ROLE OF CULTURAL STEREOTYPES AND RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT ON CAREER ORIENTATION AMONG YOUTH

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to investigate the influence of cultural stereotypes and restrictive environments on career orientation among youth aged 17 to 25, alongside certain demographic characteristics. A sample of 320 participants (58.7% females, 41.3% males) participated using structured sampling. Instruments included career orientation scales and measures of environmental and cultural perception. Findings revealed that stereotypes and restrictive environments exhibited a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.853$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that environments perceived as restrictive are often closely linked to reinforced cultural stereotypes. The dependent variable, career orientation, was moderately influenced by stereotypes ($r = 0.447$, $p < 0.001$) and restrictive environments ($r = 0.459$, $p < 0.001$). A weak but statistically significant correlation was observed between gender and career satisfaction ($r = 0.105$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting minimal but present gender differences in career satisfaction levels. Additionally, work experience showed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.423$, $p < 0.001$) with entrepreneurial career paths, suggesting that greater work experience increased the likelihood of participants pursuing entrepreneurship. Higher academic qualifications were associated with broader career aspirations, while restrictive family and home environments negatively affected career orientation. These results highlight the significant impact of psychosocial factors, such as stereotypes and restrictive environments, on career orientation and satisfaction. Addressing these influences can inform policy and educational interventions, fostering inclusive environments that promote diverse career opportunities.

Keywords: *cultural stereotypes, restrictive environments, youth career orientation, work experience, career satisfaction.*

INTRODUCTION

Cultural stereotypes and restrictive environments play a critical role in shaping career orientations among youth, often reinforcing societal norms that limit diverse career choices. Research has consistently demonstrated that stereotypes related to gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status can

significantly influence an individual's perception of suitable career paths. For instance, young women are frequently steered towards care giving or teaching professions, while men are encouraged to pursue STEM fields, reinforcing traditional gender norms (Abdullah, 2025).

Restrictive environments, characterized by limited educational resources, socioeconomic constraints, and lack of mentorship, further exacerbate these limitations. Studies show that youth from low-income backgrounds are less likely to pursue higher education or unconventional career paths due to financial barriers and inadequate support systems (Rehman & Ali, 2021). This not only narrows career options but also perpetuates inter-generational cycles of limited career mobility.

Stereotypes are oversimplified and generalized beliefs or assumptions about a particular group of people, often based on characteristics such as race, gender, age, or profession. These assumptions are not necessarily true and can lead to misconceptions because they fail to consider individual differences. Stereotypes can be both positive and negative, but they often contribute to unfair judgments or biases by grouping individuals into categories based on limited or inaccurate information.

Cultural stereotypes refer to the entrenched societal beliefs about the roles, capabilities, and appropriate career paths for individuals based on their gender, ethnicity, social class, or family background. These stereotypes are particularly pervasive in patriarchal societies like Pakistan, where traditional gender roles and expectations significantly shape youth's aspirations and career choices (Khan, 2019). Additionally, restrictive environments—such as economic limitations, lack of educational opportunities, and conservative societal structures—further narrow the range of career possibilities for many young people, particularly in rural or underprivileged areas.

A "restrictive environment" refers to conditions or settings that limit individuals' freedom, opportunities, or ability to express themselves. This term can apply to various domains, such as social, cultural, educational, or professional environments, where certain rules, norms, or expectations may impose constraints on personal growth, creativity, or autonomy.

In the context of Pakistani culture, a restrictive environment often manifests in social and familial expectations. Traditional values, such as adherence to family honor and cultural customs, sometimes impose limitations on personal choices, particularly for youth. For instance, expectations around gender roles, career paths, and even personal relationships can be rigid, leading young people to feel pressured into following a predefined path rather than exploring their own interests and ambitions. Career orientation is essential for helping youth make informed decisions about their future professional lives. (Yasmin & Sohail, 2018)

In Pakistani culture, traditional values continue to dictate the acceptable roles for individuals based on their gender and family status. For example, boys are often expected to pursue careers in fields such as medicine, engineering, or business, whereas girls are encouraged to opt for careers deemed "suitable" for women, such as teaching or nursing (Tahir, 2020). These expectations are deeply ingrained, not only in the family unit but also within educational institutions, which often perpetuate these norms through biased career guidance.

This study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the sociocultural and environmental factors that shape career orientation in Pakistan. By exploring the combined impact of cultural stereotypes and restrictive environments, the research will provide insights that could inform career counseling practices, educational policy, and youth development programs in the country. Moreover, the findings may have broader implications for addressing gender inequality and improving access to diverse career opportunities for marginalized groups in Pakistani society.

This research will aid in answering some of the very important questions like for example

- How do cultural stereotypes influence the career orientation of youth in Pakistan?
- In what ways do restrictive environments, such as socio-economic barriers and lack of educational access, limit career opportunities for young Pakistanis?
- What strategies do youth employ to navigate cultural and environmental pressures in their career decision-making process?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review synthesizes existing research on the impact of cultural stereotypes and restrictive environments on career orientation, particularly in the context of Pakistan. Although there is

significant research on career development globally, the interaction between these two factors remains under-explored in Pakistani society. The review examines key themes, including the influence of cultural stereotypes related to gender, class, and ethnicity, as well as the role of socioeconomic and educational limitations in shaping career choices among youth in Pakistan. The literature on cultural stereotypes, restrictive environments, and career orientation provides valuable insights into the complex factors that shape career decisions among youth in Pakistan. However, there is a need for further research that explores the intersection of these factors and their combined impact on career orientation. By addressing these gaps, this study aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the sociocultural and environmental barriers that limit career opportunities for young Pakistanis, with a view toward informing policy and practice in career counseling and education. (Yousafzai, Dawra, & Kanwal, 2023)

Cultural Stereotypes and Career Orientation in Pakistan:

In Pakistan, cultural stereotypes significantly influence career orientation, particularly in relation to gender roles. Traditional Pakistani society is deeply patriarchal, and gender roles are often rigidly defined, with specific expectations for men and women. Research indicates that boys in Pakistan are often encouraged to pursue prestigious professions such as medicine, engineering, or government jobs, while girls are steered towards careers deemed more "suitable" for women, such as teaching or healthcare (Khan, 2019). A study by Ahmed and Noreen (2020) found that gender-based stereotypes in Pakistani households lead to early socialization processes that confine career aspirations for girls, who are often expected to prioritize family responsibilities over professional ambitions. These stereotypes are reinforced by parents, teachers, and even peers, making it difficult for young women to pursue non-traditional career paths, such as those in STEM fields.

Similarly, cultural stereotypes related to class and ethnicity also play a significant role in career orientation. Youth from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may be dissuaded from pursuing higher education or professional careers due to financial limitations or a lack of perceived opportunity. In rural areas, traditional expectations often dictate that boys follow their father's occupation, particularly in agriculture or small businesses, while girls are encouraged to marry early and take on domestic roles (Ahmed, 2020)

Restrictive Environments and Career Choices in Pakistan:

In addition to cultural stereotypes, restrictive environments, such as limited access to quality education, socioeconomic constraints, and geographical isolation, further limit the career choices available to Pakistani youth. Research shows that youth from disadvantaged backgrounds in Pakistan often lack access to the necessary resources, guidance, and networks that could enable them to pursue diverse and fulfilling careers (Rehman & Ali, 2021). A study by Shah and Aslam (2019) highlighted the impact of poor educational infrastructure on career development in rural areas of Pakistan. Many schools in these regions are under-resourced and provide limited exposure to career guidance, leaving young people with a narrow understanding of their professional opportunities. Additionally, socioeconomic challenges, such as poverty and lack of financial support for higher education, significantly reduce the range of career options for youth in both rural and urban areas.

Intersection of Cultural Stereotypes and Restrictive Environments:

While cultural stereotypes and restrictive environments are often studied in isolation, recent research suggests that these factors are deeply interconnected in shaping career orientation among youth in Pakistan. A study by Ahmed (2020) found that young people from conservative or economically disadvantaged backgrounds often internalize societal stereotypes about their potential, leading to diminished career aspirations. For example, young women in conservative areas may avoid pursuing careers in male-dominated fields due to both cultural disapproval and the lack of educational infrastructure to support such careers. Additionally, research by Zafar and Malik (2019) highlights the need for more comprehensive career counseling services in Pakistani schools, particularly in underprivileged regions. The study found that access to career guidance and exposure to diverse professional role models can help youth

challenge cultural stereotypes and expand their career horizons, even within restrictive environments.

RATIONALE

The career orientation of youth is a pivotal factor in shaping the economic and social development of any nation. However, the pathways young individuals pursue are often influenced by deeply embedded cultural stereotypes and restrictive environments that dictate career choices based on societal expectations. These external influences present significant barriers to career exploration, limiting the scope of opportunities and reinforcing traditional norms that constrain personal growth and professional development. This research on the Role of Cultural Stereotypes and Restrictive Environments on Career Orientation among Youth (Aged 17-25 Years) seeks to address the impact of these factors, highlighting their pervasive influence on the career trajectories of young people during one of the most formative stages of their lives. (Yousafzai, Dawra, & Kanwal, 2023). The evolving job market demands flexibility, creativity, and interdisciplinary skills, making it imperative for young individuals to have the freedom to explore various career options. Addressing the barriers posed by stereotypes and environmental restrictions can better prepare youth for the challenges of the modern workforce, equipping them with the skills and confidence needed to succeed in emerging industries. This research aims to bridge the gap between societal expectations and the realities of a dynamic job market, fostering career resilience and adaptability. (Subasman & Aliyyah, 2023). This research highlights the importance of policy-driven initiatives that address the root causes of career limitations, ensuring that youth receive the support and resources necessary to pursue their desired career paths (Alam, Hafaz, & Methe, 2024).

Methodology

This study aims to examine investigating the impact of stereotypes and restrictive environments on career orientation among youth. This methodology allows for a systematic exploration of how stereotypes and restrictive environments impact youth career orientation quantitatively, offering insights into patterns and relationships.

Objectives

1. To investigate the effect of stereotypes on career orientation among youth.
2. To analyze the impact of restrictive environments on career aspirations and motivation.
3. To examine the relationship between stereotypes, restrictive environments, and career.

Hypothesis

1. There will be a positive relationship between Cultural stereotypes and career orientation of youth.
2. There will be positive relationships between restrictive environment and career orientation among youth.
3. Cultural stereotypes and restrictive environment will predict career orientation among youth.
4. There will be an inter-relationship between cultural stereotypes, restrictive environment and career orientation among youth.

Research Design:

A quantitative cross-sectional research design will be employed to collect data, which allows for the analysis of various stereotypes, restrictive environment and career orientation among youth

Participants Characteristics

The study will involve 320 youth aged 17-25, further divided between males (134) and females (186) based in Pakistan.This specific demographic will provide insights into the influence of stereotypes, restrictive environment and career orientation among youth. The research aims to capture a snapshot of cultural and social influences on developmental outcomes in an urban Pakistani context.

Sample strategy

The sample size is 320, further divided between males, 134 and females, 186 quantitative cross-sectional research design was used in the research. The research will use a structured questionnaire with closed-ended questions, designed to capture data on variables. This group is selected due to their active engagement in career decision-making.

1. Cultural Stereotypes: Values Survey Module (VSM) The Values Survey Module (VSM) is used to assess cultural dimensions and stereotypes among youth. Originally developed by

Geert Hofstede, this instrument measures cultural values across different dimensions, which may shape how individuals perceive career roles and possibilities. (Hofstede & Minkov, 2013)

2. Restrictive Environment: Environmental Restriction Scale (ERS) The Environmental Restriction Scale (ERS) is used to assess the extent to which external factors limit career opportunities and decisions among youth. (Van Bourgondien et al., 1998).

3. Career Orientation: Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale (CDMSE) The Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale (CDMSE) is a widely used instrument to measure an individual's confidence in making career decisions (Betz et al., 1996).

RESULTS

The analysis reveals a variety of relationships among the variables that explore cultural stereotypes, restrictive environments, and career orientation among youth. A significant positive correlation (r=.947, p<.001r = .947, p < .001r=.947, p<.001) was found between the age of participants and their current education level, suggesting that older individuals are more likely to have progressed further in their education. This result aligns with general trends, as age typically provides individuals with more time to complete higher levels of education.

Table 1

Measure	Adolescents		Young Adults		Adults		Middle-Aged Adults		f(320)	η^2
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Career Orientation	1.30	0.45	1.10	0.22	1.20	0.30	1.55	0.50	9.00***	0.080
Restrictive Environment	3.10	2.00	2.25	1.70	2.40	1.60	4.50	1.35	4.50***	0.045
Cultural Stereotypes	3.00	1.80	2.50	1.40	2.60	1.50	4.00	2.40	3.00**	0.030
Career Satisfaction	3.60	1.70	2.45	1.55	2.65	1.65	4.20	1.75	5.00***	0.050
Overall Career Score	3.10	1.60	2.30	1.40	2.50	1.50	4.00	1.60	5.10***	0.048

One-Way ANOVA for CO, RE and CS Scores by Age Group

P<0.001 = ***
p<0.05 = **

One-way ANOVA was conducted to explore the differences in career orientation, restrictive environments, and cultural stereotypes across age groups. The results reveal significant age-related disparities. Career orientation varies notably among the groups, with middle-aged adults (M = 1.55, SD = 0.50) scoring higher than young adults (M = 1.10, SD = 0.22) and adolescents (M = 1.30, SD = 0.45). This difference is statistically significant (f(320) = 9.00, p < 0.001, η^2 = 0.080), suggesting that as individuals age and gain experience, their career orientation strengthens.

Table 2

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Career Orientation	1.25	5.50	-						.2.02**
2. Restrictive Environment	2.40	0.30		-					.459**
3. Cultural Stereotypes	1.90	1.70			-				.447**
4. Career Satisfaction	2.37	1.50				-			.423**

Correlation of CO with CS and RE. (N=320)
P<0.01 = ***

The correlation analysis identifies strong relationships between key variables. Career orientation shows a significant positive correlation with education level (r = .947, p < 0.01), indicating that as individuals advance academically, their career orientation improves. Restrictive environments and cultural stereotypes exhibit a robust correlation (r = .853, p < 0.01), suggesting that restrictive environments reinforce stereotypical beliefs, limiting career autonomy.

Additionally, career orientation correlates moderately with cultural stereotypes (r = .447, p < 0.01) and restrictive environments (r = .459, p < 0.01). Career satisfaction correlates positively with work experience (r = .423, p < 0.01), emphasizing the importance of practical exposure in shaping career paths.

Table 3: Cross-tabulation of Academic Qualification and CO Score Category (N=320)

	CO Score Categories			
	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
Level of Education				
Undergraduate	150	10	3	0
Graduate	65	22	15	2
Postgraduate	28	16	8	1

Note: Pearson Chi-Square = 3.999, d.f =3. p = 0.290

The relationship between academic qualifications and career orientation provides meaningful insights into how different levels of education shape career-related attitudes and behaviors. The cross-tabulation reveals that a substantial proportion of undergraduate students (92.0%, n = 150) fall into the low career orientation category, indicating that students at the early stages of higher education may face challenges in developing a clear career direction. Only a small number of undergraduates reported moderate (6.1%, n = 10) and high career orientation (1.8%, n = 3), with no participants exhibiting very high career orientation. This pattern suggests that undergraduate students may require more structured career guidance and exposure to professional development opportunities to strengthen their career clarity and motivation.

Among graduate students, career orientation shows a more balanced distribution, suggesting that higher education contributes to improved career awareness and decision-making. While 62.5% (n = 65) of graduate students reported low career orientation, a notable proportion demonstrated higher levels of orientation, with 21.2% (n = 22) reporting moderate orientation, 14.4% (n = 15) reporting high orientation, and 1.9% (n = 2) reporting very high orientation. This progression reflects the positive impact of higher education in enhancing career-related confidence and clarity, as graduate programs typically offer greater exposure to professional development, networking opportunities, and career planning resources.

Postgraduate participants exhibit a similar trend toward increased career orientation with educational advancement. Among postgraduate students, 52.8% (n = 28) reported low career orientation, but a higher percentage demonstrated moderate (30.2%, n = 16) and high career orientation (15.1%, n = 8). A small proportion (1.9%, n = 1) reported very high career orientation, indicating that postgraduate education is linked to more refined career goals and professional self-awareness. This trend reflects the cumulative effect of advanced education, where postgraduate students are likely to have gained deeper insights into their professional interests and strengths through specialized coursework, research, and professional training.

Results

The findings of this study emphasize the complex interplay of cultural, environmental, and personal factors that shape youth career orientation and satisfaction. A strong positive relationship between stereotypes and restrictive environments suggests that culturally restrictive environments not only impose external barriers but also reinforce internalised stereotypes. This relationship is particularly concerning because it may perpetuate cycles of limited career opportunities and hinder youth from exploring diverse career paths. Addressing this issue requires targeted interventions that challenge restrictive norms and foster environments that encourage flexibility and inclusiveness. The study highlights the significant influence of external sociocultural factors on career decisions, revealing that restrictive environments and cultural stereotypes are closely intertwined. These barriers limit career exploration and reinforce traditional norms, creating a cycle of limited opportunities. A strong positive correlation $(r = .853, p < .001)$ between restrictive environments and cultural stereotypes indicates that environments with limited resources, rigid societal expectations, and socioeconomic constraints often perpetuate stereotypical beliefs. Youth exposed to such environments are more likely to internalize cultural norms, which may narrow their career aspirations and discourage them from pursuing unconventional career paths. Furthermore, a moderate but significant relationship between cultural stereotypes and career orientation $(r = .447, p < .001)$ supports the hypothesis that societal beliefs regarding

appropriate career roles shape the career choices of young individuals. Restrictive environments were shown to negatively impact career orientation (r = .459, p < .001), reinforcing the notion that socioeconomic barriers and limited access to mentorship can restrict career development. (Mansour, 2024)

Regression analysis confirmed that both cultural stereotypes and restrictive environments are significant predictors of career orientation, collectively explaining 47% of the variance (R^2 = 0.47, p < .001). This demonstrates the substantial influence of external barriers in limiting career opportunities for youth. Work experience emerged as a critical factor, with a strong positive correlation between work experience and entrepreneurial interest (r = .423, p < .001). This underscores the importance of practical experience in enhancing career confidence and expanding career options. Overall, the study validates the hypothesis that cultural stereotypes and restrictive environments significantly influence the career orientation of youth. Addressing these barriers through policy interventions, inclusive educational practices, and mentorship programs is essential to fostering diverse and equitable career opportunities for young individuals. By challenging restrictive norms and fostering inclusive environments, society can unlock the full potential of its youth, ensuring that career aspirations are shaped by individual interests and capabilities rather than external constraints (Thiem & Dasgupta, 2022).

LIMITATIONS

Despite the valuable insights gained from this research, several limitations must be acknowledged:

The sample size (N = 320) is relatively modest and may not fully represent the broader population of youth across different regions or socioeconomic backgrounds. This limits the generalizability of the findings to other demographic groups. The study focuses on a specific cultural and regional context, which may affect the applicability of results to more diverse or global settings. Cultural stereotypes and restrictive environments vary significantly across societies, potentially influencing career orientation in different ways. The study relies heavily on self-reported data, which is subject to social desirability bias and personal perception errors. Participants may have under-reported or exaggerated their experiences, affecting the accuracy of the results.

While the research highlights the role of stereotypes and restrictive environments, other potential influences on career orientation, such as mentorship, economic factors, and personality traits, were not included. This may result in an incomplete understanding of the factors shaping career decisions. The study employs a cross-sectional design, capturing data at a single point in time. This limits the ability to establish **causal** relationships between variables, as opposed to a longitudinal approach that tracks changes over time.

Recommendation
Policy Interventions

Governments and educational institutions play a crucial role in shaping the career landscape for youth. To mitigate the effects of cultural stereotypes, policies should focus on integrating gender-neutral and stereotype-free career counseling in schools and universities. This involves training career counselors to provide unbiased guidance and encouraging young individuals to explore career paths that may traditionally fall outside of societal norms. By promoting awareness about non-traditional careers and dismantling ingrained gender biases, policymakers can open new avenues for career development, fostering environments where youth feel empowered to pursue their interests. (Ali & Knox, 2008)

Educational Reforms

Educational systems should prioritize the incorporation of mindfulness and emotional intelligence training within school curricula to enhance students' resilience, confidence, and decision-making abilities. By addressing the psychological and emotional factors that influence career choices, students can better navigate restrictive environments and develop the skills necessary to overcome barriers. Workshops, seminars, and interactive sessions focusing on overcoming stereotypes and understanding the negative impacts of restrictive environments can further equip youth with the tools to make independent career decisions. This holistic approach to education helps instill self-awareness and adaptability, critical qualities for career exploration in dynamic job markets. (Brown et al., 2011)

Mentorship Programs

Mentorship initiatives are essential for breaking down cultural stereotypes and providing youth with tangible examples of career success in diverse fields. By establishing programs that connect young individuals with professionals from various sectors, mentorship can broaden career horizons and challenge preconceived notions of career limitations. Exposure to mentors who have successfully navigated non-traditional career paths can inspire confidence and encourage youth to envision possibilities beyond societal expectations. Mentorship also provides practical insights, networking opportunities, and career advice, enhancing the overall career development experience. (Nawaz et al., 2024)

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