

THE INFLUENCE OF PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS ON THE CAREER CHOICES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA

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ABSTRACT

The career goals of students in secondary schools are important for understanding what kind of jobs they might choose later in life; that's why this study investigated what students want to do as careers, compared how boys and girls have different career goals, and came up with good ways to help students plan their futures. The study included all students, their parents, and teachers from higher secondary schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The data that was collected was looked at using a method called thematic analysis. The study looked into the main career goals of students from secondary schools, including fields like medicine, teaching, engineering, military, and government service. It found that there were clear differences in the career choices of boys and girls. The study also suggested better ways to guide students in choosing their careers and pointed out areas where more research is needed.

Key words: Counselling, students, Career, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of secondary education is to prepare students for life. It has two key roles: it helps train people for jobs and also prepares students for further studies in professional fields (Education Policy, 2009). Wright (2005) described the time in secondary school as a period when students move from learning in school to working in the real world. Students at this level have big dreams about their future jobs, and based on these dreams, they choose subjects and courses that shape their future careers. Shumba and Naong (2012) found that career goals set during secondary school form the base for future careers. These goals determine what kind of jobs students will eventually pursue. It's important for students to think carefully about their future careers, so they can choose the right paths and avoid jobs that might not make them happy (Watson, McMahon, Foxcroft & Els, 2010). Because of this importance, the National

Education Policy of Pakistan (2009) suggested that secondary schools provide career guidance to help students better understand their goals and make choices based on their talents rather than just following traditional paths. Ohiwerei and Nwosu (2009) said that many secondary school students want to become doctors, engineers, or lawyers, even though they may not have the right skills or abilities for these challenging careers. These students often do not know what it takes to succeed in such competitive fields. This leads to frustration for many graduates because they can't follow the careers they wanted. As a result, students need proper guidance during their secondary school years to make smart career plans. Salami (1999) noted that students often choose careers based on money, social status, power, and respect, rather than their actual abilities. Salami (2000) reported that most secondary school

students want to become doctors, engineers, architects, bankers, pharmacists, or lawyers because these jobs are seen as respected and glamorous, but they may not have the skills or knowledge needed for these roles.

Okafor (2004) found that secondary school students commonly aim for careers in medicine, engineering, business, accounting, teaching, nursing, and the armed forces. Egwuchukwu (1997) studied the career goals of secondary school students and the factors that influence them. The study found that the most popular career choices were medicine, engineering, law, pharmacy, and accounting. Students wanted these careers because they offer good pay, social respect, and prestige. The least popular careers were those related to the arts, spirituality, and psychology. Nworah (1997) studied students' career choices and found that boys usually preferred medicine and geology while girls often chose banking, broadcasting, and teaching. The reason for this was that these careers were seen as prestigious, respected, and honorable in society.

In Pakistan's secondary schools, most students want to become doctors, engineers, teachers, or join the armed forces. But they choose these careers without knowing much about themselves or what these jobs really involve. Kiani (2010) found that in these schools, boys mostly want to be doctors, engineers, or army officers, while girls usually aim for becoming doctors, teachers, lawyers, or nurses. He pointed out that Pakistan is still a developing country and has not made much progress in many areas. The country's young people are a valuable resource for helping the economy grow, but they often lack proper guidance on choosing careers that match their personal strengths, interests, and abilities. Therefore, it's very important to help students in secondary schools understand themselves better and make informed career choices based on their talents and interests. Karim (2010) said that secondary school is a key time for deciding the path of higher education. At this stage, students choose subjects like science, arts, commerce, or technical fields, which greatly influence their future careers. So, the career goals students set at this level shape their future work lives. Khan (2011) added that secondary school is a crucial period where students choose subjects and dream about future jobs. Because of this, teachers at this level have an important role in helping students build solid career plans for their future.

Kiani, Hassan, and Irfan (2013) looked at the career goals of secondary school students and found they mostly aim to become doctors, engineers, army personnel, teachers, or lawyers. They also noticed differences between boys and girls, with boys showing more interest in science and technical fields, while girls leaned towards social and artistic careers. Tabassum (2012) argued that students in secondary schools in Pakistan don't get much help in choosing careers. Because of this, most students pick traditional jobs like being a doctor or engineer without thinking about whether these fields are a good fit for them. As a result, many miss out on their true potential. They follow what others tell them to do instead of making their own choices (Noor et al, 2024) .

In conclusion, career choices are very important at the secondary school level. However, there isn't much research on the career goals of Pakistani youth, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Therefore, there's a need for more studies to explore the career aspirations of students in secondary schools. Most students in Pakistan's secondary schools want to go into careers like medicine, engineering, the army, law, or teaching without considering their own interests, skills, or the actual opportunities in these fields. This leads to the waste of potential. So, it's important to understand these career aspirations and come up with good strategies to help students make better career choices.

Materials and Methods

The researchers made detailed interview guides to collect qualitative information. They used the results from the questionnaires to find more areas to explore and explain, which helped them create the interview guides. Before starting the interviews, they tested the guides with a small group to make them better and plan the actual interviews. The sample size was 07 respondents that were taken purposively to get targeting information. To analyse the qualitative data, they wrote down the interview notes, read through them carefully to find important points and create themes, which helped them understand and explain the results from the first part of their study.

Results and Discussion

The desire to have the right kind of job is an important duty for students in secondary schools. The main career goals of students in secondary

schools are Medicine, Engineering, Teaching, and the Armed Forces. Boys usually want to go into Medicine, Engineering, Teaching, and the Armed Forces, while girls mostly aim for Medicine and Teaching. The reasons why students have these career goals include making good money, wanting to help others, wanting to be respected, having power and control, enjoying a comfortable life, and feeling happy and satisfied in their work. Regarding the career dreams of male students, one male school teacher (MT1) told the researchers like this: *"It's very clear that we offer subject choices like Medical, Engineering, and Humanities at our school, just like how students usually prefer Medical as their top choice, then Engineering, followed by Teaching and other options."* The main career goals for women are in Medicine and Teaching. The Medicine field for women includes roles like Nursing and Lady Health Visitors, which are specific types of medical jobs. In this case, a female teacher (FH1) answered the researchers' question:

"The female students at our school hope to become doctors, teachers, and nurses, so they plan to pursue careers in medicine, teaching, nursing, and Lady Health Visitor (LHV) roles after completing their intermediate education."

Students in secondary schools often choose Medicine as their career because it brings high income, social respect, and prestige. Engineering is seen as a good option for earning good salaries overseas, while teaching is considered a career that offers local job opportunities, free time, and a good social status. One male teacher, MT2, shared his thoughts on this:

"Everyone wants to have power, money, respect, status, and honor. Medicine offers a good salary, respect, and honor, which is why it's the dream of many students to become doctors. Engineering comes next because many people go to foreign countries, especially Saudi Arabia, where they can earn good money. Teaching is also a popular choice because it is available locally, gives free time, and offers a good status compared to jobs like police or other services, which is why students like to become teachers".

Female students want to become doctors, and they aim to serve females in society through their medical careers. Their parents and teachers also support these aspirations. When it comes to the career goals of girls, one female student named FS1 shared her future plans with the researcher:

"I studied Biology and want to become a doctor. I used to like Mathematics, but my older sister, who is a nurse in

a government hospital, said that Mathematics is more for boys. After that, I started liking Biology. I believe that through this profession, I can help people, especially the women in our neighborhood who are poor and not educated. They often don't feel comfortable telling their sickness to male doctors. Also, they can't afford to pay for medical treatment. I think being a doctor is a good path because it will allow me to help my sisters and mothers, and also the poor people in society. One of my teachers told me that through this, you can serve your family, teachers, and the poor, and people will pray for you. That is the highest form of virtue.."

Male students want to become doctors because they want to help people, serve society, earn money and enjoy financial benefits, and feel satisfied. When talking about their career goals, one male student (MS1) shared his aspiration with the researchers like this:

"I want to become a doctor because there will be a place where people can get help and have access to medical care. I will be there for everyone all the time. I will charge a small amount from patients. It is a service that helps people and also gives money. There is also a feeling of happiness in doing this work".

Male students want to become engineers because they are inspired by patriotism, the desire for a good quality of life, and the benefits of financial stability. Regarding this, a male student named MS2, who aspires to be an engineer, shared his career goals in the following way:

"I have chosen engineering as my path because it will give me a chance to help make my country stronger in defense. It will also lead to a good life and I will have money."

"I want to become a teacher because I believe education can help remove ignorance from society and give people a fair chance. Good education is necessary for progress, and it helps create a more equal society. Being a teacher can also provide a good income and respect, just like the teachers I admire, who lead a happy and satisfying life. I also want to use my job to serve my country"

Discussion

When looking at the career goals of students in secondary schools, the numbers showed that the most common career choices are Medicine, Teaching, Engineering, Military, and Government jobs. The least chosen careers are Farming, Computer and IT, Law, and Business. When considering differences between boys and girls, boys mostly picked Medicine, Engineering, Teaching, and Military as their top choices, while

girls mostly chose Medicine and Teaching. The qualitative findings explained these results further. Students' career choices like Medical, Engineering, Teaching, Armed forces, and Civil service are influenced by socio-economic and socio-cultural factors. Male students choose Medical due to financial benefits, honor, social status, and a desire to serve society. They choose Engineering for financial rewards and a sense of patriotism. Teaching is chosen because of the respect given to teachers and the influence of their own teachers. Armed forces are preferred because of the desire for authority, power, and heroism. Female students choose Medical for the same reasons as males, along with a desire to serve society. They also have aspirations for Nursing and Lady Health Visitors (LHVs), which are subcategories of the Medical field. They choose Teaching because it avoids contact with males, aligns with their culture, religion, and traditions, and offers locally available jobs that don't interfere with family life (Jan et al, 2025).

It was found that students mostly choose careers that are popular and respected. Male students spread their choices across different careers, while female students are more concentrated in Medical and Teaching, indicating that their career options are more limited in the society where the study was done. Male career aspirations are mostly influenced by socio-economic factors, while female aspirations are shaped by socio-cultural influences. The results of this study align with findings from Kiani, Hassan, and Irfan (2013), who noted that secondary school students in Pakistan aspire to be doctors, engineers, army officers, teachers, and lawyers. They found that male students have more conventional and investigative career goals, while females prefer social and artistic careers. Tabassum (2008) also reported that most secondary school students in Pakistan want traditional careers like doctor and engineer. Kiyani (2010) found that boys in Pakistan want to become doctors, engineers, or soldiers, while girls want to become doctors, teachers, lawyers, or nurses. Other studies, like those by Olamide and Salami (2013), Salami (2000), Okafor (2004), Nworah (1997), and Onoyase and Onoyase (2009), also show that students have similar career goals

The study looked at the main and secondary career goals of secondary school students. The main careers they wanted to pursue were Medicine, Teaching, Engineering, Armed Forces, and Civil Services. The secondary or less popular careers included Agriculture, Computer and Information Technology, Law, and Business. When comparing boys and girls, the study found that boys mostly wanted to go into Medicine, Engineering, Teaching, and Armed Forces. Girls mainly wanted to go into Medicine and Teaching. Boys chose Medicine because they thought it was financially rewarding, gave respect, had social status, and allowed them to serve society. They wanted to study Engineering for money and because they felt proud to help their country. Teaching appealed to them because teachers are respected, and they were influenced by their own teachers. Boys also wanted to join the Armed Forces because they admired authority, power, and being a hero for their country. Girls wanted to go into Medicine because they wanted to serve others and get good money. They also wanted to become Nurses or Lady Health Visitors, which are part of the Medicine field. Girls chose Teaching because it doesn't involve working with men, fits with their culture, religion, and traditions, and is available locally. Also, teaching doesn't interfere with their family life. Secondary school students had strong interest in popular and respected careers. Male students had a wide range of career choices, while female students focused mostly on Medicine and Teaching. This shows that in Pakistan, girls have fewer career options than boys. Boys were influenced by economic factors, while girls were influenced by cultural and social factors.

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Conclusions and Recommendations

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