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Factors Influencing Youths' Career Aspirations: A Case Study of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan

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The paper measures youths' career aspiration index based on achievement, leadership, and educational aspirations and determines the role of career counselling and mentorship in career aspirations by applying heterogeneity bias-adjusted OLS on the primary data, collected through a questionnaire in the year 2020 from 1015 youth in Muzaffarabad, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, comprised of 42:58 male-female ratio. Findings show a 39 percent educational, 30 percent achievement, and 31 percent leadership aspirations index score with an overall index of 54 percent. The career plans, academic background, and mentorship appeared significant in shaping career aspirations among selective youth. It is suggested to hire qualified mentors and offer formal career counselling at institutions that can help in reinforcing youths' motivation and efforts for better career choices that will ultimately bridge the labour market gaps in the area.

Keywords: Career Aspirations, Youth, Mentorship, Career Counselling

1. INTRODUCTION

Career aspirations refer to the ambitions of individuals they want to accomplish and subsequently endure to turn them into reality. Career aspirations are generally connoted with the professions or occupations individuals aspire to join in their future course of career path. These aspirations are set forth as future planning to attain personal and professional satisfaction and play a significant role in career choices. Besides, this also represents the goals and expectations of individuals towards a specific course of action. Hence, career aspirations can be termed as long-run goals which are required to be settled for career progression. Johnson (1995) regarded career aspirations as point-in-time expressions of career-oriented goals.

According to Crites (1978) and Levinson (1993), career aspirations reflect the ability of individuals to make an appropriate career decision which should be realistic and should remain consistent over time. Successful career growth relies on the determinants of career aspirations and is influenced by various factors including lifestyle, mindset, norms, and personal aptitude of individuals. Career aspirations among youth depend on the extent to which they gain the knowledge and skills which is required for smart and practical career decisions. Such career aspirations and hence, decisions are crucial for

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bridging the industry-academia gap and the existing mismatch between available labour market opportunities and acquired skills, as well.

The significance of career aspirations has been widely recognised in the literature. Hellenga, et al. (2002) pointed out that career ambitions inform society about an individual's interests as well as hopes. When it comes to young people's personal development, social adjustment, and future well-being, good career preparation can serve as a development tool as well as a responsibility. Attempts have been made recently by career theorists and academicians to understand youth's professional choices to give signals to the educators of the twenty-first century. Providing opportunities to discuss and decide the career path with professionals, such as teachers and counsellors, is critically useful to reflect individuals' interests and goals and career options, and labour market demands which eventually lay down the educational requirements and possible avenues. According to the literature, those students who involve in career planning and mentorship programmes see a favourable transformation in their perspectives regarding their future careers (Schunk & Mullen, 2013; Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng & DuBois, 2008). In the context of Kram's Mentor Role Theory (1985), mentors offer career and psychosocial advancement to apprentices to grow within the company and to improve personally and professionally. Mentoring is a fundamental part of advancing one's administrative expertise and career. Conventional mentorship has played a significant role in assisting juniors who need to succeed in their professional goals. Those who were able to have a mentor in their life are more likely to grow in their careers, earn more money, and have a successful career than people without a mentor. Hence, students' career counselling sessions and other interventions are vital to providing students updated information about available options for career paths (Dreher & Ash, 1990; Scandura, 1992; Scandura & Schriesheim, 1994; Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000).

Several factors have been identified as the determinants of career choice other than mentorship. The system Theory Framework of Career Development cited by Patton & McMahon (2015) provides the basis for the development of an extended collection of constructivist approaches to career counselling and career assessment activities. Similarly, traits and behavioural researchers believe that career adaptability build up around one's future work is critical in generating proactive career behaviour (Taber & Blankemeyer, 2015). Similarly, personality traits, interests, cultural identity, socioeconomic status, parental educational and occupational background, family structure, globalisation and socialisation along with financial and social support are among other pertinent determinants of career aspirations.[1] Therefore, the factors determining career choice may be intrinsic, extrinsic, or both.

With this background, this study endeavored to quantify the career aspirations among youth and investigate the factors that influence their career aspirations. Approximately 64 percent of the population in Pakistan is below 30 years of age with 29 percent of them falling between the age group of 15-29 years, according to UNDP (2019). Azad Jammu and Kashmir, the point of the investigation, has 27 percent of the young population defined as the age group of 15-29 years old individuals as per information available in the Labour Force Survey (2017-18). Muzaffarabad is a self-governing state of Pakistan and has a 76.8 percent literacy rate with male-female literacy

[1]c. f. Kerka (2000).

ratios of 86.9:67.3 percent (Pakistan Statistics Bureau, 2017-18). The majority of students in Pakistan choose their careers haphazardly, with little thought given to any potential paths (Humayon, et al. 2018). Ahmed, Sharif, & Ahmad (2017) contend that if Pakistan's educated populace is unable to choose the appropriate careers, the nation would undoubtedly be unable to advance in such a challenging environment. According to Boon & Ilias (2011), students choose careers in a variety of ways. For example, some students lack a thorough understanding of the range of careers because either they are uninformed or they lack the necessary background. Due to this issue, they tend to base their professional decision on what their relatives or peers have done. Zeb, Ali, Rahman, Jan, & Khan (2020) while exploring the role of secondary school career aspirations employed an exploratory research approach and discovered that medical, teaching, engineering, and the military forces are the most inspired professions among the students of secondary school in Swat. Furthermore, male career aspirations are generally driven by socioeconomic variables, whilst females are mainly influenced by sociocultural factors. According to Nadeem & Khalid (2018), females exhibited stronger career aspirations than males. Tovar-Murray, et al. (2021) investigated the extent to which sociodemographic variables impact the links between self-efficacy beliefs, feminist beliefs, and career aspiration categories. She, et al. (2008) conducted a survey of 85 Chinese medical students to assess medical career aspirations and their relationship with family background, personal skills, English language proficiency, and interest in biomedical research, all of which appeared as significant factors influencing their career interest. Several recent studies investigate the features of Generation Z individuals (born between 1995 & 2012), their values, attitudes toward work and organisations, and how they adjust to the workplace. Barhate & Dirani (2021) discovered that intrinsic and extrinsic variables influence the career aspiration of Gen Z and concluded that Gen Z has well-defined professional standards and career development plans. To the authors' knowledge, no study is available specifically for the selected area which focuses on career aspirations among youth. The study contributes to the literature by highlighting the significance of awareness programmes and the establishment of an information management system for youth in the selected area by the government. It identifies the requirement for official career counselling facilities at colleges and the hiring of skilled mentors who can support students and their prospective counselors, parents, and universities by providing them with career guidelines and orientation programmes to facilitate the right and timely choice of career on the part of youth. This will eventually close the region's labour market disparities.

Specifically, the study focused on the construction of an overall career aspirations index based on the sub-scales of educational aspirations, achievement aspirations, and leadership career aspirations indices among youth aged between 15-29 years of Muzaffarabad, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJ&K) based on the information collected through a well-structured questionnaire. Secondly, the study empirically determines the lead factors of career aspirations including various socio-economic and demographic variables like age, gender, education, employment status, educational and family background, academic performance, career plans, mentorship, and religiosity.

The rest of the study is organized as follows; Section 2 deals with the review of the literature. Section 3 provides a theoretical framework, empirical model, data

description, and estimation technique along with summary statistics. Section 4 reports and discusses empirical findings. The last section concludes the chapter with policy implications.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) proposed by Lent, Brown, & Hackett (1994) elaborates on the process of decision-making and career development. The further development in research by Lent, et al. (2000) and Blanco (2011) suggested that career development behaviour is mainly inclined to socio-cognitive outcomes; intentions, career goals, and self-efficacy which is further connected with socioeconomic status, societal support, gender, cultural and societal obstacles. Gottfredson (1981) postulated that according to the development theory of occupation aspirations, career choice is conditional on cognitive development and a given social environment. The compromised decision among competing goals depends on the individuals' perceptions of opportunities. Alternatively, the three-dimensional framework provided by Carpenter & Foster (1979) and Beyon, Kelleen, & Kishor (1998) put forth intrinsic factors including personal interest and satisfaction with a job; extrinsic factors like jobs availability and monetary benefits including pay structures while the third dimension focuses on the interpersonal factors which involve family system, parental, peers and teachers' influence. Besides, Meece, Parsons, Kaczala, Goff, & Futterman (1982) provided the grounding for investigating certain factors i.e., academic performance and background through Career Choice Model.

In another study by Super (1985), individuals' personal recognition of their abilities, interest, and characteristics boost their self-esteem to determine their career path. According to Ismail, Ramly & Rasdi (2008), career aspirations are the desire of an individual which can relate to potential job prospects and can be attained if the individual put up serious effort into that direction. Similarly, Bandura (2001) recounted that career choices are influenced by talent, skills, academic achievements, and environment. Cantor (1990), Sellers, Satcher, & Comas, (1999) and Gati & Saka (2001) added the role of age and parental socioeconomic status in determining the career path of individuals and provided that aspirations become more focused when they move from young age to adulthood especially when their parents' socioeconomic status improves.

The empirical evidence on the subject matter shows the role of mentorship as a leading determinant of career aspirations. According to Dreher & Ash (1990), individuals who were able to seek advice from mentors were also able to secure job advancements, better salaries, and higher levels of job satisfaction than those who were not being mentored. According to Kram & Isabella (1985), peers can serve as an effective substitute for mentors in terms of both psychological well-being and professional growth. Lester, et al. (2011) conducted a six-month field experiment for two sub-groups; one who received leadership mentoring and the other who received group-based leadership educational programme. There was a significant difference in leadership efficacy and performance between the mentored and educated groups. Students appeared to feel more secure and inspired while working with a mentor from industrial background and have entrepreneurship exposure. This reflects that the nature of mentorship also matters in establishing one's career path. The studies by Scandura (1992) and Srivastava (2013) also provided similar evidence. Additionally, academic achievements are

also attached with the mentoring programme as supported by Maxwell & Connell (2013) and Jekielek, et al. (2002). Informal mentoring and structured mentoring programmes offer diverse evidence in self-efficacy and moving ahead on the leadership ladder (Ragins, Cotton, and Miller, 200l; Raabe & Beehr, 2003). Over time, the mentor has become a generic term broadly used for anybody who serves as a role model, coach, guide, sponsor, or counsel (Garvey, Stokes & Megginson, 2014). The mentorship supports individuals in realising their potential as well (Spencer, et al. 2016). In addition, a mentor can also exert a positive influence on adolescents who are at risk of academic failure by increasing retention rate, enthusiasm for learning, and academic success (Schargel & Smink, 2014). Lack of mentorship has also been considered a primary reason for poor academic career development and advancement by Ibegbulam & Jacintha (2016). The results of their study further show that research mentorship has a significant impact on how many publications are produced at the individual level.

Besides, other socioeconomic factors are also explored for their likely impact on career aspirations. Shumba & Naong (2012) examined the influential factors for 133 South African university students and found family's and students' ability and teachers' capabilities as significant factors in affecting students' career choices and aspirations. For a sample of 125 girls, Mesa (2013) provided that self-efficacy, parental influence, and school-related factors dominate girls' career aspirations. The role of the guardian is examined by Kumar (2016) for 175 respondents in Bahirdar, Ethiopia. Determining the head of household, the study found an overwhelming role of fathers' qualification and decision-making in career choice decisions among students as compared with mothers. The role of interventions in influencing career aspirations is investigated by Ahmed, Sharif, & Ahmad (2017) for a sample of 120 students. The counseling sessions and other sorts of interventions in providing information to the students appeared to play an important role. Moreover, affordability, employability, finances, and social class also influence career choices as is evident from Akosah-Twumasi, et al. (2018). The study found extrinsic, intrinsic, interpersonal, and emergent bicultural factors dominant in career choice among youth. In a case study of Pakistan, Arif, et al. (2019) found a little role of demographic factors in determining the career choices of selective students from the University of Management and Technology (UMT). Few other studies also investigated the role of family background, peers and friends, personal interest, teachers, mentors, and gender and found them significant (Tesha, 2020).

A number of factors have been identified as the drivers of career aspiration however, there is a dearth of studies for Pakistan that can portray not only the determinants of career aspiration but also reflects the level of career aspirations. The study related to youth in our selected location i.e., Muzaffarabad, Azad Jammu, and Kashmir has remained a neglected area to be discovered from that context. This study endeavors to fill in the gap in the literature by offering interesting insight. Additionally, the study also contributes to existing literature by constructing a career aspirations index of youth on three sub-scales of educational, achievements, and leadership aspirations. Mainly this study addresses the following questions; how well do the young people in Muzaffarabad, AJ&K, aspire to be leaders in the future? And to what extent do different socioeconomic and demographic characteristics affect the career aspiration of young people in Muzaffarabad, AJ&K?

3. METHODOLOGY

Career selection is imperative for its long-term bearing in terms of socioeconomic status, the standard of physical and mental health, and well-being. The inconsistency between individuals' needs and motives and the labour market demands may lead to low performance, subdued productivity, job discontent, depression, and stress (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Johnson (1995) specified career aspirations as an expression of career-related goals which tend to reflect in career choices and attainments in the future. Human Capital Theory by Schultz (1961), Becker (1964) & Mincer (1974) posits that higher education and skills training is instrumental in improving the productive capacity of individuals and in converting them to human capital. Investing in education not only enhances productivity but also provides social stability and a quality lifestyle. It turns out as better lifetime earnings with every higher year of schooling, better access to high-profile jobs, and brighter career prospects (Wahrenburg & Weldi, 2007). Mesa (2013) validates that people with good job aspirations set high learning goals as the quest for new skills and full-time jobs and overcoming career adversity go hand in hand with job descriptions. According to Adler's theory of ambition (1927), the desire to achieve a higher level of accomplishment is a natural motivation. The individual's drive to achieve perfection and advancement occurs to compensate for the emotions of inadequacies and struggle. The theory also highlights the value of self and social relationships and this is asserted that individuals are largely motivated by social incentives and life objectives. Overall, the theory of ambitions (Adler, 1927) and career development theory (Super, 1953) are working behind the empirical modelling of this study.

3.1. Research Design and Sample Size

The research is based on the primary data collected through a questionnaire from 1015 youth aged 15-29 years, from Muzaffarabad, AJ&K. The sample is comprised of 42 percent of males and 58 percent of females. Initially, a pilot survey was conducted for the accuracy of the questionnaire and was modified according to the received observations. Final data were collected in the year 2020 through a purposive sampling technique with the support of officials from private and government schools, colleges, and university located in Muzaffarabad.[2] The major questions in the questionnaire are related to the demographic factors, family and educational background of respondents, mentorship, and religiosity.[3] The quantitative analysis of data includes descriptive and inferential statistics both based on Ordinary Least Square (OLS) and Heckman-adjusted OLS due to possible heterogeneity bias in the sample. The data processing, statistical analysis, and estimation of the empirical model were done in SPSS and STATA software.

3.2. Empirical Model

The study adapted Gregor & O'Brien's (2015) revised measure of career aspiration where educational aspirations, leadership aspirations, and achievement

[2]The educational institutes in Muzaffarabad were visited and management were contacted for support in data collection between July-August 2020.

[3]Questionnaire is available on demand.

aspirations are the sub-scales for measuring the overall career aspirations index.[4] The benchmark model is specified below:

$$CAI_i = \beta_o + \beta_{1j}\sum_{j=1}^{4} DEM_{ij} + \beta_{2j}\sum_{j=1}^{3} CP_{ij} + \beta_{3j}\sum_{j=1}^{2} ACB_{ij} + \beta_{4j}\sum_{j=1}^{3} FAM_{ij} + \beta_{5j}\sum_{j=1}^{5} MENT_{ij} + \beta_6 ACP_i + \beta_7 REL_i + \varepsilon_i \quad \ldots \quad (1)$$

Where *i* refers to youth and *j* indicates respective number of categories in each variable. The variables include both the discrete variables measured as dummy variables and continuous variables. *CAI* stands for Career Aspiration Index. *DEM* refers to the demographic variables including age, gender, education, and current status, *CP* refers *to* career plans including the decision about the field of prospective career, support needed for career goals, and area of job preferences, *ACB* denotes academic background comprised of the mode of teaching and location of the school, *FAM* stands for family background including the gender of the head of household, number of siblings and members of a household. Similarly, *MENT* refers to mentorship-related variables like the role of the mentor in career progression, career mapping and planning, and internship opportunities. While *ACP* refers to the academic performance measured through individual position in class and *REL* stands for religiosity.

Career Aspiration Index (*CAI*), adapted from Gregor and O'Brien (2015) revised index of career aspirations, is based on 5-point Likert scale ranging between 0 and 4, where a higher score represents higher career aspirations. The indices at disaggregated level measure the degree to which respondents aspire to a leadership position within their career for the leadership aspirations index (*LAI*). The educational aspirations (*EAI*) subscale refers to the degree to which respondents aspire to continue education or training within their careers. And the achievement aspirations (*AAI*) subscale measures the degree to which respondents aspire to significant achievements and recognition within their careers.[5] The scores for each dimension are standardised by aggregating and applying the Human Development Index (HDI) formula on each dimensional index that ranges between 0-1, given as below:

$$AI_i = \frac{\sum_{j=1}^{6} x_{ij} - minimum\ value}{maximum\ value - minimum\ value} \quad \ldots \quad \ldots \quad \ldots \quad \ldots \quad \ldots \quad (2)$$

Where *i* refers to each dimension and *AI* stands for Aspiration Indices. Finally, the composite career aspiration index (*CAI*) is computed by equal weighted sum of each dimension, as follows:

$$CAI_i = \frac{1}{3}(LAI_i + EAI_i + AAI_i) \quad \ldots \quad \ldots \quad \ldots \quad \ldots \quad \ldots \quad (3)$$

3.3. Justification of the Determinants of Career Aspirations

The expected sign of age and gender can go in either direction. For some, career desires can tend to diminish as they get older while for some others it can maintain a high degree of prominence over time. Ginzberg (1952) assumed that young people's choices are more interests driven and less realistic. Studies provided that men tend to be more

[4]A test of reliability of the measure was applied in STATA 13 which yields a significantly high value of the reliability coefficient i.e., 0.80.

[5]See Gregor & O'Brien (2015) for further details.

focused on pay and management positions as compared with their counterparts. Similarly, women are largely inclined to develop their skills and qualifications (Burke & McKeen, 1994; Sturges, 1999; Powell, 2011). The aspirations based on location are expected to be high for youth living in urban areas as compared to rural areas where children are less likely to enroll due to limited educational facilities (Lu & Treiman, 2007; Acosta, 2006). Pakistan has a dual system of education, Urdu and English medium, and can offer diverse findings over the career aspiration. Parental background and religious practices have been identified as significant cultural-cognitive variables in literature which are likely to influence individuals' career choices (Wong, 2007; Wong & Liu, 2010). This is expected that high academic achievers are more likely to have high career ambitions than others. The success in educational setup is largely determined by the academic performance in summative assessments. The expectations are in line with the empirical evidence from Adragna (2009). Most people attribute their career success to their mentors. The mentors-mentee relationship has been considered an intimate learning alliance that happens formally or informally and can be attained at any point in life. According to Ezarik (2002), youth getting the chance of having mentors in their lives tend to get high grades, better self-esteem, and future plans.

3.4. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics of variables used in the analysis. The average age of the selected sample of youth is 22 years which is comprised of 58 percent of females. The average completed years of education are 14 years. *Current Status* is split into studying, currently in employment, and currently unemployed and data reflects majority sample is currently studying only i.e., 64 percent while 20 percent are also doing some jobs and 16 percent are willing to work but were not able to get a job at the point of data collection. Seventy-nine percent of respondents have decided on their prospective field of career for the future as compared to 21 percent who haven't decided yet. Forty-three percent of youth consider family support as the most important factor in pursuing their prospective careers. The majority of respondents are willing to do jobs in their own city (73 percent) which shows less inclination towards future mobility of respondents. A nominal number (2 percent) didn't show any preference. Around sixty-five percent of youth attend English medium schools and the location of these schools are in urban areas. Father is the head of the household (81 percent) in most cases. About 63 percent of youth classified their academic performance as above average and 22 percent regarded themselves as the top of class students in their academic career.

The variables on mentorship indicate that 32 percent of the sample think no one has any influence on them in decision making while 53 percent can recall a single such person in their lives. This is connected with the other variables of mentorship where again 52 percent have the view that mentors have little role in career determination. Comparatively, 32 percent regarded the considerable role of a mentor in career planning. When the question was asked about career mapping, a majority had no idea of this term but comparatively 34 percent of youth have some concrete career planning in their mind. The figures on career planning show some diversified situation here. Additionally, 61 percent have decided to do some sort of internship during or after their studies for getting some hand on practice. Table 1 provides summary statistics of the variables.

Table 1

Summary Statistics

Variable	Definition	Frequency	Mean/Sample Proportion
Demographic Features			
Age	age in years	–	22.50
			(3.99)
Education	Completed years of Education	–	13.74
			(2.60)
Gender	=1 if youth is male	424	0.42
Gend	= 0 otherwise		
Current Status	=1 if youth is studying		
Studying	= 0 otherwise	650	0.64
CurrEmpl	=1 if youth is currently employed	198	0.20
	= 0 otherwise		
Unempl	=1 if youth is currently unemployed	167	0.16
	= 0 otherwise		
Academic Background			
Mode of Education	=1 if mode of teaching was English only		
Eng	= 0 otherwise	657	0.65
Urdu	=1 if mode of teaching was Urdu only	301	0.30
	= 0 otherwise		
Regional	=1 if mode of teaching was Regional	35	0.03
	= 0 otherwise		
Both	=1 if mode of teaching was English and Urdu both	22	0.02
	= 0 otherwise		
Location	=1 if location of school is urban	671	0.66
Urban	= 0 otherwise (rural)		
Academic Performance			
Academic Performance	=1 if youth has top of the class performance		
Top Clas	= 0 otherwise	224	0.22
Above Avg	=1 if youth has above average performance	642	0.63
	= 0 otherwise		
Avg	=1 if youth has average performance	141	0.14
	= 0 otherwise		
Below Avg	=1 if youth has below average performance	8	0.01
	= 0 otherwise		
Family Background			
Head of Household	=1 if the head of household is father	818	0.81
Father	= 0 otherwise		
Mother	=1 if the head of household is mother	103	0.10
	= 0 otherwise		
GraMoth	=1 if head of household is grandmother	7	0.01
	= 0 otherwise		
GraFath	=1 if head of household is grandfather	35	0.03
	= 0 otherwise		
Husb	=1 if head of household is husband	22	0.02
	= 0 otherwise		
Uncle	=1 if head of household is uncle	5	0.05
	= 0 otherwise		
Brother	=1 if head of household is brother	14	0.01
	= 0 otherwise		
Self	=1 if youth is head of household	11	0.01
	= 0 otherwise		

Continued—

Table 1—(*Continued*)

Household Members		–	6.50 (2.48)
Career Plans			
Decided Field of Prospective Career (DFPC)	=1 if youth has decided field of prospective career = 0 otherwise	803	0.79
Support to Achieve Career Goals: Famsupp	=1 if youth needs family support to achieve career goals = 0 otherwise	438	0.43
Social	=1 if youth needs social support = 0 otherwise	184	0.18
Financial	=1 if youth needs financial support = 0 otherwise	357	0.35
All above	=1 if youth needs all of above supports = 0 otherwise	12	0.12
None	=1 if youth needs no support = 0 otherwise	24	0.02
Preference HomeT	=1 if youth's work preference is hometown = 0 otherwise	326	.32
AJK	=1 if youth prefers to work within city = 0 otherwise	418	0.41
Abroad	=1 if youth prefers to work abroad = 0 otherwise	221	0.22
Pak	=1 if youth prefers to work anywhere in country = 0 otherwise	34	0.03
Mentorship Influence	=1 if none has influence about career decision		
None	= 0 otherwise	320	0.32
One	=1 if there is a single person in life who influenced career decision = 0 otherwise	539	0.53
More	=1 if there are more than one person to influence career decision = 0 otherwise	156	0.15
Mentor None	=1 if mentor does not have any effect in the life = 0 otherwise	169	0.17
Large	=1 if the role of mentor is to a larger extent = 0 otherwise	319	0.31
Small	=1 if the role is to a small extent = 0 otherwise	527	0.52
Career Mapping Career Map Y	=1 if youth has heard about career mapping = 0 otherwise	448	0.44
Career Planning No	=1 if individual has not planned the career = 0 otherwise	103	0.12
Yes	=1 if youth has made his career planning = 0 otherwise	345	0.34
NA	=1 if youth has no idea about career planning = 0 otherwise	567	0.54
Internship:	=1 if youth plan to do internship = 0 otherwise	618	0.61
Religiosity			
Religious Rites/Prayers: Reg	=1 if youth observes religious rites regularly = 0 otherwise	1012	1.00
Sample Size	1015		

Notes: (1) Third column shows frequency and the last column depicts average values for continuous variables and sample proportion for discrete variables. (2) Standard deviation is reported in parentheses of continuous variables.

3.5. Estimation Technique

The empirical model is estimated by Ordinary Least Square (OLS) and Heckman-adjusted OLS technique due to possible heterogeneity bias in the sample. Heckman (1976, 1979) proposed a solution to the problem by offering a two-step procedure. In our model, the variable of youth's employment status may create heterogeneity bias. And running simple OLS regression with employment status as an explanatory variable of career aspirations may create a build-in-bias in the sample, because a number of factors relying on employment status can also influence career aspirations. To overcome this concern, a 2-step Heckman procedure is applied where the first step is to determine the selection process by estimating selection equation. The model choses the employment status variable carrying value 1 for yes and 0 otherwise in the Probit regression model. And the residuals of the selection equation are used to construct a bias control factor denoted by λ. This factor captures the effects of all unmeasured characteristics related to the employment status of youth. The magnitude and sign of the coefficient of λ indicates the existence and direction of heterogeneity bias. This procedure offers to control the selection effect and endogeneity as well.

Incorporation of the bias control factor (λ) changes Equation (1) in the following way:

$$CAI_i = \beta_o + \beta_{1j}\sum_{j=1}^{4} DEM_{ij} + \beta_{2j}\sum_{j=1}^{3} CP_{ij} + \beta_{3j}\sum_{j=1}^{2} ACB_{ij} + \beta_{4j}\sum_{j=1}^{3} FAM_{ij} + \beta_{5j}\sum_{j=1}^{5} MENT_{ij} + \beta_6 ACP_i + \beta_7 REL_i + +\theta\lambda_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (4)$$

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Career Aspirations among Youth

The computation of the career aspiration index shows the educational aspirations as highest among youth i.e., 39 percent followed by leadership aspirations scoring 31 percent and achievement aspiration 30 percent. The higher percentage of educational aspirations as compared to the other two indicators might be due to the high literacy rate in Azad Jammu and Kashmir i.e., 76 percent. The overall career aspiration index (CAI) carries a score of 54 percent, which can be regarded as a moderate level of aspiration among selected youth, looking at the computed ranges of the index. Table 2 shows that 18 percent of youth lies in the low career aspiration range, followed by 32 percent falling among high career aspirants while half of the sample are moderately career inspired among the selected sample of youth.

Table 2

Distribution of Youth around Career Aspiration Index

Career Aspirations	Frequency	Percentage
Low	180	18
Moderate	510	50
High	325	32
Total	1015	100

4.2. Determinants of Career Aspirations among Youth

The determinants of career aspirations are measured using Ordinary Least Square and Heterogeneity-bias adjusted OLS. As discussed in methodology, the Heckman 2-step procedure is applied for possible heterogeneity in the sample and the significant selection

Table 3

Determinants of Career Aspirations: OLS and Heterogeneity-Bias adjusted OLS Estimates

Dependent Variable: Career Aspirations Index (CAI)

	(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)	
Variables	OLS	Heckman	OLS	Heckman	OLS	Heckman	OLS	Heckman
Demographic Variables								
Age	–0.002	–0.008**	0.002	–0.004	–0.001	–0.009**	0.003	–0.005*
	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.004)
Education	0.001	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.000
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Gender	0.014	0.014	0.011	0.011	0.015	0.015	0.012	0.012
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Current Status								
Studying	_	_	0.081***	0.088***	_	_	0.080***	0.087***
			(0.019)	(0.019)			(0.019)	(0.019)
Currempl	_	_	0.071***	0.057***	_	_	0.070***	0.054***
			(0.020)	(0.021)			(0.020)	(0.021)
Employment Status								
Employed	0.010	–0.003	_	_	0.011	–0.004	_	_
	(0.016)	(0.017)			(0.016)	(0.017)		
Academic Background								
Mode of Teaching								
English	0.058***	0.063***	0.057***	0.062***	0.056***	0.061***	0.055***	0.060***
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Regional	0.002	0.009	0.012	0.020	0.002	0.010	0.012	0.021
	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.033)
Both	–0.020	–0.013	–0.025	–0.018	–0.022	–0.016	–0.027	–0.020
	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.040)	(0.040)
School Location								
Urban	0.000	–0.002	0.003	0.001	0.000	–0.002	0.002	0.000
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Academic Performance								
Top class	0.075***	0.072***	0.070***	0.068***	0.074***	0.071***	0.070***	0.067***
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.019)	(0.019)
Above avg	0.049***	0.048***	0.044***	0.042**	0.049***	0.047***	0.044***	0.042**
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Family Background								
Head of Household								
Father	0.049*	0.051*	0.048*	0.048*	0.053*	0.056*	0.051*	0.052*
	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.033)
Mother	0.072**	0.073**	0.068*	0.067*	0.071**	0.073**	0.067**	0.066*
	(0.037)	(0.037)	(0.037)	(0.036)	(0.037)	(0.037)	(0.037)	(0.036)
Gramoth	0.006	0.001	0.000	–0.012	0.013	0.009	0.006	–0.004
	(0.076)	(0.076)	(0.076)	(0.075)	(0.076)	(0.076)	(0.076)	(0.075)
Grafath	–0.003	–0.004	0.000	–0.003	0.003	0.004	0.006	0.005
	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.045)
Uncle	0.045	0.040	0.044	0.034	0.049	0.044	0.048	0.037
	(0.088)	(0.088)	(0.087)	(0.087)	(0.088)	(0.088)	(0.087)	(0.087)
Brother	0.017	0.025	0.012	0.015	0.019	0.027	0.013	0.017
	(0.059)	(0.058)	(0.058)	(0.058)	(0.058)	(0.058)	(0.058)	(0.058)

Continued—

Table 3—(*Continued*)

Siblings	0.003	0.002	0.002	0.000	_	_	_	_
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)				
Household Members	_	_	_	_	–0.004*	–0.005**	–0.003*	–0.004*
					(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Career Plans								
Decision About Field of Prospective Career								
Yes	0.038***	0.038**	0.032**	0.032**	0.038**	0.037**	0.032**	0.031**
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Support to Achieve Career Goals								
Social	0.024*	0.025*	0.024*	0.025*	0.025*	0.026*	0.024*	0.026*
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Financial	0.022*	0.025**	0.022*	0.025**	0.022*	0.025**	0.022*	0.025**
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Job Preference								
AJK	-0.004	-0.003	-0.006	–0.004	–0.004	-0.002	–0.005	-0.004
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Abroad	0.025*	0.026*	0.026*	0.027*	0.025*	0.026*	0.026*	0.026*
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Pak	0.033	0.035	0.022	0.024	0.030	0.033	0.020	0.022
	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.033)
Mentorship								
Person's Influence of CA								
One	0.029**	0.028**	0.026**	0.024*	0.030**	0.028**	0.027**	0.025**
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
More	0.048***	0.048***	0.040**	0.040**	0.045**	0.045**	0.038**	0.037**
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Role of Mentor								
None	0.022	0.022	0.021	0.020	0.022	0.022	0.021	0.020
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Large	0.029**	0.028**	0.026**	0.024**	0.030**	0.028**	0.027**	0.025**
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Heard about Career Mapping								
Yes	0.006	–0.003	0.003	–0.006	0.006	–0.004	0.004	–0.007
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.014)
Career Planning								
No	0.002	0.001	0.006	0.005	0.004	0.002	0.008	0.006
	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)
Yes	0.013	0.013	0.018*	0.018*	0.016	0.017	0.020*	0.021*
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Internship								
Yes	0.027***	0.032**	0.027**	0.032**	0.026**	0.031**	0.026**	0.032**
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Religiosity								
Rel.	0.091	0.133	0.105	0.150*	0.099	0.147*	0.112	0.162*
	(0.105)	(0.106)	(0.104)	(0.105)	(0.105)	(0.106)	((0.104)	(0.105)
λ	–	0.135**	–	0.148***	–	0.151**	_	0.163***
		(0.055)		(0.055)		(0.055)		(0.056)
Diagnostic Test Results								
N	1015	1015	1015	1015	1015	1015	1015	1015
R^2	0.11	0.11	0.13	0.13	0.11	0.11	0.13	0.14
Adjusted R^2	0.08	0.08	0.09	0.10	0.08	0.08	0.10	0.11
F-statistics	3.78***	3.87***	4.38***	4.49***	3.86***	4.00***	4.45***	4.60***
F-Test Prob > F	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
VIF	1.60	1.86	1.67	1.92	1.60	1.87	1.67	1.93
Breusch Pagan Test BP (χ^2)	0.63	0.55	0.74	0.63	0.68	0.67	0.81	0.79

Note: Values in parenthesis are standard errors. *Significance at 10 percent; **Significance at 5 percent; ***Significance at 1 percent.

term denoted by λ in our results identifies the presence of heterogeneity. Total of eight equations are estimated due to high collinearity among a few of the variables. The results in terms of sign and significance remain consistent throughout the regressions showing the robustness of the empirical findings. The results show demographic factors, academic background, family-related variables, career planning, and mentorship as significant determinants of career aspirations. The diagnostic test results show 11 to 14 percent of the variation in the dependent variable with respect to explanatory variables which is a reasonable number keeping in view the heterogeneity of the selected sample. The joint significance is validated via F-test. The variance inflation factor (VIF) for all equations depicts a value lower than 10 and indicates no sign of multicollinearity among included variables in respective equations.

Among the demographic variables age and current status of youth appeared as significant variables.[6] The results show that age has a negative effect on career aspirations implying the lower value of career aspiration with every passing year of age. Gottfredson (1981) asserted that individuals tend to sacrifice their ambitions to accommodate the ground realities with the passing of age. Career decision becomes more demanding with the advent of the age factor as supported by Gati & Saka (2001). For the variable *current status* three categories are used namely; studying, employed and unemployed. Taking *unemployed* as the base category results show that currently studying and employed youth have relatively higher career aspirations than unemployed individuals. Understandably, young people who are studying and/or are employed set the targets around their field of study and profession. Another demographic variable *gender* didn't show a statistically significant difference among male and female youths' career aspirations and is a good factor reflecting less gender bias towards aspirations in the selected area.

Coming towards the academic background and youths' performance, the *medium of instruction at educational institutes* shows that youth acquiring education in the *English* language has significantly high career aspirations than those whose medium of instruction is *Urdu*, the base category. Approximately, 30 percent of respondents in our sample have Urdu language as the medium of instruction as compared to 65 percent studying in English. This result signals the upshots of the dual education system which can exacerbate the socio-economic gaps among the youth of the area in the future. The role of *academic performance* is vital in inspiring youth as the students who are top of the class and produce above-average results have relatively higher career aspirations than the below average students, chosen as the base category. The result is in line with Bandura (2001) and Adragna (2009) who reported that career choices are largely influenced by the academic achievements of individuals. *The location of the educational institute* however remains insignificant in affecting career aspirations throughout the regression which might be due to the fact that there is not a significant diversity among the amenities in rural and urban areas of Muzaffarabad.

The variables on *family background* include the number of siblings of respondents, the number of household members, and the head of the household. And according to estimates, youth having their parents as heads of household have high career aspirations. In our sample, 81 percent of youth have father while 10 percent have a mother as their

[6]For parsimony, the results of equation 8 are interpreted in detail.

head of households with a nominal number of other categories (might be another reason for such results). Kumar (2016) pointed out that parents, especially the father, is the true drive behind children's motivations and ambition setting for their prospective futures. It also improves self-confidence among youth. This can be attributed to the cultural norms of the selected area as well. The result is consistent with Kumar (2016) that proved the significant role of the father in career choice. The *household* members are significantly negatively associated with career aspirations which shows that the larger the family size lower would be the career aspirations of youth. As the large family size puts pressure on available resources such as income and basic utilities including food, education, and health facilities, youth find themselves less aspirants. Besides, in large families per capita income tends to be lower and parents' attention also gets divided. According to Benedictis, et al. (2010) and Chaaban & Mansour (2012), large family size discourages school enrollment as parental investment tends to decline in schooling. Another study by Hetherington (1992) also supported a negative relationship between achievement and motivation with family size.

The factors related to career planning and mentoring are crucial in determining youth's career aspirations. The results show youth who have a firm decision about their future career path are more career inspired. Similarly, those individuals are more career oriented who consider social or financial support as the most significant factor to follow their planned career path than those who need family support to achieve career goals. O'Brien & Fassinger (1993) pointed out that the profession's choice and dedication may largely hinge on the socioeconomic status of the family. The location of *Job Preference* shows that those who endeavor to go abroad are more career inspired as compared with those who prefer to remain within their hometown. This is a logical finding and indicates the high ambitions cut across the target setting

The variables on mentorship offer interesting findings. The role of a mentor plays significantly a positive role in aspiring them for future career. The individuals having one or more such mentors have high career aspiration scores as compared to those who do not have any. The findings are consistent with literature like Tesha (2020) who found the role of teachers and mentors positively significant in career preferences choice. Further, the *role of mentor* or counselor is categorised into three categories and according to results, those individuals who regarded the role of mentor as pertinent are more career inspired than others. In other words, individuals having mentors feel more confident to pursue their career path. This factor highlights the significance of counselling in the early age of schooling among youth. Osborn & Reardon (2006) asserted that the support of a mentor in raising awareness, professionalism, and career information ultimately leads to better identification of interests, academic opportunities, and decision-making. The importance of career guidance and counselling in choosing a suitable career and profession is the need of time and cannot be ignored. Dreher & Ash (1990) also argued that climbing up the ladder of career success path is related to the presence of mentors in lives. When it comes to professional growth, mentorship becomes more valuable, especially at the earlier stage of career.

Moreover, those who have *planned their career* well have higher career aspirations as compared to those who don't have any idea. Moreover, those who don't have any career plans are not statistically significantly different from those who don't

have any idea, in terms of their career aspiration, another finding in line with the literature. Besides, individuals who consider an internship as mandatory are those who have high career aspirations as well. The internship experience contributes to professional growth and helps get financial benefits. Such programmes integrate classroom knowledge with workplace realism and provide the attendees a real-time experience along with unrolling new opportunities (Agboola & Ademiluyi, 2016). The variable *religiosity* also relates regularity in religious activities with high career aspirations.

Overall, the findings of the study are consistent with the Social Cognitive Career Theory, and Gottfredson's Theory of Circumscription and Compromise. Both intrinsic and extrinsic values and factors play a lead role in determining career aspirations among youth.

5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This was documented in the questionnaire and the prospective participants were well informed about the extent to which the privacy of their information would be protected during the whole course of the research. Despite this, most of the parents and particularly women chose not to respond to the questionnaire which leads the sample selection a bit sort of a convenient sampling. This study can be further supported by investigating the quantity and quality of counselling centers in the region.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The study is based on the micro-level data collected from the youth of age 15-29 from Muzaffarabad, AJ & K. The data was collected in 2020 through purposive non-probability sampling and OLS and Heckman-Adjusted OLS for heterogeneity bias were applied for estimating the determinants of career aspirations among selected youth. The career aspiration index is calculated on the basis of O'Brien (2015) revised scale which is further based on three subscales on educational, achievement, and leadership aspirations indices. The overall index shows the average value of the educational aspirations index is 39 percent, the leadership aspirations index is 31 percent and achievement aspirations is 30 percent. The overall percentage of the career aspiration index is 54 percent, which is considered as moderately career aspired youth. The demographic features, family background, academic background, career planning, mentorship, and religiosity are regressed on the computed career aspiration index which shows that youth who are good academic performers have decided about the field of prospective career, prefer to work abroad in future and less hesitant in terms of mobility have relatively high career ambitions than their counterpart. The role of mentorship and career planning also signifies the importance of counselling in determining youths' career aspirations. The overcrowded home, financial hurdles, low academic performance, lack of career motivations, and hence, limited planning deprive them for setting high ambitions in life. Although many youths who haven't planned their career (12 percent of the sample) and those who don't have any idea about it (54 percent) are less career-inspired as compared to a smaller number i.e., 34 percent of individuals who have planned their career. The majority (79 percent) have already decided about their prospect career and 61 percent consider internship as crucial in their career path. In contrast, almost half of the sample have never heard about career mapping. These are the factors that need attention to enable the youth of the selected area to gain self-confidence to explore various career

paths and achieve their well-informed career goals adequately and in a timely manner. The study highlights the unprecedented role of counselling and mentorship in this regard.

Moreover, the study suggests familiarising youth with career mapping, providing them opportunities for internship and accessibility to career counseling centers. An appropriate and formal counselling programme is expected not only to improve career aspirations among youth but also to support society in bridging the gap between academia and industries. The frustration and feeling of deprivation among youth can be mitigated by providing them timely support to choose such a career which bridges the demand-supply gaps in the labour market as well. A critical evaluation and monitoring of existing internship programmes in the area might be another focus to serve its purpose effectively.

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