Theme 1: Nurturing Ideas and Accessing Opportunities

Measuring the Career Aspirations and its Leading Determinants among Youth in Muzaffarabad, Azad Jammu & Kashmir

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Abstract

The paper aims to quantify career aspirations among youth of age 15-29 years in Muzaffarabad through an index based on achievement aspiration, leadership aspiration and educational aspiration indices. Moreover, the role of mentorship along with other major determinants of career aspirations are empirically estimated by employing heterogeneity bias-adjusted OLS. The study is based on primary data collected through questionnaire in 2020 from 1015 youth comprised of 42 percent males and 58 percent females. The findings of the study indicated an average level of educational aspirations i.e., 39 percent, 30 percent score for achievement aspirations and 31 percent leadership aspirations index of the selected sample of youth. Overall career aspiration index noted an average value of 54 percent implying a moderate level of career aspiration for almost half the sample. According to results demographic factors, career plans, academic background, mentorship and inspirations appeared as significant contributing factors in shaping the career aspirations of selected youth. To develop positive career aspirations among youth, it is suggested to hire qualified and skilled group of teacher-cum-counselor who can offer mentorship through formal career counselling in Muzaffarabad district, which will help in reinforcing youths' motivation and efforts for better career choices which will subsequently bridge the gaps and mismatch in the labor market of Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

1. Introduction

Career aspirations refer to one's ambitions who want to accomplish them and subsequently turn them into reality. Traditionally, career aspirations are connoted with the professions or occupations individuals aspire to join in their future course of career path. The aspiration are set forth as future planning to attain personal and professional satisfaction and play significant role in the career choice. This represents the goals and expectations on the part of individual being the driving force towards specific course of action. Generally, career aspirations are termed as long-run goals which are required to be settled for career progression. Johnson (1995) regarded the career aspirations as point-in-time expressions of career-oriented goals.

In short, career aspirations reflect the ability of individuals to make an appropriate career decision which should be realistic and remain consistent over the time (Crites, 1978; Levinson, 1993). A successful career growth relies on the determinants of career aspirations and is influenced by various factors including life style, mindset, norms and personal aptitude of individuals. Career aspirations among youth focuses on the extent to which they gain the knowledge and skills required for smart and realistic career decisions which is crucial for bridging the industry-academia gap and mismatch between available labor market opportunities and acquired skills.

The significance of career aspirations has been widely recognized in literature. Hellenga et al. (2002) pointed out that career ambitions inform the society about individual's interests as well as their hopes. When it comes to the young people's personal development, social adjustment, and future well-being, a good career preparation can be a developmental tool as well as a responsibility. Attempts have been made recently by career theorists and academicians to

understand youth's professional goals choices to give a signal to the educators of twenty-first century. Providing opportunities to discuss and decide the career path with professionals, such as teachers and counsellors, is a critically useful source to reflect individuals' interests and goals as well as career options and labor market demands which eventually lay down the educational requirements and possible avenues. According to literature, those students who involve in career planning and mentorship programs see a positive shift in their perspectives regarding their future careers (Schunk and Mullen, 2013; Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng and DuBois, 2008). In the context of Kram's Mentor Role Theory (1985), mentors offer career and psychosocial advancement to apprentice for growing within the company and to improve personally and professionally. Mentoring is a fundamental part in advancing one's administrative expertise and career. Conventional mentorship has played significant role in providing assistance to juniors who need to succeed in their professional goals. According to research, 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, the students' counselling sessions and other interventions are vital to provide students updated information about available options for career path (Dreher and Ash, 1990; Scandura, 1992; Scandura and Schriesheim, 1994; Ragins, Cotton and Miller, 2000).

A number of factors have been identified as the determinants of career choice other than mentorship. According to System Theory Framework of Career Development cited by Patton and McMahon (2015), theory provides the basis for development of an extended collection of constructivist approaches to career counselling and career assessment activities. Similarly, traits and behavioral researchers believe that career adaptability build up around one's future work self is critical in generating proactive career behavior (Taber and Blankemeyer, 2015). Similarly,

personality traits, interests, cultural identity, socioeconomic status, parental educational and occupational background, family structure, globalization and socialization 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 is endeavored to quantify the career aspiration among youth and to investigate the factors that influence their career aspirations. Approximately 64 percent of population in Pakistan is below 30 years of age with a 29 percent of them falling between the age group of 15-29 years, according to UNDP (2019). Azad Jammu and Kashmir, the point of investigation, has 27 percent of young population defined as the age group of 15-29 years old individuals as per information available in Labor Force Survey (2017-18). Muzaffarabad is a self-governing state of Pakistan and has 76.8 percent literacy rate, male literacy rate is 86.9 percent while female literacy is 67.3 percent (Pakistan Statistics Bureau, 2017-18). To the author's knowledge, no study is available specifically for the selected area which focuses on the career aspirations. The study offers a number of benefits like it can highlight the significance of various programs required to create awareness and establishment of information management system for youth in selected area by the government. It can identify systematic gaps and support students and their prospect counselors, parents and universities for providing career guidelines and student orientation programs to facilitate the right and timely choice of career in order to stimulate those factors that can influence their career aspirations.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as below:

- To gauge and construct an overall career aspirations index based on the sub-scales of educational aspirations, achievement aspirations and leadership career aspirations

[1] c. f. Kerka (2000)

among youth aged between 15-29 years of Muzaffarabad, AJ&K based on the information collected through a well-structured questionnaire.

- To empirically determine the lead factors of career aspiration including various socio-economic and demographic variables like age, gender, education, status, educational and family background, academic performance, career plans, mentorship and religiosity.

1.2 Organization of the Study

The rest of the study is organized as follows; section 2 deals with the review of literature. Section 3 provides data theoretical framework, empirical model, data description and estimation technique along with summary statistics. Section 4 reports and discuss empirical finding. Last section concludes the chapter with policy implication.

2. Review of Literature

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) proposed by Lent, Brown and Hackett (1994) elaborate 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 behavior is mainly inclined to socio-cognitive outcomes; intentions, career goals, and self-efficacy which is further connected with the socioeconomic status, societal support, gender and, cultural and societal obstacles. Gottfredson (1981) postulated that according to development theory of occupations aspirations the career choice is conditioned by the cognitive development and given social environment. The compromise among competing goals conditioned by the cognitive development and given social environment. The compromised decision among competing goals depends on the individuals' perceptions of opportunities. Alternatively, three-dimensional framework provided by Carpenter and Foster (1979) and Beyon, Kelleen, and Kishor, (1998) put

forth intrinsic factors including personal interest and satisfaction from the 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 and Futterman (1982) provided the ground 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 the self-esteem to determine their career path. According to Ismail, Ramly and Rasdi (2008) career aspirations is the desire of an individual relatable to future employment provided that one put up struggle to achieve it. Similarly, Bandura (2001) recounted that career choices are influenced by the talent, skills, academic achievements and environment. Cantor (1990), Sellers, Satcher, Comas, (1999) and Gati and Saka (2001) added the role of age and parental socioeconomic status in determining career path of individuals and provided that aspirations become more focused while moving from young age to adult and with the parental rising status.

The empirical evidence on the subject matter shows the role of mentorship as leading determinants of career aspirations. According to Dreher and 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 and 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 education program. 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 paths. The studies by Scandura (1992) and Srivastava (2013) also provided the similar evidence. Additionally, the academic achievements are also attached with the mentoring program by Maxwell and Connell (2013) and Jekielek et al., (2002). Traditional model of mentoring treated it hierarchical and supported that mentor is significantly older and more experienced than the mentee (e.g., faculty-student mentorship, employer-employee mentorship). The informal mentoring and structured mentoring program programs offer diverse evidence in self-efficacy and moving ahead on the leadership ladder (Ragins, Cotton and Miller, 200l; Raabe and Beehr, 2003). Over the time, 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 support individuals in realizing their potentials as well (Spencer et al., 2016). In addition, mentor can also exert positive influence on adolescents who are at risk of academic failure by increasing retention rate, enthusiasm in learning, and academic success (Schargel and Smink, 2014). Lack of mentorship has also been considered a primary reason for poor academic career development, publications and advancement (Ibegbulam & Jacintha, 2016).

Besides, other socioeconomic factors are also explored for their likely impact on career aspirations. Shumba and Naong (2012) examined the influential factors for 133 South African university students and found family's and students' personal ability and teachers' capabilities as significant factors in affecting student's career choice and aspirations. For a sample of 125 girls, Mesa (2013) provided that self-efficacy, parental influence and school related factors dominates

in the girls' career aspirations. The role of guardian is examined by Kumar (2016) for 175 respondents in Bahirdar, Ethiopia. The study found an overwhelming role of fathers in the career choice decisions among students as compared with mothers'. The role of interventions in influencing career aspirations are investigated by Ahmed, Sharif and Ahmad (2017) for a sample 120 students. The counseling sessions and other sort of interventions in providing information to the students appeared to play important role. Moreover, the affordability, employability, finances and social class also influence the career choices as is evident from Akosah-Twumasi et al. (2018). The study found extrinsic, intrinsic, interpersonal and emergent bicultural factors dominants in career choice among youth.

In a case study of Pakistan, Arif et al. (2019) found little role of demographic factors in determining career choices of selective students from University of Management and Technology (UMT). Few other studies also investigated the role of family background, peers and friends, personal interest, teacher, 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 dearth of studies for Pakistan which can portray not only the determinants of career aspiration but also the level of career aspirations. The study related to youth in our selected location i.e., Muzaffarabad, Azad Jammu and Kashmir has remained widely a neglected area to be discovered from that context. This study endeavors to fill in this gap in the literature. Additionally, the study also contributed in existing literature by constructing career aspirations index of youth on three sub-scales of educational, achievements and leadership aspirations.

3. Methodology

Career selection is imperative for its long term bearing in terms of socioeconomic status, standard of physical and mental health and wellbeing. The inconsistency between individuals'

needs and motives behind and the requirements of labor market may lead to low performance, subdued productivity, job discontent, depression and stress (Gagné and Deci, 2005). Johnson (1995) specified career aspirations as expressions of career related goals which tends to reflect in career choices and attainments in future. Human Capital Theory by Schultz (1961), Becker (1964) and Mincer (1974) posits that higher education and skills training is instrumental in improving productive capacity of individuals and convert them in human capital. As a public investment, investing in education not only enhances productivity but also provide social stability and quality life style. While as private investment choice, it turns out better lifetime earnings with every higher year of schooling, better access to high profile jobs, and brighter career prospects (Wahrenburg and 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's adversity goes hand in hand with job descriptions. Overall, theory of ambitions and career development theory are working behind the empirical modelling.

3.1 Research Design and Sample Size

The research is based on the primary data collected 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. The survey based-method in the form of well-structured questionnaire is used for collecting data on the factors that determine the career aspirations among youth of Muzaffarabad both from rural and urban areas. Initially, a pilot survey was conducted for checking the accuracy of questionnaire and was modified according to received observations. Final data was collection was conducted in 2020 through purposive sampling technique with the support of officials from private and government schools, colleges and university located in Muzaffarabad.[2] The major

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

questions in the questionnaire are related with the demographic factors, family background, and educational background of respondents, mentorship and religiosity.[3] The quantitative analysis of data includes descriptive and inferential statistics 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 empirical model was done in SPSS and STATA software.

3.2 Empirical Model

The study adapted Gregor and O'Brien's (2015) revised measure of career aspiration where educational aspirations, leadership aspirations and achievement aspirations are the sub-scales for measuring overall career aspirations index. The benchmark model is specified as below:

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

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_i refers *to* career plans including decision about field of prospective career, support needed for career goals, and area of job preference, *ACB* denotes academic background comprised of mode of teaching and location of school, *FAM* stands for family background including head of household, number of siblings and members of household. Similarly, *MENT* refers to mentorship related variables like role of mentor in career progression, career mapping and planning and internship opportunities. While ACP_i refers to

[3] Questionnaire is available on demand.

academic performance measured through individual position in class and *REL* stands for Religiosity.

3.2.1 Measurement of Career Aspiration Index

Career Aspiration Index (CAI) used in this study is adapted from Gregor and O'Brien (2015) revised index of career aspirations that is a combined index of educational, leadership and achievement aspirations indices. Basically, the index is based on a 5-point likert scale ranged between 0 and 4, where higher score represents higher career aspirations. The indices at disaggregated level measures the degree to which respondent aspire to a leadership position within their career for leadership aspirations index (*LAI*). The educational aspirations (*EAI*) subscale refers to the degree to which respondent aspire to continue education or training within their career. And the achievement aspirations (*AAI*) subscale measures the degree to which respondent aspire to significant achievements and recognition within their career.[4]

The scores for each dimension are then aggregated and the Human Development Index (HDI) formula is applied on each dimensional index for normalization which ranges between 0-1 and is given as below:

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

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:

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

3.2.3 Determinants of Career Aspirations

Justification of variables is given below.

[4] See Gregor and O'Brien (2015) for details.

Demographic Factors: The expected sign of age and gender can go in either direction. For some the career desires tend to diminish as they get older while for some others it maintains a high degree of prominence over the time. Ginzberg (1952) assumed that young people's choices are interests driven instead of realistic concerns. Studies provided that men tend to be more focused on the pay and management positions as compared with their counterpart. Similarly, women are largely inclined to developing their skills and qualifications (Burke and McKeen, 1994; Sturges, 1999; Powell, 2011). The aspirations based on location is expected to be high of youth living in urban areas as compared to rural areas as children are less likely to enroll due to limited educational facilities (Lu and Treiman, 2007; Acosta, 2006). Pakistan has a dual system of education, Urdu and English medium, and can offer diverse findings over the career aspiration.

Family Background: Parental background and religious practices have been identified as significant cultural-cognitive variables in literature which are likely to influence the individuals' career choices (Wong, 2007; Wong and Liu, 2010).

Academic Performance: This is expected that high academic achievers are likely to have high career ambitions than others. The success in educational set up is largely determined by the academic performance in summative assessments. The expectations are in line with the empirical evidences from Adragna (2009).

Mentorship: Most of the people attribute their career success to their mentors. Mentors-mentees relationship has been considered intimate learning alliance that happen formally or informally both and which 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.

3.3 Descriptive Statistics

Table 3.1 provides the descriptive statistics of variables used in the analysis. The average age of selected sample of youth is 22 years which is comprised of 58 percent of female. 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 i.e., 64 percent while 20 percent are doing jobs and 16 percent are willing and available for jobs but are not able to get one at the point of data collection. A seventy nine percent of respondents have decided their prospect field for future as compared to 21 percent who haven't decided yet. Forty three percent of youth considers family support as most important factor in pursuing their prospect careers. Majority of respondents are willing to do jobs in their own city (73 %) which shows less inclination towards future mobility of respondents. A nominal number (2 %) didn't show any preference. Around sixty five percent of youth attends English medium schools and the location of school is urban area. Father is the head of household (81%) in most cases. About 63 percent of youth classified their academic performance as above average and 22% regarded themselves as the top of the class students in academic career.

The variables on mentorship indicates 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 variable of mentorship where again a 52 percent have the view that mentors have little role in career determination. Comparatively, 32 percent regarded a considerable role of mentor in career planning. When the question was asked about career mapping, 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 shows 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 3.1: Summary Statistics

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

Uncle	=1 if head of household is uncle = 0 otherwise	5	0.05
Brother	=1 if head of household is brother = 0 otherwise	14	0.01
Self	=1 if youth is head of household = 0 otherwise	11	0.01

Continued Table 3.1…

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: None	=1 if none has influence about career decision = 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: CareerMapY	=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 the solution to problem by offering two-step procedure. In our model, the variable youth's employment status may create heterogeneity bias. And running simple OLS regression with employment status as an explanatory variable with career aspirations on the left hand side may create a build-in-bias in the sample, due to number of factors relying on employment status itself can also influence the career aspirations. To overcome this concern, 2-step Heckman procedure is applied where the first step is to determine the selection process through estimating selection equation. The model chose 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 employment status of youth. The magnitude and sign of the coefficient of λ indicates the existence and direction of the bias. This procedure offers to control for the selection effect and endogeneity.

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

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

4. Results and Discussions

This section provides the empirical findings and discussion.

4.1 Measurement of Career Aspirations among Youth

As mentioned earlier the revised career aspirations scale of Gregor and O'Brien (2015) ranging from 0 (not related) to 4 (relatable) is used to measure career aspirations among youth. Results show highest level of educational aspirations among youth i.e., 39 percent followed by leadership aspirations scoring 31 percent and achievement aspiration 30 percent. The overall career aspiration index (CAI) carries score of 54%, which can be regarded as a moderate level of aspiration among selected youth, looking at the computed ranges of the index. Table 4.1 shows the frequency distribution at length. The higher percentage of educational aspirations as compared to other two indicators might be due to high literary rate in Azad Jammu and Kashmir i.e., 76%. The career aspiration index was divided into three categories: range between 0-0.3 is assigned low CAI category, 0.4-0.6 is assigned moderate CAI while values above 0.6 is considered as high career aspirations (CAI).

Table 4.1: Distribution of Youth around Career Aspiration Index

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

Table 4.1 shows that18 percent of youth lie in low career aspiration range, followed by 32 percent falling among high career aspirants while the half of the sample are moderately career inspired among selected sample of youth.

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, Heckman 2-step procedure is applied for possible heterogeneity in the sample and significant selection term denoted by λ in our results identifies the presence of heterogeneity. Total eight equations are estimated due to high collinearity among few of the variables. The results in terms of sign and significance remain consistent throughout the regressions showing robustness of results. The empirical findings show demographic factors, academic background, family related variables, career plans, mentorship and religiosity as significant determinants of career aspirations among youth. The diagnostic test results shows 11 to 14 percent of variation in dependent variable with respect to explanatory variables which is a reasonable number keeping in view the heterogeneity of selected sample. The joint significance is validated via F-test. The variance inflation factor (VIF) for all equations depict a value lower than 10 and indicates no multicollinearity among included variables in respective equations.

Table 4.2

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

Dependent Variable: Career Aspirations Index (CAI)								
Variables	**Equation 1**		**Equation 2**		**Equation 3**		**Equation 4**	
	OLS	**Heckman**	**OLS**	**Heckman**	**OLS**	**Heckman**	**OLS**	**Heckman**
Demographic Variables								
Age	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.008** (0.003)	0.002 (0.003)	-0.004 (0.004)	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.009** (0.003)	0.003 (0.003)	-0.005* (0.004)
Education	0.001 (0.003)	0.001 (0.003)	0.000 (0.003)	0.000 (0.003)	0.001 (0.003)	0.001 (0.003)	0.001 (0.003)	0.000 (0.003)
Gender	0.014 (0.012)	0.014 (0.012)	0.011 (0.012)	0.011 (0.012)	0.015 (0.012)	0.015 (0.012)	0.012 (0.012)	0.012 (0.012)
Current Status								
Studying	_	_	0.081*** (0.019)	0.088*** (0.019)	_	_	0.080*** (0.019)	0.087*** (0.019)
Currempl	_	_	0.071*** (0.020)	0.057*** (0.021)	_	_	0.070*** (0.020)	0.054*** (0.021)
Employment Status								
Employed	0.010 (0.016)	-0.003 (0.017)	_	_	0.011 (0.016)	-0.004 (0.017)	_	_
Academic Background								
Mode of Teaching								
English	0.058*** (0.014)	0.063*** (0.014)	0.057*** (0.014)	0.062*** (0.014)	0.056*** (0.014)	0.061*** (0.014)	0.055*** (0.014)	0.060*** (0.014)
Regional	0.002 (0.033)	0.009 (0.033)	0.012 (0.033)	0.020 (0.033)	0.002 (0.033)	0.010 (0.033)	0.012 (0.033)	0.021 (0.033)
Both	-0.020 (0.041)	-0.013 (0.041)	-0.025 (0.040)	-0.018 (0.040)	-0.022 (0.041)	-0.016 (0.041)	-0.027 (0.040)	-0.020 (0.040)

School Location								
Urban	0.000 (0.013)	-0.002 (0.013)	0.003 (0.013)	0.001 (0.013)	0.000 (0.013)	-0.002 (0.013)	0.002 (0.013)	0.000 (0.013)
Academic Performance								
Topclas	0.075*** (0.020)	0.072*** (0.020)	0.070*** (0.019)	0.068*** (0.019)	0.074*** (0.020)	0.071*** (0.020)	0.070*** (0.019)	0.067*** (0.019)
Aboveavg	0.049*** (0.017)	0.048*** (0.017)	0.044*** (0.017)	0.042** (0.017)	0.049*** (0.017)	0.047*** (0.017)	0.044*** (0.017)	0.042** (0.017)
Family Background								
Head of Household								
Father	0.049* (0.033)	0.051* (0.033)	0.048* (0.033)	0.048* (0.033)	0.053* (0.033)	0.056* (0.033)	0.051* (0.033)	0.052* (0.033)
Mother	0.072** (0.037)	0.073** (0.037)	0.068* (0.037)	0.067* (0.036)	0.071** (0.037)	0.073** (0.037)	0.067** (0.037)	0.066* (0.036)
Gramoth	0.006 (0.076)	0.001 (0.076)	0.000 (0.076)	-0.012 (0.075)	0.013 (0.076)	0.009 (0.076)	0.006 (0.076)	-0.004 (0.075)
Grafath	-0.003 (0.045)	-0.004 (0.045)	0.000 (0.045)	-0.003 (0.045)	0.003 (0.045)	0.004 (0.045)	0.006 (0.045)	0.005 (0.045)
Uncle	0.045 (0.088)	0.040 (0.088)	0.044 (0.087)	0.034 (0.087)	0.049 (0.088)	0.044 (0.088)	0.048 (0.087)	0.037 (0.087)
Brother	0.017 (0.059)	0.025 (0.058)	0.012 (0.058)	0.015 (0.058)	0.019 (0.058)	0.027 (0.058)	0.013 (0.058)	0.017 (0.058)
Siblings								
Siblings	0.003 (0.011)	0.002 (0.011)	0.002 (0.011)	0.000 (0.011)	_	_	_	_
Household members	_	_	_	_	-0.004* (0.002)	-0.005** (0.002)	-0.003* (0.002)	-0.004* (0.002)
Career Plans								
Decision About Field of Prospective Career								
Yes	0.038*** (0.015)	0.038** (0.015)	0.032** (0.015)	0.032** (0.015)	0.038** (0.015)	0.037** (0.015)	0.032** (0.015)	0.031** (0.015)
Support to achieve Career Goals								
Social	0.024* (0.016)	0.025* (0.016)	0.024* (0.016)	0.025* (0.016)	0.025* (0.016)	0.026* (0.016)	0.024* (0.016)	0.026* (0.016)
Financial	0.022* (0.013)	0.025** (0.013)	0.022* (0.013)	0.025** (0.013)	0.022* (0.013)	0.025** (0.013)	0.022* (0.013)	0.025** (0.013)
Job Preference Area								
AJK	-0.004 (0.013)	-0.003 (0.013)	-0.006 (0.013)	-0.004 (0.013)	-0.004 (0.013)	-0.002 (0.013)	-0.005 (0.013)	-0.004 (0.013)
Abroad	0.025* (0.016)	0.026* (0.016)	0.026* (0.016)	0.027* (0.016)	0.025* (0.016)	0.026* (0.016)	0.026* (0.016)	0.026* (0.016)
Pak	0.033 (0.033)	0.035 (0.033)	0.022 (0.033)	0.024 (0.033)	0.030 (0.033)	0.033 (0.033)	0.020 (0.033)	0.022 (0.033)

Mentorship								
Person's Influence of CA								
One	0.029** (0.013)	0.028** (0.013)	0.026** (0.013)	0.024* (0.013)	0.030** (0.013)	0.028** (0.013)	0.027** (0.013)	0.025** (0.013)
More	0.048*** (0.018)	0.048*** (0.018)	0.040** (0.018)	0.040** (0.018)	0.045** (0.018)	0.045** (0.018)	0.038** (0.018)	0.037** (0.018)
Role of Mentor								
None	0.022 (0.016)	0.022 (0.016)	0.021 (0.016)	0.020 (0.016)	0.022 (0.016)	0.022 (0.016)	0.021 (0.016)	0.020 (0.016)
Large	0.029** (0.013)	0.028** (0.013)	0.026** (0.013)	0.024** (0.013)	0.030** (0.013)	0.028** (0.013)	0.027** (0.013)	0.025** (0.013)
Heard about Career Mapping								
Yes	0.006 (0.014)	-0.003 (0.014)	0.003 (0.014)	-0.006 (0.014)	0.006 (0.014)	-0.004 (0.014)	0.004 (0.013)	-0.007 (0.014)
Career Planning								
No	0.002 (0.019)	0.001 (0.019)	0.006 (0.019)	0.005 (0.019)	0.004 (0.019)	0.002 (0.019)	0.008 (0.019)	0.006 (0.019)
Yes	0.013 (0.014)	0.013 (0.014)	0.018* (0.014)	0.018* (0.014)	0.016 (0.014)	0.017 (0.014)	0.020* (0.014)	0.021* (0.014)
Internship								
Yes	0.027*** (0.013)	0.032** (0.013)	0.027** (0.012)	0.032** (0.013)	0.026** (0.013)	0.031** (0.013)	0.026** (0.012)	0.032** (0.012)
Religiosity								
Reg.	0.091 (0.105)	0.133 (0.106)	0.105 (0.104)	0.150* (0.105)	0.099 (0.105)	0.147* (0.106)	0.112 ((0.104)	0.162* (0.105)
λ	-	0.135** (0.055)	-	0.148*** (0.055)	-	0.151** (0.055)	_	0.163*** (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%; **significance at 5%; ***significance at 1%*								

Among demographic variables age and current status of youth appeared as significant variables.[5] The results show that age has negative effect on the career aspirations implying the lower value of career aspiration with every passing years of age. Gottfredson (1981) asserted that individual tends to sacrifice their ambitions to accommodate the ground realities with the passing of age. The career decision become more demanding with the advent of age factor as supported by Gati and 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 or employed youth have relatively higher career aspirations than the unemployed individuals. It is understandable that 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 statistically significant difference among male and female youths' career aspirations and is a good factor reflecting low gender bias in the area.

Coming towards the academic background and youths' performance, *medium of instruction at educational institutions* shows that youth acquiring education in *English* language have significantly high career aspirations than those whose medium of instruction is *Urdu*, the base category. Approximately, 30 percent of respondents in our sample has Urdu language as medium of instruction as compare to 65 percent studying in English. This result signals the upshots of dual education system which can exacerbate the socio-economic gaps among youth of

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

the area. 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. *Location of educational institute* however remain insignificant in affecting career aspirations throughout the regression, 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 number of siblings of respondents, number of household members and the head of the household. And according to the estimates, youth having their parents as head of the household are high career aspirants. In our sample 81 percent of youth has father while 10 percent have mother as head of household with a nominal number of other categories (might be another reason of such results). Literature shows that parents especially fathers are the true driving force behind children motivations and ambition setting for their prospect futures. It also improves self-confidence among youth. The result is consistent with Kumar (2016) that proved significant role of father in career choice. The *household* members is significantly negatively associated with career aspirations and shows that larger the family size lower would be the career aspirations of youth. As the large family size put 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 and Mansour (2012), large family size discourages school enrollment as parental investment tends to decline for schooling. Another study by Hetherington (1992) also supported negative relationship between the 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 firm decision about their future career path are more career inspired. Similarly, those individuals are more career oriented who consider social and financial support as the most significant factors to follow their planned career path who needs family *support to achieve career goals.* O'Brien and Fassinger (1993) pointed out that profession choice and dedication may largely hinge on the socioeconomic status of the family. Looking from different angle, those who weigh family's moral support more than financial and societal support might be the same who have the resources to pursue their dreams but do not have family support to do so; the one reason for being less career aspirant. The location of *Job Preference* shows the youth endeavoring for going abroad are more career aspired as compared with those who prefer to remain within their home town. This is a logical finding and indicates the high ambitions cut across the target setting.

The variables on mentorship offers interesting findings. The role of mentor in youths' lives play significantly positive role in aspiring them for future career. The individuals having one or more such mentors have high career aspiration score as compared to those who do not have any. The findings are consistent with literature like Tesha (2020) found the role of teachers and mentor positively significant in career preferences choice. Further, the *role of mentor* or counselor is categorized in three categories and according to results those individuals who regarded the role of mentor as pertinent are more career aspired as compared to those who do not. In other words, individuals having mentors feel more confident to pursue their career path. This factor highlights the significance of counselling in early age of schooling among youth. Osborn and Reardon (2006) asserted that support of 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 suitable career and profession is the need of time and cannot be ignored. Dreher and Ash (1990) also argued that climbing up the ladder of career success path is inclined to the presence of mentors in lives. When it comes to the professional growth, mentorship becomes more valuable especially at the earlier stage of career.

Moreover, the youth who have *planned their career* well have higher career aspirations as compared to those who haven't even any idea about that (base category) while those who haven't any career plans are not statistically significantly different from those who haven't any idea, in terms of their career aspiration, another finding in line with literature. Besides, the individuals who consider internship as mandatory are those who have high career aspirations as well. The internship experience contributes to the professional growth and helps getting financial benefits. Such programs integrate the classroom knowledge with workplace realities and provide the attendees a real time experience along with unrolling new opportunities in front of them (Agboola and Ademiluyi, 2016). The variable *religiosity* also relates regularity in religious activities with high career aspirations.

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

5. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

The study is based on the micro level data collected from 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 was 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 educational aspirations index is 39%, leadership aspirations index is 31% and achievement aspirations is 30%. Overall percentage of career aspiration index is 54%, 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, prefers 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 a large number of youth who haven't planned their career (12 percent of sample) and those who haven't even any idea about it (54 percent) are less career inspired as compared to smaller number i.e., 34 percent of individuals who have planned their career. Majority (79 percent) have already decided about their prospect career and 61 percent considers internship crucial in career path. In contrast, almost half of the sample have never heard about career mapping. These are the factors which need attention to enable youth of selected area to gain self-confidence to explore various career paths and to achieve their well-informed career goals adequately and in timely manner. The study highlights the pertinent role of counselling and mentorship in this regard.

Moreover, on the basis of empirical findings the study suggests to familiarize youth with career mapping, providing them opportunities for internship and accessibility of career counseling centers. An appropriate and formal counselling programs is expected to not only improve the career aspirations among youth but also support the society in bridging 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 covers the demand-supply gaps in the labor market. A critical evaluation and monitoring of existing internship programs in the area might be another focus to serve its purpose effectively.

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