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## Does Socioeconomic Status of Students Influence Their Career Choice? A Study on the Tertiary Level Students

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### ABSTRACT

In the Indian subcontinent, students pay utmost importance to choosing a career as it determines people's status in society. The notion of the research was to explore the influence of socioeconomic status on students' career choices. A survey was administered among tertiary level students of Bangladesh and the respondents were found through convenient sampling. A structured questionnaire consisting of 24 items based on Social Cognitive Career Theory was developed. The questionnaire was uploaded through Google form and eventually, 563 valid responses were obtained. The results revealed that age, religion, place of residence, residing while studying, parents' education, and parents' occupation have positive impacts on students' career choices. Besides, it also indicated that family members have an influence on overall career decision-making process of the students. Oppositely, fathers' income has little bearing, whereas mothers' monthly income has a positive impact. Again, gender differences were found to have a negative impact. The findings are in line with previous studies and parties involved with career guidance and counseling may utilize the findings.

**Keywords:** Socio-economic status, Career decision-making, Tertiary level students, and Family influence.

### INTRODUCTION:

Extent research based on Gottfredson's theory, (1981) suggests that children begin to circumscribe their career options based on the information they get from their environment as the occupation is a strong determinant of a person's status within the community (Brown, 2002). Psychological theorist Holland, (1997) noted that culture has a significant impact on career choice. Besides, several psychological and social factors influence a person's career choice decision (Hughes & Thomas, 2013). Therefore, planning a career becomes one of the hardest decisions to make in everyone's life.

But many researchers argue that socio-economic status (SES) is the major factor that influences career decision-making (Agarwala, 2008; Ferry, 2006; Ma & Yeh, 2005). SES is the position or social standing

of an individual or group in any society (Thomson, 2018; Obiyo & Eze, 2015). The theoretical construct, socioeconomic status (SES), includes individual, household, and/or community access to resources. It is commonly defined as a combination of economic, social, and occupational status, and measured by income or wealth, education, and occupation (Psaki *et al.*, 2014). Centre for the Study of Higher Education, (2008) recommended inclusion of several other demographic factors such as parents' education status, job status, parents' income level, parents' education level, society in which they belong including a combination of all these factors as SES elements. The socioeconomic status of a student is determined by their parents' occupation, educational level, and family's monthly income (Murry & Pujar, 2017). Several pieces of research (Arulmani *et al.*,

2003; Garg *et al.*, 2002) conclude that parents' education level, occupation, and income influence their children's career choices. Doyle, (2011) showed that an approach to career decision-making is based on life experience from the environment which in turn contributes to a person's cultural capital.

A good portion of the people of Bangladesh are highly motivated for higher studies (Monem & Baniamin, 2011). The probable reason for the motivation for higher studies in this subcontinent is the social position of a person relies heavily on educational background, income, designation in the work place, etc. It is widely believed that the income and designation of a person fulfill the graduates' expectations and guarantee a good life for them in the future.

Furthermore, from a study of Doyle, (2011), it is evidenced that university students from lower socio-economic backgrounds have seen career needs differently from the students from comparatively higher socio-economic backgrounds. Hence, that time is very crucial for tertiary level students to make decisions that will lead to dramatic changes in a graduate's life (Abdo *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, this study attempts to explore the influence of socio-economic status on the career choice of tertiary-level students of Bangladesh.

## Literature Review

### Career Decision Making

Career is defined as the progress and actions taken by an individual throughout the lifetime which is directly related to the occupation. A career is composed of jobs, work accomplishments, and titles earned by an individual (Olaosebikan & Olusakin, 2014). Usually, people engage themselves in occupational activities for earning their livelihoods and secured life, gaining power, achieving prestige and success, and also for psychosocial wellbeing (Abdinoor, 2020). Bozgeyikli *et al.* (2009) argued that career decision is influenced by psychosocial, socio-economic, gender, ethnicity, race, social class, religion, family influence, culture, education, emotional, and physical factors and these factors are inter-related. Career or occupation not only ensures economic solvency for a person but also it serves as a key source of identity formation (Super, 1980). On this point, career decision-making is really important as it builds the foundation of occupation as well as helps to build a career that appears to be a success (Abdinoor, 2020; Kumar, 2016). Extent pieces of

research (Kumar, 2016; Bozgeyikli *et al.*, 2009) discussed that career decision-making is a life-long process that fundamentally starts at mid-adolescence and ends at retirement.

### Socio-economic Status

Social classes (higher class, middle class, and lower class) are composed of income, education, and occupation of a person (Thomson, 2018; Obiyo & Eze, 2015). Socio-economic status (SES) is considered an important indicator of family structure as it indicates the social position, power, and resources of a family.

Family SES reflects parents' educational and occupational attainment along with financial and social networking resources to which the children have access. Kuppaswami, (1981) developed a scale to measure the score of socioeconomic status that indicates that the socioeconomic status of a family is based on education, occupation, and income of the head of the family. According to Aggarwal *et al.* (2005), a person does not become the family's head unless he or she contributes to the family by earning money, and people with no income rely on the family's head, and their social status is determined by the family's head. On this note, SES significantly influences the youths' career decision-making (Conger *et al.*, 2010; Whiston & Keller, 2004).

### Social Cognitive Career Theory

Social Cognitive Career Theory is widely used for making predictions about people's occupational considerations, academic achievements, career, and academic behaviors. Social Cognitive Career Theory investigates how beliefs about personal efficacy operate within a system of socio-cultural and socio-economic influences to affect career decision-making behavior (Lent *et al.*, 1994). According to Social Cognitive Career Theory, personal inputs (e.g., gender, race, and personality), contextual factors (e.g., social/academic status, culture, and family), and learning experiences (e.g., work experiences) influence career decision-making in various ways (Orndorff & Herr, 1996). Moreover, Social cognitive career theory underlines a variety of cognitive variables, including self-efficacy, expectations for results, and goals of selection related to academic performance and persistence behavior (Gore & Leuwerke, 2000). In this regard, career decisions are formulated through various processes and may be affected by different factors and variables. This study tried to apply the Social Cognitive Career

Theory to identify the influence of socio-economic factors in choosing a career of the tertiary level students of Bangladesh.

### **Age**

Mudhovozi & Chireshe, (2012) noted that between the age ranges of six to eight years, most of the children develop their “tolerable sex type occupational boundaries.” Children and adolescents from nine to thirteen years of age begin to think about their socially acceptable occupations which eventually depend on their ability and social class (Helwig, 2001). Likewise, Otto, (2000) showed that from the high school level student’s start discussing their career plans with their parents.

### **Gender**

Gender is one of the most important variables which influences the career choices and career development patterns of male and female adolescents (Rojewski & Hill, 1998; Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996; Davey & Stoppard, 1993). Studies on gender and career decision-making revealed that females have fewer career choices than males. From a very young age, children tend to believe that some specific jobs are only for boys and some others are only for girls (Mudhovozi & Chireshe, 2012). Moreover, females in most cases have a narrow range of occupational choices (Mendez & Crawford, 2002; Looft, 1971). However, several researchers claimed that women usually experience educational discrimination in the family, resulting in fewer job options (Heins *et al.*, 1982).

### **Religion**

Duffy *et al.* (2010) argued that religion and spirituality may influence one’s career development. On this note, the research of Duffy *et al.* (2010) proposed that religion and spirituality may relate to what individuals value from their work, feelings of support throughout the career development process.

Moreover, they also stated that faith plays a critical role in life decisions such as career choices. For example, some Muslims are not interested in conventional banking jobs as in Islam; occupation related to interest is prohibited (Thomas, 2006). In addition to this, Islam doesn’t permit any kind of business or job which is prohibited, e.g., working or operating business related to Alcohol or Gambling. Similar to this, different religion has different tradition and customs, and people following that religion are more likely to follow that (Duffy & Lent, 2008).

### **Parents’ Education**

Burlin, (1976), and Mau and Bikos, (2000) claimed that the education level of both parents has a strong influence on their child’s career choices. In addition Jones and Larke, (2003) stated that children have a higher understanding of work and career-related issues whose mothers have a minimum of two-year post-secondary degrees. On the other hand, Pappas and Kounenou, (2011) noted that fathers’ educational degrees’ influence students more than their mothers. They also demonstrated that fathers who had completed elementary school had more influence on their children compared to fathers who had finished vocational institutions.

### **Parents’ Occupation**

Parents’ occupational status has a positive impact on their children’s career aspirations and career choices (Signer & Saldana, 2001; Wahl & Blackhurst, 2000; Burlin, 1976). Madarasova Geckova *et al.* (2010) found that in particular, adolescent boys’ career choices are strongly influenced by the father’s occupation and girls’ career choices are strongly influenced by the mother’s occupation. Ferry, (2006) reported that children tend to make their career choice in accordance with their parents’ occupation and also try to attain the experience and information from their parents’ prospective careers.

### **Parents’ Income**

Several researchers agreed that parental income and social status have an impact on the occupational choice of their children. Obiyo & Eze, (2015) stated that children from higher-income families have higher career aspirations (e.g., professional executive) whereas children from lower income families are more likely to prefer skilled jobs. Obiyo and Eze, (2015) also showed that both high and low-income parents wanted to make their children educated by which their children can occupy prestigious jobs.

### **Family Influence**

Family influence means the influence of the parents and siblings on a particular person (Abdo *et al.*, 2016). Parents usually urge their kids to earn a decent salary at constant employment to have a happy and secure future (Napompech, 2011). By supporting particular activities, parents can show their preference in choosing a certain career. Commonly, parent(s) tend to point out additional support for occupational choices that reflect their personal preferences (Kniveton, 2004).

**MATERIALS AND METHODS:**

This study adopted a quantitative research method. The students of all the Public Universities, Private Universities, and National universities were targeted for the survey. A structured questionnaire was developed and administered via Google Form for collecting necessary data. The study instrument was developed using Social Cognitive Career Theory and was modified to fit into the local context. The questionnaire was split into six sections. Section A was designed to collect respondents’ personal information including five multiple-choice questions. Section B contained four closed-ended questions designed to collect academic information of the participants which include the type of university, level of education, academic year, and participant’s study area. Section C was coined out with two close-ended questions designed to collect information regarding the career choice of the participants which include desired place for building a career and desired career choice of the participants. Section D was designed to collect information regarding family influence which includes the most influential person in career decision making and there was only one close-ended question. Section E incorporated six closed-ended questions designed to collect information regarding the educational status, occupation, and monthly income of the parents of the respondents. Section F contained six questions designed to identify the perception of the respondents regarding their career decision-making. The questionnaire in Google Form was forwarded to the target students through their valid Facebook account and eventually, 563 valid responses were obtained. The data collection period of this study was between the second weeks of November 2020 till the first week of January 2021.

SPSS (Version, 20) was used to analyze the data. In the first stage, descriptive statistics was used to gain a better understanding of the participants’ personal characteristics, academic information, socioeconomic status, career choice, and family influence. Following that, the Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) test was used to determine the statistical significance of the relationship between career decision-making and socio-economic status.

**RESULTS:**

**Table 1** shows that 68.7% of the participants belong to the age group between 21 and 25. More than half of the respondents (58.6%) are male, the majority

(71.8%) of the respondents are Muslim and 52% of them are living in urban areas while 24.2% are living in rural areas. Besides, 39.6% of the respondents are residing with family during their study period while the remaining 60.4% reside either in the hall or in a student mess.

**Table 1:** Personal information of the participants.

Variables	% (Percentage)	n
<b>Age</b>		
Less Than or equal 20 Years	21.0%	118
Between 21 to 25	68.7%	387
Equal 26 and above	10.3%	58
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	41.4%	233
Male	58.6%	330
<b>Religion</b>		
Islam	71.8%	404
Sanatan	18.7%	105
Christian	5.3%	30
Buddhist	4.3%	24
<b>Place of Residence</b>		
Urban	52.0%	293
Sub-urban	23.8%	134
Rural	24.2%	136
<b>Residing while Study</b>		
Family	39.6%	223
Hall	29.3%	165
Student Mess	31.1%	175

**Table 2:** Academic information of the participants.

Variables	% (Percentage)	n
<b>Type of the University</b>		
Public University	60.9%	343
Private University	20.6%	116
National University	18.5%	104
<b>Level of Education</b>		
Undergraduate	64.7%	364
Postgraduate	35.3%	199
<b>Academic year</b>		
1 <sup>st</sup> Year	20.6%	116
2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	33.2%	187
3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	14.6%	82
4 <sup>th</sup> Year	25.2%	142
5 <sup>th</sup> Year	6.4%	36
<b>Participant’s Study area</b>		
Business Studies	27.2%	153
Social Science	13.7%	77
Science	45.6%	257
Arts and Humanities	13.5%	76

**Table 2** shows that 60.9% of the participants are from Public universities whereas only 20.6% are from Private universities and 18.5% of participants are from national universities. **Table 2** also indicates that in terms of educational standing, the majority of

the respondents (64.7%) are in the undergraduate level, 33.2% of them are studying in the second year. The table also presents that the highest number of participants (45.6%) are studying science, while 13.5% are studying arts and Humanities. **Table 3** presents that 39.3% of participants' father's educational level is H.S.C while 30.4% of participants' fathers have completed graduation and above degree. However, only 5.5% of participants' fathers are illiterate. In terms of mother's education, 26.8% of participants' mothers have completed HSC and 20.4% of participants' mothers have completed graduation and above degree. Besides, only 6% of participants' mothers are illiterate.

**Table 3:** Parents' Educational status of the participants.

Variables	% (Percentage)	n
<b>Father's Educational Status</b>		
Illiterate	5.5%	31
Below S.S.C	12.8%	72
S.S.C	12.1%	68
H.S.C	39.3%	221
Graduate and above	30.4%	171
<b>Mother's Educational Status</b>		
Illiterate	6.0%	34
Below S.S.C	20.2%	114
S.S.C	26.5%	149
H.S.C	26.8%	151
Graduate and above	20.4%	115

**Table 4:** Parents' Occupational status of the participants.

Variables	% (Percentage)	n
<b>Father's Occupation</b>		
Unemployed	1.1%	6
Self-employed	25.4%	143
Govt. Sector	19.9%	112
Private Sector	26.6%	150
Professionals(e.g. Doctor, Engineer, University Teacher)	12.1%	68
Others(e.g. day laborer, Farmer)	14.9%	84
<b>Mother's Occupation</b>		
Housewife	54.0%	304
Self-employed	12.3%	69
Govt. Sector	10.5%	59
Private Sector	7.6%	43
Professionals (e.g. Doctor, Engineer, University Teacher)	9.6%	54
Others(e.g. Day laborer, Farmer)	6.0%	34

**Table 4** indicates that the fathers of 26.6% of respondents work in the private sector, 25.4% are self-employed, 19.9% are in the government sector and 1.1% is unemployed. The table also shows that more than half of the respondents' mothers (54%) are housewives; whereas only 10.5% are government employees, 7.6% are working in the private sector and 9.6% are professionals. **Table 5** shows that 36.8% of respondents' father's monthly income is between 20,001 BDT and 40,000 BDT, 43.1% have earnings of more than TK. 40,000.00 per month and the remaining 19.0% of the respondent's fathers have below TK. 20,000.00 income per month. Besides, 54.0% of respondents' mother has no income, and 20.1% have more than TK. 40,000.00 per month; while the remaining 26% have monthly income TK. 40,000 or less. **Table 6** indicates that more than half of the respondents (57.4%) want to build their career in Bangladesh. The table also indicates that 51% of the respondents prefer government jobs whereas 32.3% of respondents prefer private jobs. The table further shows that 12.4% of UniversePG | [www.universepg.com](http://www.universepg.com)

the respondents want to be self-employed and only 4.3% prefer engineering as their desired career.

**Table 5:** Parents' Income (Monthly) status of the participants.

Variables	% (Percentage)	n
<b>Father's Monthly Income (BDT)</b>		
No-income	1.1%	6
Below 20,000	19.0%	107
20,001 – 40,000	36.8%	207
40,001 & Above	43.1%	243
<b>Mother's Monthly Income (BDT)</b>		
No-income	54.0%	304
Below 20,000	12.1%	68
20,001 – 40,000	13.9%	78
40,001 & Above	20.1%	113

**Table 7** presents that 35.2% of respondents are influenced by their siblings in terms of making their career decision. The table also shows that 30% of respondents are influenced by their mother and 21% are influenced by their father. However, 13.9% of participants are influenced by someone other than their family.

**Table 6:** The career choice of the participants.

Variables	% (Percentage)	n
<b>Desired Place for Career Development</b>		
Bangladesh	57.4%	323
Foreign Country	42.6%	240
<b>Desired Career Choice of the Participants</b>		
Self-employed/ business	12.4%	70
Government Service	51.0%	287
Private Service	32.3%	182
Engineer	4.3%	24

**Table 7:** Family influence in career decision-making.

Variable	% (Percentage)	n
<b>Most Influential Person in Career Decision-Making</b>		
Father	21.0%	118
Mother	30.0%	169
Sibling(s)	35.2%	198
None	13.9%	78

**Table 8:** Chi-Square Test (Association between Socio-Economic Status & Career decision-making).

Independent Variables	( $\chi^2$ )	P-Value
Age	32.225	.000***
Gender	.139	.933
Religion	44.756	.000***
Place of Residence	63.225	.000***
Residing while Study	54.781	.000***
Most Influential person in Career Decision-Making	21.628	.001***
Father’s Educational Status	47.716	.000***
Mother’s Educational Status	28.122	.000***
Father’s Occupation	49.638	.000***
Mother’s Occupation	54.093	.000***
Father’s Monthly Income (BDT)	20.079	.066
Mother’s Monthly Income (BDT)	42.246	.000***

Significant at \*\*\*0.05

Pearson’s Chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ) is executed in this study to expound on the influence of socioeconomic status on career decision-making among tertiary level students, presented in **Table 8**, indicating that students’ age, religion, place of residence, and residing while studying is significantly associated with their career-decision making whereas there is no significant relationship of gender ( $p > .933$ ) with career-decision making. This Table also shows that a significant association exists between the most influential person and career-decision making ( $p < 0.001$ ).

**Table 8** also indicates that the educational background of the father and mother of the students are highly associated with their career-decision making ( $p < 0.000$  &  $p < 0.000$ ) respectively. Besides, father’s and mother’s occupation have also a significant relation on students’ career-decision making ( $p < 0.000$  &  $p < 0.000$  respectively). The table further indicates that the father’s income ( $p > 0.066$ ) has no significant impact on the student’s career decision-making although the mother’s income ( $p < 0.000$ ) is positively associated with the student’s career decision-making.

**DISCUSSION:**

The study findings suggest that age has a significant ( $p < 0.000$ ) relationship with career decision-making. Human beings have different tastes, different choices from one another. This taste, choice also varies from age to age. What we like at age twenty may not be the same as when we are in twenty-five and so is our career decision-making; it also varies due to age differences. This finding is in line with the study of (Mudhovozi & Chireshe, 2012; Helwig, 2001; Cook et al., 1996). This result also reveals that gender is not significantly associated ( $p > 0.933$ ) with career decision-making. Generally, there is a belief in this society that female has fewer career choices and also they are indifferent to their own career decision-making than their male counterparts. But this study finds that male and female has an equal perception of their career decision-making process. The finding of this study is not consistent with previous studies (Mendez & Crawford, 2002; Looft, 1971). This study also reveals that religion is significantly associated ( $p < 0.000$ ) with career-decision making. In our society, a good portion of people is influenced by their religion while choosing their occupations. This finding is in line with the study of Duffy and Lent, (2008) and Duffy et al. (2010). Considering

the different dimensions of Bangladesh, researchers have introduced a new variable “place of residence”. The result is significantly ( $p < 0.000$ ) associated with career decision-making. This study finds that the opinion of respondents is significantly different because of the place they live in (e.g., the facilities available in Dhaka are much more different than in Shamnagar, Satkhira). Analyzing different dimensions of Bangladesh, researchers have introduced another new variable “residing while study”. The result is significantly ( $p < 0.000$ ) associated with career decision-making. During study life, students may live with their family, or in a student mess or a university hall. Students who live in the family generally are influenced by their family members, on the other hand, who live in a student mess or a university hall may often be influenced by their friends or university senior. In every family, there is a person with whom we are attached the most. It may be a father, mother, or sibling(s) who influence other family members to make a decision. Usually, we want to choose a profession like our mother, father, or siblings because parents always want their children to earn a decent salary with a secured life as they did (Abdo *et al.*, 2016). The findings of this study depict that influence of family member son students’ career decision-making is significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). The findings of this study are in line with the earlier studies (Abdo *et al.*, 2016).

Generally, an educated parent can provide more insight into his/her child regarding career decision-making than an uneducated parent. On the other hand, uneducated parents may not be that much capable of making their children understand what is suitable for them. The study finds that children of less-educated parents (education qualification is either below S.S.C or S.S.C) have more preference for Government Service. Findings also suggest that students make their career decision considering salary packages, power, freedom-autonomy, prestige, job security, etc. and their parents’ education has a significant impact on this. The study findings further indicate that both father’s ( $p < 0.000$ ) and mother’s ( $p < 0.000$ ) educational status are highly significant with students’ career decision-making. These findings are consistent with the study of Kracke (1997). Parents’ occupation may also play a vital role in students’ career decision-making and He also identified that children of working parents are a bit different than others (Wahl & Blackhurst, 2000). The UniversePG | [www.universepg.com](http://www.universepg.com)

findings also show that the occupations of both the father’s ( $p < 0.000$ ) and mother’s ( $p < 0.000$ ) are highly significant with students’ career decision-making. These findings are in line with the study of Burlin, (1976). This study also reveals that students from different parental occupational backgrounds have different opinions or views regarding career decision-making. Findings of this study show that parents who are in a Government job, the majority of their son/daughter have more preferences on Govt. job. Moreover, for students whose father or mother is working in private service, more than half of them consider job security as a very vital issue for choosing a career. The result illustrates that fathers’ monthly income is not significantly associated with students’ career decision-making ( $p > 0.066$ ). Where previous studies found a significant relationship between fathers’ income and students’ career decisions (Obiyo & Eze, 2015; Mau & Bikos, 2000). Usually, students’ father’s income level influences them to make their career decision. Some students may choose their occupation considering their fathers’ income level. But the outcome of this study shows that students’ career decision-making is not influenced by their father’s income level. Rather, students’ mothers’ monthly income influences their career decision-making ( $p < 0.000$ ). Students might choose a career considering job security, salary packages, freedom and autonomy, prestige, the power associated with the job. The findings show that more than half of the students consider salary package is important for making a career decision whose mothers’ have no income. These findings are consistent with previous studies (Obiyo & Eze, 2015; Mau & Bikos, 2000).

#### **CONCLUSION:**

Career decision-making being very crucial in a student’s life, children and students get highly influenced by their surroundings that may influence them to expose their potential for their personal and social development. Career decision-making is a growing issue all over the world and selecting an appropriate career is a big task for student’s especially at the tertiary level. The career decision-making of tertiary-level students is commonly influenced by their socio-economic status in Bangladesh. The findings are consistent with the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) that indicates that personal inputs (e.g. gender, race, and personality), contextual factors (e.g. social/academic status, culture, and family),

and learning experiences (e.g. work experiences) influence career decision-making. This present study accepts that socio-economic status like age, religion, place of residence, residing while studying, educational status of their parents, occupation of their parents, and monthly income of their mother are associated with their career decision making. Besides, the study findings indicate that family influences the overall career choice and decision-making process of a student where gender and fathers' income barely play any significant role. Future research may be carried out on the influence of academic dynamics and personal characteristics on career decision-making, the influence of gender differences in career choices and decision-making process, the impact of social capital on career development, effects of career choice on academic achievements, and so on can be carried out to provide directions for the future generations who will build the nation with high motivation and development.

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#### CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:

The author(s) declaring that there are no potential conflicts of interest concerning the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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