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PERCEIVED PARENTAL INFLUENCE & CAREER DECISION MAKING SELF-EFFICACY AMONG PAKISTANI UNDERGRADUATES

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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between perceived parental influence and career decision-making self-efficacy amid the Pakistani undergraduate students. The objectives of study were, to understand that how Pakistani undergraduate students' confidence in making career decisions is linked to how much influence they feel their parents have; To examine whether parental support and involvement affect students' career decision-making confidence, regardless of their gender or which year of study they are in; and to provide practical, research-based suggestions on how universities in Pakistan can better involve families in the career counselling and guidance services. Three hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The results of the hierarchical regression analysis showed that, although gender and academic year had no significant effects, perceived parental significantly influence predicted CDM-SE, accounting for 11% of the variance ($\beta = .33$, $p < .001$). These results demonstrate the continued value of family guidance in Pakistan's changing educational environment. To evaluate the longevity and regional variation of parental influence on students' career self-efficacy, future research should employ longitudinal approaches that incorporate parent perspectives.

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INTRODUCTION

Family loyalty and interdependence are highly valued in Pakistani society, where parents, in particular, have a significant influence upon their children's personal and professional paths. According to Sanavi (2013), about 86% of the Pakistani households use an authoritative but supportive parenting style, characterized by warmth, high expectations, and active parental

involvement. In many Pakistani families, parents often see themselves as the primary decision -makers, especially regarding their children's education and future careers. This involvement, though driven by care and responsibility, can overshadow the advice students might get from professional career counselors or teachers. As Creamer and Laughlin (2005) note, in collectivist cultures like Pakistan, what the family says often carries more weight than guidance from the educators and other institutional figures. The study, Nazeer (2025), show that many parents support their children independence, but socioeconomic class and educational awareness vary. Parental pressure, especially in low-income households, limits students' ability to make their own professional decisions, often leading to conflicts between personal likings and academic choices.

Secondary school students want to pursue careers in medicine, engineering, teaching, and the military. Girls tend to prefer medicine and teaching, whereas boys are more inclined towards medicine, engineering, teaching, and military. The study revealed apparent gender disparities in the career choices (Hussain, Tariq & Samad, 2025). Most Pakistani youth seek professional career advice when choosing the career. Adolescent women are more likely than men to select careers based on their parents' professions and fields. The study shows that media, personal preferences, and upbringing influence young Pakistani professionals' career choices. Pakistani youth, especially women, seek expert career coaching, and women are more likely than men to let parents decide their careers. This study sheds light on Pakistani decision-making processes regarding careers and proves how career counseling can assist adolescents in making their choices. It acclaims that society establish awareness programs to help to make the informed choices (Shakil, Ali, Khan & Iqbal, 2025). Nowhere is this influence felt more strongly than in career choices.

Cultural expectations mean that sons and daughters alike are generally expected to respect and often follow paths their parents recommend. The choice of academic career among Pakistani youth, and the subsequent satisfaction and dissatisfaction that follow, are mainly influenced by social factors, according to Arif, Iqbal, and Khalil (2019). Pakistani parents overwhelmingly support certain professions when it comes to their children's career choices, especially those within the medical domain, as they associate them with success indicators like social prestige, fame, and a good income (Nawabi, Mahboob, & Iqbal, 2016). Research by Saleem (2014) shows fathers, tend to steer children toward professions considered secure and prestigious fields such as engineering, medicine, government service. While style of guidance can differ for sons and daughters, parental oversight spans all disciplines. In conservative, rural areas, daughters may face stricter rules about what careers are deemed suitable, reinforcing traditional gender roles. As family preferences often outweigh students' interests, labour market realities, any effective career counselling program in Pakistan must account for depth and complexity of the parental influence.

Objectives of Study

1. To understand how Pakistani students' confidence in making career decisions is related to how much influence they feel their parents have.

2. To examine parental support and involvement affect on student career decision making confidence, regardless of gender or year of study.
3. To provide practical, research-based suggestions on how universities can better involve families in career counselling & guidance services.

Significance of Study

The important family dynamic of parenting has multifaceted impact on family. The perception of parents' social influence on all aspects of an individual's development varies. This factor affects students throughout their lifelong career development process at the undergraduate level, which is crucial for the career decision-making. It is essential to identify the correlation between the perceived parental influence and career decision-making self-efficacy within the context of Pakistani culture, where 86.6% of parents practice authoritative parenting (Sanavi et al., 2013), as this can serve as the strong predictor of the influence on career decision-making self-efficacy.

Hypotheses of Study

1. There is a positive association between parental influence and career decision-making self-efficacy of thw undergraduates.
2. There are differences in perceived parental influence and career decision-making self -efficacy between male and female.
3. There is a significant association between parental influence on career decisions and the year of the undergraduate study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Pakistan higher education system has experienced rapid growth in the recent years, with university enrollment increasing by approximately 7% annually since 2015 (World Bank, 2022). However, career counselling and professional guidance services have not kept pace with this growth (Akbar, Ahmad, & Muhammad, 2023), so many students continue to rely heavily on their families—especially their parents—when making important career decisions. A national graduate tracer study by Higher Education Commission (HEC, 2021) found that nearly two-thirds of students (64%) turn to their parents for career advice more often than they consult teachers or use online platforms. As job markets evolve, parents are becoming more proactive in guiding their children toward emerging and in-demand fields. Information technology and renewable energy are areas where Vision 2025 predicts 46% increase in employment requiring digital skills by 2030 (Planning Commission, 2021), noted by UNESCO (2023) and Rahman and Shabir (2020).

Parental support and awareness of available scholarships contributed to a significant increase in proportion of Pakistani female students enrolled in STEM fields, from 28% in 2010 to 41% in 2022. To keep pace with these changes, universities could implement evidence-based practices like labour market dashboards, parent advisory boards, and family career academies. These interventions shown ability abroad, raising graduate employability by 15% in Nordic countries (Larsen, 2020) and locally, with pilot programs in Lahore improving CDM-SE scores by 0.45

standard deviations (Ali & Batool, 2022). Another study suggests that parents' profession is the strongest factor, social media is the second most influential factor, and personal preferences and professional career guidance are the least influential factors in choosing a career among the Pakistani university students (Shakil et al., 2025). The impacts of maternal and paternal inspiration on teenage personal development are examined, focusing on autonomy-supportive parenting.

It explores how parents' facilitation, inspiration, modeling, and rewarding influence adolescent growth. According to self-determination theory, the autonomy-supportive parenting promotes intrinsic motivation and self-actualization (McAnally & Hagger, 2024). Gillani, Abbasi, and Manzoor (2025) study whether maternal and paternal enticements differently affect adolescent growth and how demographic variables impact these outcomes. The findings of study confirm that maternal inducement, particularly facilitation and encouragement, significantly influences personal growth, whereas paternal inducement does not. Interestingly, maternal and paternal rewarding behaviors are inversely related to personal growth, indicating that undue reliance on external rewards may hinder self-directed development. Higher maternal education was inversely associated with personal growth, possibly because increased academic demands limit autonomy (Teuber et al, 2022). According to theoretical background of the current study, Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, Lent's Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT; 1994) emphasise that self-efficacy develops over vicarious learning, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal.

Parental modelling of career exploration provides mastery experiences, thereby enhancing career decision-making self-efficacy (CDM-SE) (Betz, 2007). The varying role of parental effect in forming career self-efficacy is further supported by recent research. The impact of parental instrumental support on CDM-SE has increased over time, according to a systematic review by Kim and Lee (2024) that examined 42 longitudinal studies from East and South Asia. The beta coefficient for pre-digital cohorts (1990–2005) was 0.18, while for post-2015 university entrants, it was 0.29. This increase is attributed to parents having easier access to digital tools, which enable them to gather, share information relevant to their careers more efficiently. Raza and Noor (2023) conducted meta-analysis across seven provinces in Pakistani context. A moderate and relationship was suggested amid students' career self-efficacy and parental involvement, as indicated by pooled correlation coefficient ($r = 0.31$). Disciplines differ in the strength of this influence.

It is weakest in the arts, where expected income volatility may result in less parental support, and strongest in the STEM programs, where parents see steady employment prospects. These results underscore the importance of tailoring interventions to the specific field of study and local context to maximise their effectiveness. According to Choi et al. (2012), meta-analyses show modest to moderate correlations between parental support and CDM-SE. In South Asia, choosing a STEM major is often influenced by parental encouragement (Saleem et al., 2014), but parental control, particularly in a gendered context, remains important (Sarwar, 2016). Still, Pakistani evidence remains fragmented and is often limited to the qualitative articles or single

faculties. Guided by SCCT, we hypothesized (H1) that there is a positive relationship between perceived parental influence and CDM-SE. Additionally, we assessed the incremental variance explained by parental influence beyond gender and academic seniority using hierarchical regression.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Participants & Sampling

A convenience sample of 234 undergraduates (49 % female) aged 18–25 years (M = 21, SD = 1.9) was drawn from six faculties at the Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan. Power analysis (G" Power 3.1) suggested that ≥191 of respondents would detect a small effect (r = .20) with 80 % power (α = .05).

Table 1

Demographic Information

Characteristics	N	%
Age of respondents		
18	14	6.0
19	29	12.4
20	51	21.8
21	47	20.1
22	43	18.4
23	32	13.7
24	09	3.8
25	09	3.8
Gender of respondents		
Male	119	50.9
Female	115	49.1
Year of undergraduate study		
1	40	17.1
2	39	16.7
3	61	26.1
4	65	27.8
5	29	12.4
Current academic discipline		
Arts and Humanities	32	13.7
Business and Economics	16	6.8
Chemical and Life Sciences	32	13.7
Numerical and Physical Sciences	16	6.8
Social Sciences	80	34.2
Technologies and Engineering Sciences	58	24.8

Note: n= number of sample; %= percentage of sample

A thorough summary of the study's participants, comprising 234 undergraduate students from Abdul Wali Khan University in Mardan, is provided in demographic table. Age distribution ranged from 18 to 25 years, with majority being 20 (21.8%) and 21 (20.1%) years old, indicating

that most were in the middle of their academic programs. The gender distribution was almost evenly split, with 50.9% males and 49.1% females, thereby enhancing the gender balance of the sample. All academic years were represented, although the most significant percentages were in third (26.1%) and fourth (27.8%) years. This is important as students in these years are more involved in choosing a career. A broad spectrum of academic fields was represented, with the Social Sciences accounting for largest group (34.2%), followed by technology and engineering (24.8%), arts and humanities, chemical and life sciences (each 13.7%) in smaller proportions. The least represented fields were Business and Economics, Numerical and Physical Sciences (each at 6.8%). This demographic diversity enhances study robustness by capturing wide range of student experiences and perceptions regarding parental influence and self-efficacy in career decision-making.

Research Instrument

The study used two established tools to measure key variables. The Parent Career Behaviour Checklist (PCBC) assessed students' views on their parents' support and involvement in career planning through 23 items—covering emotional support and practical actions—rated on a 1–5 scale. To gauge students' confidence in making diverse career decisions, the 25-item Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale-Short Form (CDSE-SF) was used. Consequently, both tools provided a clear picture of how parental support relates to students' confidence in their career decision-making.

Table 2

Scale Properties

Scale	Items	M	SD	Range	Cronbach's α
PCBC*	23	82.75	19.72	88	.93
CDSE-SF	25	86.57	16.54	90	.92

*PCBC Parent Career Behaviour Check list CDSE-SE

The table shows that students scored average of 82.75 on 23-item PCBC, suggesting generally strong perception of parental involvement in their career development. However, the range and variation in responses also indicate that level of parental involvement varied significantly from student to student. With score range of 90, the Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale – Short Form (CDSE-SF), comprising 25 items, yielded a marginally higher mean score of 86.57 and a standard deviation of 16.54. This implies that most students had confidence in their ability to make decisions related to careers. Cronbach's alpha values for PCBC and CDSE-SF were 0.93 and 0.92, respectively, indicating that both the instruments demonstrated excellent internal consistency and reliability in measuring the intended constructs among the Pakistani undergraduates.

Procedure & Analysis

The university review board granted ethical clearance. The participants completed an online survey after providing informed consent, with confidentiality & right to withdraw emphasized. The average completion time was 10 minutes. Data were screened for multivariate outliers

(Mahalanobis p < .001). Similarly, the Pearson correlation tested H1. A hierarchical regression entered gender and year at Step 1, thereby followed by PCBC at Step 2 to evaluate incremental validity.

RESULTS OF STUDY

Table 3

Discipline-wise Descriptive Statistics

Discipline	N	PCBC M	PCBC SD	CDM-SE M	CDM-SE SD
Arts & Humanities	32	78.2	18.4	83.1	17.5
Business & Economics	16	80.5	16.9	85.6	14.8
Chemical & Life Sci.	32	85.9	20.1	88.4	15.2
Numerical & Phys. Sci.	16	79.3	21.0	84.9	18.0
Social Sciences	80	83.7	19.9	87.5	16.1
Tech & Engineering	58	84.1	18.7	89.3	15.8

The discipline-specific descriptive statistics are presented highlighting the differences in career decision-making self-efficacy (CDM-SE) and perceived parental influence (as determined by PCBC) across various academic fields. The highest average CDM-SE score was reported by students in technology and engineering (89.3), closely followed by those in chemical and life sciences (88.4). This suggests that students in fields are more confident in their career-related decisions. In a similar vein, Chemical & Life Sciences (85.9) and Tech & Engineering (84.1) had the highest mean parental influence scores, suggesting that parents were very involved in these fields. Students in the Arts and Humanities, on the other hand, had the lowest average scores for CDM-SE (83.1) and parental influence (78.2), indicating comparatively lower levels of self-efficacy and familial engagement. These trends suggest that parental support may be solider in fields like science and engineering, which are perceived to have more defined career paths or better economic prospects. This would further support the hypothesis that there is a positive association between parental influence and the career decision-making self-efficacy of undergraduates.

Table 4

Correlation

Variables	PCBC	CDSE-SF
PCBC	—	.33" "
CDSE-SF	.33""	—

The table highlights the connection between level of support students feel from their parents and their confidence in making career-related decisions. The findings reveal a moderate yet significant positive correlation between these two factors (r = 0.33, p < 0.001). In simple terms, when students believe their parents are more involved and supportive, they tend to feel more confident about making choices related to their future careers. Initially, factors such as gender and academic year did not show significant influence on student decision-making confidence. However, when parental influence was added to analysis, it explained 11% more of difference

in students' confidence levels statistically significant result. The beta value (β = 0.33, p < 0.001) confirms that parental support plays weighty role in enhancing students' self-efficacy in career decision-making.

Table 5

Hierarchical Regression Predicting CDM-SE

Step	Predictors	B	R^2	ΔR^2	F_change
1	Gender, Year	.04	.01	—	1.27
2	+ PCBC Total	.33"	.11	.10	26.45"
3	+ PCBC × Gender	.05	.12	.01	2.30

Note. p < .001; VIF < 1.8 rules out multicollinearity.

Table 5 presents results of a step-by-step analysis aimed at understanding how well parental influence predicts students' confidence in making career decisions. In first step, the researchers examined whether gender and academic year had any impact on the results. These two factors, however, explained only 1% of the variation in students' career decision-making confidence, and that difference was not statistically meaningful (F = 1.27). This claims the rejection of hypothesis 3, and admits that there is no significant association between parental influence on career decisions, and the year academic level had minimal impact on how confident students felt about their career choices. When the total PCBC (Parent Career Behaviour Checklist) score was incorporated in Step 2, the model's explanatory power improved significantly, explaining 11% of the variance (ΔR^2 = .10, F_change = 26.45, p < .001), with strong beta coefficient (β = .33), indicating that perceived parental support is predictor of CDM-SE. To see if the effect differed by gender, an interaction term between parental influence and gender was added in Step 3. However, this term was not significant (β =.05), hence rejecting the null hypothesis that there are significant differences in perceived parental influence career decision-making self-efficacy between male and female respondents in study, indicating that relationship between parental influence and self-efficacy is the same for both male and female students. Besides, values of the Variance Inflation Factor less than 1.8 indicate that multicollinearity was not a significant issue for model.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study support the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), especially the idea that students' confidence in their ability to choose a career is positively affected by strong parental support. The correlation identified in this study (r = 0.33) matches findings from international research, like Betz (2007) and Akbar, Ahmad, and Muhammad (2023), indicating that the impact of parents on students' career confidence is not unique to Pakistan; it is seen in cultural contexts. Nazeer (2025) shows many parents support their children independence, but outcomes vary depending on socioeconomic status and educational awareness. Still, even with this significant linking, much of what shapes students' confidence in making career decisions remains unexplained. This suggests that other factors, such as peer encouragement, teacher mentoring, or access to career information, may also play crucial roles. As Shakil, Ali, Khan,

and Iqbal (2025) and Ullah, Kaleem, and Aamir (2020) mentioned, factors influence students' career choices.

Interestingly, unlike earlier studies like Khan (2015), highlighted gender-based differences in how parents influence their children, this study found no such distinctions. Girls tend to prefer medicine and teaching, whereas boys are inclined towards medicine, engineering, teaching, and the military. The study revealed apparent gender disparities in career choices (Hussain, Tariq & Samad, 2025). This could show that traditional gender roles in Pakistan are gradually changing. The results also revealed no significant link between parental influence on career decisions and the students' year of study, aligning with findings from (Schnabel et al, 2002). Shakil et al (2025) demonstrate how career counseling can assist adolescents in making their choices. Practically, these findings suggest that universities should involve families in their career guidance programs. One practical approach is to establish "family career academies," where parents and students can learn about job trends through simple, interactive sessions. Mobile reminders with tips can encourage supportive parental behavior, potentially boosting student confidence. Still, since this study was cross-sectional and based on self-reports, more long-term research involving parents is necessary to understand how these influences develop over time.

CONCLUSION

In light of above discussion, it has been concluded that there is a strong influence of parents' choices upon the decisions of undergraduates regarding career making. Further, no significant differences were observed in perceived parental influence, career decision-making self-efficacy between male and female respondents in the study. There is also no significant association found amid parental influence on career decisions and year of undergraduate study. Perceived parental effect significantly boosts Pakistani students' confidence in making career decisions. Supportive parental guidance helps students make informed choices, especially as the country moves toward a knowledge-based economy. The open parent–child communication can align educational paths with the job market needs, strengthening future contributions to the national development.

Recommendations

1. Engage Parents: Involve them in career counselling through webinars, academies, and advisory panels.
2. Offer Toolkits: it provide simple PCBC-based guides to support the parent–child career talks.
3. Use Digital Reminders: to send the career tips to the parents via WhatsApp and mobile messages.
4. Promote Awareness: Align curricula with the labour market needs through university–policy collaboration.
5. Support Research: Encourage studies that explore the long-term and regional impacts of parental influence.

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