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Factors Influencing the Youth Career Choices: Opinions and Experiences of a Public University Graduates

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Abstract

Career choice is not an ordinary concept. It plays a very important role in the overall personal and professional development of human life. It is linked with the positive as well as negative psychological, social, and economic development of individuals and goes beyond the youth age to an individual's adult life. Keeping the research gap regarding this important issue in view, the study was aimed to examine the factors influencing youth career choices. A qualitative research design was used to investigate the opinions and experiences of public university graduates. A semi-structured interview protocol was developed and used by researchers to generate the data. Snowball sampling technique was employed to trace and interview the graduates till the data saturation. Due to the pandemic situation, 17 participants were interviewed telephonically. The data was analyzed through thematic analysis to identify the factors that influence the youth career choices positively/negatively. The findings highlighted various important factors that influence the graduates' career choices including parents, family and peer influences, interest, abilities and personality, job market, job opportunities and competitive environment, pressure for marriage, economic factors, lack of awareness, and favoritism. Some recommendations for the policy are given.

Key words: *Youth Career Choices, Opinions, Experiences, Public University Graduates.*

Introduction

Career selection due to the variety of talents and abilities is one of the most important decisions and most people possess an element of choice concerning their vocational career. There are many variables such as abilities, self-expression, interests, values, personality characteristics, childhood experiences, parental influences, and social elements that influence youth's career choices but for making the right choice one should be familiar with their inner talents and abilities (Mattar, 2016). But in our country, the right of

making career choices is at the most dangerous point because youth are not allowed to make that decision according to their interest.

The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defined the term “youth” as young people within the period of transitioning from the dependence of childhood to adulthood independence. The term youth refers it is the period of cognizance of their interdependence as members of a community to a more fluid category than a fixed age group. Career choice is an important subject in the developmental phase of every individual because it is directly linked with progressive as well as destructive spiritual, physical, and economic discriminations that continue well beyond the youthful age into an individual's adult life (Pafili & Mylonak, 2011).

Career development is directly linked with personality development and their interest in the particular subjects as many studies showed that people who have investigative nature are more likely to go with sciences but the students who are very social are more likely to go with social science and students with an artistic attitude are more likely to do majors in interdisciplinary fields and arts but most of them are not allowed to select their career according to their interest and there are many reasons like societal pressure etc (UNESCO, 2017).

Individual differences open the door for choices. This paper highlighted that it is important to review those factors that influence youth’s career choices for better economic development and for making a sense of continuity with the same degree as a profession to ensure greater efficiency and output of the youth in the task field. we are the product of many complicated things-just like the value system, abilities, attitudes, home environment, learning styles, and we all are significant, unique, and special but due to our complexity, it is difficult for us to clear our interests, values, abilities because it is not a very easy process.

There are a variety of factors that influence youth career decisions. Students typically take into account the quality of life they want in the future. Opportunities for career enhancement are one of the most influencing factors in career selection along with many other factors such as academic ability, familiarity, interest in the field, economic stability, and influential people can play an important role in the career decision-making process. Studies in the past showed that many variables influenced youth career choices both in positive or in negative ways but most of the time these variables such as abilities, interests, values, personality characteristics, childhood experiences, parental influence, etc. put negative influence because youth did not end up with satisfaction due to the lack of interest in their career (Porter & Umbach, 2006).

As a child’s age increases the complexity of career-related decisions also increases (Gati & Saka, 2001). Younger children have phenomenal perceptions and are most likely to represent what they want to do when they grow up as an ideal career (Howard & Walsh, 2011). Children describe their career choices as a dynamic interplay of their developmental stages and the prevailing environmental circumstances when they get older. The proper process of understanding, planning, and guidance is required for defining what youth want to do for making career decisions (Porfeli & Lee, 2012). Proper handling of the process affirms individual identity and fosters wellbeing, job satisfaction, and stability (Kunnen, 2013).

Passion demands a way to established and resolution without chances is not as worthy as it seems to be. Still, the labor market is highly segregated by gender, and the link between horizontal gender discrimination shown by researchers says that unequal distribution of gender across occupations and in vertical segregation female-dominated jobs pay less and offer less professional development opportunities. In the era of educational expansion, women can select any career. Girls' and women’s performance exceeds the boys' and men’s performance in school and higher education respectively, this

caused considerable growth in the services sectors and changed the labor market structures in the favor of women's employment but family pressure and gender discrimination badly influence women. it is the responsibility of any state to ensure good opportunities for those students who are very hard working but did not have good resources for making their future strong without gender discrimination. (Leuze & Strauß , 2016).

A sociologist recently depends upon three explanations for the continuous horizontal gender discrimination (England, 2010; Leuze & Strauß, 2016). Self-selective behavior is a result of first horizontal gender discrimination because women are many attracted to family-friendly professions. The second major reason for gender discrimination is employers' inclinations for applicants for certain jobs (Kricheli-Katz, 2019). Devaluation of female-dominated occupations is the result of third horizontal gender discrimination (Bertogg et al., 2020). Overall studies found that female applicants have lower employment chances as compared to men but this sensation is not equally valid in all countries. It depends upon country to country and varies from occupation to occupation within the country. In Bulgaria the strongest gender discrimination was found in the field of mechanics, followed by Greece in the field of mechanics, and Greece and Switzerland in the field of IT. In Norway, no discriminatory behavior against female candidates was found (Birkelund et al., 2019).

In Pakistan, most of the students are not given guidance and counseling to select the courses/area of study of their choice. The majority of students are even not allowed to select their career according to their interests. There are maybe reasons behind it. This study is focused to identify the reasons/factors that influence youth career choices. This study may create awareness in the students and parents to choose the courses/area of study of the students' interest. Career selection is not a simple and easy task. The choice of the courses/area of study leads to the career choice. This study contributed to highlighting the emerging need for career counseling for students and parents. The findings of this study may help to contribute in highlighting the need for a policy regarding guidance and counseling about career choices and development. Despite the importance of the issue under debate, there is less research done in this area. Interestingly, there are no policies, infrastructure, trained human resources, and institutional arrangements to guide the students regarding the choice of courses/area of study according to their capabilities/interest, and later to choose the career line. This study addresses this important research gap.

Research Objective

To identify the factors that influence youths' career choices.

Research Question

What are the factors that influence the youth's career choices?

Methodology

The Qualitative approach has been adopted to conduct the study. Participants' opinions and experiences are sought through open-ended questions. This approach is very useful to capture the reasons behind the issues (Berkwits & Inui, 1998). Students who graduated in 2018 and 2019 from three campuses located in Lahore of a public sector university were considered as a population of the study. Because of the COVID pandemic, the snowball sampling technique was used to interview the graduates telephonically till the data saturation. The data was generated from 17 graduates through a semi-structured interview protocol developed by the researchers themselves. After conducting all the interviews researcher transcribed the

data and developed initial coding. The thematic analysis technique was used to analyze the qualitative data and draw the main messages.

Data Presentation and Findings

This section presents the data and messages from the data under the defined themes. The data highlighted various factors which influence the youth career choices positively/negatively. These factors include parents, family and peer influences, interest, abilities and personality, job market, job opportunities and competitive environment, pressure for marriage, economic factors, lack of awareness, and favoritism.

Parents, Family and Peer Influences

The parents, family, and peers' influence seem the most important factor among all the factors which influence the youth career choices. Within this category parental influence is at the top in influencing the youth's career choices. These influences the youth career both positively/negatively. This study shows that if parents let their child choose their careers according to their interests, it provides graduates a healthy professional growth. But if the parents do not allow their children to choose the area of study and career of their interest then it has serious negative effect children's personal and professional life. This study showed that youth who selected their career just because of their parent's pressure was more frustrated and less motivated to continue their career. Due to the lack of interest, they did not pay full attention to their degree.

> *I think families influence our career choices mostly (Graduate (G)1). Mostly parents influence our career choice (G4), because they are most concerned about our career (R5). I selected the area of study because of my friends, we all decided to go in one field (G 14).*

> *I feel my parents did not do good with me because I was not interest in this discipline and related career, I am not happy with it (G11). I came in this profession because of my parents pressure, I have no interest in it and I am planning to change it now. But I need another degree, this is wastage of my time and money (G 8). I am not interested to continue my career in the field I completed my degree because I am unable to develop my interest in this filed, I chose this degree due to family pressure (G 15).*

Interest, Abilities and Personality

The intrinsic motivation of a person is directly influenced by his/her interest and aptitude. Students who select their degree/area of study according to their interests are more motivated to continue their careers. Abilities and skills are better nourished if youth pay their full attention to their career, this is more likely if youth choose the career of their interest.

> *If you select your career according to your interest it positively influences you because you have interest in your choice. Because of interest you polish your skills and abilities to groom yourself in the career (G2.) I have interest in this career, so I am much satisfied and trying to develop myself for progression in this career and my organization is also happy from me (G 7). I think I was allowed to choose my area of study/degree and later career according to my internal interest therefore I am more confident and more willing to continue my degree (G3).*

Personality matters a lot while selecting a career because you can enhance your skills when it's best matched with your personality (G6). If you are not coming in the career of your own interest, you do not do your best for the progression in that career which affects your performance negatively, and you also remain unsatisfied and fee misfit in the career (G13).

Job Market, Job Opportunities and Competitive Environment

The existing job market, availability of the types of jobs, and the trend regarding jobs in a certain area also influence career choices.

I live in Lahore and Lahore is a big city. There are diverse markets of the job and there are almost always jobs available for the good candidates (G9). My friends and class fellows were trying to get jobs in the field where I am now working. This thing not only guided me but also helped me to get the current job. Because you always learn from the people who are around you, and the way my class fellows were grooming and preparing themselves for the jobs helped me a lot to do the same, as a result I got a good gob (G12).

I belong to a remote area of D.G. Khan and if I would be in my district instead Lahore, I would never be able to get this good job. May be I just would be able to get a clerical job in my area because of poor job market and less opportunities. Moreover, in my area there is no competition as such for the advancement in good career and life (G10).

Pressure for Marriage

Pressure from the family to get married just after graduation or at the start of the career, most of the time affects the career negatively.

Family pressure for getting married adversely effects my career choice. I just started my career and I got married. My in-laws live in a small town where there are almost no opportunities to start the career. I can only work here as a private school teacher (G 1). I was eldest son of my parent and just after my graduation they married me. So I am now not in any profession. Now I am responsible for the house and family affairs. This is very unfortunate in my case (G4).

Economic Factors

The study points out that the poor economic conditions of the family are also a factor that affects the career choice among graduates.

Overall country economic situation and low resources/poor economic condition of my family, I started part time job during my study. It demotivated me and I did not pay proper attention toward my study and career. As a result I could not develop myself for a good career. I am in the current career because of my luck and poor conditions of my family not because of my choice (R5).

Lack of Awareness

Findings of this study show that poor guidance regarding choice of courses/area of study at school and university level, and then in university lack of guidance regarding career choice is also an important factor that negatively influences youth's career choices.

> *After 8th grade, we were not guided which group of subjects to choose in Matriculation. Same happened after matric and in F.Sc. I chose pre-medical to become a doctor. But because of no interest I could not make merit for M.B.B.S. As a result I came in B.Sc, and then M.A. Education, and now I am a private school teacher. This whole journey is I think just because of lack of guidance and counselling. I chose this degree randomly, and I think most of the students do the same thing. This thing is making the graduates less productive (G16).*

Favoritism

Data show that sometimes biased treatment demotivates graduates which affects their career choices.

> *My immediate head treated me with biasness and because of continuous negative treatment I was forced to leave the job. Currently, I am not working in the profession linked with my graduation. Such favoritism and biased behavior sometimes leads to conflicts (G 17).*

Discussion

The findings of the study have been discussed by comparing and contrasting the with previous studies findings. This study showed the opinion and experience of public university graduates and identified many factors that influence youth's career choices both positively and negatively. These factors include parents, family and peer influences, interest, abilities and personality, job market, job opportunities and competitive environment, pressure for marriage, economic factors, lack of awareness, and favoritism.

Previous studies show that family socioeconomic status is an important indicator of the family structure. Family social position, power, resources have a great impact on the career choices of the youth of a certain family. If the family has a strong socioeconomic background, the youth of that family have more opportunities to explore the career of their choice. Similarly, the youth of that family have more options to select the subjects/areas of study that lead to a career. Studies show that youth from higher Socio-Economic Status (SES) families often hold expectations of higher levels of education in good institutions, and accordingly aspire to more prestigious jobs/occupations (Rojewski & Kim, 2003). These findings support the present study findings. Previous studies show that parental support, interest, guidance, opportunities, motivation, and social and school environment because it is the first source of making a career decision, are also important factors that influence youth career choices (Oladele, 2013). These findings are also in agreement with the current study findings.

However, counseling about the choice of subjects/area of study and career at the initial stages provide the right track to the youth and their parents for making the right decision. Because those students who are dissatisfied with their career selection did not get career counseling while selecting their area of study and career and they themselves did not have any clear vision about their interests (Conger, Conger, & Martin, 2010). These results are in agreement with the current study findings. In the Pakistani context, most parents select areas of study and career for their children without considering their capabilities and interest. Parents make independent decisions regarding the study and career of their children without consultation with any career counselor.

While taking decisions about the children's career, parents give more attention to the degree scope instead of their children's interests and abilities. It has very adverse effects because students could not pay proper attention to their degree due to a lack of interest in the chosen subjects. Even after completing the most demanding degree, graduates could not compete with other graduates with regards

to the knowledge/skill in the market and spent their whole life blaming their parents for their wrong career selection. However, this was not only the fault of parents. Some of the graduates even do not try to adjust themselves in the selected area of study and career. Some graduates did their best in the area of study chosen by the parents against their aptitude and performed well. However, imposing decisions by the parents on their children regarding the choice of career is not justifiable in any case. It does not mean that parents should not involve in career selection, instead, they should consider their child's interests and capabilities so they can perform better and adjust themselves in the career and life (Nyarko-Sampson, 2013).

Career selection is not a straightforward decision, many factors are attached to it. But while deciding on career parents must consider the children's capabilities and interests rather than the scope of the degree. Because according to this study students who selected their career by their own choice, they are more satisfied in their profession and they are enjoying healthy physical, social and psychological development. These graduates can face all the challenges more confidently than those graduates who did not select their degree program according to their interest because of various reasons but more importantly lack of career guidance and awareness. They are not even willing to continue their career, this will not only negatively affects their career but also has adverse effects on their personal life. Those graduates who selected their careers based on their interests are found more motivated and dedicated in their profession. These findings of the current study are supported by many previous researches (Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017). There is a very strong and positive connection between the choice of career according to the graduates' interest and job performance (Van Iddekinge, Putka & Campbell, 2011). Better job opportunity is also linked with it because good organizations select employees whose personality fits best to the specific job nature. This does not only enhance the organizational effectiveness but also saves the energies and time (Holland, 1997).

Conclusion

This study highlights many factors including parents, family and peer influences, interest, abilities and personality, job market, job opportunities and competitive environment, pressure for marriage, economic factors, lack of awareness, and favoritism that influence the youth career choices positively/negatively. The findings of this study show that those graduates who selected their career according to their interest were more satisfied and committed, and more motivated to continue in the same career. Those graduates who selected their career according to their interest have good job experience, have more concept clarity, and confidence about their profession than those students who did not select their career according to their interest due to the lack of career guidance and awareness. In the current time, the scope of the degree does not matter if graduates have less command on the study knowledge/skills. It is also concluded that those graduates who did not choose their career according to their interest were dissatisfied with the job, were less committed and motivated in the job, and were more frustrated.

This study concluded that career decisions should be a decision of youth's own, and parents/family should just support the students in making career decisions according to their interests. This creates a need to start the proper career counseling services at the very initial stages. This will empower the youth and will make them more responsible as they are setting their targets on their own according to their motivation. When students get enrolled in a certain degree against the interest they have, it is better to leave that degree at the very initial stage and get enroll in the program of their choice. This will save students' resources and will energize the students to achieve their life goals. Changing the degree after graduation or near completion of the degree wastes much of the students' time, energies, and finances which may lead to frustration.

In a country like Pakistan, the dropout rate can be controlled by providing career counseling through proper channels. It is more appropriate to provide career counseling when students get enrolled in grade VIII at the school level, so they can select subjects according to their interest in Matriculation (Grade 9 & 10). This will provide them in their next career-decisive years (Intermediate – year 11 & 11) and they will get enrolled in the field of their interest. Career counseling is not only important for students it is equally important for parents so they can support their child in a better way, otherwise it is difficult to control the dropout rate. Awareness about career counseling will contribute to making the learning environment more effective because it will promote positive intellectual, psychological, physical, and emotional learning of the students and will them to the career opportunities of graduates' interest. Students' career counseling departments should be an integral part of the school, college, and university both in the public and private sector.

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