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Career aspirations of female students in economics: a case study of public sector universities in Punjab

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Measuring the Determinants of Career Aspirations among Female Students in Economics: A Case Study of Public Sector Universities in Punjab

Session

Labour Market and Career Choices

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Introduction

- Women are under-represented in the field of Economics and hesitate to specialize in the subject.
- Few women reach the top echelon in any field, which is indicative from the fact that so far 53 women have won Nobel Prize as opposed to 866 men.
- Only two women have achieved the distinction of winning the Nobel Prize in the field of economic sciences.
- This study focuses on the female students of Economics enrolled in selected Universities in Punjab that enabled us to measure the career aspiration index and identifying its potential determinants.
- We have selected the field of Economics because the glass ceilings are quite prominent in professions relating the subject of Economics.
- As heads of departments in the universities, member on the board of governors & economic advisory council, planning commission and in policy making role women are quite invisible.

Rationale of the study

- This is an explorative study that is based on the assertion that achievement presupposes aspiration
- We have explored a number of venues through which aspirations among women in Economics may be affected
- We have attempted to ascertain the impact of personal, demographic and institutional attributes in determining career aspirations among women in Economics

Literature Review: Theoretical Literature

- **Gottfredson's Theory of Circumscription and Compromise (1981)**
- **Farmer's Career Development Model (1985)**
- **Social Cognitive Career Theory Framework (1994)**

Empirical Literature

Author/s	Sample	Title	Source	Findings
Strober (1975)	1974-75 CSWEP, AEA Survey of Economists	Women economists: Career aspirations, education, and training	American Economic Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existence of role model was identified to be the dominant factor in choosing economics as profession
Neumark and Gardecki (1996)	female PHD students and the faculty members	Women helping women? Role-model and mentoring effects on female Ph. D. student in economics	NBER w5733	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mentorship relations must be encouraged among students
Jensen and Owen (2000)	sample of 1,776 students from liberal arts colleges of United States	Why are women such reluctant economists? Evidence from liberal arts colleges	American Economic Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • male students are more likely to have a favorable attitude towards Economics
Ginther and Kahn (2004)	sample of 320 professors where 93 were females in USA	Women in economics: moving up or falling off the academic career ladder?	Journal of Economic perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lower chances of females getting tenure in Economics
Colander and Holmes (2007)	231 interviewees from top universities in the USA	Gender and graduate economics education in the US	Feminist Economics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • women are less likely to be registered in the Economics courses as compared to males in the sampled institutes

Proposed Model

We are assessing indicators spanning across 8 distinct dimensions of our respondents' existence.

1. *Demographic Indicators*
2. *Academic history*
3. *Current academic status*
4. *Choice of economics*
5. *Future Plans*
6. *Mentorship and inspiration*
7. *Gender association*
8. *Religion*

$$CAI_i = \beta_o + \sum_{d=1}^5 \beta_d DEM_{di} + \beta_6 AHIS_i + \sum_{d=7}^9 \beta_d ASta_{di} + \beta_{10} ChEco_i + \sum_{d=11}^{13} \beta_d FPl_{di} \\ + \sum_{d=14}^{15} \beta_d Mentor_{di} + \beta_{16} Gender_i + \beta_{17} Rel_i + \theta \lambda_i + \varepsilon_i$$

Data Collection

- The study is based on primary data from selected universities in Punjab
- Our sample comprises of 415 female students enrolled in Economics program in universities in the province
- The survey questionnaire was administered between the months of November 2019 to March 2020 in 12 universities
- This research is based on the FJWU-funded project from Faculty Development Program of Fatima Jinnah Women University, conducted in 2019-2020

Measuring Career Aspirations

- The Career Aspiration Index was measured based on the responses in the form of 5-point Likert scale adapting the methodology by Gregor and O'Brien (2015).
- They revised the index by classifying its constituents as leadership aspiration, achievement aspiration and education aspiration.
- The indexation is carried out by using the methodology for calculating the dimensional indices for Human Development Index (HDI)

- The general formula for the index is

$$XAI_i = \frac{\sum_{j=1}^6 x_{ij} - \text{minimum}}{\text{maximum} - \text{minimum}}$$

- Finally the Career Aspiration Index (CAI) is calculated by using weighted sum of LAI, AAI and EAI, with weight being equal to 1/3.

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

Findings

- Age, marital status, mother's education and employment status of the respondent were found to be insignificant
- Father's education and working status were found to be significant
- If the respondent identifies her household as non-poor she would have higher career aspirations.
- Upon applying Heckman's correction models have been re-estimated after incorporation of λ .
- The coefficient of λ was found to be negative and significant.
- Respondent's academic history presented by private schooling and opting for O-levels has no impact on career aspirations
- Women enrolled in MS/MPhil programs have significant and higher career aspirations when compared to women who are enrolled in Undergraduate studies.
- Contrary to expectations Women enrolled in PhD programs do not have higher career aspirations.
- The most significant variable is respondent's characterization of the institute they are currently enrolled in.
- The respondents who picked *economics as the first choice* for undergraduate studies didn't have significantly different career aspirations from those who did not
- Women who plan to marry within 5 years of graduating tend to have significantly lower career aspirations than women who do not have marriage as part of their medium term plans.
- The results indicate that ambivalence regarding prospective career choices have a detrimental effect on career aspirations.
- Women who indicate existence of a mentor have higher career aspirations than those who indicate absence of mentorship.
- Women who adhere to traditional gender roles were found to have lower aspirations

Conclusion

- The study focuses on female university students enrolled in Economics departments in Punjab, Pakistan.
- Various avenues ranging from demographic factors to the future plans are explored with the help of descriptive and inferential statistics.
- The index of career aspiration was calculated from Gregor and O'Brian (2015) revised index of career aspirations
- The calculated average *Career Aspiration Index* of selected female students of universities in Punjab is 58 percent which shows a moderate level of career aspirations.
- The results indicate the effectiveness of socioeconomic status, employment status, male guardian's occupational status, availability of a mentor and perceptions about ranking of institute of higher learning in enhancing career aspirations of Pakistani women.
- Prospective marriage in near future, ambivalence regarding career choice and ascription to traditional gender roles were found to be detrimental
- These results are the crucial first step towards identifying the main hurdles in women's achievement in the field of Economics

Recommendations

- Educational institutes need to initiate capacity building mentoring and leadership program
- The range of courses supported with quality of education can be widened to develop highly motivated students from the start of their education path and can develop positive attitude towards professional life

Limitations of the Study

- Sample size
- Sample selection
- Unexplored avenues