

PARENTAL OCCUPATION AND FAMILY SOCIOECONOMIC POSITION AS CORRELATES OF EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS IN CHILDREN IN CONFLICT WITH LAW AND NON-CCL ADOLESCENTS

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ABSTRACT:

Background: Growing up in a less-than-affluent home can influence a teen's emotions and actions, and this may have even greater implications for teens already involved in the justice system. In this study, parental occupation, as a simple measure of family socioeconomic position, was examined to determine whether it is associated with emotional and behavioural problems in children with a Child and Young Person Child Protection record (CCL) and those without a record (Non-CCL). We obtained 60 complete, anonymous questionnaires from 600 adolescents (300 CCL and 300 Non-CCL), aged 14–18 years, in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, completed using the Achenbach Youth Self-Report (YSR). We grouped parents into two broad occupation groups: labour and other occupations. For adolescents, those who experienced higher anxiety and depression levels, as well as higher withdrawal behaviour, social issues, rule-breaking tendencies and aggressive behaviour, were all higher, on average, when their parents were working as labour workers as compared to those of other parents who worked in different occupations. In the CCL group, adolescents who worked in labour withdrew more. They experienced more social difficulty, whereas the other adolescents in the CCL job group experienced more thought and attention problems. The groups did not differ in somatic complaints. Based on these results, it appears that parental occupation is not in isolation, but in conjunction with justice involvement when creating varying emotional and behavioural problems in children. The findings suggest the value of family-centred, occupation-sensitive support for the CCL population rather than a one-size-fits-all family intervention paradigm.

KEYWORDS: parental occupation, socioeconomic status, children in conflict with law, juvenile delinquency, emotional and behavioural problems, Youth Self-Report, family stress model

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a period of life distinguished by varying changes. Changes in the body, friendships, and how a young person views the world. For most teenagers, these times are not very difficult to deal with, but for some they're harder because of changes in their household. Money pressures, insecure work, and parents' work schedules can subtly affect a child's emotional state before anything seems wrong. In adolescents, the strain is more significant in those children who are already involved with the law, known as Children in Conflict with the Law or CCL. It is worth noting that often these youth have experienced extended, intense hours of hard work from their parents, with few job security benefits, and whether such families lead to greater emotional and behavioral struggles. At the same time, the question of justice involved could be raised.

Family socioeconomic position typically is assessed by an individual's income, level of education, or job. In India, occupation is a very helpful parameter, as many children's parents work in unorganized or labour-intensive occupations where income may not be fixed, and evidence may be scanty. A daily-wage worker parent may not have as much time, energy, or financial buffer to provide emotional support to their child as a salaried or business-owner parent. This lack of parental support, over time, can manifest as anxiety, withdrawal, social problems, and/or acting out in the child. A recent study by Ouyang et al. (2022) also reinforces this pattern in large-sample studies across cultures: While some researchers question how and why family socioeconomic status gets to affect adolescent problem behaviour from a parent's pay slip to a child's mood and behaviour, the effect does happen.

In these two adolescent samples, there were some interesting gender differences and implications for the effect of trauma and substance use on emotional and behavioural difficulties, as well as the protective factors of resilience, which were examined in two previous papers for this doctoral project. The present paper adopts a different, but related perspective. Rather than examining the nature of the protection, one looks at the nature of the economic strain at the family level as indicated by the parent's occupation, and aims to answer questions regarding what economic strains in terms of specific emotional and behavioural problems are associated with the family, if anything, and whether this looks different when it comes to a CCL adolescent versus this when it comes to a non-CCL adolescent. This knowledge

matters because of its practical value. If parental occupation is linked to particular sorts of complications, rehabilitation and counselling programs for adolescents with CCL problems can be designed to tackle the true stressors that girls and boys experience in the household setting, instead of a checklist of problems.

This focus is also for policy reasons. Although low socioeconomic status is a consistent risk marker in studies on Indian children in conflict with the law, and most of these studies show that the occupation of the mothers is key, few studies isolate the role of the occupation of the mother or compare the impact of occupation directly with an equivalent sample of children that were not involved in conflict with the law (Hasanath et al., 2024). This paper attempts to address that gap and relies entirely on data already gathered as part of the parent thesis to put the two groups of adolescents on an even footing, using the same state, time period, and measurement tool for both groups.

There's an added dimension to this question in India, with the labour market in India. A very high proportion of working parents in society, especially in the states included in this study, work in informal or unorganized sectors; daily cash-wage construction labourers, agricultural labourers, workers in the domestic sector or in small informal vending, where earnings are collected daily or weekly, and working hours are long and irregular. They have very little institutional protection against unforeseen loss of income. Any job other than salaried work in a business differs from salaried or business employment, although the difference in monthly earnings is not necessarily vast. A mother or father in a lower-paid, 'labour-hour' job could make a similar amount of money but has far less line of sight or paid time off to attend a school meeting or counselling session, and is far more exhausted by the end of the day. This is precisely the sort of difference that a simple occupation category could capture even if income data were noisy or difficult to measure reliably; hence the use of occupation (as opposed to self-reported income) as the primary socio-economic marker in this paper.

Theoretical Framework

This paper loosely draws on the Family Stress Model (FSM), which is not endorsed as a specific theory to test. The model, previously used to explain adolescent problem behaviour, assumes that negative economic experiences do not have direct, immediate impacts on children. Instead, its effect is indirect and mediated by the parent: Financial stress impairs a parent's patience, availability, and emotional stability, shaping how they communicate with a child throughout the day (Chen et al., 2024). If a parent works long hours at their job, not only do they not have time to talk, but they have less time and energy to keep their child warm after a hard day's work and, naturally, less time to notice a change in their behaviour and get to the school office for a meeting or counselling session. This "parental bandwidth" deficit is how parents are expected to achieve their child's emotional and behavioural needs over months and years, not just through income deprivation.

In addition, this paradigm assumes that different types of problem behaviour do not have to be the same to evoke the same economic response. Problems that are more relational in nature, such as "withdrawal," "anxiety," and "social difficulty," are expected to be more responsive to changes in parental warmth and accessibility. Occupational factors are likely to be less influential for neurodevelopmental problems, such as attention problems. In contrast, other factors, such as school demands or individual cognitive differences, are likely to be more influential (van der Plas et al., 2026). This distinction leads to the hypotheses of the present study, as discussed.

The second (complementary) idea that shouldn't be lost on the VAT predictor is cumulative disadvantage, whereby the interaction of CCL status and low parent occupation leads to a sharper increase in some types of problems than either partner. This isn't to suggest that low occupation gets people into the CCL state, or that the CCL state gets them into low occupation; a broader range of family and community factors shapes both. The cumulative disadvantage message would instead hold that a child's justice entanglement, coupled with unstable and labour-intensive work, may carry a greater emotional cost than it would without that extra pinch. Although this is an idea that is difficult to test directly in the present study, it is tested indirectly by comparing the effects of the occupation separately for the CCL group and for the Non-CCL group, rather than assuming that the two groups have the same effect due to occupation.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There is a large body of newer research that has been conducted that shows a connection between family socioeconomic status and adolescent mental health conditions; the nature of the association is dependent on the type of mental health outcome and on the way socioeconomic status is measured. In a large sample of adolescents in China, Yang et al. (2025) used structural equation modelling to identify socioeconomic and family-level factors that directly predict mental and physical health in adolescents, and those that do so indirectly through parental involvement. They found that the amount of time parents remained actively involved in their children's lives mediated the relationship between aspects of the family's socioeconomic status and adolescents' mental health; time spent with parents also predicted physical health, but not directly. In line with this, the relationship between occupation and income and health is interpreted as largely reflecting the impact of these two factors on the quality and quantity of parent-child contact time, rather than as an additional Stressor.

Ouyang et al. (2022) examined data from a large, nationally representative sample of adolescent students in a Chinese junior high school to determine whether family socioeconomic status affects situation behaviour among adolescent students and how this is mediated by family expectations regarding education, as well as youth's own future perspectives. They conclude that socioeconomic disadvantage is not an 'on-pipe risk factor. Rather, it alters a child's psychology through psychological factors—such as expectations that the effort will be rewarded—which in turn affects a child's behaviour as much as actual economic conditions.

Researchers have also investigated the direct, causal association between reduced parental time and availability and child outcomes. Kopp, Lindauer and Garthus-Niegel (2024) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of

maternal employment and the mental health of children, which revealed a mixed, but meaningful pattern: Some labour types, such as working long or irregular hours, had a negative association with the mental health of children, while other studies did not yield consistent results. This review of their work is useful as a caveat against relying on the assumption that a child suffers well-being consequences from childhood in a child's parents' work, since there is clearly a more important distinction this work makes—which in this paper relates to what kind of work it is, its hours of work and how it leaves time to care for the child—and that is between labour work and all other categories.

Using a large-panel United States data set, Chen et al. (2024) found that, in the Family Stress Model, caregiver psychological distress was a key pathway linking family income to adolescent problem behaviours, and this pathway was moderated by increases in family financial assets, even when household income was comparable. A useful crossover note is that this study implies a coarser proxy (at the occupation-category level), meaning families within the same broad occupation category may vary in the absolute buffer they have against economic shock. For these reasons, not all subscales in the present results moved in the same direction.

Although somatic complaints are included with the majority of other emotional and behaviour disorders in the field of socioeconomic literature, they are not treated separately as they react differently to the other complaints. Brons et al. (2025) examined adolescents' complaints and socioeconomic inequalities across 32 countries and found that these complaints followed trends over time on both psychological and somatic dimensions; however, on the somatic dimension, these trends were less clearly demarcated by socioeconomic position. They found that physical symptoms—such as headaches or stomach cramps—that are brought on by stress tend to be fairly common and occur across income bands, not just in a single band.

For attention-related problems, evidence also suggests they develop in ways not attributable solely to economic factors. van der Plas et al. (2026) conducted a recent systematic review and meta-analysis of predictors of psychiatric outcomes after childhood attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), which resulted in building on childhood anxiety, social problems, and socioeconomic status predictors, yet including additional and stronger neuro-developmental childhood ADHD predictors such as persistence of symptoms. This supports interpreting attention and/or thought-related issues as less related to family occupation and more to other cognitive and environmental factors, such as school structure, which this study later confirms.

However, research on justice-involved adolescents has turned to Indian studies, which are a welcome addition to the volume of research on other types of children. Hasanath et al. (2024) reported that, in comparison to the non-CCL group who participated in the study, the CCL group showed higher scores on emotional problems internalising attributes, higher frequencies of substance involvement, and CCL students were associated with lower levels of parental education, lower family income and more dysfunctional families in the CCL group. Their study adds to the evidence that, in India, family-level disadvantage and justice involvement go hand in hand; this overlap is exactly what this paper sets out to address by examining differences in family-level disadvantage across occupations in each group (CCL, Non-CCL).

In a case-control analysis of children who come into contact with the criminal justice system in Mumbai, Tilak et al. (2025) identified that, after controlling for age, sex and SES, an overview of substance use, low self-esteem and non-suicidal self-injury emerged as the strongest risk factors of juvenile delinquency, while attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder and aggression did not reach statistical significance following multivariate model analysis. Part of what makes the present study interesting is that its design paralleled the case-control approach for socioeconomic status (hybrid effect), before examining the factors proposed as more specific risk factors for each subscale.

In conclusion, some encouraging literature provides a counterbalance to the literature on risk. Jangam et al. (2022) identified family-strengthening psychosocial intervention specifically for parents of children in conflict with the law, advocating the need to directly support family functioning to contribute to the rehabilitation of boys and girls in conflict with the law. In the present study, these programs were an ideal match for the Family Stress Model, showing the occupational pathway to adolescent outcomes, parental availability, and family stress.

Another area of study has examined the specific interaction between family disadvantage and gender in adolescents' outcomes. The present paper does not return to the socioeconomic status theme, as previous publications in this project already addressed it. Still, recent SES research has consistently found that girls respond to socioeconomic strain in the same way as boys. Girls are more likely to have internalising symptoms under economic pressure, and boys are more likely to have externalising symptoms under economic pressure, as found in several large-sample studies, which is similar to the gender differences reported in an earlier paper about resilience from this project. This implies that parental occupation and gender differ but are tied to other layers of context around an adolescent, rather than being two alternative explanations for the same outcome.

This study is worth placing in the context of the more general existing body of global evidence, much of which is related to high- and middle-income countries with more 'formal' labour markets than found in India. A three-way distinction (unemployed, manual labour, mental or professional labour) is often employed in large panel data studies in China, which is thematically similar to our two categories of labour market activity (labour or other jobs), despite the key difference in labour market institutions (Yang et al., 2025). Encouragingly, the overall pattern of results (that higher-status occupations and more flexible occupations generally have better outcomes) tends to be similar across these very different economic contexts, providing some confidence that the pattern observed in this Indian sample is not exclusively a product of one labour market context. However, key mechanisms and effect sizes may differ.

As a whole, the existing literature indicates that the parental occupation (as an indicator of the family's economic status) is more likely to be associated with some emotional and behavioural outcomes (such as withdrawal, anxiety, social difficulty) than others (such as somatic complaints, attention and thought problems) where cognitive, individual or schooling factors can be more influential. Less is known, however, about whether patterns differ between those justice-

involved in the Circuit Court system and those not involved. This paper explores that question using directly comparable data from each group.

One more item from the literature is recognised before delving into the goals of the present study. Many of the Indian studies cited above point out that mental health services within CCL and Observation homes are still sparse when compared to their needs, and that the counsellors could often be handling high caseloads with little or specialised training in family-systems approaches (Jangam et al., 2022). Evidence on which types of academic difficulties adolescents are most likely to have is not only interesting; it also informs efforts by a few counsellors to be effective in a resource-limited setting like this. This is one reason parental occupation is used as a screening variable in this paper instead of a more detailed socioeconomic variable (which would not be easily obtainable in a routinely fashioned entrance process to an institution).

Rationale and Objectives

This study, based on the review above, aimed to investigate three main areas: (1) Emotional & behaviour problems of CCL and Non-CCL adolescents whose parents participated in labour work or other jobs; (2) Emotional & behaviour problems between different parent occupation categories of CCL adolescents and Non-CCL adolescents; and (3) Overall pattern of emotional and behavioural problems among parents engaged in labour work and Non-CCL engaged in other work of the full sample irrespective of CCL status.

Talented adolescents whose parents were engaged in labour-intensive work would be significantly higher on the internalising and social difficulty subscales of the Youth Self-Report, specifically on the anxious/depressed, withdrawal/depressed and social problems subscales, compared with CCL adolescents whose parents were in other occupations, and the difference between the two groups would be greater for the CCL than for the Non-CCL group. It was further expected that evidence of other difficulties that rely on attention and thought—difficulties more weakly linked to socioeconomic status (van der Plas et al., 2026) — would either not show a significant occupation effect or would show a pattern in the opposite direction. The evidence cited above is cross-national, and one would predict that, because other symptoms are more socially determined than somatic complaints, occupation would not differ from the other symptoms.

METHOD

Design

This study used a cross-sectional, comparative survey design and a quantitative approach.

Participants

This sample included 600 adolescent students (14-18 years) from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana states. Of these, 300 were CCL adolescents in CCL homes for boys and observation homes for girls in the cities of Visakhapatnam, Vijayawada, Eluru, Hyderabad, and Warangal, and 300 were non-CCL adolescents recruited from Government Schools/colleges at the secondary, intermediate, and degree levels in Visakhapatnam, Vijayawada, and Hyderabad. Within the entire sample, 311 adolescents had mothers/fathers in labour, and 289 had at least one parent working; participants were randomly sampled from each setting, and parental information such as occupation, parental education, monthly family income, housing, and substance use behaviours was collected using a personal information sheet.

Variables

The two factors of interest that were kept as independent variables were CCL and parental occupation (labour work or otherwise). The various outcomes measured were the eight YSR subscales mentioned below. Other variables included in the larger thesis, such as parental education, monthly income, place of residence, and substance use, were not included in the present analysis but can be used in future investigations using the same dataset to support comparative analysis.

Measures

We assessed emotional and behavioural problems using the Achenbach Youth Self Report (YSR). This widely used self-report questionnaire measures eight factor subscales: Anxious/Depressed, Withdrawn/Depressed, Somatic Complaints, Social Problems, Thought Problems, Attention Problems, Rule-Breaking Behaviour, and Aggressive Behaviour. Each subscale consists of a series of items describing symptoms in that area, with adolescents rating how true each item is for them; the higher the subscale score, the more severely the items were reported. The YSR is among the most commonly used self-report instruments internationally assessing adolescent emotional and behavioural functioning, and has been previously validated with adolescents in several recent Indian studies investigating justice-involved and general-population/adolescent samples, including the ones presented above, thus providing a basis for comparing the present results to the larger body of literature reviewed above.

Parental occupation was obtained from the personal data sheet and analysed by grouping occupations into two categories: labour jobs and other jobs. Labour jobs included daily-wage, agricultural, or manual jobs and other jobs included salaried, business or skilled occupations. The two categories are analogous to those adopted in large-sample, socioeconomic studies of recent years which, together with education, have included one or more of the more consistent measures of family socioeconomic position that are not income measures (such as occupation) when that is not readily recorded with any degree of reliability (Yang et al., 2025).

Procedure

Institutional permission was granted, and questionnaires were completed during school and college time to ensure participation from all CCL adolescents (at CCL and observation homes) and Non-CCL adolescents (in school classroom settings). All participants were supervised while completing the personal data sheet and the YSR, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the process.

Ethical Considerations

As a significant percentage of the sample were minors living in CCL and observation homes, consent procedures were highlighted particularly. Prior institutional clearance was secured from the appropriate home authorities, and all residents received a questionnaire in private with a researcher, who could answer questions and support the subject if they experienced distress while completing it. Demographic data were the only information collected about residents who participated in the intervention, and no one in the intervention or control homes lost or gained social status as a result of the intervention. In the Non-CCL sample, good coordination of student participation and integration with school and college administration allowed involvement to occur during normal school and class hours, and students' absences had no consequences.

Statistical Analysis

Comparisons of mean YSR subscale scores were conducted using independent-samples t-tests between the different categories of occupations for the entire sample and for the comparison between the CCL and Non-CCL adolescent subgroups, between the within-CCL and within Non-CCL (subgroups) and occupation and between occupation (subgroups). $p < .05$ was considered statistically significant. Three types of comparisons were performed: comparisons based on a fixed occupational background and CCL status (first subtest; whether a given occupational background is associated with a higher or lower mean score for the CCL status subscale); comparisons based on a fixed CCL status and occupation (second subtest; whether a given CCL status subscale is correlated with a higher or lower mean score for a given occupational category across all levels of the CCL status subscale); and overall comparisons across the entire sample for each CCL status subscale (third subtest; the unconditional association of CCL status subscale with occupation). Several of these are reported separately and treated independently. Hence, each is easy to interpret in isolation, and is structured the same way as the original thesis chapter from which these data come.

Results

Effective comparisons are presented between CCL and Non-CCL adolescent groups with parents in labour work; between two groups of CCL adolescents; between CCL and Non-CCL adolescents; and overall across the total sample (CCL and Non-CCL) with parents in labour work, across occupation categories.

CCL versus Non-CCL Adolescents from Labour-Work Families

Among adolescents whose parents were engaged in labour work, CCL adolescents scored significantly higher than Non-CCL adolescents on anxious/depressed ($M = 1.58$ vs. $M = 1.42$), $t(309) = 2.06$, $p = .040$, withdrawal/depressed ($M = 1.66$ vs. $M = 1.49$), $t(309) = 2.28$, $p = .024$, and social problems ($M = 1.72$ vs. $M = 1.47$), $t(309) = 3.37$, $p < .001$. Non-CCL adolescents from labour-work families, in contrast, scored significantly higher than CCL adolescents on thought problems ($M = 0.73$ vs. $M = 0.51$), $t(309) = -2.58$, $p = .010$, and attention problems ($M = 0.85$ vs. $M = 0.50$), $t(309) = -4.36$, $p < .001$. No differences were found for somatic complaints, rule-breaking behaviour, and aggressive behaviour. Table 1 provides the complete comparison.

Table 1 Comparison of Emotional and Behavioral Problems in CCL and Non-CCL Adolescents from Labour-Work Families

YSR Subscale	Non-CCLM (N=142)	CCL M (N=169)	t(309)	p
Anxious/Depressed	1.42	1.58	2.06	.040*
Withdrawal/Depressed	1.49	1.66	2.28	.024*
Somatic Complaints	1.20	1.14	-0.58	.564
Social Problems	1.47	1.72	3.37	<.001***
Thought Problems	0.73	0.51	-2.58	.010**
Attention Problems	0.85	0.50	-4.36	<.001***
Rule-Breaking Behavior	0.75	0.70	-0.60	.552
Aggressive Behavior	12.81	13.30	0.98	.326

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Occupation Differences within the CCL Group

Within the CCL group, adolescents from labour-work families scored significantly higher than those from other job backgrounds on withdrawal/depressed ($M = 1.66$ vs. $M = 1.44$), $t(298) = 2.99$, $p = .003$, and social problems ($M = 1.72$ vs. $M = 1.44$), $t(298) = 3.95$, $p < .001$. CCL adolescents from other job backgrounds, on the other hand, scored significantly higher on thought problems ($M = 0.86$ vs. $M = 0.51$), $t(298) = -3.83$, $p < .001$, attention problems ($M = 0.84$ vs. $M = 0.50$), $t(298) = -3.95$, $p < .001$, and rule-breaking behavior ($M = 0.94$ vs. $M = 0.70$), $t(298) = -2.71$, $p = .007$. Multiple analyses of occupation revealed no significant differences in anxious/depressed behaviour, somatic complaints and/or aggressive behaviours within the CCL group.

Occupation Differences within the Non-CCL Group

In the Non-CCL group, those from a labour-work background had higher scores on thought problems ($M = 0.73$ vs. $M = 0.42$), $t(298) = 3.57$, $p < .001$) than the others in the group. Non-CCL adolescents from other job backgrounds scored significantly higher on social problems ($M = 1.65$ vs. $M = 1.47$), $t(298) = -2.15$, $p = .032$, and rule-breaking behaviour ($M = 1.10$ vs. $M = 0.75$), $t(298) = -3.93$, $p < .001$. In the Non-CCL group, there was no significant difference across

occupations for anxious/depressed, withdrawal/depressed, somatic complaints, attention problems or aggressive behaviour.

Overall Sample: Parental Occupation and Emotional-Behavioral Problems

Across the full sample of 600 adolescents, those whose parents were engaged in labour work ($n = 311$) scored significantly higher than adolescents whose parents worked in other occupations ($n = 289$) on anxious/depressed ($M = 13.77$ vs. $M = 12.56$), $t = 3.39$, $p < .001$, social problems ($M = 8.72$ vs. $M = 8.13$), $t = 2.02$, $p = .044$, attention problems ($M = 23.70$ vs. $M = 22.17$), $t = 3.03$, $p = .003$, rule-breaking behavior ($M = 14.61$ vs. $M = 13.18$), $t = 3.12$, $p = .002$, and aggressive behavior ($M = 18.64$ vs. $M = 17.40$), $t = 2.33$, $p = .002$. Overall, there were no significant differences in scores on either of the outcome measures, withdrawal/depressed mood or somatic complaints, or thought problems, across occupation groups. Table 2 presents the following results.

Table 2 Overall Parental Occupation-Wise Comparison of Emotional and Behavioral Problems (N = 600)

YSR Subscale	Labour Work M (n=311)	Other Jobs M (n=289)	t	p
Anxious/Depressed	13.77	12.56	3.39	<.001***
Withdrawal/Depressed	7.19	6.84	1.44	.150
Somatic Complaints	4.14	4.11	0.17	.866
Social Problems	8.72	8.13	2.02	.044*
Thought Problems	12.56	11.87	1.84	.067
Attention Problems	23.70	22.17	3.03	.003**
Rule-Breaking Behavior	14.61	13.18	3.12	.002**
Aggressive Behavior	18.64	17.40	2.33	.002**

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Summary of Findings across the Three Comparisons

Together, the three sets of comparisons reveal a relatively consistent division. The scores of anxious/depressed, withdrawal/depressed and social problems shifted in the direction of higher scores in most comparisons, especially for CCL adolescents. Thought problems and attention problems went in other directions in all cases where they became significant, with higher scores occurring in other-job families. No significant differences were found between the occupations in the three comparisons with somatic complaints. In general, rule-breaking behaviour and aggressive behaviour were higher in labour-work families, but higher in other-job families in the CCL and Non-CCL groups separately.

Consider the magnitude, and not the direction, of those differences. The most significant results in the data set, as measured on the t-values, were for the attention problems comparison within the labour-work subgroup ($t = -4.36$) and the social problems comparison within the CCL group ($t = 3.95$), which far exceeded t-levels for a strong effect in behavioural science research of this nature. Several significant findings were at the overall sample level, such as social problems ($t = 2.02$) and withdrawal within the labour-work subgroup ($t = 2.28$), which were more modest in size but statistically significant. The differences in Attention and social problems suggest a real difference that could plausibly support screening choices at a practice level; some of the smaller, but still significant, differences suggest a population-level difference that should be monitored, but are unequal enough not to indicate that a specific screening target should be drawn.

The consistency of the null finding in the three comparisons is significant in itself. It is not easy to remain unconvinced that the lack of differences in somatic complaints by occupation across comparisons is simply a lack of statistical power when the data include 600 participants and several subscales on which several comparisons yield results significant at the $p < .001$ level. This is more likely to reflect a true lack of a significant occupation effect on this sub scale, in line with the wider literature on somatic symptoms canvassed earlier in this chapter.

Before discussing the results, it is important to note the following descriptive observation. The directional of the thought and attention problems findings (higher scores for other-job families than labour-work families) was consistent over all other comparisons between families in which either of the sub scale scores were significant, with scores for thought problems more serious for Non-CCL families than for CCL families by occupation. This consistency, even across three separate comparisons using sub-subsets of the sample, adds support for the idea that this reversal effect was real, not a random trend specific to any one comparison.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to gain insight into the relationship between parental occupation (as a proxy for family economic situation) and emotional or behavioural problems among CCL and Non-CCL adolescents. This overall picture confirms that a lack of overall economic resources is not a side issue. In the literature, it appears in positive ways in how adolescents feel and behave. However, not for every type of problem, and when applied to youth in the justice system, it resembles the Family Stress Model.

Internalising Problems and Social Difficulty

The most obvious pattern in this study was the link between internalising and social problems. Adolescents, particularly those currently in the CCL system, who had labour-work family backgrounds expressed greater anxiety and social problems as well as greater withdrawal compared to adolescents with other occupational backgrounds. This resonates with the central tenet of the Family Stress Model: children are most vulnerable to economic disadvantage because of parenting time challenges and emotional availability, more so than poverty itself (Chen et al., 2024). In a physically demanding job that requires long hours, a parent has less time to talk with a child, comfort them, or notice when they are struggling. Specializing in how labour-intensive work cropped out of a household's daily life, Yang et al. (2025) uncovered a similar indirect pathway in a completely different national context: family socioeconomic status influenced adolescent mental health indirectly via parent-child engagement time.

The finding also supports findings in a recent meta-analysis by Kopp et al. (2024) of the association between maternal employment and child mental health: not employment per se, but the type and amount of work undertaken, specifically long or irregular shifts and lesser access to parents, predicted poorer mental health. This profile – a lot of long and irregular hours of work with little scheduling flexibility – may be the reason for a difference in withdrawal between the Indian context assessed as labour work (daily-wage and agricultural work) and the context when labour is assessed broadly, and families are employed in general.

Social Problems in the CCL Group

The social problems findings warrant further consideration. Adolescents from labour-work sub-socialisation families reported the greatest social difficulties of all subgroups in this study. One lens is the pattern described by Hasanath and colleagues (2024) in their comparative study of Indian CCL and Non-CCL adolescents, where higher rates of internalising attributes among CCL adolescents were accompanied by more markers of family disadvantage than among non-CCL adolescents. The combination of having fewer family resources to foster positive peer relationships, and already having the social stigma of engaging with the justice system, may create a compounded disadvantage for youth in social situations: their pathways are further blocked by lack of resources for peer relationships within the family, and diminished availability of accepting peers/relationships from the justice system.

Thought and Attention Problems: A Reversed Pattern

However, the pattern reversed for thought and attention problems: thought problems were more serious in older adolescents from other job-burden families than in labour-work families, in both the CCL and Non-CCL groups. Attention problems were more serious in older adolescents who came from other job-burden families than in the labour-work family group. But this was not predicted when only economic hardship was seen as a cause of their psychological problems, with recent findings showing that attention-related problems are only moderately correlated with family socioeconomic status, alongside other factors. van der Plas and colleagues (2026) concluded in their meta-analysis of long-term outcomes of ADHD that socioeconomic status was present as an additional contributor to ADHD outcomes at the levels of adult psychiatric outcomes, and not as a main factor by itself. For adolescents in other occupations, there may be additional pressures, more competition, different supervision models, and greater exposure to structured but demanding environments than in the present sample, as well as factor interactions that the simple economic hardship model does not capture.

Adolescent rumination or attentional drift may also be more salient in the adolescent in the labour-work household, given that they are typically more involved in household duties from an early age, and are thus unlikely to have as many opportunities to ruminate or pay attention idly to a self-report instrument. This may be a reasonable possibility, but this study cannot directly verify it, as the YSR records self-reported symptoms rather than time use/daily routine.

Somatic Complaints: A Universal Stress Response

The one subscale that did not differ by occupation across the three comparisons was somatic complaints. This aligns with cross-national evidence reported by Brons et al. (2025): over 20 years, they observed psychological and somatic complaints in 32 countries and found that, unlike many other indicators of adolescent distress, somatic symptoms showed no clear socioeconomic trend. In this sample, it appears that regardless of financial situation, or of being a family's CCL or Non-CCL adolescent, the body responds to stress in a fairly common way, implying that headaches, stomach ailments, and other physical responses to stress might be more indicative of an adolescent's overall level of stress than any specific economic group.

Rule-Breaking and Aggression: A Suppression Pattern

The picture regarding rule-breaking and aggressive behaviour was less clear. Both were higher for adolescents living in labour-work families at the overall sample level. Still, in the CCL and Non-CCL groups, they were even higher for adolescents from other job families. This type of reversal is sometimes referred to as a suppression effect; that is, a young person's status as a participant in the juvenile justice system accounts for much of the variance in the likelihood that they will be a participant in the adult justice system, and the parents' involvement adds very little to the base rates. Following a similar line of thinking, but slightly different in focus, Tilak and colleagues (2025), in their case-control study, which matched cases and controls on socioeconomic status, came up with a similar result: Although they found no independent association between aggression and juvenile offending, in a model of strong independent predictors, they identified substance use and low self-esteem as important predictors. This supports the notion that parents' occupation category may not directly cause conduct-related outcomes, and that broader exposure to the justice system and individual factors may account for them more directly.

This suppression phenomenon needs to be teased out a bit more, since it can be read at first glance in a lot of different ways. The finding that labour-work families score higher on externalising risk measures (rule breaking and aggression) than non-labour-work families would stand alone as support for the more well-known argument that lower SES =

greater externalization of risk. However, this is different within each CCL group when the samples are split by CCL status. This is likely because occupation and CCL were correlated at the individual level but not at the overall sample level. Overall, CCL and non-CCL adolescents differ primarily in their scores on measures of rule-breaking and aggression. In contrast, scores for each occupation are similar within each group. The latter type of within-group comparisons, which hold constant the CCL status and are therefore the more trustworthy "read" of the effect of occupation alone on the correlates of rule-breaking and aggression, suggest a small, albeit real but opposite-to-anticipated result: other-job families had a somewhat more rule-breaking profile than labour-work families, potentially reflecting some difference in patterns of peer exposure, unsupervised time or independence afforded to the adolescent in such families, none of which this study measured directly.

Bringing the Pattern Together

Overall, the results indicate that problems that are most closely related to internalising problems, anxiety, and withdrawal would be most affected by parents' occupation and so would be problems that were closer to cognition and attention and rule-following to a greater extent. It is a helpful distinction to make! Assuming that a combination of family economic disadvantage confers one level of risk for all types of difficulties is wrong. Rather, it seems it exacerbates some vulnerabilities and protects others—or perhaps even brings them to a different group of adolescents—reflecting a rising consensus in the broader socioeconomic status literature that different areas of adolescent functioning are affected by different aspects of the family environment (Ouyang et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2025).

This is also why the two initial papers in this work, which focused on resilience in general and gender differences, did not fully capture this picture. Resilience and gender are at the individual level, girls' capacities and what they see themselves as, but parental occupation is a step back further at the level of the family's material and time constraints in the daily material world. While both layers seem important, they do not always align, as this paper's contradictory finding on rule-breaking and attention problems demonstrates.

The Cultural Context of Labour Work in India

I think one way to reflect on what labour work means in day-to-day life to the families in this sample is to step back and consider what it means to them. Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have several work items such as agricultural labour, daily Labors, builders, etc., that leave their dwellings well before sunrise to work for hours during the daylight hours in challenging physical environments, and are exhausted afterwards, often without any time to sit together or engage in a lengthy check-in with emotions. For the same reason, weekly payments are often more frequent than monthly payments, so there is a 'constant' of financial uncertainty that a minority who gets a fixed monthly salary doesn't experience. This uncertainty may also be a different type of chronic, low-burden stress response mechanism that seeps into the household environment regardless of the average family's income and sufficiency. This is peculiar to India, but because of the size of the informal sector among the states studied here, those living in such sectors also face a mix of physical demands, irregular work schedules, and day-of-work payments, even though they make up a marginal group.

Indeed, in this cultural context, one can better understand why, in this sample, withdrawal and social problems were the most clearly observed animal-species externalising symptoms of family strain, while more dramatic symptoms didn't appear. Often such homes would not allow for any sign of grief "outside" the family because of notions of "family honour," because of the lack of time for the child to grieve, or simply because the parent who returns from twelve hours or more of physically demanding work doesn't have the capacity to be involved with the emotional display of the child. In this context, an adolescent might only have a "withdrawal" coping response, which is in line with the current findings and previous research examining socioeconomic stress and internalising psychopathology.

Comparing Statistical Significance with Practical Significance

A word of caution should be given here. Some of the differences reported in this study are statistically significant but represent small absolute differences on the YSR sub scale scores. For instance, there was a 0.16-point difference on the sub scale (1.58 vs. 1.42) between cautiousness and depression in its labour-working group. These differences matter at the study level as a description of group tendencies. Still, they should not be interpreted as representing a meaningful difference between each individual from a labour-working family and each individual from non-labouring families. There is virtually no doubt that the two distributions overlap significantly. What these findings reflect is a probabilistic statement about the population level of risk areas – this can help allocate limited counselling and outreach resources – not a deterministic statement about any particular youth.

Reading These Findings Alongside the Two Earlier Papers

It is also necessary to be explicit about how this work relates to the two previous papers, the outcome of this doctoral project. The first paper focused on resiliency and wellbeing as buffering factors of emotional and/or behavioural problems, finding that there were significant gender differences and that trauma along with substance use were important contextual risk factors. The second paper expanded this to explore the effect of resilience on behavioural health more broadly in injuries and teens. Both papers focus on adolescents' 'inner level': internal resources, personal resilience, relational resilience, coping, and individual exposure to risk. In the present paper, the lens shifts, and we examine the adolescent's psychological resources through the economic and occupational context of the family as a social system, which precedes, rather than runs alongside, the adolescent.

This shift matters because although resilience research is useful for design, it may carry a hidden message: the adolescent's coping role is the primary one available to leverage in interventions. The present results bring this picture into question. While the low score was an individual score for the adolescent, it is not the same as a time/place in the adolescent's family that will prevent them from coping. And a program that emphasises only the skills of individual

problems cannot face a headwind it is unaware of when insecure or volatile family time boundaries are also an issue. The clearest example in the current data is that, while resilience is usually presented in resilience research as a coping skill an adolescent can opt into, in the former findings it seems to be a more structural reaction to less parental presence, which they may have less control over. Programs that build individual resilience and family-level resilience support are best equipped to address both levels. One example is the pilot implemented by Jangam et al. with CCL families in India.

Implications for Practice

This finding has several implications for working with CCL adolescents. Counselling and rehabilitation work in CCL and observation house programs should focus on the family's economic background when planning intensive work, not solely the legal history. Adolescents in families with labour work benefit most from interventions fostering emotional expression and social bonds, as they have been reported as being most anxious, more withdrawn and having more social difficulty. Family-strengthening models that were specifically developed for the parent or caregiver of the adolescent who is involved in a legal justice system process, like psychosocial services by Jangam and colleagues (2022), provide a concrete example: when working with the adolescent, focus on the parent/caregiver's availability and family functioning because that is where the internalising symptoms are being generated.

Second, it may be important to offer more supportive interventions focused on attention regulation and structured routines, as youth outside this occupational cluster (CCL and Non-CCL) experienced greater thought and attention problems. Difficulties are perhaps more strongly related to individual and schooling factors than to economic hardship (van der Plas et al., 2026), and interventions may therefore differ significantly from the interventions above on improving family functioning, as they would more likely focus on improving the school environment, adapting the school curriculum, and improving the architecture of learning – namely on modifying academic instructional needs, study skills and, where relevant and identified, offering clinical attention and support for attention-related problems that would be well served by clinical assessment.

Thirdly, once individual predictor factors are taken into account, the relationship between rule breaking/aggression and CCL status appears more consistent across occupational subgroups than that of a highly individualised general behaviour-based intervention in CCL homes, indicating its continued relevance across occupations. Finally, somatic complaints were not found to differ by occupation, which means that programmes involving relaxation training or basic health education, based on physical symptoms of stress, can be offered in these settings, without having to be tailored according to family background, in line with the cross-national evidence that somatic symptoms are a fairly universal stress response (Brons et al., 2025).

More generally, screening for parents' occupation and hours worked, along with the psychological screening measures used in observation homes, is effective. The short questions on type and hours of parental work effort are easily collected and, based on the results of this study, do have information they can provide about the specific subcategories of adolescents who might be at risk for some of the most common and significant issues of anxiety, withdrawal and social difficulty.

Also, workforce development is part of the equation. As a large proportion of the elevated burden of the experience of internalising was specifically linked to jobs with unpredictable working hours in this sample, there is a possibility that indirect interventions that increase the scheduling flexibility of work – such as linking parents with more regular hours of working, for example, vocational training or cooperative working arrangements – could have cascading downstream effects on adolescent emotional wellbeing, despite being characterize as interventions for employment scheduling flexibility, but not specifically mental health interventions. This is speculative and cannot be directly tested in this study. Still, this follows from a Family Stress Model interpretation of the results, provided the mechanism is parents' time and availability (not family income) (Chen et al., 2024).

Findings suggest that, for the immediate care that should be taken for an adolescent who has disclosed a labour-work family background, a triage heuristic is that initial attention should be given to mood, withdrawal and peer relationships. In contrast, for adolescents from other occupational family backgrounds, the triage heuristic is attention, concentration, and academic functioning. It is not a replacement for individual assessment; it is a useful guide for placement when caseloads are high, and not all adolescents can receive the same level of initial assessment time.

Policy Implications

At the Policy level, these findings call for a small but significant paradigm shift in resourcing CCL rehabilitation in India. Asking mental health professionals to participate in observation in CCL homes is not at the forefront of current advice in Juvenile Justice, and usually focuses on the treatment and assessment of the young person and not the family's working conditions and financial issues. To create a short, standardized occupation and working-hours question to add to existing psychological assessments of adolescents—along with attendance in the facility—would be inexpensive and would provide facility staff with a sign that arrival time would provide that, based on statistical data, the adolescent might have heightened levels of anxiety, withdrawal, and social issues. A screening system like this (adding low-cost batteries) is appropriate for the many observation homes in India that are constrained in resources.

The point could also be made for the need for state-level coordination between juvenile justice agencies and labour or social welfare agencies so CCL family-support programs can tie into existing social welfare programs, skill training, or more stable employment opportunities with regular hours where these programs exist. But policy should not use this as an intervention to move families out of labour work; labour work is important and dignified, not to be stigmatized. Instead, it is important to acknowledge that families already facing food insecurity and/or stress over having too few hours in the day to work and raise their kids will be better served by being connected to any income-stable or time-flexibility supports that are in place within the broader social support system, than by being required to shoulder both these strains without any additional assistance.

Strengths of the Study

This study has elements worth noting, in addition to its limitations. A sample size of 600, divided equally between CCL and Non-CCL adolescents, is relatively large compared to the N=70-340 typical in Indian studies with justice-involved adolescents, as noted in various studies cited above (Hasthart et al., 2024; Tilak et al., 2025). The sheer size of this sample enabled this structure of comparison, three-way here, that permits an analysis of the impact of the occupation variable on the overall sample, in each of the CCL and Non-CCL groups of subjects in isolation from each other, to which smaller-scale studies cannot contribute the level of granularity offered here.

Moreover, all adolescents completed a single, well-validated measure (the Youth Self-Report), strengthening the validity of the comparisons. Differences between the two groups of adolescents are less likely to be measurement artifact given that both groups were measured on the same measure and were broadly similarly administered. Lastly, the geographic area sampled (two contiguous states) limited generalizability but also helped internal comparisons by keeping certain regional, linguistic, and economic factors stable while varying others, such as occupation and CCL.

Limitations and Future Directions

There are a couple of things to note about this research. Only two general categories of 'parents' activity were available: labour work and other jobs; this lack of granularity regarding the differences and conditions faced by families is recommended for future studies to incorporate more detailed measures of socioeconomic status, such as income level, job security, and working hours, to paint a richer picture, as recent meta-analytic studies indicate that the job characteristics and intensity of parental labour are more important than just a job status indicator (Kopp et al., 2024).

The cross-sectional design also precludes causal inferences: it cannot be determined whether family economic strain causes these emotional and behavioural patterns, or whether other unmeasured factors are the cause. To better understand the directionality of these relationships and whether the differences in somatischer or psychological complaints between occupations become more or less pronounced or change as adolescents traverse through the justice system or into adulthood, a longitudinal study could clarify these points and specifically help understand whether occupational differences in somatischer or psychological complaints expand, narrow, or shift over time.

In addition, this study was unable to measure the mechanism in the Family Stress Model proposed in this study: psychological distress of parents and quality of interaction between parent and child. Future research connecting parental stress/absence measures with direct measurement of adolescent outcomes would provide another direct test of the processes through which occupation relates to an adolescent's outcomes, as opposed to an assumption that has been drawn from the pattern of results, as the modelling approach of Yang et al. (2025) and the pathway used by Chen et al. (2024) have done.

It is related, but the two categories in this occupation variable (used for institutional intake purposes) do not account for much variation within the categories. Labour work includes occupations ranging from construction labour and traditional farming to household services and small-scale daily-wage work that may differ in hours worked, physical activity, or income stability. Other jobs range from lower-paid, lower-level work to owner-business ownership, or morenership; more precise occupational classification, as used in some of the international literature cited above, may find that some occupations within each general group are more likely to be affected by the effects described in this sort than others in the same group. This could be tested in the future with a larger, purposely designed sample.

Adolescent self-report of outcome and (indirectly) of family circumstances is also mentioned. For the YSR, validity and reliability have been well established in this age group; for self-report instruments, the adolescent's mood state before test administration is the key factor, and it can be influenced by prior events unrelated to family occupation. Future analyses would benefit from combining data with parent-report and/or teacher-report measures, which is emerging in the larger socioeconomic status and mental health literature (Kopp et al. 2024).

Lastly, this study included samples from two states in India, and the results have limited generalizability due to cultural and regional variations in marital and employment status and norms. In line with the growing body of research on CCL samples from single cities in India, and CCL in other nations, an important comparison for future multi-site studies building on this work is CCLs essentially managed through diversion or community-based organisations elsewhere in India. The CCL sample was also collected in institutional settings, which may differ meaningfully from CCL adolescents managed through diversion or community-based services at other sites across India and previously in other countries (e.g., Hasanath et al., 2024; Tilak et al., 2025).

Conclusion

A parent's position on a data sheet is more than a statistic. It is mediated - in real, tangible terms - by adolescents' feelings and behaviours, and the relationship is slightly different if an adolescent is already involved with the justice system. Adolescents from labour-working families overwhelmed with anxiety, withdrawal and social difficulty seem to bear a heavier burden than adolescents from other occupational backgrounds, with adolescents from labour-working families having more social difficulties, withdrawal and anxiety. In contrast, families from other occupational backgrounds showed greater difficulties with thought and attention. This is consistent with the recent international and local adolescent wellbeing research, which suggests that while there is a relationship between family SE Status and adolescent wellbeing across multiple domains, this relationship is not uniform (Ouyang et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2025; Hasanath et al., 2024). Understanding these differences can help rehabilitation programmes and family support move away from a 'one-size-fits-all' approach and provide tailored support to the individual adolescent and their family members.

The present study is the third piece of research included in this doctoral project and adds a family-context perspective to previous studies on resiliency and gender; results indicate that, in the case of emotional and behavioural risk, the CCL adolescent's story can't be told without taking the family context into account. This evidence-based occupational layer is

different and directly measures what rehabilitation systems in India can already do: it shapes daily rhythms of time, availability, and stability, and marks a measurable layer of context that can be acted upon. A crucial next step is to implement the pattern: establish family-strengthening supports for the particular vulnerabilities that cluster around labour-work families, and do not overlook different, but very real, needs among young people in different occupations.

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