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# The South Asian Dilemma



**Written by Hira Vayani.**

Many South Asian children’s earliest memories include their family and a stethoscope.

It's the child's 4th birthday, and they have received a doctor's kit as a present. This is just the beginning of the continuous career conditioning, as most people in the South Asian community have a narrow definition of success, due to cultural and societal beliefs that STEM & health careers are the only employable paths.

Although I am incredibly fortunate to have parents who allow me to study anything my heart desires, I am well aware of those who are forcefully pressured, out of both love and fear, to pursue careers in STEM & health. South Asian parents, like most, want their children to have lives with anything and everything. This desire is channeled into the belief that non-STEM & health careers will result in unnecessary hardship.

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This is the typical story: a set of parents enter the United States. They work incredibly hard to provide for their children. They observe their adversity and realize this is not the life they want for their children. They encourage their children to pursue careers in the field of STEM & health because it will pay for a big house, create happiness, allow an easy life, etc.

These experiences lead parents to believe that the only route to a well-paying job and a prosperous future is in the fields of STEM & health. While STEM & health careers can grant stable jobs with impressive benefits, pursuing journalism, education, entertainment, the arts, or other passions can lead to more.

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By choosing the career you want, you can become a more fulfilled individual. According to Hungarian psychologist, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, enjoying your job will lead to a highly focused mental state and increased productivity.

You can improve representation in other fields, which will increase the presence of South Asians in politics, media, and other lacking domains. Kamala Harris, United States Senator from California, is the first Indian woman elected to the U.S. Senate. Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, a Pakistani filmmaker, has won two Academy Awards in the documentary short film category. Mindy Kaling, actress, writer, and comedian, created her own TV show, *The Mindy Project*. All of these successful people pursued non-STEM & health careers and come from South Asian backgrounds, which supports the idea that a career in STEM & health is not equivalent to success.

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You can use your passion to elicit change.

I am tired of observing my struggling friends try to maintain their own desires while also appeasing their parents. The burden they carry is exhausting, I imagine. In choosing a career, the only consideration should be what is the most beneficial for your future. Your parents mean well, but you must explain to them your desires, your future, your life. After all, you, not your parents, are going to be the one working that 9 to 5.



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