

Parental Influence and Career Choice: Guidance versus Autonomy among Bangladeshi University Students

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ABSTRACT

Choosing a career represents a critical transition in young adulthood, shaping long-term socio-economic mobility, identity, and personal well-being. In collectivist societies like Bangladesh, vocational decisions are closely tied to family relationships, where financial backing, cultural values, and parental expectations intersect. This study investigates the nature and extent of parental influence on higher education students' career choices in Bangladesh, focusing on the interplay between parental involvement and students' autonomy.

Using a quantitative exploratory survey design, data were collected from 140 students from public and private universities in Bangladesh through a structured questionnaire containing both close-ended and open-ended questions. The data were analyzed using frequencies, percentages, and coded qualitative responses. The empirical findings reveal that parental influence operates in multiple ways, expressing itself primarily through supportive frameworks rather than explicit coercion forms of involvement. Nearly half of the respondents (47.9%) reported selecting their field independently, while 33.6% stated that their parents provided guidance while leaving the final choice to them. Financial support (41.4%) and direct advise or guidance (35.7%) emerged as the most prevalent forms of parental influence. Although a majority of participants (57.9%) experienced no parental pressure, 28.6% reported occasional pressure and 13.6% experienced strong pressure.

Among socioeconomic factors, parental education level was identified as the most influential factor (27.9%), followed by household income (23.6%). Cultural beliefs influenced career decisions to varying degrees, whereas gender-role expectations exhibited a lower aggregate impact, yet remained significantly constraining for a subset of female respondents. Notably, 69.3% of respondents indicated that parents should play a major role in career choices, provided that such involvement is accompanied by open communication, support, and respect for personal freedom. These results demonstrate that university students do not reject family involvement, but rather favor an autonomy-supportive approach that aligns guidance with individual aspirations. Based on these insights, recommendations are provided to enhance institutional career counseling and establish structured parent-student engagement programs.

Key Words: parental influence, parental support, parental pressure, career choice, career autonomy, university students, Bangladesh

INTRODUCTION

Selecting a career path marks a pivotal transition for young adults, effectively bridging higher education with long-term employment, financial independence, identity, and personal satisfaction. As university students near graduation, the urgency of making informed vocational decisions becomes especially pronounced as they prepare to transition into the labor market.

Parents influence career outcomes through material assets (such as funding higher education and leveraging professional networks) and psychosocial mechanisms (including emotional encouragement, values transmission, and verbal reinforcement). Frequently, parents project personal ambitions regarding employment security, social

prestige, and economic return onto their children. Research rooted in Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) demonstrates that targeted, supportive parental behavior enhances students' career decision-making self-efficacy and fosters healthier psychological functioning. Conversely, intrusive control or rigid pressure can compromise student self-determination, leading to decision ambiguity, academic burnout, and friction within the household.

As a result, distinguishing between parental support and parental control is difficult. Supportive parents empower students to explore diverse paths and arrive at reasoned choices, whereas overbearing control restricts individual ambition. As Cordeiro et al. highlighted, parenting that satisfies basic psychological needs fosters meaningful career exploration and personal well-being, whereas parenting that thwarts these needs correlates with poorer psychosocial adjustment.

This dynamic carries distinct weight in Bangladesh, where collective family structures deeply influence educational and career trajectories. In this context, parental expectations, socio-economic standing, cultural norms, and traditional definitions of career success exert strong pressure on young adults. Simultaneously, Bangladesh's evolving labor market is opening doors to non-traditional fields and emerging industries. This rapid shift creates an obvious friction point between conventional parental desires and the evolving ambitions of modern university students. Rather than asking if parents exert influence, this study investigates how Bangladeshi students experience this involvement and examining specifically whether parental input nurtures or restricts student autonomy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Choosing a career path is a complex, multi-layered journey. It is shaped by a mix of personal traits, family dynamics, financial realities, cultural expectations, educational background, and environmental conditions. Even as university students step up to take greater control over their professional futures, parents remain a primary anchor. They provide critical career information, emotional encouragement, financial stability, expectations, and valuable social connections. This parental influence becomes especially visible during the transition from academic life to employment, as students work to align their personal passions and skills with market opportunities and family hopes.

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) offers a helpful lens for this experience, suggesting that vocational goals and choices grow out of ongoing interactions between personal beliefs, hands-on learning, and external support or barriers (Lent et al., 1994). Within this framework, parents serve as a core contextual influence. Their encouragement, expectations, resources, and work histories shape how students learn about careers and what options they view as achievable.

Recent research underscores the deep reach of parental involvement in career development. In a systematic review focused on high-school and undergraduate students across Asian collectivist cultures, Damas and Kurniawati (2025) found that parental involvement remains a central pillar of career decision-making. Following a PRISMA-guided protocol across multiple academic databases, their study highlighted how family influence takes shape through structured guidance, support, expectations, and role modeling. These findings are particularly relevant in Bangladesh, where career decisions in collectivist communities are tied to family relationships rather than treated purely as solo endeavors.

When parental involvement encourages students instead of dictating their paths, it consistently leads to healthier career outcomes. Parents often help by sharing information about occupations, walking through educational requirements, fostering exploration, offering financial support, opening doors to professional networks, and expressing faith in their children's abilities. Evidence from Bangladesh reinforces this dynamic. Examining parental support and career goals among college students in Rajshahi, Sayed et al. (2023) observed that emotional backing and open communication played a major role in shaping career drive. The authors suggested that parents should focus on offering emotional support, constructive dialogue, gentle guidance, and positive career modeling, rather than trying to manage their children's choices directly. This indicates that the impact of parental involvement depends heavily on its underlying nature and style.

The connection between family influence and career confidence is well-documented in higher education literature. Research by Koçak et al. (2021) showed that family support and academic satisfaction correlate positively with career decision self-efficacy and overall happiness. Their work demonstrates that family dynamics can boost a student's confidence in making sound career choices—pointing to psychological and cognitive pathways rather than direct control. This observation aligns directly with SCCT, where positive environmental support strengthens self-efficacy and outcome expectations, ultimately driving career interests, goals, and decisions (Lent et al., 1994).

However, parental involvement is not universally positive. Recent studies distinguish supportive parental behaviors from intrusive pressure or micro-management. For instance, Maftei et al. (2023) categorized parental career-related behaviors into three distinct types: support, interference, and complete disengagement. Distinguishing these types is theoretically essential because highly involved parents can unintentionally undermine a student's career growth if their involvement restricts the student's independence. Broader research highlights potential risks associated with over-involvement: Angelini et al. (2025) linked parental interference in career selection to heightened risks of school burnout and depressive symptoms, showing that excessive control can harm personal well-being alongside professional choices. Consequently, the primary concern is not simply whether parents exert influence, but whether that influence builds autonomy or imposes control.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) further clarifies this distinction by prioritizing autonomy, competence, and relatedness as core drivers of healthy personal motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Parents who listen to their children's preferences, offer choices, give constructive feedback, and respect individual interests help nurture autonomy and competence. In contrast, parents who dictate specific professions, prize social status over personal interest, or leverage financial and emotional pressure risk undermining their children's self-determination. Recent work in career development supports this view, showing that autonomy-supportive parenting builds adaptive resilience and confidence, whereas controlling behavior creates friction throughout the decision-making process. This balance is critical for university students who find themselves at an age where family support remains vital, yet personal autonomy becomes paramount.

Parental involvement carries unique weight in collectivist cultural environments. Across many Asian societies, selecting a career is often viewed as a family affair, as professional choices directly touch upon household financial stability, social standing, intergenerational mobility, and long-term family responsibilities (Damas & Kurniawati, 2025). In these settings, students often seek parental approval even when they hold strong personal preferences. As a result, career choices frequently emerge from an ongoing dialogue between individual aspirations and family expectations, rather than through complete detachment from the household.

Parental socioeconomic status (SES) serves as another influential pillar. Household income, parental education levels, career backgrounds, and professional networks directly dictate the resources available to students for higher education, specialized training, internships, exploration, and international travel. Parents with advanced degrees often understand educational systems and job markets better, while those in specific industries can expose their children to niche work environments and professional networks. Empirical evidence from Bangladesh confirms these patterns: Akter (2018) noted that parental occupation, family income, and residential background were closely connected to students' career paths. While such studies reflect specific institutional settings, they reinforce the broader reality that family socioeconomic standing forms a significant part of a student's career foundation.

Updated research confirms that socioeconomic background continues to play a major role in the modern Bangladeshi job landscape. Investigating career preferences among 648 undergraduate students across public, private, and national universities in Bangladesh, Ali et al. (2026) demonstrated how career ambitions vary significantly across socioeconomic lines, academic disciplines, and gender. These findings emphasize that parental influence cannot be isolated from the material conditions surrounding a student. A student's desired career relies not only on family encouragement, but also on whether the household commands the financial assets and social capital required to pursue it.

Parental profession also shapes career decisions through direct role modeling. Children naturally gain familiarity with specific industries by observing their parents at work, hearing about daily experiences, and tapping into

established professional networks. This exposure clarifies what specific roles entail and builds confidence to pursue them. Sayed et al. (2023) identified career-related modeling as a core facet of positive parental support, showing that informative exposure strengthens student aspirations. In short, parents do not always need to tell their children what path to take; simply exposing them to professional environments can naturally shape how they view available options.

However, cultural expectations and traditional gender norms introduce added complexity. In traditional patriarchal settings, family dynamics and career expectations vary significantly by gender. Male students often face heavy pressure to secure immediate, high-earning, or stable employment—such as public sector jobs—to fulfill expectations as future primary household earners. Female students, while benefiting from expanding higher education opportunities in Bangladesh, often navigate distinct societal expectations that prioritize family balance, geographic proximity, or occupations perceived as culturally safe (e.g., teaching or administration). As contemporary Bangladeshi youth increasingly look toward international migration, technology-driven entrepreneurship, and non-traditional creative sectors (Ali et al., 2026), the gap between traditional family ideals and modern career avenues underscores the need for continuous research.

Parental educational background operates in a similar way. Highly educated parents tend to be more familiar with university systems, professional certifications, market trends, and non-traditional career paths, enabling them to offer targeted advice. Still, parental education should not be seen as a rigid predictor. Personal passion, academic performance, peer networks, university life, access to digital information, and evolving market trends can all modify the impact of family background. Consequently, modern career development is best viewed as a dynamic interaction between family resources and individual agency.

Cultural values and traditional gender roles introduce additional layers of family influence. Families pass down beliefs about job security, financial safety, social responsibility, gender expectations, and occupational prestige. These ingrained ideals often push students toward paths perceived as stable, respected, or socially acceptable. At the same time, today's young adults are increasingly tuned into global industry trends, remote work, digital entrepreneurship, study abroad programs, and international migration. This shift can create a generational divide between a parent's idea of a "safe" job and a student's vision of modern opportunities.

This evolving dynamic is pronounced in Bangladesh's changing labor market. Ali et al. (2026) highlighted international employment as a top priority for many Bangladeshi university students, showing that career ambitions are expanding well beyond traditional domestic routes. The growth of tech-driven careers further complicates reliance on traditional parental advice, as emerging roles rarely match parents' own professional experiences. Reflecting this shift, recent initiatives in Bangladesh have begun exploring tech-enabled career guidance platforms to complement standard family support with up-to-date, personalized career data.

Ultimately, parents are part of a broader, interconnected career ecosystem. While family influence remains strong, students also gather insights from university faculty, peers, social media, professional networks, internships, formal advisors, and online platforms. As Marcionetti et al. (2025) noted, young adults continue to view parents as a primary source of interpersonal support shaping their confidence, expectations, and goals, though the strength of that influence varies based on background, field of study, gender, geography, and information access.

Career Construction Theory provides another useful framework for interpreting this evolution. Rather than viewing career choice as a single event based on fixed traits, Savickas (2005, 2013) conceptualizes career development as an ongoing story through which individuals build their vocational identity inside a shifting social world. From this perspective, parents offer stories, values, expectations, and life experiences that students continuously accept, adapt, negotiate, or set aside as they write their own professional narratives. This model fits the Bangladeshi context well, as students frequently work to honor family expectations while carving out their own professional identities.

Synthesizing recent literature shows that parental influence on career choice is multifaceted rather than a one-way street. Positive emotional support, constructive advice, financial assistance, professional modeling, and open communication empower students to explore options and set ambitious goals. Conversely, rigid

expectations, overinvolvement, and pressure can restrict independence and cause friction between personal goals and family desires. Recent studies across Bangladesh and similar collectivist contexts show that socioeconomic assets, cultural values, and family ties remain influential even as young adults encounter wider career horizons. However, a clear gap remains: limited research in Bangladesh has brought together parental support, parental pressure, socioeconomic status, cultural expectations, and student autonomy into a single unified framework at the university level. The current study addresses this gap by exploring how students perceive these different sides of parental involvement and how those perceptions relate to their career decisions. Moving beyond the simple question of whether parents exert influence, this study examines which forms of involvement build students up, which ones hold them back, and how family context shapes the career trajectories of Bangladeshi university students.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The principal objective of this study is to examine the parental support, parental pressure, and career choice among University Students in Bangladesh.

To achieve the principal objective, the following specific objectives were formulated:

- a. To assess the socio-economic and demographic characteristic of the respondents.
- b. To understand the respondents' approaches to career choice.
- c. To examine parents' approaches to the career choices of the respondents.
- d. To understand the influence of parents' socio-economic status on the career choices of the respondents.
- e. To know the influence of parents' cultural background and environmental factors on the career choices of the respondents.
- f. To explore the respondents' opinions on how parents can contribute to their children's career decision-making.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

To investigate how parental factors shape the career choices of university students in Bangladesh, this study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional, non-experimental exploratory survey design. The target population consisted of third- and fourth-year undergraduate students from public and private universities across Bangladesh. They were selected for their proximity to graduation. Students enrolled in the National University were excluded. A final sample of 140 valid, completed questionnaires was obtained through combining online distribution and face-to-face interview to ensure institutional diversity. Data were collected through a self-administered, structured questionnaire that was pre-tested on a pilot group for clarity and logical flow. The questionnaire assessed demographic characteristics, parental guidance, financial and emotional support, parental background, family socioeconomic status, cultural and gender expectations, and students' career preferences. The instrument consisted primarily closed-ended questions alongside selective open-ended questions. Close ended responses were coded and summarized using frequencies and percentages. Open-ended responses were reviewed, coded by recurring ideas, and grouped into themes such as parental support, pressure, students' autonomy, socioeconomic influence, cultural and gender expectations, and effective parental involvement. These responses were used descriptively to supplement the quantitative findings, not as relationships were inferred. Ethical protocols were strictly observed, requiring informed consent, voluntary participation, and complete anonymity for all respondents. Using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentage distributions, the analytical strategy focused on identifying overarching empirical patterns and self-reported student perceptions without asserting direct causality. Quality control was maintained via rigorous data cleaning and systematic coding; however, constraints such as the sample size ($N = 140$), cross-sectional design, and non-probability sampling limit broad generalizability across the entire Bangladeshi higher education system, aligning the study's scope with standard regional research practices.

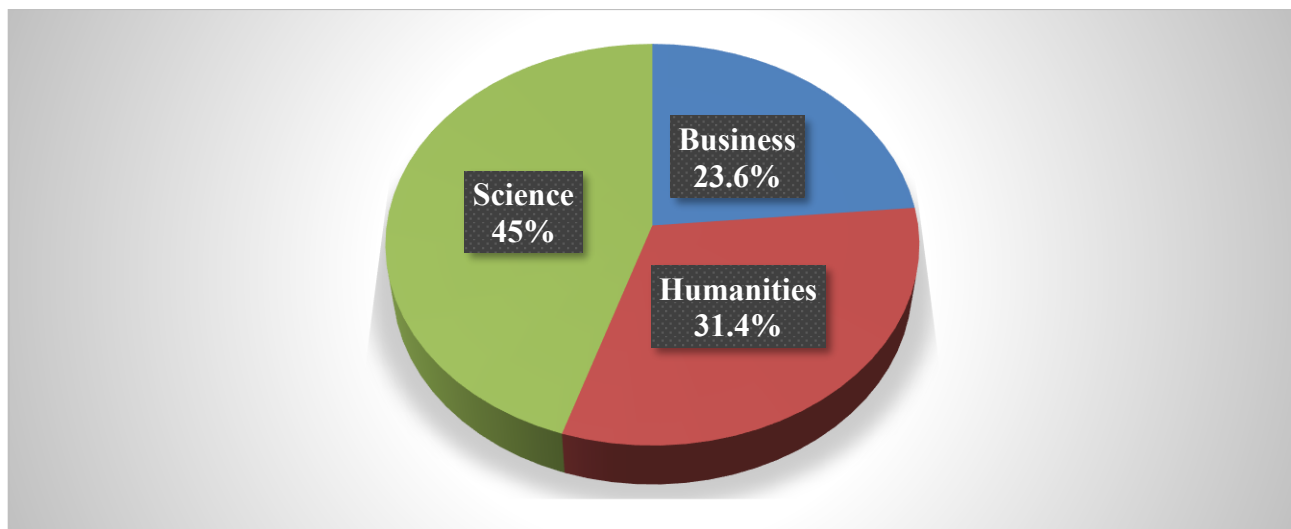
DATA ANALYSIS AND MAJOR FINDINGS

Table 1: Socio-economic and Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Characteristics	Sub category	Frequency	Percentage
Age group	Age 18-20	2	1.4%
	Age 21-23	81	57.9%
	Age 24-26	57	40.7%
Gender	Male	73	52.1%
	Female	67	47.9%
Present residential area	Urban	87	62.1%
	Rural	35	25%
	Suburban	18	12.9%
Marital status	Unmarried	127	90.7%
	Married	11	7.9%
	Divorced	2	1.4%

The empirical sample comprised 140 university students. As detailed in Table 1, the majority of respondents were aged 21–23 years (57.9%, n=81), followed by 24–26 years (40.7%, n=57); 1.4% (n=2) were aged 18–20. The gender distribution was 52.1% male and 47.9% female. Most respondents lived in urban areas (62.1%, n=87), followed by rural (25.0%, n=35) and suburban (12.9%, n=18) areas. Most were single (90.7%, n=127), and 64.3% came from nuclear families.

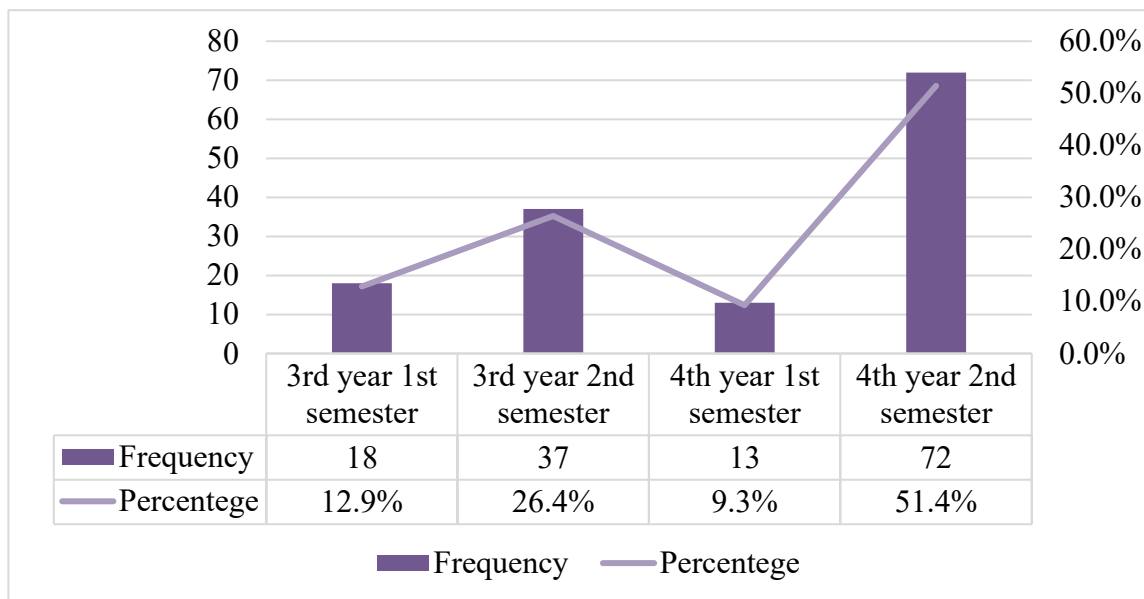
Figure 1: Mainstream Choices at HSC Level among Respondents:



The collected data reveals that majority of respondents (45.0%) chose Science as their HSC stream, reflecting a strong interest in stable and high-demand careers like engineering and technology. This preference may also reflect parental guidance and societal perceptions. Meanwhile, 31.4% pursued Humanities, indicating personal interests in arts and education, while 23.6% selected Business Studies, suggesting an interest in finance and

management. Overall, the distribution shows a clear preference for science among students, with varied interests in Humanities and Business shaped by family backgrounds and individual aspirations.

Figure 2: Current Education Level of the Respondents:



The data show that the majority of respondents (51.4%) were in the fourth year, second semester, indicating that they were nearing graduation and were likely focusing on career transitions. A further 39.3% were in the third year, 2nd semester or third year, first semester. Overall, 60.7% of students were at advanced academic stages, when career planning and parental influence may be more relevant.

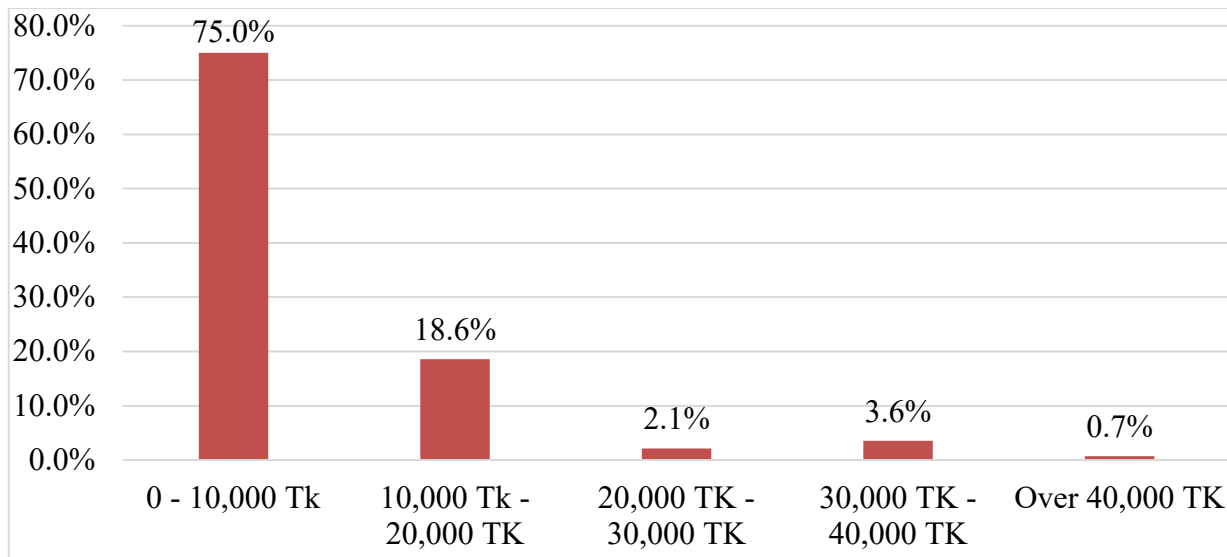
Table 2: Faculty of the Respondents:

Name of the faculty	Frequency	Percentage
Social science	36	25.7%
Arts	20	14.3%
Science	33	23.6%
Business studies	27	19.3%
Life and earth science	4	2.9%
Law	11	7.9%
Computer Science and Engineering	2	1.4%
Others	7	5.0%
Total	140	100.0%

The table shows that the proportion of students was from the Social Science (25.7%), indicating a strong interest in fields related to societal issues and human interactions. Science faculty followed with 23.6%, showing a significant representation of empirical and analytical fields. Business Studies represented with 19.3% of respondents, reflecting interest in finance and management. Smaller proportions were from Law (7.9%), Arts (14.3%), and Life and Earth Science (2.9%). Computer Science and Engineering had the lowest representation

(1.4%) while only 5.0% of the respondents were from other faculties including Engineering, Fisheries, Agriculture and other fields.

Figure 3: Monthly Income of the Respondents:



Collected data reflect that significant majority of respondents (75.0%) had a monthly income of 0 - 10,000 Tk, indicating that many students may rely on limited financial resources or parental support while pursuing their studies. 18.6% fell within the 10,000 - 20,000 Tk income range, suggesting a smaller segment of students with slightly higher financial stability. Only 2.1% earn between 20,000 - 30,000 Tk, and 3.6% between 30,000 - 40,000 Tk, reflecting a low representation of students in these income brackets. Only 0.7% earned over 40,000 Tk, highlighting the scarcity of higher income earners among the respondents.

Table 3: Sources of Income of the Respondents:

Source of income	Frequency	Percentage
Tuition	91	65.0%
No income source	21	15.0%
Part-time job	10	7.1%
Freelancing	9	6.4%
Business	7	5.0%
Others	2	1.4%
Total	140	100.0%

Table 5 shows that tuition is the primary income source, with 65.0% of students engaged in tutoring. This indicates that a majority of students depend on tuition to support their education. A further 15.0% reported having no source of income, they depend on family support or scholarships. Part-time jobs (7.1%) and freelancing (6.4%) represented additional, less common source of income. A small proportion of students engage in business (5.0%) or fell into other categories (1.4%) like Henna and Makeover Artist.

Approach of the respondents towards the career choice

Table 4: Specific Career Path of the Respondents:

Career Path	Frequency	Percentage
Not decided	41	29.3%
Education	25	17.9%
Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)	24	17.1%
Business & Finance	20	14.3%
Law & Public Policy	16	11.4%
Health care	4	2.9%
Arts & Entertainment	2	1.4%
Others	8	5.7%
Total	140	100.0%

Table 4 reflects that nearly 29.3% of students had not yet decided on a specific career path. Among those who had made a decision, Education (17.9%) and STEM (17.1%) were the most popular choices, highlighting a balanced interest in both academic fields and technical fields. Business & Finance (14.3%) and Law and Public Policy (11.4%) also held strong appeal, suggesting a focus on careers that offer stability and opportunities for leadership. Less common paths, Health Care (2.9%), Arts & Entertainment (1.4%), and Others (5.7%) represented smaller percentages, indicating lower interest areas among the respondents. So, Education and STEM were the most popular career fields among the respondents.

Figure 4: Timing of Choosing Career-decision of the Respondents:

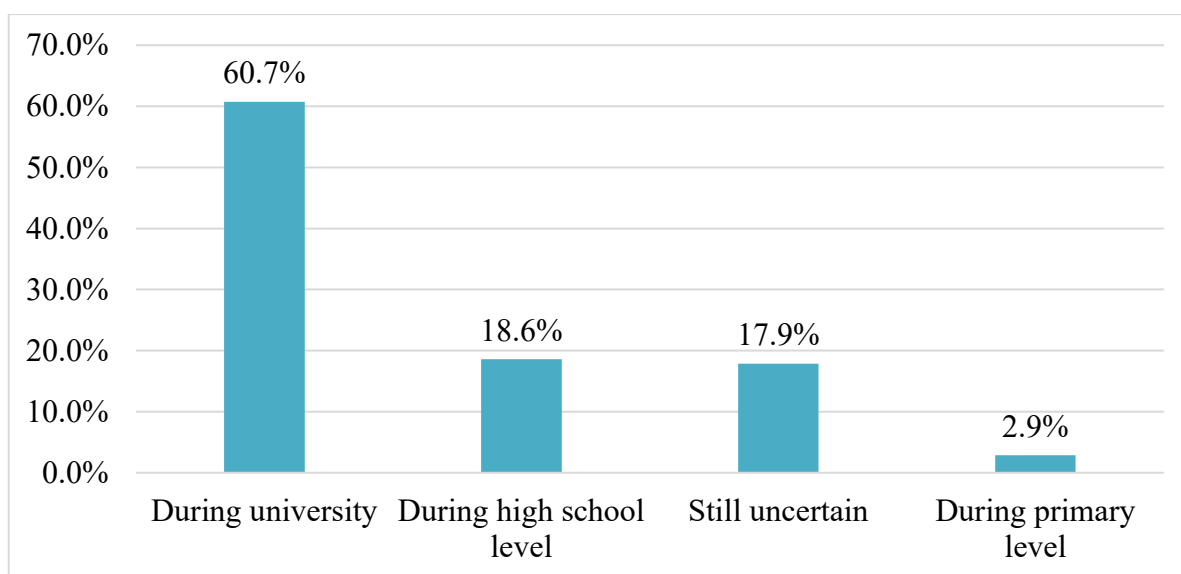
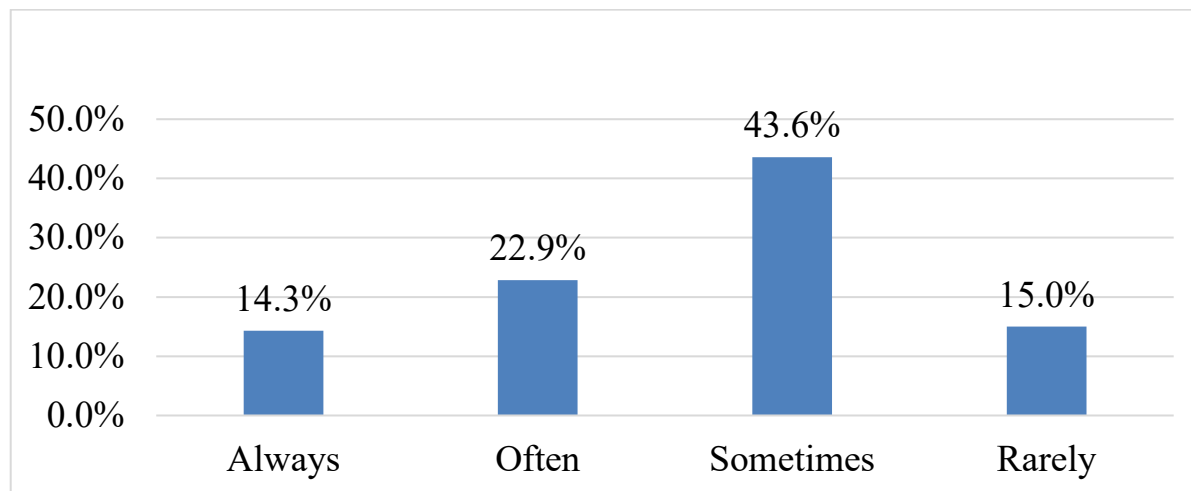


Figure 4 represents that most respondents (60.7%) made their career decisions during university, indicating that higher education may play a significant role in shaping career choices as students are exposed to specialized fields. A smaller portion (18.6%) decided on their career paths in high school, possibly influenced by early

academic interests or parental guidance. Only 2.9% made their career choices at the primary level, which may suggest early clarity that may stem from strong family or cultural influences. However, 17.9% remained uncertain about their career paths, highlighting a potential need for additional guidance and exploration.

Approach of the parents towards the career choice of the respondents

Figure 5: Frequency of Parental Discussions on Career Aspirations:



The largest group of respondents (43.6%) reported that their parents discussed career aspirations "sometimes," indicating that such conversations occurred occasionally rather than consistently. In addition, 22.9% of students experienced discussions "often," while 14.3% said they occurred "always," showing that many parents are actively involved in their children's career planning. However, 15.0% of students reported that career conversations were "rarely" held, and 4.3% reported that they "never" occurred. Overall, the data indicates that most parents engaged in discussions about their children's career goals, although the frequency of these conversations varied.

Figure 6: Parental Influence on Career Choices among Students:

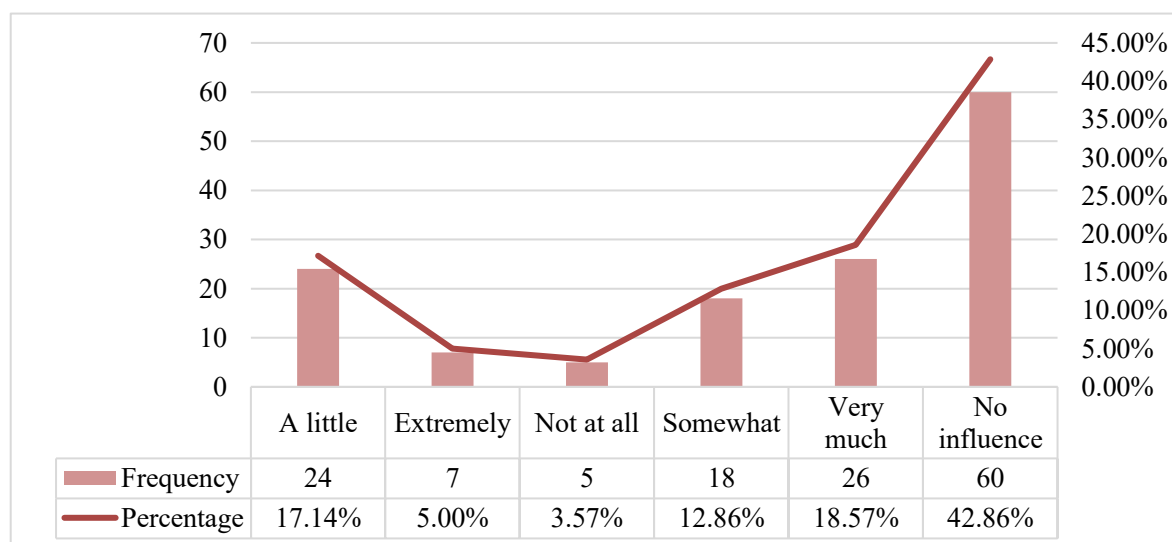


Figure 6 summarizes that the largest group of students (42.86%) reported no parental influence on their career choices, indicating a strong sense of independence in decision-making. In contrast, 18.57% felt their parents influence their choices "very much," and 5.00% as "extremely," suggesting an impact for a notable portion of students. 17.14% students felt "a little" influence from their parents, while 12.86% felt "somewhat" influenced,

indicating that many students received some input from their parents, though it doesn't affect their career choices strongly.

Table 5: Parental Encouragement on Specific Career Options

Career Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Government Job	36	25.7%
No specific choice	21	15.0%
Teaching	13	9.3%
Parents support in any career	11	7.9%
Banking	10	7.1%
Law	10	7.1%
Engineering	8	5.7%
Doctor	6	4.3%
Business	4	2.9%
Private Company	2	1.4%
Others	19	13.6%
Total	140	100.0%

Table 5 represents that parents favored government jobs (25.7%) due to their stability, benefits, and social respect. Traditional fields like teaching (9.3%), banking (7.1%), and law (7.1%) were also common, as they provided reliable paths and income. In contrast, some parents preferred "no specific choice" (15.0%), and 7.9% supported any career their child likes, showing flexibility. Few parents encouraged private sector jobs (1.4%) or business (2.9%), possibly due to concerns about job risks. Meanwhile, 13.6% supported fewer common careers, reflecting openness to various paths. Overall, while many parents preferred stable, respected careers, a good number support flexible or unique choices.

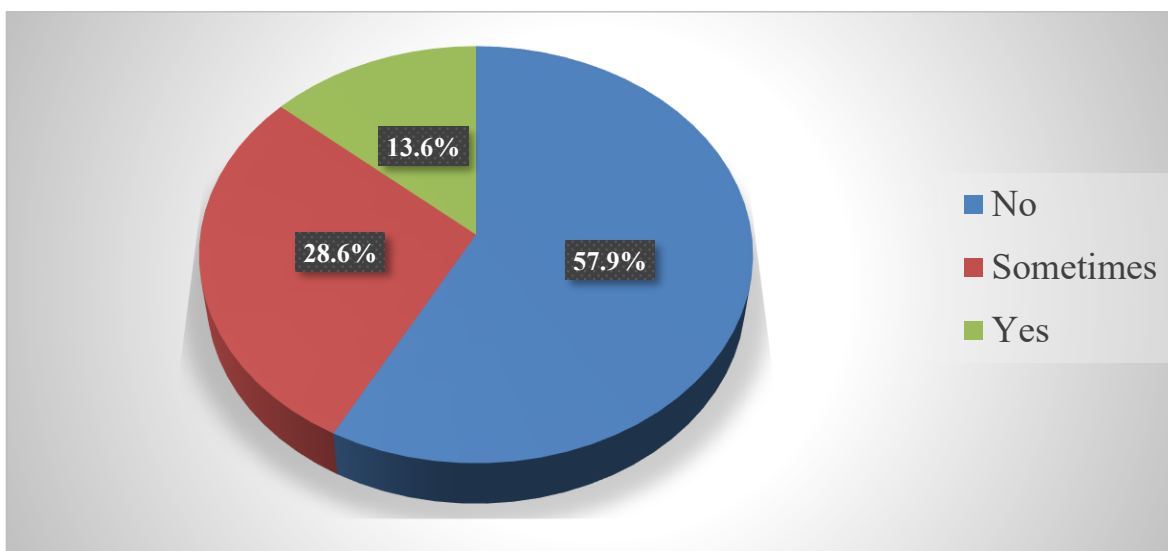
Table 6: Ways that Parents Use to Shape Students' Views on Career Choices:

Parental Influence on Career Choices	Frequency	Percentage
Financial Support	58	41.40%
Direct Advice or Guidance	50	35.70%
Educational Resources	14	10.00%
Social Networking Opportunities	5	3.60%
Positive Appreciation with Supportive Environment	1	0.70%
Comprehensive Support (All of the Above)	5	3.60%

No Support	6	4.30%
Others	1	0.70%
Total	140	100.00%

Table 6 represents that financial support (41.4%) was the biggest influence on students' career choices. This help can make some careers more reachable by easing financial barriers. Direct advice from parents was also important for 35.7% of students, showing that many valued their parents' insights when considering career options. About 10.0% benefitted from educational resources provided by parents which helps them gaining necessary skills. Some parents (3.6%) also helped by providing networking opportunities, connecting their children to valuable contacts for their careers. However, 4.3% of students said that they receive no support from their parents, indicating that some felt independent or lack guidance. Overall, most parents played a significant role in their children's career development through financial, educational, and networking support, but a small number of students felt unsupported.

Figure 7: Perception about Parental Pressure in Career Choice:



This figure shows that most of the students (57.9%) felt no pressure to meet their parents' career expectations, indicating they were independence in decision-making to choose their career. However, 28.6% sometimes felt some pressure, indicating that while many were independent, some may struggle with their parents' wishes. Only 13.6% felt strong pressure to follow their parents' expectations, which can lead to stress for those students. Overall, the data shows that most students were generally independent in their career decisions, but some still experienced varying levels of pressure from their parents, suggesting that parental expectations can influence career choices for a few individuals.

Table 7: Extent of Parental Influence on Career Choices:

Statement	Frequency	Percentage
No influence	60	42.90%
I feel pressured by my parents to pursue a certain career	2	1.40%
My parents have always supported my career choice	53	37.90%

My career choice is influenced by my parents' profession	1	0.70%
My parents have specific expectations about my career choice	17	12.10%
My parents discussed career options with me frequently	7	5.00%
Total	140	100.00%

Table 7 reveals that 42.9% of students felt no parental influence on their career choice, reflecting a high level of independence. Only 1.4% reported feeling pressured to pursue a certain career, showing minimal direct pressure overall. In contrast, 37.9% received support from their parents, very few 0.7% felt influence by their parents' profession, indicating that most students didn't feel obligation to follow in their parents' professional paths. However, 12.1% experienced specific parental expectations regarding their careers, and 5.0% frequently discussed career matters with their parents, suggesting an engaged or supportive family environment. The data suggests that while nearly half of students made career decisions independently, a significant number also benefitted from parental support. Only a small minority felt pressure or influenced by their parents' careers, though some still faced specific parental expectations.

The Influence of Parent's Socio-Economic Status on Career Choice of the Respondents

Figure 8: Parents' Monthly Income Distribution:

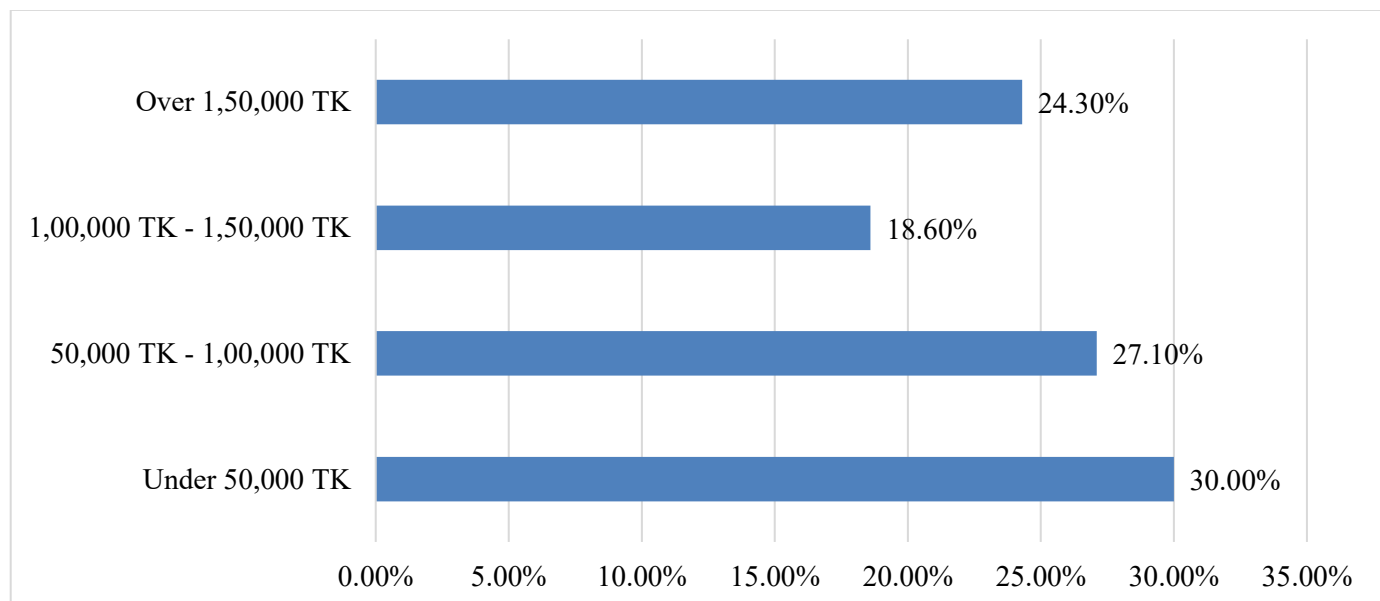


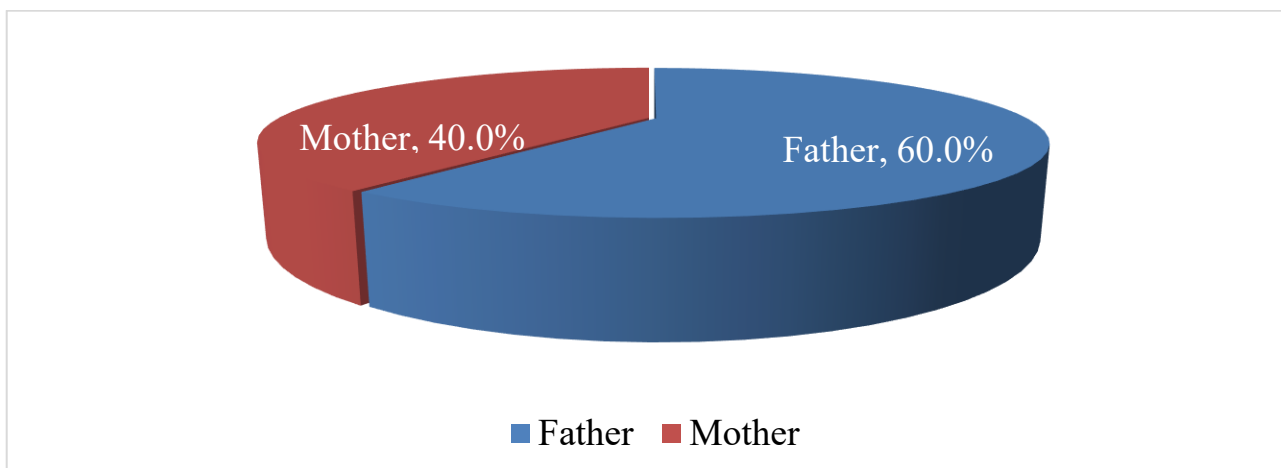
Figure 8 represents the levels of financial background and likely influences on career decisions. The largest group, 30.0%, came from families earning under 50,000 TK monthly, which may limit access to educational and career resources, possibly leading to more practical or stability-focused career choices. Middle-income families, with 27.1% earning between 50,000 to 1,00,000 TK and 18.6% between 1,00,000 to 1,50,000 TK, likely had moderate resources to balance basic needs with some support for career-related opportunities. Meanwhile, 24.3% of students were from families earning over 1,50,000 TK, providing them greater financial flexibility for career exploration, including quality education and external guidance. This diversity in financial backgrounds highlights how income levels can shape parental support and influence, with lower-income families possibly prioritizing stable careers over exploratory ones.

Table 8: Educational Level of Parents:

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Secondary Education	41	29.3%
Master's Degree	35	25.0%
Bachelor's Degree	30	21.4%
Primary Education	19	13.6%
No Formal Education	10	7.1%
Higher Secondary	2	1.4%
Vocational Training	1	0.7%
Others	2	1.4%
Total	140	100.00%

This table shows that the educational backgrounds of parents significantly influenced students' career choices. A notable 29.3% of parents had completed secondary education and 46.4% of parents held higher education degrees (25.0% with master's and 21.4% with bachelor's), suggests that a significant number of parents were likely to encourage their children's academic and professional aspirations due to their own educational backgrounds, which can positively influence career choices. On the other hand, 7.1% of parents had no formal education, which may encourage immediate job stability over long-term career growth, limiting children's career aspirations and exploration. The impact of vocational training was minimal at 0.7%, with only 1.4% in other educational categories, reflecting limited guidance for specialized career paths.

Figure 9: Father vs. Mother: Who Influences Career Choices Most?



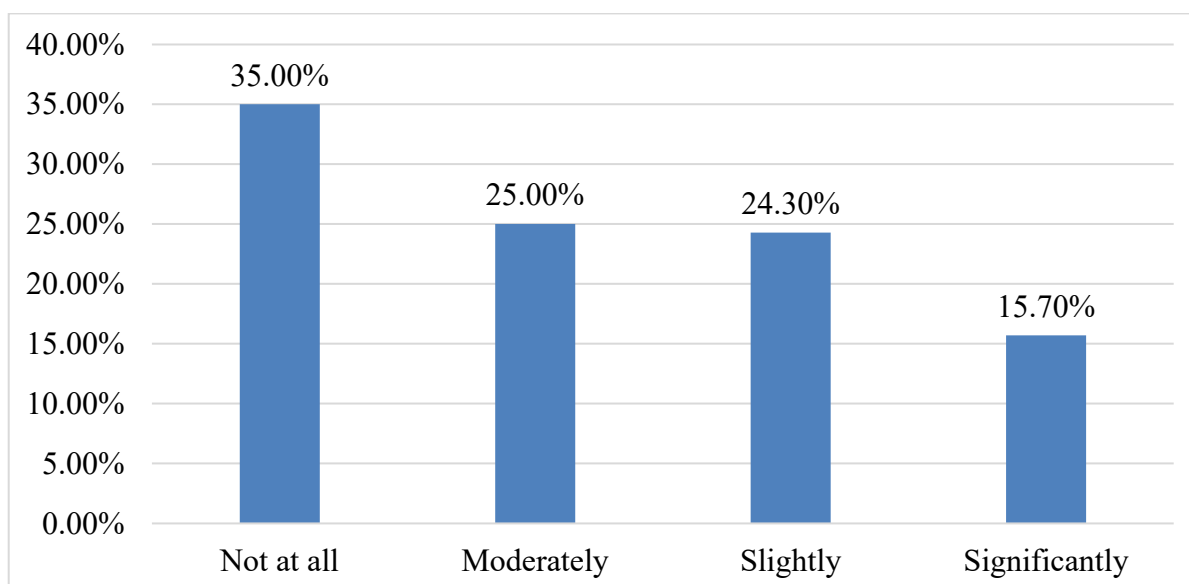
This figure indicates that fathers had a strong influence on students' career choices, with 60.0% of students identifying them as the primary guiding figure. This suggests that fathers often take a leading role in shaping career aspirations. Mothers also played an important role, with 40.0% of students reporting significant influence from their mothers, showing that career guidance is a shared responsibility between parents, even if fathers held a somewhat stronger influence. These results may reflect traditional perceptions of parental roles, where fathers were seen as key decision-makers.

Table 9: Impact of Parents' Profession on Students' Career Choice:

Profession of Parents	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Homemaker	44	31.40%
Teacher	29	20.70%
Businessman	20	14.30%
Farmer	12	8.60%
Banker	5	3.60%
Civil Service	5	3.60%
Labor	4	2.90%
Marketing Officer	4	2.90%
Health Assistant	3	2.10%
Others	14	10.00%
Total	140	100.00%

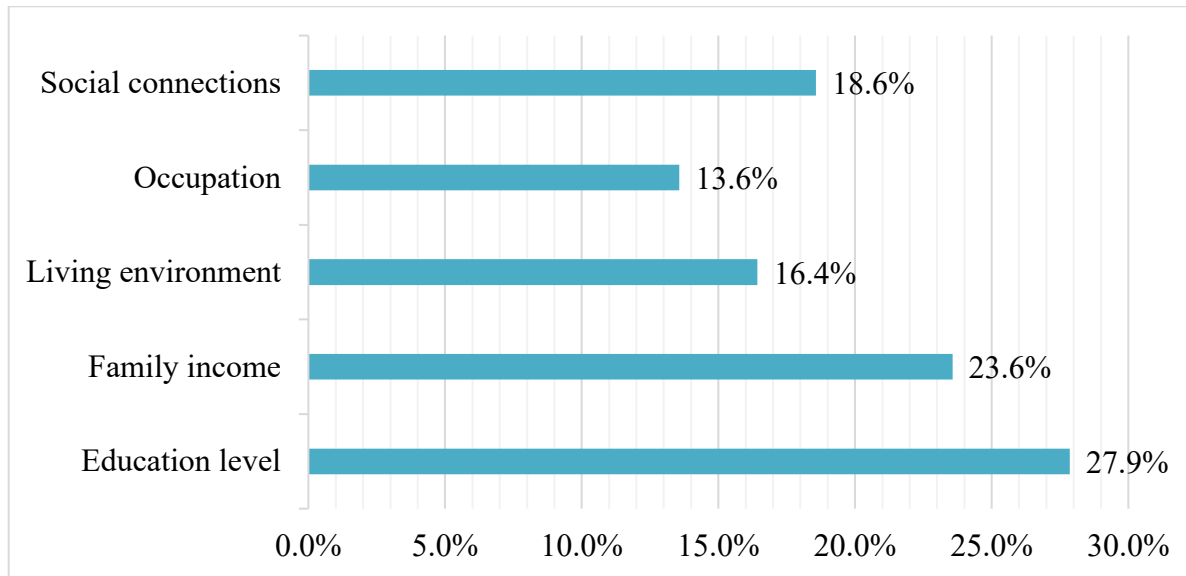
Table 9 reveals that the most common parental profession among respondents was Homemaker who didn't have father, cited by 31.4%, suggesting a strong influence toward stable, family-oriented careers. Teachers followed at 20.7%, likely fostering a value for education and encouraging students to pursue similar paths. Business professionals account for 14.3%, which may inspire entrepreneurial interests, while 8.6% came from farming backgrounds, potentially guiding students toward agricultural studies. Lesser representations include bankers and civil servants (3.6% each), labor and marketing officers (2.9% each), and health assistants (2.1%), indicating varied career influences based on parental professions. The "Others" category (10.0%) reflects diverse socio-economic backgrounds impacting students' career aspirations. Overall, parental professions significantly shape students' career choices, particularly in stable and educational fields.

Figure 10: Impact of Parents' Socio-economic Status on Career Choice:



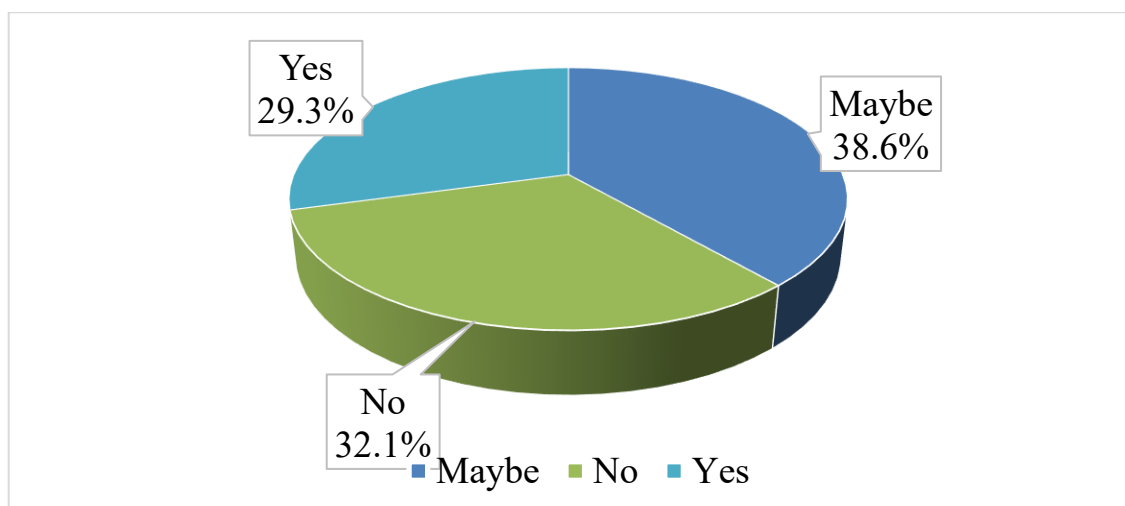
This figure represents that most students (35.0%) felt that their family's socio-economic status didn't affect their career choice, indicating that many feel independent to decide based on their own goals. About 49.3% felt slightly to moderate influence, meaning that family resources or expectations may play a role in their choices. Meanwhile, 15.7% felt their family's finances significantly shape their career path, often guiding them toward steady or high-paying jobs. In summary, while many students felt independent in their choices, a good number do feel some influence, showing that family finances can impact career plans in different ways.

Figure 11: Key Socio-economic Factors Influencing Career Choices:



This figure represents that most (27.9%) students identified parental education level as their biggest influence, suggesting that educated parents tend to encourage similar achievements or high-reaching career paths for their children. Additionally, 23.6% of students considered family income a major factor, likely steering them toward careers seen as financially stable. Social connections and the family's living environment also impact career perspectives, with 18.6% influenced by social connection and 16.4% by the living environment they grew up in. These influences reflected how exposure to various professions and lifestyles within one's social circle can inspire specific career interests. Additionally, 13.6% of students said that their parents' jobs directly influenced their own choices, potentially due to parental role-modeling in terms of career success or stability. Overall, parental education and income levels had the strongest impact on career choice. Social connections and environment also played an important role, highlighting the diverse ways that socio-economic background shapes career goals.

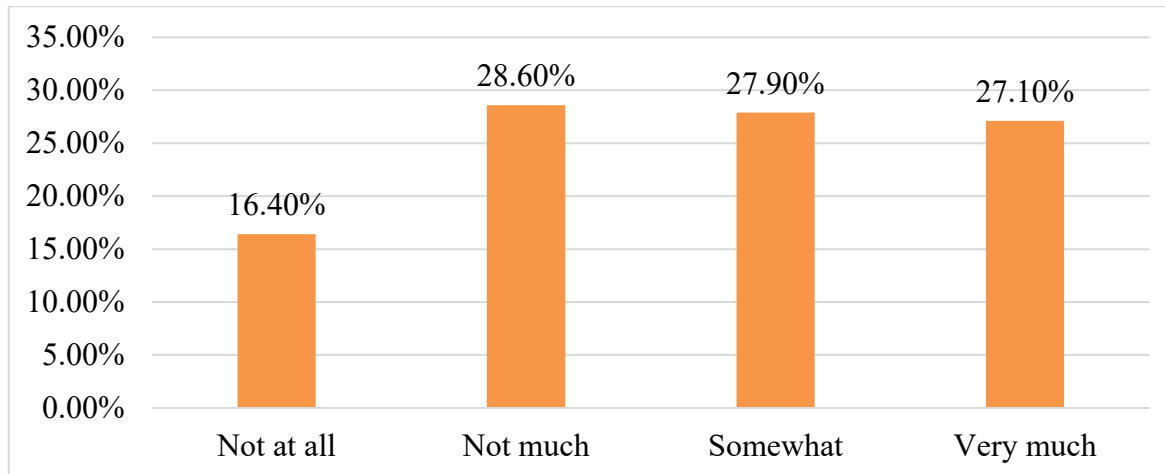
Figure 12: Impact of Parental Socio-Economic Status on Alternative Career Choice:



Collected data show that parental socio-economic status had a varied but noticeable impact on career choices. A substantial 38.6% of students felt that their path "maybe" would have changed with different financial or social conditions, suggesting that socio-economic factors played a quiet role in shaping career choices for many. Meanwhile, 32.1% of respondents believed their career choice would remain unchanged. And 29.3% acknowledged that their career would likely differ with an altered socio-economic background.

The parents' Cultural Background and Environmental Factors Influencing the Career Choice

Figure 13: Influence of Parents' Cultural Beliefs and Values on Career Choices:



This figure represents that nearly half of the students (45.0%) believed that their career choices are influenced minimally by cultural beliefs and values, with 16.4% stating "Not at all" and 28.6% responding "Not much." This suggests a growing trend towards individualism, where students prioritize their personal aspirations over traditional cultural expectations. On the other hand, 27.9% acknowledge a "Somewhat" moderate influence of cultural beliefs, indicating that while culture was not the main driving force, it still played a role in shaping their mindset. Additionally, 27.1% feel a strong influence from their parents' cultural values, highlighting that for many, cultural heritage significantly impacts career decisions. Overall, this data reveals a complex relationship between cultural context and individual career choices.

Reflection of the respondents

Table 10: Strategies for Effective Parental Involvement in Career Choices:

Suggestion	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Advice and Guidance	47	33.6%
Encouragement and Motivation	14	10.0%
Proper Environmental Condition	14	10.0%
Freedom and Opportunity	18	12.9%
Mental and Financial Support	32	22.9%
Discussion and Cooperation	15	10.7%
Total	140	100.0%

Table shows that strong majority of respondents (33.6%) emphasized the importance of parents providing advice and guidance in career decisions, reflecting the critical role that parental knowledge and experience played in

helping children understand various career paths. In addition, 22.9% recognized the value of mental and financial support, suggesting that when parents reduce economic pressures, children were more likely to explore different interests and career options. On the other hand, 12.9% of respondents appreciated the freedom to explore their career choices independently, highlighting the need for parents to create an environment that encourages autonomy and personal exploration. Furthermore, 10.7% emphasized the necessity of open communication and collaborative discussions, pointing out that regular conversations about career aspirations can align parental expectations with children's goals. Moreover, 10.0% of respondents stressed the significance of motivation and encouragement from parents, indicating that positive reinforcement can boost children's confidence in their career pursuits. Finally, another 10.0% identified the importance of a supportive environment, suggesting that parents should provide resources and opportunities that facilitate exploration and learning. Overall, the data underscores the diverse strategies parents can employ to support their children in making career choices. By balancing guidance with encouragement for independence, fostering open discussions, and creating a supportive atmosphere, parents can help their children make informed and satisfying career decisions.

DISCUSSION

The Interplay of Personal Autonomy, Financial Precarity, and Institutional Gaps

The findings reveal that higher education serves as the primary critical window for career identity formation, with 60.7% of respondents solidifying their career choices during their university years. This period is characterized by a strong sense of student self-determination: 57.9% report feeling no pressure from parental expectations, 42.9% claim total independence in selecting their path. This high degree of perceived self-direction indicates a broader generational shift toward individualism and merit-based career choices among tertiary students in Bangladesh.

However, this personal autonomy exists alongside significant economic vulnerability. A remarkable 75.0% of respondents operate within a low personal monthly income range of 0–10,000 TK, with 65.0% relying on private tutoring (tuition) as their primary means of self-support. While tutoring provides an immediate financial cushion, it is largely informal and temporary. This reliance on short-term income sources highlights how financial precarity can limit a student's capacity to engage in long-term career planning, unpaid internships, or specialized skill development.

Most critically, the data exposes an acute institutional transition gap: 29.3% of respondents remain completely undecided about their specific career path, even though 51.4% of the entire sample are in their final semester (fourth year, second semester). The presence of nearly one-third undecided students at the brink of graduation indicates that while universities foster independence, they currently lack the structural mechanisms such as mandatory career counseling, skill mapping, and industry networking that needed to translate student autonomy into concrete employment outcomes.

Familial Dynamics, Socio-Economic Anchors, and Risk-Averse Preferences

Parental involvement in student career choices operates primarily as a supportive framework rather than an authoritarian control. Parents influence their children mainly through practical means, providing financial support (41.4%) and offering direct advice or guidance (35.7%). Fathers were identified by 60.0% of respondents as the dominant parental influence figure, reflecting traditional socio-cultural structures where fathers manage primary financial outlays for higher education, though mothers play a vital role for 40.0% of students.

Where parents do express specific career preferences, their choices heavily lean toward traditional, risk-averse security. Government jobs are the undisputed favorite among parents (25.7%), followed by teaching (9.3%), banking (7.1%), and law (7.1%). This strong preference for public sector and formal roles stems from perceptions of long-term stability, social prestige, and job safety in a volatile economic environment. Conversely, high-risk avenues like private entrepreneurship (2.9%) or corporate employment (1.4%) receive minimal parental backing.

Socio-economic markers act as quiet but powerful determinants of career aspirations:

- Parental Education Level (27.9%) and Family Income (23.6%) emerged as the top two socio-economic factors driving student choices.
- Students from higher-income backgrounds (24.3% earning over TK. 150,000 monthly) and educated households (46.4% of parents holding higher degrees) benefit from a financial safety net that allows for exploratory, high-ambition choices in STEM (17.1%) or Business (14.3%).
- Conversely, lower household incomes (30.0% under 50,000 Tk monthly) often constrain student choices, pushing them toward immediate, stable income generation to assist family economics.

RECOMMENDATION

- Institutionalize mandatory career counseling, aptitude testing, and professional skill-mapping workshops starting in the third year to guide the 29.3% of students who remain undecided near graduation.
- Create structured on-campus assistantships to reduce student dependence on informal private tutoring (65.0%) and provide relevant job experience for the 75.0% earning under 10,000 Tk. monthly.
- Build direct corporate, research, and non-profit internship pipelines for Social Science (25.7%) and Arts (14.3%) faculties to broaden employment options beyond civil service exams.
- Align institutional career orientation programs with the core transition period, as 60.7% of students commit to their career path during their university enrollment.
- Expand state grants, startup incubators, and innovation funds to capitalize on strong student interest in STEM (17.1%) and Business (14.3%), boosting self-employment beyond the current 5.0% business engagement.
- Address socio-economic inequalities by expanding access to career resources in rural (25.0%) and suburban (12.9%) regions.
- Proactively engage professional career counselors and university advisors, building on the 52.9% of parents who already support external career guidance.
- Continue providing foundational financial backing (41.4%) and guidance (35.7%) while respecting student self-determination, supporting the 42.9% of students who prefer making independent decisions.
- Broaden home career discussions beyond traditional fields (government jobs, teaching, banking) to support emerging opportunities in technology, freelancing, and creative industries.
- Initiate career research, skill mapping, and networking during the 2nd and 3rd academic years rather than deferring decisions to the final semester (51.4% of respondents).
- Move beyond academic coursework to acquire digital, technical, and communication skills through freelancing (6.4%) and internships to stand out in the labor market.
- Maintain proactive dialogue with parents regarding personal career aspirations to align family expectations with real-world market demands.

CONCLUSION

The study on parental influence on university students' career choices reveals how socio-economic, cultural, and familial factors shape the career decisions of students in Bangladesh. The sample, primarily aged 21–23 with a balanced gender distribution and mostly from urban, nuclear-family backgrounds, provides a glimpse into the socio-cultural landscape influencing career choices. Many students made career decisions independently, yet parental guidance, often without direct pressure, plays a substantial role, with nearly half of the respondents

aligning their career ambitions with their chosen fields of study. Parental socio-economic status, including family income and educational background, significantly impacts students' career aspirations, with a considerable number indicating that financial stability and parental support have influenced their career paths. Cultural beliefs and gender roles appear less influential for most respondents; however, some students still experience subtle cultural expectations shaping their choices. Reflecting on parental involvement, students generally appreciate financial support, guidance, and motivation while valuing independence in decision-making. These findings underscore the importance of a balanced parental approach, where students receive support and autonomy to pursue careers that align with their individual interests and strengths. The study's insights hold relevance for educators, counselors, and parents, highlighting the need for open communication and resource availability to foster independent, satisfying career choices.

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