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Factors influencing career choice in Generation Z: a study from students of private colleges in Lahore

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ABSTRACT

Background and Objective: Choosing a career is a difficult decision, especially among young adults, which is influenced by many dynamics. Every adolescent faces the dilemma of choosing a career due to exposure to so many avenues in today's digitalized world. The objective of this study was to determine the factors influencing the career choices of Generation Z studying in different private colleges in Lahore city of Pakistan.

Methods: It was a cross-sectional survey enrolling $n = 196$ young students of private colleges of Lahore between the age group of 17 and 20 years selected through the convenient sampling technique. An online, validated questionnaire was distributed via WhatsApp groups and the participants were asked to return the filled but anonymous proformas within 1 week. The data compilation and analysis were done by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences software version 26.0 by keeping the level of significance at 5%.

Results: The mean age of the participants was 18 ± 1.93 years. The mean age for starting to think about their career choices was 15 ± 3.32 years. Influences like social, internal, and external factors were rated as 38.8%, 37.1%, and 49.6%, respectively. The odds of making a career choice were higher for those with parental influence, a prestigious profession, and a job with a higher salary.

Conclusion: The most influencing factors affecting the career choice in Generation Z were parents' wishes, pressures, or role modeling followed by a prestigious profession and higher salaries.

Keywords: Career, influence, generation Z, young, parents, job satisfaction.

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Introduction

Choosing a career has always been a trivial step in every human's life, especially for youngsters. Adolescence is considered one of the most challenging stages in the human life cycle.¹ During this period, perhaps, children are passing through phases of confusion in many aspects of their life, especially their career selection and adoption.² It has been shown in many studies that people born in different decades have different exposure to various challenges. Therefore, the factors affecting their career choices might be varied. The young adults in their early twenties born between 1995 and 2012 belong to a generation known as "Z." This generation is digitally native, lives in a world of gadgets, is very accepting of changing norms of today's world, is health-conscious, value their privacy, is entrepreneurial, and worried about their prospects.³

It may be very understandable that these young adults while passing through their adolescent stages, several factors may influence them to choose their careers.⁴ The primary influence may be their age superimposed by social, internal, and external factors.⁵ The Millennials were not as digitally innovative and exposed as Generation Z are. So, it is worthwhile to emphasize that Generation Z has more exposure to the digital world than the older generation and is more aware of the newer career choices.³ Besides social factors like parental influence, they may acquire guidance from their peers and social media.⁴ Although they gather much information from different sources, they still fail to choose the appropriate career, which may be the cause of their stress and anxiety.⁶ Peers, parents, family expectations, and seniors may be influencing these adolescents' choices as well. This may be the reason for indecisiveness to choose a career path without

identifying their interests and potential.⁴ Besides the parents' and peers' influence, other factors like financial support and job satisfaction in terms of salary and prestige may also be playing an essential role in choosing a career.

The rationale of this study was to determine the age at which Generation Z young students start thinking about their career choices and relate to the factors influencing them. The study results will be able to highlight different challenges and influences, the current Generation Z is facing while choosing their careers.

Methods

It was a cross-sectional survey study conducted from January 2022 to June 2022. The study population was young students between the age range of 17 and 20 years studying at three major educational institutes of Lahore city offering general certificates of secondary education and graduation studies. The principal investigator used a self-designed structured questionnaire with a reliability score of 0.71 using Cronbach's alpha after a pilot study. Informed consent was taken from all the participants. The questionnaire was distributed via different WhatsApp groups. Participants were thoroughly guided about filling out the responses. The participants were given 1 week to send back their filled responses through their contact numbers, keeping anonymity in the proforma. The principal author collected all the proformas for the compilation of data. Formal approval of the study was taken from the Institutional Review Board of Central Park Medical College, Lahore, Pakistan.

Statistical analysis

To compile and analyze the data Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 26.0 was used by keeping the level

of significance at 95%. Multiple linear regression analysis was applied to observe the impact of different factors on the age of the respondent at which these young adults started thinking about their career choice.

Results

The mean age of the participants was 18.94 ± 1.93 years. According to the respondents, the mean age at which they had started thinking about a career choice was 15.41 ± 3.32 years. Table 1 shows the responses to social factors that may have influenced their thinking or perceptions about career choices. The overall average influence of each broad category like social, internal, and external factors was 38.8%, 37.1%, and 49.6%, respectively.

The most common internal factors in descending order of influence were job satisfaction, self-validation, and learning experience. The least influential factor was self-interest. Among all, nearly 67.35% of the participants agreed that thinking about future benefits from a job or career is the major factor that impacts their career choices. A total of 60.71% of respondents mentioned that parents' pressure or wishes were the major influence for them while another 47% of the teenagers favored a high salary as the most potential contributing factor to their career choices. Most of the respondents were of the view that their seniors had a minimal impact on their career choices (Table 1).

Multiple linear regression analysis determined the impact of various factors on the age at which the participants started thinking about their careers. The *R*-squared in multiple linear regressions for social, internal, and external factors was 0.03, 0.06, and 0.09, respectively, keeping the significance level at 95%.

Table 1. Frequency distribution of internal, external, and social factors for career choices.

	Yes (%)	No (%)	Social factors	Yes (%)	No (%)
Internal factors					
Learning experience	74 (38)	122 (62)	Parents	119 (61)	77 (39)
Self-interest	54 (27)	142 (72)	Teacher	66 (34)	130 (66)
Self-validation	79 (40)	117 (60)	Institute	63 (32)	133 (68)
Job satisfaction	84 (43)	112 (57)	Family	98 (50)	98 (50)
External factors					
Prestigious profession	77 (39)	119 (61)	Siblings	53 (27)	14 (73)
High salary income	93 (47)	103 (53)	Peers	98 (50)	98 (50)
Future benefits	132 (67)	64 (33)	Seniors	40 (20)	156 (80)
Guaranteed job opportunity	87 (44)	109 (57)	Social media	71 (36)	125 (64)
Cumulative impact (%)					
Social factors	38.8	61.2			
Internal factors	37.1	62.9			
External factors (%)	49.6	50.4			

Table 2 shows the results of multiple linear regression analyses for social factors. The thinking of career choices at an early age is insignificantly impacted by parents and family (Table 2).

The reference category was yes for all the factors. Among all the internal factors, the influence of job satisfaction was significant for a teenager when they start thinking about a career choice (Table 3).

The age for career choice significantly depends upon various external factors such as a prestigious profession and a high salary or income. Future benefits and guaranteed job opportunities did not influence career thinking much (Table 4).

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that the average age at which young adults of Generation Z start thinking about their careers is approximately 15 years. Several studies indicate that adolescents at the observed age are confused regarding their career selection.⁷ The students between 13 and 14 years of age are just graduating from the world of imagination to realism.⁸ In countries like Pakistan, adolescents cannot make independent decisions about their careers without their parent's involvement.⁹ The confusion persists as most students are not ready to choose their subjects for future career pathways.⁴ A Nigerian study depicted the same results where a student at the age of 15 starts pondering about the career alleyway.¹⁰ A survey conducted in Kenya supported that age was significantly associated with career maturity and indecision.⁵ The career choice decision must be taken at an early age. Parents' wishes, fantasies, and environmental circumstances are the main influences as indicated in this study. Proper handling of the process and facilitating the child in terms of the practical application of their careers encourage faster decision-making, fostering individual distinctiveness, comfort, job gratification, and steadiness.¹¹

The study results also suggest that parents are the most important social factors contributing to the choice of careers. Literature supports that parents significantly influence children's career development and decision-making as they inculcate value in them since childhood, inspire, role model, and offer opportunities to learn and develop.¹² Through their life experience and job satisfaction, parents inspire adolescents to adopt the career path they had for themselves

since childhood. This fact is universal around the globe. Parents belonging to any region of the world are a source of inspiration and guidance for their children.¹³ In today's world, orthodox parenting has lost its footing. The parents are not just authority figures but friends, guides, and role models.¹⁴ With the vibrant educational environment wherein the role of parents is diminishing and these Generation Z young adults, when passing through adolescence, are taught to be independent to make their career decisions⁴ still, parents' involvement in career choice selection is pivotal as they have to support them financially and emotionally. Parents should consider their child's aptitude, interest, and course availability while choosing a career.¹ A career path selected against the talent ends up with the one trending but not best for them. In this situation, parents are the ones who help them make the right decision.¹¹

The results of this study show that the other most influential social factor is the involvement of peers and family. It is seen through literature that peers have positive and negative influences on an informed decision regarding career choice.¹⁵ Different studies suggest that peers have different ideologies and social norms; hence, their impact on adolescent career decisions is significant.^{15,16} Peers influence through counseling, interaction, advice, and relationship with each other.¹⁶ Positive influence of peers helps in making a career decision.¹⁷ Forced adoption of a career seems to have some built-in reputation in society and family. Therefore, it is worth emphasizing here that if peers and family are to influence, they should match the interest, not merely the status.¹⁷

The results of this study suggest that the most significant internal factor identified by the participant was the perception of job satisfaction. The most crucial internal drive to choose a career is job satisfaction, which depends on many factors like personal inclination, values, and aptitude.¹⁸

According to this study, the most significant external factor for these young adults to choose a career was the prestige associated with the job and the salaries and/or income.¹⁹ This finding has also been supported by the literature which shows that the essential element in choosing a career is prestige. Further, the literature supports that besides the internal and external factors mentioned above; there is a significant relationship between the working environment and a worker's personality. A worker's personality improves

Table 2. Regression analysis of the impact of social factors on the age of thinking about a career choice.

Social factors	B	SE	p-value	95% CI (L-U)
Parents	-0.84	0.51	0.10	-1.84 to 0.16
Family	-0.82	0.47	0.08	-1.75 to 0.11

*Significant at a 5% level of significance.

Table 3. Regression analysis of the impact of internal factors on age of thinking about a career choice.

Internal factors	B	SE	p-value	95% CI (L-U)
Learning experience	-0.28	0.48	0.56	-1.23 to 0.66
Self-interest	-0.78	0.52	0.14	-1.80 to 0.25
Self-validation	-0.77	0.48	0.11	-1.72 to 0.18
Job satisfaction	-1.30	0.48	0.01*	0.25 to 0.36

*Significant at a 5% level of significance.

Table 4. Regression analysis of the impact of external factors on the age of thinking about a career choice.

External factors	B	SE	p-value	95% CI (L-U)
Prestigious profession	-1.63	0.49	0.00*	-2.59 to 0.67
High salary/income	-1.15	0.47	0.01*	-2.08 to 0.34

*Significant at a 5% level of significance.

performance and hence the atmosphere of the organization.⁵ The workers adopting a career according to their interests will be a source of motivation and enthusiasm for their coworkers.¹⁹ Therefore, it is worth planning a future study to determine the role of personality in a career choice.

Conclusion

The most influencing factors for Generation Z to choose their careers are the pressures, wishes, or role-modeling by their parents followed by higher salaries, and job prestige. Therefore, it is highly recommended that parents do scaffolding for their children while choosing a career by keeping their interest as a priority which will be a source of job satisfaction and motivation for their children in the future.

Limitations of the Study

It was an online survey, so there can be respondent bias. Hence, the results cannot be generalized.

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List of Abbreviations

SE Standard error

Conflict of interest

None to declare

Grant support and financial disclosure

None to disclose

Ethical approval

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Central Park Medical College, Lahore on 29-11-2021 with ethical approval number CPMC/IRB-No/1304.

Authors' contributions

HA: Conception and design of study, acquisition, and analysis of data, and drafting of the manuscript with critical intellectual input.
AA, HA, EK: Conception, acquisition of data, and drafting of the manuscript
ALL AUTHORS: Approval of the final version of the manuscript to be published.

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