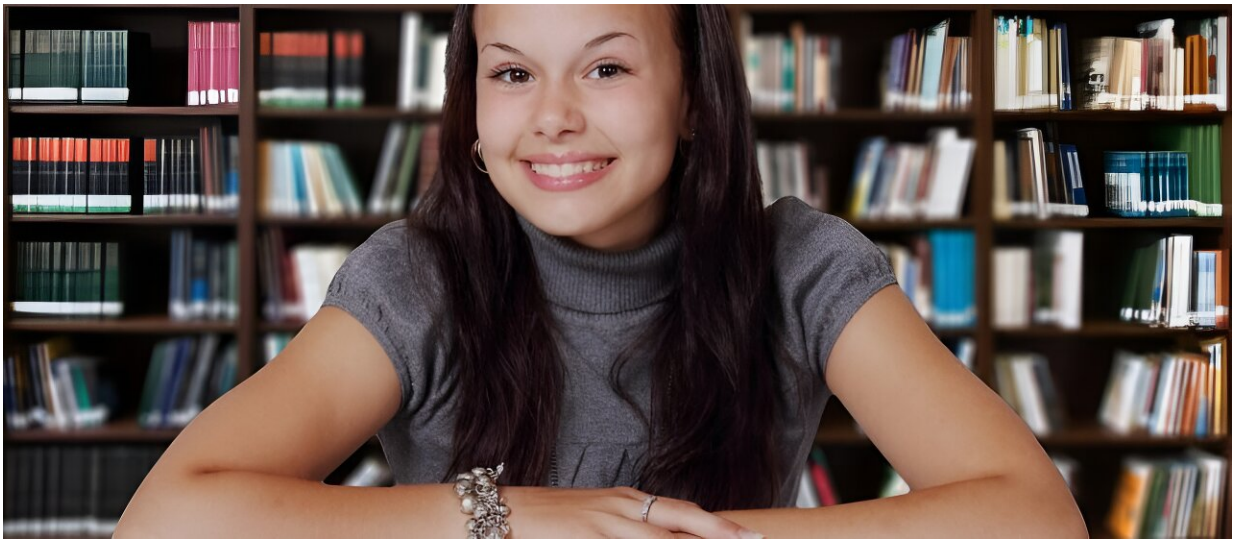


Researchers analyze career pathways for gifted girls

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Compared to boys, girls often excel in their secondary education results—but even the most gifted students may struggle to find their "dream job" and follow the best career path, pay grades and workplace progression to become leaders in their fields.

To dissect the situation, a South Australian [study](#) led by Flinders University experts published in *Gifted Child Quarterly* looked at [career development](#) and outcomes for 18 girls from Year 8, 10 and 12 grades in three schools and has recommended further support and direction of

high career aspirations among gifted [adolescent girls](#).

It's important to provide the estimated 10% of Australian students likely to be academically gifted with the best guidance, says Flinders University College of Education, Psychology and Social Work Ph.D. Dr. Rebecca Napier.

"Understanding early influences on the development of gifted girls' career-related values and employment dreams can help us keep our girls on strong pathways to achieve equity with men in women's long-term prospects," says Dr. Napier, who is also director of the Gifted Pathways consultancy.

"We see a range of interrelated influences on career values, goals and choices that reflect their relationships and experiences at home, school and the community plus their own personal traits, strengths and interests.

"High expectations from parents and teachers can also play a pivotal role in explaining any discrepancy in career outcomes."

Issues discussed by the girls in this study included coping with high internal and external expectations, maintaining physical and psychological well-being in the context of a career, and balancing career pathways with [family relationships](#) and other aspects of adult life.

Some participants reported that the career information or support provided by the school was not expansive and conducive to steady development through high school and students' personal journeys.

Strategies for gifted girls to reach their career potential include:

- Individual and highly personalized career advice for gifted adolescent girls, encouraging them to self-determine their best

interests and passions.

- Expanding career support to access a wide range of career-related contexts and relationships from primary to [high school](#), including work placements in high-impact workplaces and [role models](#) for formal and informal mentoring.
- Exposure to potential fields and roles should not be confined to assumed traditional careers deemed appropriate for high academic achievers, such as medicine.
- Provide opportunities to undertake school- and community-based leadership roles to help achieve career leadership goals.
- Career-related education and support should be ongoing and systematically integrated into the school curriculum, including entrepreneurship or areas of emerging technologies as well as traditional career pathways.
- Career support should include guidance about navigating psychological and social aspects of career development.

Flinders Emeritus Professor John Halsey says while males tend to value high-profile career positions and salaries, some research indicates that adolescent girls tend to lower their career aspirations as they progress through secondary schooling, particularly if they aim for highly prestigious or non-traditional careers for women.

Narrowing of preferences over time may reflect girls focusing on future work-life balance and perceptions of gender, socio-economic and cultural differences in fields of work.

"However schools and outside influences such as mentors, work-integrated learning and changing perceptions on gender work can help to reduce these negative influences in girls achieving eminence in their chosen [career paths](#)," says Professor Halsey, a former Fulbright exchange scholar in gifted education.

"Encouraging individuals to explore their strengths in light of multitude pathways in complex, changing workplaces is a powerful way to add to the influence of family, teachers and parents.

More information: Rebecca D. Napier et al, Influences on Career Development for Gifted Adolescent Girls in Selective Academic Programs in Australia, *Gifted Child Quarterly* (2023). [DOI: 10.1177/00169862231201604](https://doi.org/10.1177/00169862231201604)

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