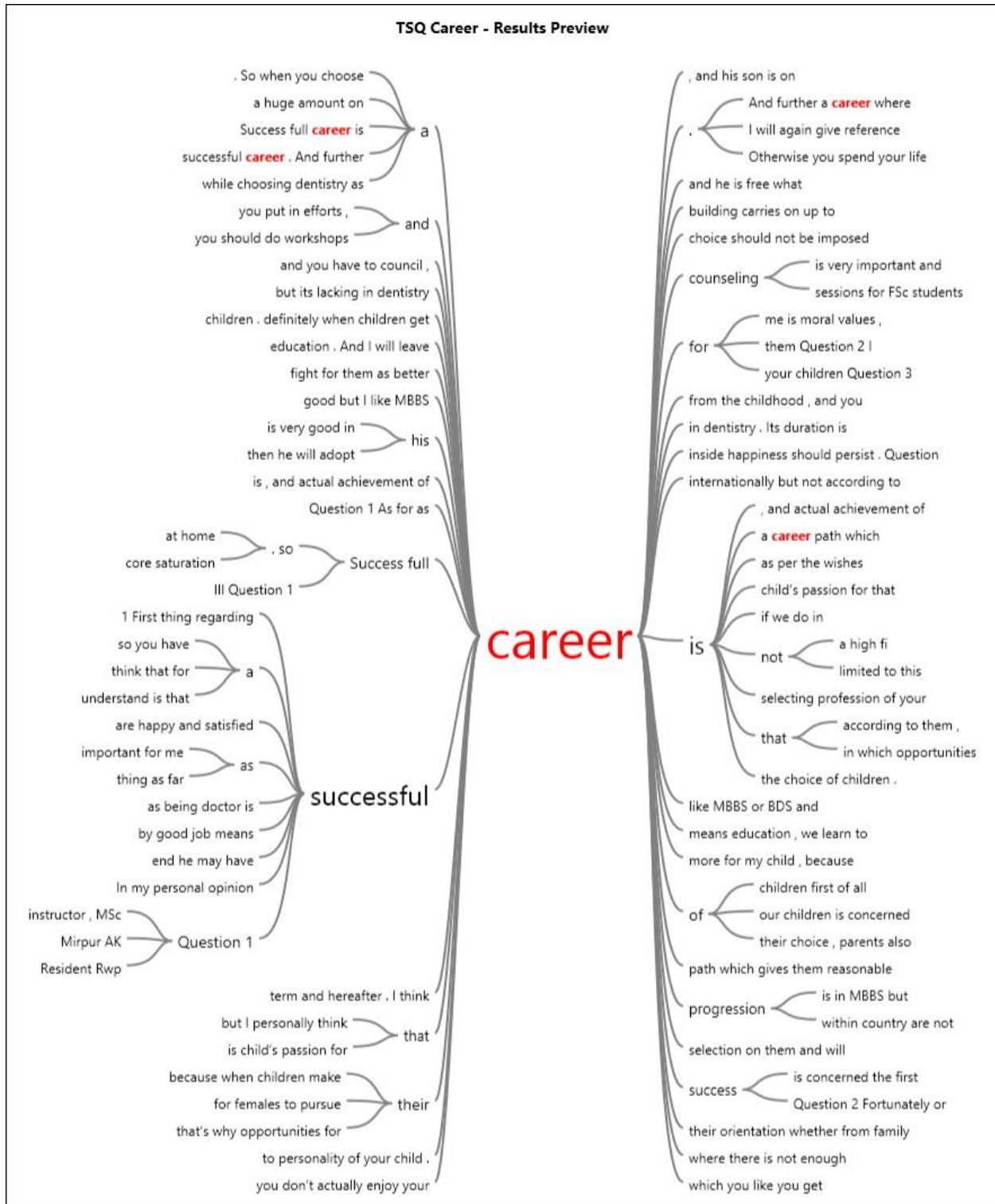


Figure 5: Word tree query of career choice

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