

## **Factors Affecting Students' Career Choice**

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Making a career choice is a defining phase in every student's life. Students have to consider several factors before arriving at a decision. The purpose of this research was to see the factors which affect the choice of career among students. This study investigated the influence of several factors such as parental education, profession and income on the career decisions of 432 students from two public sector universities in Lahore city. The influence of peers on the respondents' choice of subject specialization was also investigated along with any impressions taken from the media. It also examined whether students at the MS level opt for their chosen fields forcefully, make compromises, or make decisions which are independent and without external pressures. Data was collected through a questionnaire and in-depth interviews. The results show the parents influence as most significant, followed by influence from peers, gender, print media, financial reasons, interest and others.

**Key Words:** *Career choice, career influences, student autonomy, higher education, Universities*

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### **Introduction**

The influence of career choice has a lasting impact on an individual. It serves to be a predictor and determinant of their prospective level of income, nature of work and consequently leaves a mark on the personality, demeanour and outlook of an individual. Thus one wrong decision can change the fate of an individual. It is difficult for everyone to make a decision regarding their career. This individual action is manifested on a larger scale in the economic prosperity of a nation. Individuals who are misfits in their workplace tend to be less productive and efficient, and therefore are unable to achieve their goals. The concept has been explained by Onyejiaku (as cited in Jones & Larke, 2005), who defines occupation as a means of living, which has the power to change personalities, determine social status, predict expected earnings, determine social groups etc. Thus its importance cannot be undermined. Given its complexity, it is then a point to ponder upon as to how career decisions are made. These are elucidated by Ipaye (as cited in Alemu, 2013), who elaborates the

importance of dialogue with peers, sessions with college counsellors, and discussions with parents and teachers on career selection as "career convention" or "career conference". According to him "career convention is an instrument of career information", and entails the following:

1. To create awareness regarding areas of interest and prospective career fields.
2. To help in shortlisting preferable jobs.
3. Provides opportunities in which parents, employees and career counsellors can exchange views.

A crucial influence in decision making regarding career is the home environment (James, 2000) as it lays the foundation of a child's personality. It's the parent's upbringing which is the basis of the outcome of the personality. The values of the parents are transferred into the child. Besides the home, another major determinant of career choice is media. It provides exposure at the earliest stage. Media highlights social travails, global issues, trends and fashions, portrays the glamour of a culture, and the glitter of the consumer world. Moreover, talk shows,

documentaries, movies and dramas portray careers such as law, media and advertising as very glamorous and appealing, thus drawing students towards them. Sometimes the choices of the peers also become a determining factor in choosing a profession. Other factors which influence career choice are family, parents, friends, culture, academic achievement, health factors, existing income level and financial constraints, media influences, prospective levels of income, employment opportunities, the social acceptability of profession, recognition, and work satisfaction among others. The purpose of this research was to investigate the various choices which have an influence on students' career choice. It looked into the interplay of various decision making influences on MS students' chosen field. It sought answers to queries whether MS students chose their respective fields, had to reconcile with circumstances or had a say in the decisions. It gives an insight into the various factors which influence students' decision making.

#### **Factors Influencing Choice of Career**

Career choice is one of the biggest dilemma and challenge in any student's life. It involves an interplay of many factors which are intricately intertwined. It is not a straightforward task and involves a difficult process of decision making. This issue is not confined to Pakistan only but is universal in nature. According to Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli (2001) an individual's environment, talents, skills, and academic achievement exert an influence on career choice. In case of a wrong choice, it may lead to resultant failure and disappointment. Research shows homes, schools and the social setup influence an individual's career choice. Financial prospects influence the career choice of men as they have to meet household expenses, whereas women show more concern for social values and utility (Sax, 1994). Other factors such as aptitude, life circumstances, and academic achievement

have also been proven as determinants of career choice (Ferry, 2006). Educational level of parents, their profession and income are also identified as very important factors (Hearn 1984, 1988). Every student at a certain juncture in their life has to make a choice regarding their career. It is incumbent that students make the correct choice asserts Oladele (as cited in Nyarko-Sampson 2013). This will make them more poised, stable, and endowed with a pleasant countenance. Consequently, it will lead to knitting a better fabric for the society. Unfortunately, career choices are made with little awareness of the real world (Caplow, as cited in Bright, Pryor, & Harpham 2005). Students make crucial decisions at a stage when they may not be fully informed of their choices, or else unavoidable circumstances prevent them from pursuing their goals. Thus counsellors can play a positive role in guiding them to make informed choices. Being interested in a particular profession is very important in decision making. If a student is forced into a career, he may exhibit low self-esteem and poor performance. Suutari (2003) reports that several studies have indicated a positive relationship between interests and career choice. It has also been investigated that individuals with better academic performance are able to make better judgments about themselves (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). Herbart (2005) opines that a child coming from an environment where he/she receives parental support and lives harmoniously is more likely to be dictated by them. In such a scenario, a child's occupational aspiration is most likely to be influenced by the parents' profession. Research reports career choice is greatly influenced by students' surroundings, society and family etc (Gim, 1992; Leong 1995). In his analysis, Watts (1996) concluded that developing countries direct their students into careers according to the country needs. Professions have varying degrees of acceptability in different cultures which

also influences an individual's career choice (Kerka, 2003). Socioeconomic factors, therefore, are also important in motivating the students to make career decisions (Sukovieff, 1989). A comprehensive study by Ngesi (2003) reports that students from poor socioeconomic backgrounds made wrong career decisions, and chose professions which required a short duration of training, primarily due to financial constraints. As the old adage goes, nothing succeeds like success, similarly, a student who fare well academically have better career prospects and choices as compared to the struggling ones. Hoover -Dempsey & Sadler (2000) assert that a well-read person has more information related to career choice, and reads more to make the crucial decision. Thus their decisions are likely to be correct and wise. The role of parents in the lives of children is undeniable. Olayinka (2005) asserts that it so happens that parents have pre-determined the careers for their wards, and only serve to steer them in that direction. In other research, it is elaborated that the attitude of parents and the influence of the home environment influences a child's career path. Similarly, parents' education has been proven as a factor influencing career choice (Grissmer, 2003; Ogunlade, 1973). Research supports the position that parents' education is linked with the students' career choice. Literature reports that parents' educational level is the most important factor in students' career decision (Grissmer, 2003; Ogunlade, 1973). The results uphold that parents are a child's first teacher, and thus they have the role of a guide, advisor and counsellor in their lives. Bladeless cited in Nyarko-Sampson (2013) explains that parents exert emotional pressure on their wards regarding the choice of careers. They make independent consultations regarding the career they think is most suitable for their children. The child's preferences are never a matter of concern for them. A study by Mickelson and Velasco (1998) shows that mothers have a

stronger influence on their children as compared to their fathers. Another fact proven by research is that children prefer to discuss their plans and choices with their mother more as compared to the fathers (Muthukrishna & Sokoya, 2008). According to Edwen (2000), different values are attached to different career options. These values according to him stem from life experiences, educational background, and the environment. Values are also attached to the stability which is attached to a particular career. An important factor in determining students' career choice is the school to which they belong. Different curriculum options, hidden curriculum, and school culture are all determinant of a student's career choice. Schools role is to provide accurate guidance, and also encourage students to continue with education and not drop out (Oladele, as cited in Nyarko-Sampson 2013). He further elaborates that some parents are receptive to suggestions. However these types of parents usually set high standards from the very outset, and then pave the way for their children to follow that path. Studies report that children who are initially dependent on parents regarding career decisions tend to become more independent as they enter high school and adolescence (Kinnier Brigman & Nobel, 1990). Different studies show that students the world over, irrespective of their genders face the same problem as career decision (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli. 2001). Decisions which involve the choice of elective subjects, courses of specializations and subsequent careers are equally stressful and trying for girls and boys completing schooling and proceeding to college (Issa and Nwalo 2008). They have to weigh their options according to the environment in which they live, their interest and their educational performance. Both the genders lay emphasis on social type and investigate the type of occupations, with more girls favouring the former, and boys the latter (Watson et.al.,

2010 as cited in Bani-Khaled, 2014). In the same study it was also reported that 80% of both the genders lay great stress on high status occupations. Stereotyping of jobs has also been observed amongst the genders, where boys tend to opt for high earning careers, and girls in schools and daycares. A study conducted in Florida reports 99% females opted for cosmetology fields and 100% males chose to be plumbers (Greenberger, 2000). Research reports that females traditionally avoid male-dominated fields. However, recent studies show that women are adopting professions which are conventionally male-oriented. Brock and Cammish (1997), interviewed school children from six countries, viz. India Bangladesh, Jamaica, Cameroon, Sierra Vanuatu and Leone, asked them to share their opinion on gender factor which acts as a barrier for women education. Access to school was reported as a common factor for females. A major disadvantage to females is culture biases toward males rather than females. Media in today's world plays a very strong influence in decision making at various levels. Gender stereotypes are created by commercial advertising. Different commercials and posters provide information about different occupations. These messages leave an impact on the people and they adopt the careers which are not traditionally associated with their gender. According to Wroblewski and Huston (1987), children tend to be more informed about situations they see on television and movies, rather than the reality, which serves as a strong influence on their career decisions. Similarly, Trujillo and Ekdom (1987) assert that media, particularly television teaches us to value those professions which are portrayed to be more socially valued in a society. According to Semali (2003), the various means through which we are bombarded with information are "television, radio, newspapers, magazines, internet, billboards and marketing materials". At the time of personal

development, these types of advertisements leave a lasting impression on the youth. A factor which influences career choice is the lack of awareness regarding professions (Jones and Larke, 2005). Students have misconceptions about professions due to lack of information, which prevents them from choosing them. On the contrary, these fields were actually gaining more demand and were expanding.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The purpose of the research was to study the factors that influence career choice of students at MS level in Lahore. This study employed mix method research, which combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches. A sample of four hundred and thirty-two students was selected from two public sector universities chosen purposively. From these two departments from two disciplines, ie. Education and Mass Communication from Humanities and Social Sciences and Physics and Chemistry from Natural Sciences were chosen. From these, MS classes were taken to administer the instrument on purpose. Data was collected with the means of a questionnaire. Twelve students, six males and six females from each university were interviewed for in-depth information.

### **Objective**

To investigate the influence of demographic variables (gender, academic discipline, peer group, parental pressure, parents educational background, parents' income, media and grades) on students' career choice.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data from students was collected with the help of an inventory from MS students of two public sector universities enrolled in Departments of Education, Mass Communication and Physics and Chemistry. After a thorough review of related literature, a questionnaire consisting of 24 statements rated on a Likert scale was developed. Statements fell into eight categories, viz. family influence,

peers' influence, gender influence, academic reasons, print media, financial reasons and others. This instrument was given to experts for content validity. Reliability analysis revealed a Chronbach Alpha level of 0.85. The researcher developed some demographic questions to gather relevant knowledge related to the participant's background such as gender, university, mothers' and fathers' education, their profession and income level. After survey completion, the researcher conducted interviews with some students from science and humanities students to get a more in-depth result. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 17, and qualitative data were coded, themes were derived and analyzed.

**Results**

The quantitative data were analyzed tabulating means and frequencies for

simple descriptive statistics. ANOVA and t-test were utilized for finding out the significant difference between the various independent and dependent variables. Table1 shows the frequency of statements regarding career choice with which the majority of students agreed. The statement with the highest frequency, 65% is that they are confident in their choice as they can give their best. Next statement with high response (51%) is that their choice was made as they had the marks to qualify on merit, and 7% were undecided. The statement with the next highest response is they chose the field on their teachers advise (48%). The fourth highest reason was attributed to teachers boosting their confidence that they would succeed in this career (47%). Suitability of the work environment was a reason for 44% students.

**Table 1**

*Frequency of Reasons Most Influencing Career Choices*

Item no	Statement	Likert Scale					M	SD
		1	2	3	4	5		
22.	I chose this field because I am fully confident that I will give my best here.	12.7	17.6	4.6	36.6	28.5	3.50	1.39
12.	I chose this course because I fulfilled the merit requirement.	21.3	19.2	8.1	34.4	17.1	3.06	1.43
13.	I chose this field because I was inspired /advised by my teachers.	21.1	25.0	5.6	35.9	12.5	2.93	1.39
14.	I chose this field because my teachers made me feel that I could succeed in this occupation.	17.1	29.6	6.7	30.1	16.4	2.99	1.39
21.	I chose this field because its working conditions suit me well.	19.4	30.3	6.3	29.2	14.8	2.89	1.39

Table 2 presents the statements with least frequent responses, reflecting that these factors were not influencing their career choice. Results show 78% denied being influenced by print media. For 76% of the respondents, their parents' profession was

of least influence on their career choice, and 72% disagreed that their family business influenced them. Information from the internet (72%) and inspiration from their relatives (71%) also came across as the least influencing reasons.

**Table 2**  
*Frequency of Reasons Least Influencing Career Choices*

Item no	Statement							
		1	2	3	4	5	Mostly M	Agree SD
17.	I chose this field due to influence of print media.	36.3	41.7	3.2	12.5	6.3	2.10	1.20
1.	I chose this field because my parents are/are in the same profession.	39.1	36.8	1.6	13.9	8.6	2.15	1.30
4.	I chose this field as it is part of my family business.	37.5	34.7	6.7	14.1	6.9	2.18	1.26
16.	I chose this field after getting information from internet.	28.9	43.1	3.5	11.1	13.4	2.34	1.32
23.	I chose this career because I was inspired by one of my relative.	31.9	39.4	6.5	15.0	7.2	2.26	1.25

In the present study, analysis of data through ANOVA reveals no significant effect of independent variables such as father's and mother's profession and total household income on the students' career choices. Results of ANOVA on father's

**Table 3**

<i>One- Way Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) of Career Choice Influenced by Fathers' Education</i>					
Factors	N	M	SD	F (44, 432)	Sig
FI	432	2.34	.710	2.775	.027
PI	432	2.44	1.12	4.003	.003

FI=Family Influence, PI=Peers' Influence M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, Sig.=Significance

Analysis of one way variance applied on the level of mothers' education to know to determine its influence on career choice revealed that from the eight categories,

education reveals that there was a statistically significant difference for Family Influence:  $F(44,432) = 2.775$ ,  $p = .027$ , Peers' Influence:  $F(44,432) = 4.003$ ,  $p = .003$ . The results of other six categories did not yield significant results.

only "interest" yielded a significant result:  $F(44,432) = 2.62$ ,  $p = .034$ . The results of other seven categories are non-significant.

**Table 4**

*One- Way Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) of Career Choice Influenced by Mothers' Education*

Factors	N	M	SD	F (44, 432)	Sig
I	432	3.20	1.12	2.62	.034

I=Interest, M=Mean, SD=Standard deviation, Sig.=Significance

**Table 5**

*Means, Standard Deviations and t-Tests for Overall Reasons of Career Choice by Gender*

Gender	N	M	SD	T	Sig.	Difference
Boys	63	2.50	.42			
Girls	369	2.57	.54	-1.01	.006	F>M

\*p <0.05

An independent samples t-test was conducted to explore the impact of gender on students' career choice, which was found significant for the category of Peer Influence (.001) and Overall (.015) as reported in Table 5 given below.

**Analysis of the Semi-Structured Interviews**

The following themes which emerged from the study are presented asunder.

**Family Influence**

None of the respondents reported the negative influence of the family. However, they did express that their parents expressed their reservations and concerns in the stage of making a choice. However, they were affable and relaxed once the decisions were made. One female student reported that she was inspired by her father, and it was his choice in making her career decision. As one female respondent (4) elaborated "I opted for media studies, and my family did not consider it a respectable profession for girls".

**Peers' Influence**

Even at the MS level, it was seen that students reported feeling more comfortable and confident making choices to be with

their school/ college friends. They further elaborated that it is easy to study with friends one is comfortable with. It is also possible to ask for their help comfortably. This was particularly true for the female students. As remarked by a female respondent (1) "I got admission in computer sciences, but my friend didn't, so I took admission here". This was also found in the male respondents as remarked: "We are used to group study, so we all took admission in the same profession".

**Gender**

None of the respondents felt that their Gender was a barrier to their career choice. One female student from the Department of Communication Studies reported that initially, her family was against her choice as they felt the field was not "safe" for her. They were of the opinion that "girls should opt for teaching". However, she took a stand, and eventually, they reconciled with her decision.

**Academic Reasons**

All the respondents praised their teachers for helping them make career choices. They either inspired them or motivated

them to choose their field of interest. However, one female respondent reported not securing enough marks as a hindrance for her to choose a career of her liking.

#### **Media Influence**

Only one student reported opting for Journalism as a field as she was inspired by the way they were portrayed in movies. None of the other reported and influence of print or electronic media in their career choices.

#### **Financial Reasons**

Most of the students did not express financial constraint as a factor inhibiting them from pursuing a career of their choice except one, who did not secure good marks in FSc and could not afford the fee of private medical colleges. However three male and one female respondent remarked that they would have like to secure admission to a private university, but that is too expensive and unaffordable.

#### **Interest**

All the students showed that the main reason for their choice was their interest in the subject. However, one of the female respondents reported she had other areas of interest in early life, which she could not pursue either because of not being able to secure admission (medical college), or financial constraint.

#### **Influence of Others**

One female student from the Physics Department reported opting for her career on the advice of her paternal uncle. Others did not report any factor influencing them

#### **Discussion and Analysis**

To know the extent to which career choice influences the various demographic variables ANOVA and t-test were applied. The results of the one way between-group analysis of variance revealed that father's and mother's profession and total household income had no significant influence on the students' career choices. Fathers' education yielded significance, particularly in the category of family influence and peers influence. This shows that fathers played a role in these two areas

particularly. The Sheffe post hoc results reveal that fathers who had a professional degree exerted more influence. Similarly, mothers' influence was significant in the category of Interest=.03. Thus mothers exert a lot of inspiration and motivation in their children's lives. Similar results were reported by Grissmer (2003) whose study showed that parents' educational background serves as a determinant in the career choices of their children. Results of the t-test reveal that gender has a significant influence on career choice. In the present study, the effect of gender on the category of peer influence is significant at .006. Girls have reported being more influenced by their peers as compared to boys. The interviews also reveal that media, financial constraints and academic performance are some factors which influence students when making career choices.

#### **Conclusion**

The study reveals that role of school counsellors is minimal when it comes to making informed career choices. It also reveals that the youth is impressionable, and gets swayed by peers, and impressed by media when it comes to choosing a career. It also highlights the role of the teachers who motivate and inspire their students. The work environment is also a factor that attracts students towards a career. The study shows that students from these institutions were not influenced by the parents' profession, or pressurized by them. It also reveals that girls are more inclined towards their peers, and their choices are dependent on them.

#### **Recommendations**

A career decision is undoubtedly on the most crucial choice in any students' life. New and emerging careers and existing prestigious preferences pose a challenge in making these decisions. Moreover, it requires a balance between the freedom given to the pupil to make an independent decision, and counselling on behalf of the parents and teachers, to share their insight and experience. Exerting pressure and



dictatorial attitude may demotivate the students and also lower their performance. The types of jobs that might be relevant to their interests, skills or aspirations should be discussed in a democratic way to avoid problems. Students should choose the career which is according to their capabilities and of their interest. In this decision, the school should help the student by making centres of counselling for students. Thus students easily understand which career is best for them. Student interest should never be undermined in choosing a career path.

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