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GENDER AND THE PURSUIT OF CAREER ASPIRATIONS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DHAKA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the contributing factors of society, family, and institutions to the secure desired career of the students at the University of Dhaka, particularly concentrating on gender difference. This study used simple random sampling to achieve an equitable gender distribution, gathering data from 100 undergraduate and postgraduate students via an online survey using a quantitative research methodology. The research indicated that male students were more inclined to choose occupations emphasizing financial security, leadership, and individual ambitions. By contrast, female students prioritize careers that offer a balance between work and family responsibilities. Familial support emerged as a significant determinant of female career aspirations, whereas male students benefited more from peer support and institutional opportunities. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to examine the relationships between career aspirations and influencing factors, revealing that societal norms and patriarchal values shape these aspirations distinctly for each gender. The findings of the study stress the necessity for policy interventions to augment institutional support and dispel societal stereotypes that restrict female students to achieve their expected careers. The objective of the study is to advocate for equitable career opportunities among all students at the University of Dhaka, particularly by fostering a congenial and convivial atmosphere for study and career opportunities.

Keywords: University of Dhaka, quantitative research approach, career aspirations, institutional support, societal stereotypes

INTRODUCTION

To assist authors in presenting their work so that editors can quickly review it, CRC Gender differences in career aspirations are crucial to understanding social inequality and economic development. At the University of Dhaka, gender-based expectations reveal how sociocultural and economic influences affect young people's career decisions. Male and female students' aspirations diverge because of societal norms, family dynamics, and educational opportunities. Women often seek careers to balance their personal and professional lives, while men opt for high-risk, high-reward opportunities (Di Martino et al., 2020). Girls' self-empowerment in Bangladesh

meets with some hurdles, such as, mounting expectations of family, societal gender stereotypes, and downsized facilities. (Yasmin & Husna, 2020).

The Kaleidoscope Career Model indicates that female students' aspirations are driven by authenticity, balance, and challenge, especially in patriarchal society where constrainted movement and domestic responsibilities navigate career choices (Ashraf, 2021; Anwar, 2015). Familial support significantly influences women's career development, while socio-cultural barriers, such as gender biases and family burdens, deter ambitious career pursuits (Yasmin & Husna, 2020; Rahmatullah & Zaman, 2014). Fields such as engineering see fewer female participants owing to confidence issues and a lack of role models and support networks (Saifuddin et al., 2013). Cultural and social networks are more influential than formal institutional factors in determining female entrepreneurship in Bangladesh (Sobhan et al., 2021). Gender roles and socioeconomic class also impact women's ability to own businesses (Huq, 2000). Women face help in pursuing careers in science and engineering, which is attributed to their lower interest and self-concept in these fields (Direito et al., 2017). Self-efficacy and social support are more impactful for men pursuing engineering education (Saifuddin et al., 2013). Married women pursuing higher education abroad face institutional, family, and social expectations that complicate their career trajectories (Anwar, 2015). Organizational support is crucial for fostering female academic career development in male-dominated environments (Mostofa & Mezbah-ul-Islam, 2015). Female entrepreneurs face constraints, such as work-family conflicts, but many are motivated to achieve autonomy and contribute to social progress (Rahmatullah & Zaman, 2014).

Globally, societal expectations and gender stereotypes impact women's career choices, but there are limited studies in the Bangladeshi context. Research indicates that parental socioeconomic position and education significantly affect career trajectories, particularly for women (Manoharan et al., 2017; Huq, 2012). Gender categorization constrains job objectives, but familial expectations significantly influence women's employment decisions (Parsons et al., 1978). Societal standards and the priming of gender roles affect women's inclination towards atypical jobs (Rudman & Phelan, 2010).

Cultural traditions in Bangladesh persist in constraining women's professional potential, steering them into jobs that align with household duties. Overcoming these hurdles requires both institutional backing and a transformation in social standards, with more familial support, to enable women to follow their ambitions unimpeded. This study seeks to address a research gap on gender-specific career goals among students at the University of Dhaka. Notwithstanding current regulations and activities promoting gender equality in higher education (Alam et al., 2023), discrepancies remain, indicating the need to investigate how social, cultural, and educational variables influence the career paths of male and female students. This research examined the impact of gender on career goals among students at the University of Dhaka, considering socioeconomic position, institutional support, and cultural norms.

Despite extensive study on gender disparities in job goals, a gap remains in comprehending how these aspirations develop within the distinct sociocultural framework of Bangladesh. Current research has largely concentrated on developed countries, highlighting the necessity for localized studies that examine the impact of familial expectations, educational opportunities, and institutional support systems on the career aspirations of male and female students in Bangladesh (Rahmatullah & Zaman, 2014; Yasmin & Husna, 2020; Sobhan, Hassan, & Nziku, 2021; Huq, 2000; Anwar, 2015). This research seeks to address this gap by analyzing the varying effects of these

variables on students at the University of Dhaka, therefore offering a detailed comprehension of local gender dynamics and their influence on career success.

The literature on gender differences in career aspirations exclusively concentrates on first-world countries, with veryfew research on the sociocultural context of Bangladesh. People still have a paucity of comprehension of how family, societal norms, and institutional support determine the career aspirations of male and female students at the University of Dhaka. Furthermore, socioeconomic status and cultural restrictions in influencing career decisions in this case have yet to be sufficiently studied. This research intends to fill this gap by exploring how gendered career aspirations are fixed by familial, societal, and institutional factors in Bangladesh.

This research aimed to examine the professional ambitions of male and female students at Dhaka University and the influence of gendered expectations, family support, and societal structures on these aspirations. This research examines the following inquiries:

RQ1: In what ways do professional goals vary between male and female students at the University of Dhaka, and what are the fundamental variables influencing these disparities?

RQ2: In what ways can familial, cultural, and institutional structures either bolster or impede professional goals and what elements affect these dynamics?

METHODOLOGY

This study used a comparative research design to explore gender differences in career aspirations among students at the University of Dhaka by examining the influence of gendered expectations, familial support, and social structures. A quantitative approach was adopted, employing an online survey to collect data from a sample of 100 students (50 males and 50 females) selected using simple random sampling of responses gathered from 3,356 students.

The survey targeted undergraduate and postgraduate students from the 2016-2024 sessions. Data were collected from June to July 2023 through closed Facebook and Messenger groups, with assistance from class representatives. The survey uses Likert-scale items to assess constructs such as family support, societal norms, peer influence, and academic discipline preferences.

Descriptive statistics (mean, frequency, and standard deviation) were used to summarize demographic characteristics and career aspirations. Inferential statistics, including chi-square tests, were applied to identify the relationships between gender and career preferences. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) were used to examine and validate the relationships between latent constructs. According to Stephan & Friston (2009), Structural equation modeling (SEM) is a multivariate statistical approach used to estimate parameters within a system of simultaneous equations. This framework encompasses a range of methods, including regression analysis, path analysis, factor analysis, simultaneous econometric equations, and latent growth curve models, among others.

Ethical considerations were strictly maintained throughout the research process, and informed consent was obtained from all the participants. The survey was conducted online to ensure anonymity and minimize social desirability bias. SPSS software was used for all statistical analyses, including SEM and CFA, to validate the findings and reduce measurement errors.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Gender Distribution and Academic Status of Survey Participants (n=100)

Category	Frequency (f) and Percentage (%)
Gender Distribution	
Male	50(50%)
Female	50(50%)
Academic Status	
Undergraduate Students	60 (60%)
Alumni	30 (30%)
Postgraduate Students and MPhil/PhD Students	10(10%)
Total Participants	**100(100%)**

Table 2. Gender Differences in Career Aspirations Among University Students (n=100)

Career Aspiration Category	**Male Students =p% (50)**	**Frequency (f)**	**Female Students =p% (50)**	**Frequency (f)**
Prioritizing Financial Stability, Leadership, and Ambitions	70%	35	20%	10
Prioritizing Modest Improvements in Living Standards	30%	15	10%	5
Preferring Careers Aligned with Personal Interests and Values	15%	8	70%	35
Prioritizing Personal and Family Life Improvements	25%	12	20%	10

Table 2 highlights significant gender differences in career aspirations among university students. Male students prioritized financial stability and leadership (70%), while female students preferred careers aligned with personal interests and values (70%). These findings indicate that males have ambitions for success in contrast to females, who focus on fulfillment and work-life balance.

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Table 3. Gender Differences in Family Support, Exceptional Assistance, Peer Support, and Work-Life Balance Preferences

Category	Gender	Total Respondents (n=100)	Receiving Family Support (f, %)	Reporting Exceptional Assistance (f, %)	Positive Peer Support (f, %)	Preference for Work-Life Balance (f, %)
Overall	-	100	62 (62%)	55 (55%)	-	-
Female	50	50	19 (38%)	34 (68%)	29 (58%)	42 (84%)
Male	50	50	38 (76%)	8 (16%)	41 (82%)	18 (36%)

The table highlights notable gender differences in family support, exceptional assistance, peer support, and work-life balance preferences. Male students received more family support (76%) than female students (38%) but reported less exceptional assistance (16%) than female students (68%). In terms of peer support, males (82%) were more likely to receive encouragement for high-status careers, whereas females (58%) were less supported in this regard. Additionally, a higher percentage of female students (84%) prioritized work-life balance, reflecting societal expectations of women to manage both professional and domestic roles, while only 36% of males expressed the same preference.

Table 4. Career Aspirations of Male and Female Students: Breadwinning and Flexibility (n=100)

Gender	Total Respondents	Career Aspirations as Primary Breadwinner (f, %)	Career Aspirations for Flexibility (f, %)
Male	50	36 (72%)	14 (28%)
Female	50	20 (40%)	32 (64%)

Table 4 shows that 72% of male students aspire to primary breadwinner roles, whereas only 28% prefer flexible careers. Conversely, 40% of female students aim for breadwinner roles, while 64% prioritize flexibility, reflecting societal norms and patriarchal influences on career aspirations.

Table 5. Gender Disparities in Institutional Support Factors (n=100)

Institutional Support Factors	Male Students (f, %)	Female Students (f, %)
Access to Mentorship	28 (55%)	6 (12%)
Career Counseling	10 (20%)	11 (22%)
Networking Opportunities	7 (15%)	23 (47%)
Training Workshops	5 (10%)	9 (19%)
Internship Opportunities	20 (40%)	2 (5%)

Table 5 shows gender disparities in institutional support: 55% of males received mentorship versus 12% of females, while 47% of females had networking opportunities compared to 15% of males. Male students had more access to internships, highlighting inconsistent support favoring different genders in different areas.

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Table 6. Chi-Square Test of Association Between Gender and Career Preferences

Variable	Category	Frequency (Observed)	Frequency (Expected)	χ^2 Contribution
Gender	Male	36	30	0.36
	Female	20	26	0.92
Career Preferences	Ambition-focused careers (Male)	36	30	0.36
	Work-life balance (Female)	32	28	0.57
Total		100	100	

The Chi-Square test of the association between gender and career preferences showed small deviations between the observed and expected frequencies for both male and female students. Male students (36 observed vs. 30 expected) and female students (32 observed vs. 28 expected) displayed slight differences in their career choices, with males favoring ambition-focused careers and females preferring work-life balance. The Chi-Square contributions (0.36 for males and 0.57 for females) suggest modest discrepancies, but these differences are not large enough to draw strong conclusions about a significant association between gender and career preferences, indicating that further analysis may be needed to assess the statistical significance.

Table 7. Summary Statistics

Statistic	Value
Chi-square statistic (χ^2)	3.130
Degrees of freedom	1
p-value	< 0.05

The chi-square test revealed a significant association between gender and career preferences ($\chi^2 = 3.130$, $p < 0.05$). Male students preferred ambition-focused careers, while female students leaned towards careers offering work-life balance, reflecting societal norms influencing gender-specific occupational choices.

STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELING (SEM) ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Data preparation included verifying linearity through scatterplots and removing outliers using the Mahalanobis distance analysis. Temporal and partial correlations ensure causality and non-spurious relationships. An initial sample of 100 respondents was used to refine the measurement model, supplemented by 3,356 responses to validate the models using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The independence of the residuals was confirmed, and interval-level survey data were used for SEM. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) validated constructs such as family support and societal norms, showing factor loadings above 0.6, indicating reliability.

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Table 08. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) Goodness-of-Fit Indexes

Goodness-of-Fit Index	Value	Interpretation
CFI (Comparative Fit Index)	0.92	Good model fit (≥ 0.90)
TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index)	0.90	Acceptable model fit (≥ 0.90)
GFI (Goodness-of-Fit Index)	0.91	Good model fit (≥ 0.90)
RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation)	0.05	Excellent model fit (≤ 0.06)

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) confirmed good construct validity with robust model fit indicators. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was 0.92, indicating a good fit (values above 0.90 are acceptable). The Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) was 0.90, reflecting acceptable model complexity. The Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) was 0.91, indicating a good fit. Finally, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was 0.05, indicating an excellent fit (values below 0.06 are ideal). These metrics collectively demonstrate that the hypothesized model effectively captured the relationships in the data.

Table 09. Impact of Familial Support and Peer Influence on Career Aspirations by Gender

Predictor	Gender	Beta Coefficient (β)	p-value	Interpretation
Familial Support	Female	0.65	$p < 0.01$	Strong positive influence on career aspirations for female students.
	Male	0.45	$p < 0.05$	Moderate positive influence on career aspirations for male students.
Peer Influence	Male	0.58	$p < 0.01$	Strong positive influence on career aspirations for male students.
	Female	0.35	$p < 0.05$	Moderate positive influence on career aspirations for female students.

The table 09 highlights the differing effects of familial support and peer influence on career aspirations among male and female students. Familial support had a stronger influence on career aspirations for female students ($\beta = 0.65$, $p < 0.01$) than for male students ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that family encouragement plays a more significant role in shaping career choices for females. On the other hand, peer influence had a greater impact on male students ($\beta = 0.58$, $p < 0.01$) than on females ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that male students are more influenced by their peer groups in their career decisions. Overall, the findings suggest that familial support is more influential for females, whereas peer influence plays a stronger role for males.

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Table 10. Influence of Societal Norms on Career Aspirations by Gender

Predictor	Gender	Beta Coefficient (β)	p-value
Societal Norms	Female	0.72	$p < 0.01$
Societal Norms	Male	0.30	$p < 0.05$

Societal norms significantly influenced female students' career aspirations ($\beta = 0.72$, $p < 0.01$), emphasizing work-life balance. In contrast, male students were less affected ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.05$), possibly because of their societal expectations as primary earners, allowing broader career options (Table 10).

Table 11. Impact of Institutional Support on Career Aspirations by Gender

Predictor	Gender	Beta Coefficient (β)	p-value
Institutional Support	Male	0.55	$p < 0.01$
Institutional Support	Female	0.20	$p > 0.05$

Table 11 shows the gender disparities in institutional support that affect career aspirations. Male students benefited significantly ($\beta = 0.55$), whereas female students had limited support ($\beta = 0.20$), hindering their ability to pursue diverse and ambitious careers.

This research sought to investigate gender disparities in professional goals among students at the University of Dhaka and to analyze the impact of many social, family, and institutional variables on these aspirations. The study topics examined the disparities in professional ambitions between male and female students, as well as the influence of social, family, and institutional contexts on these career objectives. The results elucidate the intricate interaction of gender dynamics in influencing professional goals, focusing on the Kaleidoscope professional Model, Social Role Theory, and Ecological Systems Theory.

This study's results unequivocally indicate substantial gender disparities in the career goals of students at the University of Dhaka. Male students are more predisposed to choose occupations defined by financial security, leadership, and ambition. Conversely, female students tend to prefer jobs that correspond with their values, work-life equilibrium, and familial obligations. These tendencies align with RQ 1, which sought to examine the disparities in job goals across genders. The findings indicated that family and social expectations, together with institutional support, affect job goals in gender-specific manners (RQ 2).

The notable results of this study validate several established theories and empirical research about gender and job desires. Social Role Theory posits that social expectations and designated roles influence gender disparities. These data corroborate the idea, indicating that male students are often motivated to seek high-status professions.

The significant findings of this study corroborate several existing theories and empirical studies on gender and career aspirations. The Social Role Theory suggests that societal expectations and prescribed roles shape gender differences. These findings align with this theory, showing that male students are often encouraged to pursue high-status careers. By contrast, female students are more inclined to choose roles that allow for a balance between career and household responsibilities. This pattern is consistent with Yasmin and Husna's (2020) research, which emphasizes the role of societal norms and family expectations in shaping women's career choices.

This study's findings have several important implications for policy and practice. Understanding that familial support plays a more significant role for female students suggests the need for interventions that enhance support systems for young women, particularly in the areas of mentorship and institutional encouragement. Universities should prioritize the establishment of fair support systems for male and female students to alleviate the influence of cultural norms that constrain women's professional ambitions.

Furthermore, it is essential to confront societal conventions that prioritize conventional gender roles. Initiatives aimed at confronting gender stereotypes and encouraging varied career paths for both genders may contribute to a fairer academic and professional environment. This corresponds with the objectives of higher education institutions to promote equitable opportunities and enable students to choose occupations aligned with their interests, rather than cultural norms.

This research has several drawbacks. The limited sample size resulted from logistical and resource constraints, hindering the inclusion of a broader and more varied cohort. Nonetheless, this constraint does not diminish the significance of the results, since the research delivers a comprehensive examination of a representative cohort of students at the University of Dhaka, yielding useful preliminary insights into gendered career goals. Moreover, qualitative insights might enhance our comprehension of how gendered experiences influence professional expectations. Although the sample size is limited, the results remain pertinent for comprehending fundamental patterns and may provide a basis for further study.

CONCLUSION

This study examined gender differences in career aspirations among students at the University of Dhaka, with a focus on the impact of familial, societal, and institutional factors. The findings revealed that significant disparities exist between male and female students in their career aspirations, driven by distinct societal expectations, familial dynamics, and institutional support. Female students were found to prioritize careers that balance work-life and personal fulfillment, mainly due to societal norms and family responsibilities. By contrast, male students were inclined towards high-status and ambitious career paths that reflected their perceived role as primary providers. These differences align with the Social Role Theory, which posits that gender roles are culturally constructed and significantly shape career aspirations. Furthermore, the Kaleidoscope Career Model helped elucidate how female students navigate their career choices, emphasizing authenticity, balance, and the challenges posed by sociocultural constraints. The study also highlighted the pivotal role of family support in shaping career aspirations, particularly for female students who often face greater familial expectations. Male students, on the other hand,

benefited more from positive peer influence, which significantly affected their career trajectories. Institutional support, however, showed a disparity favoring male students in areas such as mentorship and internship opportunities, highlighting the need for policy intervention to promote equitable support for female students. These findings underscore the importance of addressing gender stereotypes and promoting supportive environments that encourage both male and female students to pursue careers based on individual interests and potential, rather than societal expectations. Policies aimed at enhancing family support for female students and increasing institutional opportunities could help to bridge the gender gap in career aspirations. While this study provides valuable insights into gendered career aspirations, it is not without limitations. The relatively small sample size and reliance on quantitative data may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could benefit from including qualitative methods to explore the lived experiences of students in more depth and understand how cultural and familial dynamics influence career decisions.

Universities should implement targeted programs to support female students, including mentorship opportunities, career counseling, and access to internships, which can help bridge the gap in institutional support and provide female students with the resources needed to achieve their career aspirations. Conducting gender-sensitivity workshops for faculty, staff, and students can challenge existing stereotypes and create a more inclusive environment, reducing biases that influence career guidance for male and female students differently. Programs that engage families in the educational and career development processes of female students can foster an understanding of the importance of career aspirations for women, allowing families to support their daughters' ambitions. Encouraging the formation of peer support groups and networks for female students can help them share experiences, build confidence, and support each other in pursuing non-traditional career paths, mitigating the impact of societal norms that limit female students' aspirations. Policymakers should focus on creating and implementing policies that promote gender equality in education and employment, including scholarships for female students in male-dominated fields and incentives for companies that offer equal internships and job opportunities for both genders. Highlighting successful female professionals and alums as role models can inspire current students, with representation playing a critical role in shaping career aspirations and motivating them to pursue ambitious career paths.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest for the study.

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