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Adolescent parent perceptions on sustainable career opportunities and building employability capitals for future work

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ABSTRACT

As primary career influencers, parents must support adolescent children in navigating evolving and increasingly challenging employment landscapes. Using a capitals lens, this study explores secondary school parents' capacity to provide informed career advice and their perceptions on factors known to enhance youth employability and employment prospects. Survey data were collected from 301 Australian secondary school parents to examine their understanding of sustainable youth career opportunities, what can aid youth's employment prospects, and their utilisation of available resources to support career advice for adolescents. While parents' perceptions of opportunities by sector and industry aligned with wider thinking, many lacked awareness of contemporary trends impacting on youth career progression, did not engage with external career resources, and were not confident in their understanding of youth labour markets. Some recognised the importance of cultural and psychological capital for securing and sustaining employment, yet undervalued aspects of human capital (work experience) and social capital (networks). Variations in parent perspectives by education level and their own career experiences highlights the need for targeted strategies to better support parents in providing informed career advice for future adolescents' success.

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Employability; adolescent career development; career advice; parent career advisors; capital resources

Introduction

Developing youth workers that are agile and skilled for rapidly evolving labour market demands is critical for personal career wellbeing, as well as organisational and national prosperity. Given employers lament new workers' preparedness for future work and career (e.g. Pennington & Stanford, 2019; Wilton, 2011), youth employability should feature strongly in education policy, yet the overarching focus remains confined to developing future-oriented skills to support effective workplace performance (e.g. Mertanen et al., 2020). More recent education-based perspectives on individual employability emphasise thinking beyond requisite skills (see Artess et al., 2017). They often emphasise

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personal capital resources which can enhance labour marketability, empower youth to realise career aspirations and improve employment prospects (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020; Tomlinson, 2017; Williams et al., 2016). These resources span human capital (e.g. professional capabilities for future work), cultural capital (e.g. connecting with employers through common language, values, and attitudes), social capital (e.g. networking capabilities and contacts to access the job market), identity capital (e.g. effectively communicating one's strengths and achievements to prospective employers) and psychological capital (e.g. demonstrating resilience in volatile labour markets).

Another important dimension of youth employability is the ability to effectively navigate the labour market and manage one's career (Akkermans et al., 2015; Bridgstock, 2009). This is recognised as increasingly difficult for adolescents (Staff et al., 2010) as automation, precarious work, non-linear career pathways, and globalisation make careers more unpredictable (Santilli et al., 2020). Recognising that employability transcends short-term job attainment, Tomlinson and Nghia (2020) describe career readiness as "the ability to manage the transition into the labour market and make proactive and purposive decisions towards the goal of sustaining a meaningful career pathway(s)" (p. 9). Career self-management and employability are inextricably linked, the former requiring youth to understand and mobilise their capital resources (Hillage & Pollard, 1998) and signal their marketability to prospective employers, while developed capital resources can augment greater career proactivity and planning (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020).

Adolescence is a critical time for career development learning, including building self-awareness, understanding work, career planning, and career exploration (Hirschi, 2010), affecting career decision-making and employment outcomes in future years (Hughes et al., 2016). Parents are widely understood to be key, if not primary, influencers on adolescents' post-school career decisions (Dockery et al., 2021; Sattler, 2021), albeit often implicit and unintended (Rogers et al., 2018; Watson et al., 2016). Profound changes in work require youth to access accurate and comprehensive occupational knowledge (Nota et al., 2015) and have led to growing pressure on parents to better support their children for future career success. Yet evidence suggests that parents lack understanding of youth employability, including available career pathways (Jahn & Myers, 2014) and contemporary labour market demands (Global Access Partners, 2019), and there are barriers to their effective involvement in career development learning (Oomen, 2016). Consequently, there is a need to review and enhance parents' provision of informed career advice (Crowley & High, 2018). This is particularly important for low socio-economic status (SES) parents who often give less career support due to time and resource constraints, and their own limited career experience (e.g. Lindstrom et al., 2007).

This study aimed to explore parents' understanding of youth employability, rather than gauge youth employability *per se*. In doing so, we sought to identify any misalignment between parent perceptions and the realities of contemporary labour markets, and factors known to enhance youth employability and employment prospects. The research questions were, therefore: how equipped are parents to provide informed career advice for their adolescent children to succeed in future work (RQ1), and how do parents believe adolescents can appeal to youth employers to secure employment (RQ2)? The questions were addressed through examining parents' perceptions on available career opportunities; what employers seek in youth employees; how they engage with sources of career information; and how they believe adolescents can better position themselves in the labour market.

The study makes an important contribution by considering youth employability from the parents' perspective. It explores secondary school parents' perceptions on the role of capital resources, building on investigations in the higher education sector (e.g. Clarke, 2018; Tomlinson & Jackson, 2021), and their understanding of factors that enhance adolescent employability. It also addresses the dearth in empirical investigation of parents' provision of career information (Dockery et al., 2021) and how parents seek information to support their adolescent children's career development (Crowley & High, 2018). Benchmarking parental perceptions allows us to identify ways to improve parents' understanding of what is sought in youth recruits and better align their career advice to contemporary and sustainable careers. This is urgently needed to support adolescents in their imminent career decisions and navigation of challenging labour markets (Joyce, 2019), and to potentially improve person-organisation fit.

Background review

Youth employability from a capitals' perspective

Young people (15–24 years) globally are more likely to be unemployed compared with others, driven by rises in part-time and casual work (Woodhouse & Thorpe, 2021). The authors found that youth unemployment varies by region, for example, it is 1.6 times that of adult unemployment in Japan, and 2.5 times higher in Australia. An all-time high in Australian youth unemployment reached 16.4% in 2020 (Angeles, 2021), largely attributed to a “crowding out” effect from rises in labour supply and increased competition for jobs (Borland & Coelli, 2021). The young now account for around 15% of the labour force, compared to nearly 25% in the early 1980s (Dhillon & Cassidy, 2018). This reflects a progressive ageing of the population, a decline in the participation of young workers, and changes in their employment structure. More than half of young people now work part-time, up from nearly 15% in the early 1980s, and 55% are employed casually (Dhillon & Cassidy, 2018). They are also more likely to work in industries with high rates of part-time and casual employment, including retail and hospitality (Dhillon & Cassidy, 2018). Further, it is doubtful that they will experience a linear pathway into their intended career due to the changing employment landscape (Angeles, 2021).

Given these employment trends, it is important that adolescents – with the support of their parents – consider how to develop their capital resources to appeal to prospective employers. Human capital, the skills and knowledge which enable effective workplace performance (Becker, 1964), can be acquired through education and work-related learning. Developing proficiency in those future-oriented capabilities highly regarded by youth employers, such as enterprise skills, problem solving, communication, and teamwork (Foundation for Young Australians [FYA], 2018; Hughes et al., 2016; World Economic Forum, 2020), may be fostered through schooling, work experience and community-related activities. Despite the acknowledged value of human capital for labour marketability and employment prospects, differentials in economic rewards among similarly qualified individuals point to the need to consider other non-educational factors and resources (see Marginson, 2019).

Bourdieu's (1986) conceptualisation of social capital refers to individuals' connections and networks which can advance career and standing. Developing personal and

professional networks is critical for employability, aiding youth in obtaining information on career pathways, better understanding how to market themselves effectively to prospective employers, and increasing their access to the hidden job market (Hughes et al., 2016). Bourdieu also emphasised the important role of cultural capital – individuals' values, attitudes and disposition – for social mobility. Building youth's cultural capital can prepare them for confidently engaging with employers and positively presenting themselves during recruitment and selection. Understanding the fit between their own personal values and those of different career opportunities and pathways can lead to more effective career decision-making and career outcomes (Tomlinson, 2017).

Identity capital relates to youth's agency and ability in creating a personal narrative which captures and communicates their strengths and achievements to prospective employers, known to enhance employability and employment outcomes (Côté, 2016). Critical to articulating their worth to prospective employers is a strong sense-of-self which may be developed through reflective activities (Harvey et al., 2002). Finally, psychological capital is considered integral to employability, encompassing youth's confidence in their own capabilities, drive, adaptability and a willingness and ability to develop and be mobile in the labour market (see Williams et al., 2016). High levels of perceived employability are known to improve coping strategies and employment prospects in uncertain labour markets and can lead to greater career satisfaction (see Akkermans et al., 2015). Developing youth's persistence in achieving career goals and resilience and adaptability to career shocks are important aspects of psychological capital which can support youth in their career journey (Rossier et al., 2017).

Importantly, capital resources are considered to interconnect and influence each other. For example, Tomlinson (2017) highlights how interactions with professional networks (social capital) can help individuals to develop skills (human capital) and understanding of workplace norms and values (cultural capital), leading to improved employment prospects. Meanwhile Donald et al. (2019) propose that human capital encompasses social, cultural, and psychological capital, and education institutions should develop these resources – alongside career proactivity – and provide informed career advice to enhance students' self-perceptions of employability.

Developing youth ability to self-manage their career

Fundamental to employability is youth learning to self-manage their career, enabling them to understand, leverage and communicate their capital resources to support career aspirations and readiness, during recruitment processes and beyond. Formal career development learning through schools is one approach, and should be student-centred, foster independence and life-long learning. It should also involve the collaboration of children, teachers, career counsellors (Austin et al., 2021; Oliveira et al., 2015) for more positive career outcomes (e.g. Meijers et al., 2013). Encouraging experimentation with career pathways that align to strengths and interests will enable students to understand available opportunities and more effectively evaluate their suitability to diverse careers and occupations (Austin et al., 2021).

Another important way of developing youth's understanding of careers and occupations is through career exploration (Lim & You, 2019), such as engaging in informational interviews and work experience. This can help to build occupational knowledge, shape

career goals, aid career decision-making, and engage in meaningful work (see Ferrari et al., 2015; Hughes et al., 2016; Porfeli et al., 2013). Ferrari et al. affirmed the positive association between career exploration and occupational knowledge and, echoing Creed et al. (2007), emphasised the value of exposing children to diverse occupations and encouraging reflection on their observations.

As a career influencer, parents have an important role in supporting youth's career self-management. They need to share accurate information on employer requirements and expected outcomes for different career pathways (Crowley & High, 2018). This occupational knowledge will enhance adolescents' understanding of different work contexts and aid informed career decision-making (Hawkins et al., 2012). Imparting a deep understanding of the expectations of employers, trends in labour markets and antecedents of changing work contexts should also support youth's career adaptability, the ability to cope with challenges and transition (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Parents' influence on youth's career development may be understood by social cognitive career theory (SCCT) (Lent et al., 1994) which emphasises dynamic contextual influences, such as family and social support. SCCT highlights a complex interplay of self-efficacy beliefs (youth feeling they can perform well in a particular career), outcome expectations (youth believing the career will lead to desired outcomes), and goals (intentions to engage in a certain way that will result in an outcome) with contextual variables. Lent and Brown (1996) report how parental influence can mediate their child's career-related self-efficacy and outcome expectations, interests, as well as career goals, behaviours and accomplishments.

Resonating with SCCT, emotional and psychological support is shown to foster awareness, confidence and resilience in children to support career decision-making and the achievement of career goals (e.g. Lim & You, 2019). Lim and You advocate for parents encouraging agency, curiosity and career exploration, rather than imposing goals and controlling children's decisions which can hamper career maturity and cause career indecision. Relatedly, Liu et al. (2015) emphasise that children do not passively consume the informal career information provided by parents but actively engage in career planning with, the sub-conscious or otherwise, support of their parents. This aids meaningful congruence between parent and children's career adaptability, career planning, career certainty, knowledge of the world-of-work (Rogers et al., 2018) and career orientation (Suryadi et al., 2020). The latter is known to increase the confidence and better enable children to make informed career choices, although not always the case (e.g. Daddis & Smetana, 2005).

Parental influence may be unintended and arise through regular parent-child interaction where career aspirations and decisions are discussed and negotiated (Billett et al., 2020; Vernon & Drane, 2020). Here, children extract cues from provided information and form an image of their vocational self and the future work they might engage in (Liu et al., 2015). Whether explicit or unintended, parental input can support children's "information seeking and research behaviours; self-efficacy, career decision-making and confidence; planning, goal setting and creating a sense of direction; and career adaptability, flexibility and employability skills" (Barnes et al., 2020, p. ii). The level of influence can be affected by parents' own career achievements and experiences (Barnes et al., 2020; Billett et al., 2020), with parental educational attainment being positively associated with children's vocational and educational expectations (Hill et al., 2004).

Parental influence may also be indirect through the child's interpretation of parental support, which can manifest as positive, interference, or lacking (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009). Interference or a lack of support are associated with career decision-making difficulties (Parola & Marcionetti, 2022) while positive perceptions are linked to career self-efficacy, career planning, career exploration, and career choice (see Ginevra et al., 2015). Keller and Whiston (2008) found that perceived parental support of career plans was more impactful on adolescents' career confidence than detailed occupational information.

Although a significant influencer on their children's career aspirations (Liu et al., 2015) and career decision-making, parents experience many challenges and barriers in this role (Bisson & Stubbley, 2017; Sattler, 2021). Sattler asserts that many parents are time-poor and prioritise other matters over their child's career development learning. They often lack the information to confidently provide informed career advice and can struggle to engage with available support and resources on career education. Parents may find it difficult to provide accurate and sufficient information on occupations outside of their own, creating anxiety and uncertainty (Crowley & High, 2018), and their advice can be impacted by a lack of knowledge (Bisson & Stubbley, 2017). Vernon and Drane (2020) assert that parents, as career influencers, "need the time, skills, knowledge and access to up-to-date pathway information" (p. 167), particularly those of low SES students who rely more on parents for career support.

Methodology

The study adopts a positivist approach, the posed research questions examined through survey data. Combining closed and open questions was considered optimal given the dearth of extant literature, potentially allowing transferability of findings and deeper insights into parent perceptions.

Participants

The study's sample comprised 301 parents of secondary school students in years 10, 11 or 12, their characteristics summarised in Table 1. These school years were selected given their importance for career development (Rogers et al., 2018), including subject and vocational/higher education selection. Parents were located across all states/territories in Australia, approximately three-quarters from Metropolitan areas. Over one-half were university-educated and a similar proportion worked in professional/managerial roles. Almost two-thirds of their children attended government schools.

Procedures

Following ethics approval, parents were recruited online via a survey panel provider. Sampling was a combination of random and purposive, with criteria given regarding parents' geographical dispersion (all states/territories to be represented) and school type (participation by parents of children in both government and non-government schools). Participating secondary school parents completed an online survey during April and May 2021. Participants' informed consent was provided by progressing with and completing the survey.

Table 1. Summary of participant characteristics ($n = 301$).

Variable	Sub-groups	N	%
Gender	Male	134	44.5
	Female	167	55.5
Age	35–44 years	83	27.6
	45–54 year	129	42.9
	55–64 years	63	20.9
	65 plus	26	8.6
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) origin	Non-ATSI	258	85.7
	ATSI	43	14.3
Non-English-speaking (NESB) background	NESB	237	78.7
	Non-NESB	64	21.3
Home location	Metro	224	74.4
	Regional	77	25.6
Occupation	Manager	89	29.6
	Professional/Associate professional	79	26.2
	Trade person/related	8	2.7
	Clerical/sales/service worker	42	14.0
	Production/transportation/labourer worker	20	6.5
	Homemaker	39	13.0
	Not working	24	8.0
	Highest education level	Primary/secondary school	54
Highest education level	Post-secondary school Certificate/Diploma	40	13.3
	Technical/trade qualification	42	14.0
	University degree	165	54.8
	Secondary school region	Metro	228
Regional		73	24.3
Secondary school type	Government school	195	64.8
	Non-government school	92	30.6
	Education philosophy school	8	2.6
	Home school	6	2.0

Measures

The survey was piloted among 10 secondary school parents, feedback leading to minor revisions to improve clarity and flow. Parents first provided detail on their background characteristics and were instructed to respond with respect to their oldest year 10, 11 or 12 secondary child, even if they had multiple children in those year groups. Several measures gauged how equipped parents are to provide informed career advice (RQ1). Parents first rated the quality of opportunity (1 = very poor, 2 = poor, 3 = fair, 4 = good, 5 = excellent), that different sectors (public/private/not-for-profit) and organisation types (small/medium/large) give youth today in terms of seven intrinsic and extrinsic factors widely considered as indicators of career success among new workers (e.g. Jackson et al., 2022). Organisations were classified by number of employees: small (1–49), medium (50–149), and large (150+). Participants were also asked to select three industries (from 16, with an option for “other”) they felt offered the most career opportunities for youth today. Using the categories in Table 1, parents selected one occupation which they would most encourage their child to pursue, explaining why as an open response.

Parents rated their agreement (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree) on the importance of the impact of COVID-19, emergent technologies, casual/precarious work, non-linear career pathways, and

rises in higher education enrolments, on youth's career progression. Parents were invited to explain their concerns with these trends by open response. They also selected the focus of their initial career conversations from two groups: a specific occupation of interest (e.g. nurse/teacher) or personal strengths/skills (e.g. being caring, highly organised). This was followed by rating (using above agreement scale) their confidence in understanding labour market opportunities, and the influence of their own career experiences/progression on the career they encourage their child to pursue. Finally, they rated (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = always) how often they used seven defined resources to stay informed of youth career opportunities.

For RQ2, parents were asked to consider what employers seek in youth workers and how secondary school children can heighten their chances of securing employment. They rated the importance (1 = not important at all, 2 = slightly important, 3 = moderately important, 4 = very important, 5 = extremely important) of ten skill clusters to prospective youth employers. The ten skills are widely considered as important to youth employers (e.g. FYA, 2016) and were previously identified in collaboration with graduate employers (Jackson et al., 2020). Using the same agreement scale, parents rated the importance of 11 factors believed to assist job attainment. The factors were drawn from existing literature and relate to youth's life/work achievements, networking capabilities/contacts, and confidence and ability in navigating recruitment processes, including presenting themselves effectively to prospective employers (e.g. Bridgstock, 2009; FYA, 2018). As open responses, parents then described how youth can demonstrate these skills/attributes/achievements to prospective employers, and ways they encourage their adolescent child to enhance appeal for future employers.

Analysis

Preliminary analysis was conducted to examine the data normality, skewness and kurtosis falling within the accepted ranges of 3 and 10, respectively (Kline, 1998). Harman's single-factor test investigated common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003), producing 11 factors which accounted for 70.0% of variance. The total variance extracted by one factor was 36.5%, indicating the absence of common method variance. Responses to closed survey questions were analysed using SPSS 26.

Descriptive techniques (frequencies/percentages/means/standard deviations) were used for RQ1. One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), with Tukey *post-hoc* analysis, explored variations in parent perspectives by occupation and education level. Independent Samples T-tests examined differences by school type, comparing only government and non-government schools due to sample size. Bivariate correlations gauged the relationship between parent use of different resources for career development learning, and their confidence in understanding labour market opportunities. Open responses were examined using thematic analysis in Microsoft Excel. Following Braun and Clarke (2006), one researcher inductively coded individual responses to produce initial codes. Codes were organised into main and sub-themes and reviewed by another researcher with differences discussed until consensus was reached and themes finalised. An audit trail was retained for credibility and trustworthiness.

For RQ2, means/standard deviations were also computed, and One-Way ANOVA used to examine variations in parent responses by occupation/education level. Principal

Components Analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation explored if and how the 11 items that influenced employment attainment grouped together. Multiple linear regressions were used to investigate associations between a range of variables and the composite average measures for the emerging factors. Thematic analysis identified common themes in parents' open responses on how youth can develop and evidence their skills/attributes/achievements. Results from the quantitative analysis (closed question responses) are presented first, followed by the thematic analysis.

Results

Quantitative analysis

Table 2 presents parents' mean ratings on the quality of opportunity provided by different sectors/organisation types using the career success indicators. Higher means for private sector and large organisations indicated parents believed they offered the greatest quality of opportunities across all measures of career success, except for job security where the public sector scored marginally higher than private. Specifically, parents felt the private sector offered the greatest opportunity for status, and large organisations for professional development, promotion, and career advancement. Not-for-profit and small organisations were considered to provide the lowest quality of opportunities across all indicators, apart from greater professional fulfilment and satisfaction for the not-for-profit compared with public sector. Overall, parents felt that each sector only offered a "fair" to "good" level of opportunity.

Parent perceptions on industries that offer the most youth career opportunities were aggregated and show the frequency/proportion for each industry being selected in the top three (see Table 3). Health/Community Services, followed closely by Communications/Technology, were considered to offer the greatest opportunities, and Wholesale Trade, Cultural/Recreational Services, and Agriculture/Forestry/Fishing the least.

Parents selected the occupation grouping they would most encourage their secondary child to pursue. Over one-half of parents indicated a Professional/Associate professional role, substantially higher than Manager (16.9%) and Trade person/Related (15.3%). Only small proportions selected Clerical/Sales/Service worker (6.3%) and Production/Transportation/Labourer worker (3.6%). Other (3.3%) comprised parents indicating "what their

Table 2. Perceived quality of opportunity by sector and organisation size.

	Sector						Organisation size					
	Public		Private		Not-for-profit		Small		Medium		Large	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Personal and professional development	3.70	.862	3.79	.760	3.52	.889	3.52	.929	3.68	.790	3.84	.841
Financial reward	3.56	.921	3.81	.753	3.30	.908	3.46	.903	3.59	.814	3.79	.816
Job security	3.57	1.029	3.53	.911	3.46	.896	3.34	.969	3.57	.828	3.64	.863
Status	3.55	.910	3.85	.786	3.47	.892	3.49	.908	3.57	.848	3.72	.818
Promotion/career advancement	3.61	.890	3.80	.807	3.45	.899	3.45	.935	3.62	.809	3.84	.858
Professional fulfilment and satisfaction	3.57	.938	3.74	.811	3.68	.856	3.55	.891	3.62	.798	3.71	.836
Flexibility and work-life balance	3.62	.928	3.63	.872	3.57	.882	3.50	.930	3.55	.853	3.60	.888
Composite average	3.60	.776	3.74	.663	3.49	.742	3.47	.806	3.60	.701	3.73	.716

Table 3. Perceived career opportunities by industry.

Industry	<i>N</i>	%
Accommodation/Cafes/Restaurants	65	21.6
Agriculture/Forestry/Fishing	21	7.0
Communications/Technology	110	36.5
Construction	77	25.6
Cultural/Recreational Services	14	4.7
Education	93	30.9
Electricity/Gas/Water Supply	24	8.0
Finance/Insurance	79	26.2
Health/Community Services	119	39.5
Manufacturing	34	11.3
Mining/Resources	51	16.9
Personal/Other Services	50	16.6
Property/Business Services	53	17.6
Retail Trade	46	15.3
Transport/Storage/Logistics	35	11.6
Wholesale Trade	10	3.3
Other	22	7.3

child wished to do". Notably, Homemaker was the least encouraged at 0.7% of responses. When asked the reason for their choice, the most common theme (87 responses) was because it suited their child's strengths and interests. Next in importance (78 responses) was career prospects, followed by career type itself (e.g. being a professional, 46 responses), remuneration (24 responses), job security (19 responses), personal growth (18 responses), and job satisfaction (15 responses).

In their consideration of contextual factors negatively impacting on youth's career progression, parents viewed the rise in casual/fixed-term contracts, at the expense of ongoing positions, to have the greatest negative impact on youth's career progression, and new technology the least (see Table 4). Similar mean scores (between "neither agree/disagree" and "agree") were reported for rises in gig working, increasing number of university graduates, demise of linear career pathways, and COVID-19. Table 4 shows significant ANOVA results, with a Bonferroni correction ($\alpha = .025$), for parent's occupation and education level in emboldened font. Tukey *post-hoc* analysis ($\alpha = .05$) shows that

Table 4. Negative impacts on youth career progression.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Variable	ANOVA			
				<i>df</i> (between groups)	<i>df</i> (within groups)	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
New technology (including automation)	3.14	1.145	Occupation	6	294	2.038	.061
			Education	3	297	1.716	.164
Rise in casual/fixed-term contracts	3.77	.914	Occupation	6	294	2.388	.029
			Education	3	297	1.040	.375
Rise in gig working	3.50	1.005	Occupation	6	294	1.688	.124
			Education	3	297	4.079	.007
Increasing numbers of youth graduating from university	3.56	.977	Occupation	6	294	2.970	.008
			Education	3	297	.678	.566
Linear career pathways being the exception, rather than the rule	3.43	.879	Occupation	6	294	2.385	.029
			Education	3	297	.683	.563
COVID-19	3.49	1.106	Occupation	6	294	4.734	<.001
			Education	3	297	8.611	<.001

Managers reported higher mean scores for the increasing number of university graduates than Homemakers. For the negative impact of COVID-19, Managers reported significantly higher means compared with all other occupation groups, except Tradespersons and Production/Transportation/Labourer workers. University-educated parents also reported significantly higher mean scores than the primary/secondary school educated. Finally, regarding gig working, university-educated parents assigned – on average – higher impact ratings than those with school education.

Parents' classification of their initial career conversations with their child was almost equally distributed across strengths/skills (49.2%) and specific occupations of interest (50.8%). When rating their agreement with: "I am confident in my understanding of labour market opportunities for my secondary child", parents scored a mean of 3.58 ($SD = .890$), hovering between neutral and agree markers. ANOVA ($\alpha = .025$) reported a significant result for occupation, $F(6,294) = 5.856$, $p < .001$; and education, $F(3,297) = 3.489$, $p = .016$. *Post-hoc* analysis showed Managers ($M = 4.00$, $SD = .769$) recorded significantly higher means than the Clerical and Homemaker groups, and university-educated parents ($M = 3.71$, $SD = .890$) scored higher on average than those post-secondary Certificate/Diploma.

Regarding their agreement with "My own career experiences and progression influence the career I encourage my secondary child to pursue", parents recorded a mean rating of 3.35 ($SD = 1.158$). Significant variations were reported for occupation, $F(6,294) = 4.543$, $p < .001$; and education, $F(3,297) = 11.220$, $p < .001$. *Post-hoc* results showed Managers ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.039$) had significantly higher means than Clerical workers and Homemakers, while the university-educated scored, on average ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 1.090$), more highly than school and post-secondary educated.

Parents' average use of each resource for staying informed of youth career opportunities approximated to three, indicating they are only used sometimes (see Table 5). Personal/professional networks and career advice from tertiary institutions were used marginally more, and government/employer reports the least. Bivariate correlations showed the different ways of staying informed were positively correlated with each other ($p < .001$, ranging from .547 to .724), indicating engaged parents tended to embrace multiple approaches rather than relying on one. The positive, albeit less

Table 5. Staying informed of youth career opportunities.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Variable	ANOVA			
				<i>df</i> (between groups)	<i>df</i> (within groups)	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Career advice from secondary schools	3.02	1.231	Occupation	6	294	8.316	<.001
			Education	3	297	13.235	<.001
Newspapers/magazines	2.94	1.199	Occupation	6	294	6.069	<.001
			Education	3	297	12.342	<.001
Blogs/forums/online groups	3.00	1.261	Occupation	6	294	7.595	<.001
			Education	3	297	8.358	<.001
Government/employer reports	2.82	1.274	Occupation	6	294	7.717	<.001
			Education	3	297	10.430	<.001
Own career/work	3.11	1.238	Occupation	6	294	9.334	<.001
			Education	3	297	11.178	<.001
Personal/professional networks	3.22	1.183	Occupation	6	294	3.894	<.001
			Education	3	297	8.994	<.001
Careers advice from TAFE/Universities	3.21	1.149	Occupation	6	294	4.992	<.001
			Education	3	297	7.145	<.001

moderate, bivariate correlations ($p < .001$, ranging from .339 to .429) between parents' confidence rating of their understanding of labour market opportunities and each resource suggest engagement with resources enhances confidence in giving career guidance. T-test results ($\alpha = .05$) reported no significant differences in parent engagement from government and private schools.

Table 5 shows ANOVA reported significant variations in parent use of the seven different resources by occupation and education. *Post-hoc* analysis ($\alpha = .05$) revealed Managers used all resources, on average, significantly more than most other occupations. Notably, Homemakers reported significantly less use of personal/professional networks and staying informed through one's own career. Further, *post-hoc* analysis showed that university-educated parents consistently made significantly greater use of the resources than those from different education backgrounds.

The mean ratings exceeded four for the importance of the 10 future-oriented skills (responsibility and accountability, communicating effectively, working effectively with others, acting professionally, problem solving, self-management, data and technology, self-awareness, enterprise and think critically). This indicated that parents considered them very important to prospective youth employers. The highest reported mean was for "responsibility and accountability" ($M = 4.26$, $SD = .78$) and the lowest "thinking critically" ($M = 4.03$, $SD = .863$).

To examine how parents perceived the 11 items to influence employment attainment, PCA with varimax rotation was conducted to reduce the data. Two underlying factors emerged, explaining 61.43% of variance. Means/standard deviations for each item are presented in Table 6, along with the factor structure and loadings. The first factor focused on capabilities/achievements widely believed to enhance labour market positioning, also incorporating aspects of social capital. The second related to cultural and psychological capital, important for navigating and succeeding in the recruitment process. Cronbach Alpha was .847 and .863 for the capability and cultural factors respectively and a composite average rating was computed for each.

Multiple linear regression on the capability and cultural factors are reported in Table 7. Both regression models were significant: capabilities factor, $F(11, 289) = 2.974$, $p < .001$ and cultural factor, $F(11, 289) = 2.747$. Results for the capabilities factor show a positive association only for university-educated parents. This group assigned significantly greater importance to human and social capital resources than the base variable group

Table 6. Factors influencing youth securing and sustaining employment.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Factor 1: Capability	Factor 2: Cultural
Work experience	3.84	.916	0.634	0.273
Sport/travel/community-based activities	3.28	1.094	0.802	0.052
Good networking skills	3.80	.903	0.704	0.282
Good contacts with relevant people in targeted career	3.74	1.013	0.776	0.144
Good levels of information about jobs/job opportunities	3.83	.843	0.627	0.388
Ability to use social media/other tools to market oneself/develop contacts	3.58	.986	0.757	0.204
Resilience/persistence when applying for jobs	4.23	.781	0.100	0.798
Familiarity with employers' recruitment processes	4.01	.762	0.345	0.722
Being comfortable in interactions with prospective employers	4.09	.760	0.246	0.808
Being confident of capabilities/potential to succeed	4.20	.785	0.118	0.818
Understanding/relating to the culture of targeted career	4.05	.786	0.341	0.691

of primary/secondary school educated. For the cultural factor, there was more variation with older and female parents placing greater emphasis on cultural and psychological capital than younger and male parents, respectively. Further, those holding a post-secondary qualification or university degree assigned more importance to this factor for youth attaining employment than those who completed primary/secondary education. Neither regression reported any significant differences for occupation, of which the base group was those not working.

Thematic analysis

Five common themes emerged in parent responses to concerns regarding external trends. The themes, count of responses, indicative quotes and respondent ID are presented in Table 8. The most frequently mentioned theme of “declining youth labour market” emphasised concerns with employment opportunities, development of careers, and uncertainty. This was followed by “weakening employment conditions” with observed commentary on increases in less secure work and lessened longevity of careers. Pandemic-related concerns were the third most frequently reported by parents, noting the impact of COVID-19 on job opportunities. Parents also expressed concerns around “changing skill and learning requirements” and the “need for more education and experience”.

Thematic analysis of the ways that parents encourage their child to improve their labour market appeal are presented in Table 9. The development of psychological capital, through building their child’s confidence, resilience, and competence, featured in the most frequently stated theme “develop personal attributes/skills”. Parents also recognised the importance of children embracing available learning opportunities to continually develop their skills in “education/training”. Of similar importance was supporting their child through open communication, encouraging them to explore their interests, and providing guidance when needed. A further aspect of human capital, work experience, was considered important for appeal and to increase children’s understanding of the workplace. Also evident, but to a lesser extent, were themes around encouraging

Table 7. Multiple regression on capability and cultural factors.

Variable	Capability factor				Cultural factor			
	B	SE	β	<i>p</i> -value	B	SE	β	<i>p</i> -value
Constant	3.434	0.379		<.001	3.022	0.327		<.001
Female	-0.072	0.096	-0.049	0.456	0.153	0.083	0.122	0.065*
Age	0.003	0.005	0.033	0.586	0.012	0.004	0.170	0.006***
Post-secondary education	0.130	0.148	0.061	0.381	0.263	0.128	0.144	0.041**
Technical/trade education	0.074	0.148	0.035	0.620	0.002	0.128	0.001	0.986
University education	0.335	0.121	0.230	0.006***	0.388	0.104	0.311	<.001***
Manager	0.223	0.175	0.141	0.205	0.059	0.152	0.044	0.696
Professional/Associate Professional	-0.180	0.171	-0.109	0.295	-0.070	0.148	-0.049	0.638
Trade/related	0.132	0.295	0.029	0.654	0.190	0.254	0.049	0.456
Clerical/sales/service worker	-0.089	0.191	-0.043	0.643	0.146	0.165	0.081	0.379
Production/transportation/labourer worker	-0.030	0.215	-0.011	0.887	0.211	0.186	0.084	0.257
Homemaker	0.026	0.191	0.012	0.890	-0.074	0.165	-0.040	0.654
R ²	.102				.095			
Adjusted R ²	.068				.060			

p* < .10, *p* < .05, ****p* < .01

Table 8. Parental concerns regarding child's career progression.

Theme	Count	Indicative quote(s)
Declining youth labour market (employment/development of careers/uncertainty)	64	"High unemployment across all age groups, especially young people with minimal/no experience" (P74) "Jobs actually being available that each student qualifies for. Even the elite professions can be difficult to progress or get a training place in" (P99) "Not knowing what the future holds" (P156) "I think the world is changing very rapidly and it would be hard to lock in any career path too early" (P85)
Weakening employment conditions	30	"No longevity in careers anymore" (P192) "Increase in less secure work with no guarantee of employment" (P118)
Pandemic-related concerns	28	"COVID has shown most jobs are unreliable" (P11) "COVID has made employment opportunities change immensely" (P42)
Changing skill and learning requirements (skill requirements/technological advancement)	22	"I worry that they won't get the social interaction that is inherently important as they will be working remotely much more" (P131) "Need to find a career that won't suffer long-term from automation and AI" (P195)
Need for more education and experience (and difficulties attaining)	20	"Companies will always keep looking for more qualifications" (P265) "Lack of experience and ability to get experience" (P151)

Table 9. Encouraging ways to improve adolescents' labour market appeal.

Themes	Count	Quote(s)
Personal attributes/skills	84	"Be confident in yourself/your abilities. Study hard and get good grades, show initiative, be able to work effectively in team environments, be able to effectively problem solve and be culturally aware and competent" (P176) "Talk to people more to develop resilience and the ability to communicate" (P133) "Their attitude, honesty and integrity ... most important are resilience and believing in oneself" (P247)
Education/training	44	"I encourage her to take available learning opportunities and gain skills that can be used in different jobs" (P45) "Value in continual learning" (P187)
Support/encouragement	41	"Encouragement through open communication at any opportunity" (P88) "We have encouraged his passion for his elected profession. We are always there to talk and have honest communication about what is expected from him in the workplace and what opportunities exist" (P247)
Work experience	33	"Encouraged them to pursue work experience related to their chosen pathways" (P135) "Encouraged her to take part-time jobs to understand employer expectations and appreciate the real world" (P103)
Extracurricular activities	14	"Encourage child to be involved in community work" (P211)
Research	11	"To keep their eyes on the workplace markets and the constant changes in criteria" (P209) "Keep researching for the best opportunities and see if that is what you really want to do" (P221)
Building recruitment tools	10	"I have been coaching in interview techniques" (P157) "I helped her make a resume by talking about her qualities, achievements, experiences" (P95)
Networking	9	"Networking with people/organisations already in their field" (P140) "Connected them with people who may be beneficial to career pathway" (P135)
Career planning/guidance	9	"Take a subject focusing on career development skills" (P 71)

human capital through “extracurricular activities”, identity capital through “building recruitment tools”, and social capital through “networking”. Only a small number recognised how career development learning can enhance appeal, specifically researching labour market trends and opportunities and career planning.

Table 10 summarises common themes in parent responses on ways that youth can demonstrate their appeal to prospective employers. Five themes emerged, the most dominant being exhibiting psychological capital to prospective employers, through confidence and self-belief. Of similar importance was human capital through “work experience”, demonstrating relevant, practical knowledge, skills, and their potential value to recruiting organisations. This was followed by parents recognising the importance of demonstrating a positive and professional identity during recruitment processes. Themes showcasing human capital aspects then followed, specifically their involvement in community-based activities, and their passion and capacity for learning and development.

Discussion and implications

In some respects, findings indicated that parents have a sound understanding of the youth labour market, positioning them reasonably well for providing informed career advice. For example, their perceptions on which industries offered the most opportunity aligned with current labour market trends. Health Care is Australia’s largest and fastest-growing industry (Job Outlook, 2021) and on-going disruption from digitisation mean that Communications/Technology are also considered to offer sustainable career opportunities (Nayyar et al., 2021). Interestingly the industries where young people often work part-time or casually, namely Retail and Accommodation/Cafes/Restaurants (Australian Government, 2016), were not considered to offer quality career opportunities. Encouraging their children to gain experience in industries which offer greater career opportunities may better support youth transition to employment post-education, particularly given the value that employers place on relevant work experience (ÓHiggins & Pinedo, 2018).

Table 10. Ways to demonstrate adolescents’ labour market appeal.

Themes	Count	Quote(s)
Personal attributes	83	“By engaging in maturity, exhibiting self-confidence and their own belief in their self-worth” (P273)
Work experience	73	“Work experience, show how their education and learning would link with the organisation and how they will be of value” (P22) “Get work experience within the industry they are striving for, showing responsibility within that opportunity and striving to improve the skills they are targeting” (P19)
Career development initiatives	49	“Well-written and presented CV showing their wide range of skills” (P143) “Taking opportunities at interviews to impress” (P129)
Extracurricular activities	46	“Talk about extracurricular activities and ways they have supported the local community” (P232) “Charity work, fundraising, volunteering for a community group, belonging to a sports/community club organisation” (P93) “Obtaining references from teachers and coaches” (P45)
Learning/development	43	“Work hard, gain skills whilst not in employment, show up and be willing to learn” (P20) “Good grades indicate they are good learners” (P45)

Parents' observations of greater job security in the public sector, and stronger job satisfaction in not-for-profit organisations, support earlier work (Chirumbolo et al., 2020). Their assessment that all three sectors only offered, overall, a fair-to-good-quality career opportunity for youth reflects global concerns for poor job prospects (Dhakal et al., 2018). Given their influence, the evidenced beliefs that private sector and large organisations provide better career opportunities for youth may explain the strong preferences for this organisation type among new workers (e.g. Jackson et al., 2022).

Parents, however, were not overwhelmingly confident in their understanding of the labour market and demonstrated an overall lack of awareness of the impact of external trends on youth career progression. This highlights a clear need to develop parents' understanding of the nature and role of contemporary trends which are impacting on youth labour markets. Managers and the university-educated better appreciated the potential negative impact of certain economic trends, possibly due to experiencing them in their own careers (i.e. competing with large numbers of graduate recruits, or standing down staff due to COVID-19). Indeed, their recognition of the adverse effects of rising casual/fixed-term contracts on youth's career progression aligns with wider concerns of precarious work impacting on youth career sustainability (e.g. MacDonald & Giatzoglou, 2019). Interestingly, parents viewed technology positively. Their favouring of occupations in Communication/Technology aligns to perspectives that new technology is a creator – rather than destructor – of jobs (see Acemoglu & Restrepo, 2019). This is somewhat unexpected given the highly publicised reports on automation leading to job displacement (e.g. World Economic Forum, 2020).

Parents broadly recognised the importance of capital resources for employability, particularly those with a degree or in managerial roles who may have had greater exposure to securing and sustaining work in their own career experiences. They understood the importance of future-oriented skills for prospective employers (Jackson et al., 2022; Wilton, 2011), noting communication and teamwork as aspects of human capital that are vital for effective workplace performance and highly sought after by employers (World Economic Forum, 2020). There was some understanding of the importance of work experience, yet parents do not appear to prioritise it in line with youth employers. As over 55% of youth are currently engaged in casual work (Dhillon & Cassidy, 2018), parents may consider work experience a requisite element for career success that is typically met. Greater promotion of work experience that is relevant to their child's career aspirations could substantially improve their child's marketability (Carnevale & Smith, 2018). Similarly, encouraging children to engage more in sport, particularly those of low SES who can experience barriers to participation, may support the development of skills deemed important by youth employers (Coalter et al., 2020).

To some degree, parents realised the importance of social capital. They recognised the value of good networking skills, contacts, and information about job roles although findings did not reflect the true advantage networks can create in the labour market (see Moore, 2021). Parents calling upon their personal/professional networks as a career resource reinforce the value they attribute to social capital for career development. The lack of appreciation of youth using social media/other tools to market themselves/develop networks is concerning, given their association with labour market advantage (Davis et al., 2020). Overall, findings suggest a need to educate parents, especially

those without a degree, on the importance of youth social and professional connectedness, including the role of online profiles.

The recognised importance of cultural capital was unanticipated yet highly encouraging. Parents understood the need for youth to familiarise with the culture of professional practice and the cues and language of employers, proven to support positive interactions in the workplace (Tomlinson, 2017). Supporting their children in researching targeted professions and organisations can improve their prospects during recruitment (Rivera, 2012). Further, it may enhance person-organisation fit, leading to reduced turnover and improved workplace outcomes (Memon et al., 2018).

Parents also acknowledged the importance of psychological capital resources, especially resilience and persistence which are known to support youth in their recruitment and career endeavours (e.g. King et al., 2021). Engaging their children in activities where they reflect on and communicate their career motivations and qualities, and problem solve and develop coping strategies for certain career setbacks can foster career self-efficacy, proactivity and resilience (Akkermans et al., 2015). Parents also appreciated the need for youth being confident in their capabilities and potential to succeed, in support of established links between perceived employability and career success (Blokker et al., 2019). Targeted strategies to promote the significance of cultural and psychological resources could be directed to younger and male parent groups, and those less educated.

It was evident that parents were quite supportive of their adolescent children, encouraging them to pursue an occupation that interests them and aligns with their capabilities. This resonates with Austin et al.'s (2021) promotion of a strengths-based approach to supporting youth in effectively managing their career and encouraging them to "choose a job cluster based on their interest and strengths rather than focus on one dream job" (FYA, 2016, p. 4). In accordance with SCCT, strong perceptions of parental support can have a significant impact on the youth's career confidence and their career development (Keller & Whiston, 2008). There was some evidence that parents' own career achievements and experiences influence the career their secondary child pursues (e.g. Barnes et al., 2020; Billett et al., 2020), more so among those in managerial roles and the university educated.

The somewhat mixed results regarding clarity on aspects of youth employability and the role of capital resources could be improved by strengthening parents' engagement with career-related resources. Overall, parents made limited use of the specified resources, particularly those not employed, in blue-collar roles, or not holding a degree. This highlights a critical need to better engage parents with careers provision, particularly given those who did engage felt more confident in their understanding of youth career opportunities. Parents' greater use of networks and advice provided by educational professionals indicates a preference for active engagement and dialogue, rather than passive information transmission options. Crowley and High (2018) found that educational professionals can offer parents easy access to accurate and quality career information, and an interactive-based approach is considered best practice for reaching parents (Sattler, 2021). Further suggestions to better engage parents include schools offering multiple touch points and delivery methods (Barnes et al., 2020; Sattler, 2021) and partnering with parents in career provision (Austin et al., 2021).

Despite these insights and recommendations, it is important to acknowledge the role of structural influences on youth employability. External factors such as structural imbalances in the labour market, and changes in labour market and migration policy can have adverse effects (e.g. McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005) and may offset individual efforts in developing capital resources and effectively self-managing their career. As Wilton (2011) asserts, “it is possible to be employable, yet unemployed or underemployed” (p. 87).

Conclusion

This study contributes to the field by enhancing our understanding of parent perceptions on youth employability and their confidence and approach in supporting adolescent children to develop sustainable careers. It provides valuable insights on how parent perspectives align to the realities of contemporary youth career and factors known to enhance employability and employment prospects. Further, it draws on capitals theory to understand parent perspectives on how adolescents can better position themselves in the labour market. The study therefore serves to highlight areas where parents, particularly certain groups, may require additional support in providing informed career advice to improve employability and career success among school leavers. This responds not only to calls to strengthen youth career development learning (Lim & You, 2019; Oomen, 2016) but should also improve person-organisation fit for youth employers, critical amid talent shortages (Australian Government, 2022).

The study highlights how parents’ understanding of the relative value of different sectors, industries, and organisation types for youth career opportunities – and the overall opportunities for youth today – broadly align to wider perspectives. However, other than those in managerial roles and/or with a university education, parents lacked detailed awareness of contemporary trends known to impact on youth career progression, did not actively engage with external sources to stay informed of youth career opportunities, and were not confident in their understanding of the youth labour market. Managers and the university-educated appear better equipped to provide adolescent children with informed career advice, most likely guided by their own career experiences as well as their engagement with external career-related resources. Clearly, targeted strategies are needed to engage other groups of parents, as well as develop their understanding of ways to build their child’s human capital (particularly through work experience) and social capital (through networks) to improve their chances of employment post-education. The role of identity capital was somewhat recognised and there was encouraging evidence that parents appreciated the value of cultural capital and psychological capital to secure and sustain employment.

The study’s findings are drawn from a reasonably sized, national sample yet the study is cross-sectional in nature and reliant on self-reported data. There would be value in designing a longitudinal study, which investigates parental career advice and their child’s career outcomes over time. Future studies which experiment with, and gauge the value of, different interventions to engage diverse parent groups (e.g. gender, age) in professional development on career development learning would also contribute further to the field. Particularly useful could be focusing on interventions that target educating parents on contemporary youth labour markets and the value of different forms of social and human capital on career prospects.

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