

## **A Systematic Analysis of Factors Influencing Career Choices of Urban Youth of Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

Pakistan is a country with a population of more than 100 million young people. The insightful channelization of the enormous energy owed by this young segment of society through the development of the right skills can effectively contribute to the rapid economic development of the country. An understanding of desires, aspirations, and motivations as well as the knowledge of challenges and limitations faced by these young people while planning for their career path is very important to create a conducive environment and facilitate the formulation of the right policies for these youngsters. The study is an effort to systematically explore various aspects involved in the decision-making process of urban youth in our society. The investigation of the role and effect of personnel, social, cultural, and economic factors as well as popular concepts in society about privileged professions is part of the research. By using a simple random sampling technique 05 universities out of 23 universities in Islamabad were selected and then by using a purposive sampling technique 400 respondents were accessed, however, the final responses got back from 270 accompanied by 67.5% response rate for the current study. A quantitative approach was applied to meet the study objectives by using a questionnaire as a study tool for university students in Islamabad-Pakistan. The findings of the study are likely to contribute to a better understanding of youth policymaking and support students to optimize career decisions in line with their personal motivations and societal goals.

**Keywords:** Career choices, Career planning, Urban youth, Counseling, Financial support, Peers Encouragement, Job market.

### **1. Introduction**

Pakistan is a country with a population of more than 100 million young people. Mid-Year population estimates for Pakistan are 216.5 million in 2019 out of which about 55% are aged under 25 and only 6% are aged 65 or above (United Nations, 2019). The handsome share of the working-age population (25-64 years) provides an opportunity for accelerated economic growth, generally known as the demographic dividend. However, the economic growth rate of Pakistan has appeared to be a quite challenging phenomenon and has been slower compared

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to its true potential despite having an appreciable working, age population and abundant natural resources (Economic Survey of Pakistan, 2020-21).

Public spending on education has been generally low in Pakistan and comprises less than 2.5% of the GDP. This negligence towards one of the most important sectors has adversely affected the economic and social development of the country. The current overall literacy rate estimate in Pakistan is about 62% (Economic Advisor's Wing, Ministry of Finance Pakistan, 2019). The literacy rate in urban areas (76%) is higher than that of rural areas (53%). The literacy rate at pre-primary and primary level education is higher and drops significantly for higher classes. Unemployment of youth is another challenge in Pakistan. The employment opportunities are limited and yet the availability of rightly skilled and motivated workers is another matter of concern.

There is a dire need for purposeful research focused on those issues of youth that affect their productivity. Besides the need to focus on skill-employment factor analysis the researcher was also inspired by personal experience and observation that many people were not satisfied with their existing well-paid jobs and had a tendency to find an alternate career despite having handsome earnings and appreciable skill set required for the job. This suggests the need to investigate the existing understanding of desires, aspirations, and motivations as well as the knowledge of challenges and limitations faced by these people while planning for their career path. Systematic research might be very important to create an environment conducive to productivity and facilitate the formulation of the right policies for youngsters.

The study's aim was to investigate the different factors i.e. the role of demographic characteristics, peer groups, individual interests, and valued professions in society on academic and professional occupations opted for and desired by students at the university level. The findings of the study are likely to contribute to a better understanding of youth policymaking and support students to optimize career decisions in line with their personal motivations and social goals.

## **2. Theoretical Foundations of Career Selection**

There are many different theories that attempt to explore and explain different aspects of career decision practices with varying approaches. The research work of more than a100 years in the field has provided a mature theoretical and empirical base to develop a comprehensive system of theories and intervention procedures to optimize career decisions.

Jena and Nayak (2020) attempted to carry out an in-depth analysis of career development theories by through content analysis approach utilizing published literature. They argued that career development theories can be divided in four categories which include: the trait factors (e.g. Frank Parson theory), personality or psychological theories (like Holland theory), the decision-situational factor theories (like social cognitive career theory) or the self-concept theories (Super's life-span approach). Alternatively, the theories can be divided into process theories (dealing with communication interaction and change over time like super's life-span and Gottfredson's circumscription and compromise theory), content theories (related to features of individual and their environment, e.g. Work Adjustment theory) and process-content theories (combination of process and content domains). Roe's theory of personality development and career choice, Krumholtz's social learning theory of career decision-making, and social cognitive career theory are examples of process-content theories (Jena & Nayak, 2020)..

### 3. Objectives of the study

Following were the objectives outlined for this research.

1. To explore the role of expectations and support of family and peer grouping in defining career goals of young adults
2. To investigate the effect of the socio-economic status of participants on their career preferences
3. To find out the influence of valued professions, societal motivations, and limitations on the career decision process

### 4. Conceptual Framework

This research has one major dependent variable i.e. “Career Choices of Urban Youth”. There are several casual variables “Factors” under the influence of which the response of the dependent variable is to be reviewed in this study. This research has one major dependent variable i.e., “Career Choices of Urban Youth”. The dependent variable for the research is investigated with respect to occurrence in three categories which are “Independent Career Choice, Forced Career Choice and Hybrid Career Choice”. Independent Career Choice refers to career choice purely on personal interest/aspirations and satisfaction wherein the individual is free to choose any career. Forced Career Choice means that the career decision is not free and is influenced by outer factors. The third form of decision is Hybrid Career Choice indicating a transitional position on the continuum between free and forced career choices and is characterized by optimization of career decision under the influence of outer factors but keeps a significant share of personal interests and motivations as well. The following conceptual framework has been used to carry out the study and analyse the outcomes of the research.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of the Study

Independent Variables		Dependent Variable			
Influencing Factors		Career Choice			
i.	Influence of Peer Group	i.	Independent Career Choice	Freedom level of Career Decision	High
ii.	Family role (Expectations and Support)				
iii.	Socio-Economic status				
iv.	Highly valued/ Prestigious Professions	ii.	Hybrid Career Choice	Freedom level of Career Decision	
v.	Social mobility (social values, motivations and limitations)				
vi.	Employability and Market				
		iii.	Forced Career Choice	Freedom level of Career Decision	Low

The “Career Choice of Urban Youth” – the dependent variable is thus expressed in terms of the “freedom level of career decision” of students in this research which can be high or low. Independent variables of research include the role of peer group and family, socio-economic status, the influence of prestigious professions, social mobility, and limitations, employment opportunities, and contribution of employment opportunities on the Career Choice of Urban Youth.

Researchers have done multiple studies to investigate and establish a relationship of various social and structural factors with the career path of an individual (Krumboltz et.al, 1976, Klover. D.M., 1983, Ahuja 2002, Strods et.al, 2013, Raveenther, 2017, Al-Abri, 2018, Gwelo, 2019). While career decision and development have transformed into a significantly mature discipline across the world, especially in developed countries, there is yet a huge potential of investigating the phenomenon in Pakistan. Pakistan is a rapidly progressing country with a huge population living and growing in diversified cultures and social structures. The work of a few authors provides the necessary foundations to understand the relationship of career decision-making and various career-influencing factors (Abbasi & Sarwat, 2014, Shahzad et al., 2014, Hafeez & Shah, 2016, Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017), however, these are not sufficiently enough for generalization throughout. There is also needed to get an updated version of data and insight to integrate with previous works already done by researchers. The present research is an attempt to further expand the existing knowledge.

There have been many studies to understand the factors which students care for in the selection of their career path across the world. However, studies have shown that the effect of influencing factors is not universally similar. Individuals from different backgrounds and cultures report different extrinsic, intrinsic, and interpersonal factors which play a variable role in their career planning and development process (Akosh-Twumasi et al., 2018). There are many authors (Dawis, 2002, Leung., 2008, Flanigan, 2011, Argyropoulou, & Kaliris, 2018) who attempted to understand the very basic questions related to motives, career aspirations and the course of career development and theoretical perspectives devised from their work have become a great source of reference knowledge for modern day researcher’s community. These theories help to acquire knowledge about the how an individual develops his career, adopts to work environment, makes adjustments to meet personal and social needs in the different situations concerning one’s social world (Jena, L. & Nayak, U., 2020).

Abbas et al. (2020) carried out research to understand influence of socio-economic background of family on the decision-making process and career choice. They examined the early socialization processes, family background, mother and father education level, parental income and occupation to establish relationship with the career choice of students. The research results were found in line with social reproduction theory establishing that parental cultural capital and student’s career decision at tertiary level are associated.

Arif et al. (2019) carried out research to identify different factors which influence the academic career of students of University of Management and Technology Lahore. Researcher also determined the factors which effect the satisfaction and dissatisfaction level of students in relation to their opted career. However, Twumasi et al. (2018) systematically reviewed existing literature on factors that influence youths’ career choices in both collectivist and individualistic cultural settings from around the globe. Further, Kazi & Akhlaq, (2017) examined the effect of parental education and socio-economic status on the career decision process of students.

They investigated the peers influence, role of school counsellors, previous grades and print media on choice of student. The study also attempted to explore the confidence level, gender role and freedom of student's choice about their specialization subject.

Peer advice, encouragement and peer education could be among influencing factors in career decision process of young adults (Mtemeri, 2020). Bodovski (2010) highlighted that children career selection and educational achievements are variably affected by the parental occupation, family background, social class and parents' behaviours and attitudes. Studies have suggested that fringe benefits such as job security, job accessibility, job satisfaction, career advancement and better financial remuneration associated with potential future employment motivate youth to follow a particular career path (Ashiq et al., 2020; Ryan and Deci, 2000; Edwards and Quinter, 2011; Baker et al., 2014). The limitations imposed on career choices due to social factors are gradually found to decreasing with increasing education and awareness, globalization and industrialization and improved share of female in work force (Abbas & Ashiq, 2017; Arif et al, 2019; Arif, Ejaz & Yousaf, 2017).

## **5. Methodology**

A quantitative study design was applied to meet the study objectives. According to the Higher Education Commission-HEC (2020-21) of Pakistan, there were 23 government-chartered universities providing educational services in Islamabad Capital Territory-ICT. Out of 23 universities, 7 were exclusively managed by the private sector, and the other 16 were fully or partially run under the umbrella of the public sector. Thus, universities located within ICT limit were considered as the study universe i.e. the whole aggregate from which the sample for the study was to be drawn. For the present study, the findings have to be generalized to the young segment of people who are enrolled at university-level education and used the non-probability sampling procedure to draw the required sample of respondents. Initially, by using a simple random sampling technique 05 universities out of 23 universities were selected, and then by using a purposive sampling technique targeted group of respondents was accessed. About 400 sets of structured questionnaires were printed and distributed in five universities. However, 270 completely filled questionnaire sets were received back, which shows an overall response rate of about 67.5%. The data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed in SPSS (version 21.0).

## **6. Results and Interpretation**

The following paras are based on key research findings and their interpretation. Cronbach's alpha reliability and validity test in Table 1 showed the scope of alpha reliability for variables of the current study.

Table 1

Cronbach's Alpha for the study (N=270)

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha
i. Role of peer group/family in defining career goals	0.727
ii. Effect of socio-economic status (SES)	0.778
iii. Influence of valued professions and societal motivations	0.669

The results reveal Cronbach's alpha for the current study is from 0.66 to 0.72 this demonstrated the high dependability and inward/ internal consistency in between the measurement used for reliability and validity scale analysis. The measure was used for checking the internal consistency and high internal reliability between question items in 3 different sections of the questionnaire tool. These sections included the role of expectations and support of family and peer groups in defining career goals of young adults, the effect of the socioeconomic status of participants on their career preferences, the influence of valued professions, societal motivations, and limitations on the career decision process. Cronbach's Alpha computed for these predictors and response variable are internally consistent.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics Summary of all Variables

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Role of peer group in defining career goals	270	3.1000	.72034
Role of family in defining career goals	270	3.4707	.55585
Effect of socio-economic status (SES)	270	3.6895	.73137
Influence of valued professions, societal motivations	270	3.3963	.64499

#### **i. Descriptive Statistics Interpretation: Role of Peer Group in Defining Career Goals:**

All the descriptive analyses revealed mean values of 05-point Likert Scale-based calculations however interpretation includes the (%) values of the data items individually too. It is clear from data that a vast majority of respondents (76.7%) had a peer group, and more than half of respondents daily spend a time more than 4 hours with their peer group. This indicates that majority of respondents under study were more exposed to peer group and hence their chances to take peer influence would be high. This likelihood is strengthened with the observation from data wherein more than half (55%) of respondents indicated that they consult their friends for any important decision whereas much lesser (~27%) participants didn't consult peers for important decisions. Although, the influence of peers on study respondents appeared to be high in terms of career decisions, the effect of peers has not appeared to be very high

About 48.8% of respondents informed that their friends assisted them to choose a career but only about 30% reported that their peers tried to convince them to choose a career option. Nearly 20% of respondents were uncertain about the role of their peers in their current career decision.

The role of peers and friends in career decisions appeared to be moderate. It seems that students tend to consult their friends for their career choices, but they are not compelled to opt the career choice suggested by their friends. This trend is thus depicted by the Mean score “3.1” which lies close to the center of continuum between agreement and disagreement level appeared for Role of peer group in defining career goals (Table 1.2). One of possible explanation for a less profound influence of friends and peers on career choice in this study might be that most of students (61.1%) had a career plan before they met to their current peer group.

## **ii. Descriptive Statistics Interpretation: Role of Family in Defining Career Goals:**

A profound Majority (78.1%) of participants revealed that their parents are highly concerned about their career whereas a minor fraction (12.2%) disagreed with the notion. Almost 80% students consult their parents before deciding about their career and take opinion of their parents as important. About 61.5% students expressed that they cannot take step without approval of their parents. This shows that parents’ consent for a certain career choice by students is highly valuable and essential. On one side, this may appear from the data through these items of study that student’s independence to choose their career is severely compromised because of their intention to seek parents’ approval. However, there were, interestingly, about 81.5% respondents who admitted that their parents were highly supportive to their own choice about career. This suggests that parents in the career decision are not influencing the personal will and motivations of their children. Thus, the essentiality of parents’ approval for adopting a career path is not likely to suppress the freedom of students. Instead, the high value bestowed by students to their parents for career decisions might be due other factors, for example the care, respectable attitude and trust on parents.

Brothers and sisters provided guidance to improve decisions of about 57.4% respondents whereas 24.8% participants denied having such advice from siblings and rest were uncertain to answer on it. Although more than 50% students expressed that their brothers and sisters had not influenced to change their career choice, about 27.1 % agreed that they had changed their decision due to their brothers and sisters. This together with those (21.9%) who showed uncertainty in assessment of the role of their siblings in finalizing career decision could point that a reasonable number of students have suffered from influence of their siblings in their career selection process. The effect of one’s own career decision on the career choices of siblings could also be a consideration at time of career decision. The data suggests that about 43% of respondents believe that their career choice is likely to affect the career plans of their siblings. Despite of all, about 79.3% respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that their siblings are supportive to their choice. Therefore, it might be inferred that the role of siblings in career decision process was more about guidance and related to improvement and the direct interference of siblings effecting freedom of final career choice was not high for most of respondents.

In terms of gender and social values, the expectation of family for career choice were inquired from participants. The respondents who claimed that their family expectations about their career choice were gender-oriented constituted about 31.5% of the total while more than 52% disagreed with it. However, more students (59.3%) expressed that their family expects

them a career in line with their social values. Only 22.6% of participants of the study indicated that their family financial support is subject to career plans in accordance with family choice while a majority (66%) don't feel fear of financial support withdrawal on refusal to family decided career choice. Similarly, most of the students (63%) perceive that their family supports them is independent of their success or failure.

The descriptive statistics concerning the role of the family in career decisions (mean score=3.4) are summarized in the sense that students pay special attention to family expectations from them, and they value the feelings and considerations of their family. However, there is low evidence that students face any strict compulsions from family while choosing their career path

### **iii. Descriptive Statistics Interpretation: Influence of valued professions, societal motivations, and limitations**

Study data further reveals about frequency and percentage distribution of responses against queries made to assess the effect of socioeconomic status on career choices along with a mean score "3.6" and SD values that socioeconomic status was also one of the important factors which students considered for their current career path. Most of the participants in the study considered that their career is aligned with socioeconomic status of their family and it would help them in securing future opportunities. They believed that their current career choice is within economic resource potential of their family and they also expected that there is a significant hope to improve the social and economic status of their family through a successful career in adopted field. The disagreement to the statements, mostly inquiring about compatibility of a current career with socio-economic setup of respondents and associated expectations for improvement in economic and prestige status was relatively less than the agreements. For example, about 22.2% of students disagreed that their family SES served as the foundation for their career choice compared to 58.9% of students who agreed. A similar trend observed when 61.5% of respondents considered their current career in synergy with the potential to secure future opportunities against only about 13.3% who disagreed to the statement. Only 17.4% of study participants believe their career is not compatible with their social environment and those who consider their career aspiration incompatible with their economic accessibility were merely 14.1%. There were around 75% of students expect that their current career will bring honor and improvement in their socioeconomic status.

### **iv. Descriptive Statistics Interpretation: Influence of valued professions, societal motivations, and limitations**

The collected data brought evidence for a dominated opinion of students highlighting the prevailing perception in society that splits professions as prestigious and non-prestigious occupations and hence restricts them to choose career from certain widely accepted options. This means that a number of alternate career paths are likely to be never or seldom selectable even if they could be more prospective for someone's better development and aligned with interests and intrinsic motivation. While more than 90% students agree that there is a division of professions based on their perceived honor in society, the trend of choosing career from well-received professions is strongly reflected in career selection as well. It is noticeable by the fact that about 69% students believe their opted career is highly honorable compared to around 18% who think they have not taken a highly prestigious profession. About 72% of participants of study associate the success in their current career with expected improvement in social contact



and mobility for them in society.

More than half (~53%) students consider their adopted field is a dream for others and a close proportion of respondents (~51%) responded that they have learned about concept of valued professions since early age. About 43% students said they have not faced any societal disapprovals for career alternatives but still a healthy number of respondents (38.5%) reported that the expected societal disapprovals for certain careers ultimately caused them not to select these options. While only about 22% respondents denied for considering social values important for career assessment, about 55% indicated that social values were an important aspect that was considered by them during career evaluation process. About 47% students don't consider gender compatibility necessary to choose a career, yet about 30% value the gender-occupation synergy and 22% are non-decisive. Although, this an almost half of proportion alone cannot be considered as strong evidence for a generalization that students have adopted a dream career based on their learning from society during early childhood socialization, but the conceptualization of idea becomes more appealing by seeing that most of times about 25-30% of respondents have disagreed with statements exploring role and significance of societal approvals and values while 20-25% were not able to provide a certain opinion on inquired statements. The effect of internalized concepts about good and more valuable professions according to societal standards seems to play a significant role in career selection process of students although in many cases its effect is not well realized, perhaps due to latent nature of socialization process that gradually makes a person conformable to existing norms and values. Apart from that, data suggests that majority of students (64%) consider it important that career choice should not be bounded to cultural values and this shows a desire of students have a more free environment with reduced cultural and social limitations for independent career decisions.

During the current study, a chi-square test was carried out to test the association between the gender of respondents and their consideration of possible limitations associated with their current career plan. It was hypothesized that gender and the limitations faced for career plans have an association. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 1.3.

Table 3

Chi-Square test results of Gender of respondent Vs evaluation of associated limitations with current career plan

		What is your gender			Total
		Male	Female	Other	
You have evaluated the associated limitations with current career plan	Strongly disagree	5	4	1	10
	Disagree	18	27	0	45
	Uncertain	32	29	1	62
	Agree	47	72	0	119
	Strongly agree	17	17	0	34
Total		119	149	2	270
		Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square		17.740 <sup>a</sup>	8	.023	

The results of variables showed a positive and high association between these variables. The chi square probability value appeared 0.023 which provides evidence that there exists a relationship between “Limitations with Current Career Plan and Gender” at 5% level of significance alpha

## **7. Research Recommendations**

The outcome of the study included a thorough review of the career decision process and factors which contribute to effectiveness of a choice. Based on comprehension from literature review and feedback of respondents of this study recommendations are outlined here that are expected to improve the career planning procedure, assessment, and decisions.

A systematic understanding of self-identity, interests and motivations, skills and abilities can be very helpful in right assessment of career choice and setting up smart goals for future achievement. There is never a single career choice. A thoughtful review of opportunities can decorate a broader range of career options on the table. Discussion with peers, elders and professionals would help to maximize career alternates. Once the career choices are ranked, simulating and assuming the plan being executed could be a good idea before making a final decision.

Career counseling has proven its effectiveness in career decisions whether it is availed in formal or an informal manner. While, an informal career advice can be available from parents, peers, teachers and experts of some specific subject, a professional career counselling involves a trained multidimensional career advisor. It is suggested that government and educational institutions should work together to bring in a mechanism that can provide a structured career counseling facility to students throughout their schooling and hence making them able to take prudent career decisions. Therefore, family, society and government should focus on sparing resources and creating environment which could facilitate to take an individual a fruitful career. A reduced socio-economic pressure can be a valuable motivation for productive career pursuits.

## **8. Conclusion of the Study**

On the basis of current study findings, it has been concluded that career choice is an intricate but interesting process. It involves intrinsic and extrinsic factors, playing role to shape the decision of an individual for his/her future life. Apart from personal abilities and interests, socio-economic conditions and expectation of future reward are strongest determinants of career decision in studied population. Role of family and perceptions of “good” and “bad” in society are also considered by individuals for making career choices. Career counseling, financial support from family and government, moral support and encouragement from peers and society and an improved job market can motivate an individual to take free and less compromised decisions. A successful and motivated individual can serve society to make it progressive and peaceful for everyone.

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