



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Perception of high school female students regarding  
career counseling in Karachi: A qualitative study**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This research aimed to examine the pertinence of career counseling for female 12th-grade students in Pakistan employing a qualitative research methodology, specifically through focus group interviews. The investigation sought to elucidate the determinants influencing female students' career choices, the consequential impact of career counseling on their vocational aspirations, and the interconnection between career counseling and the academic performance of female students. Additionally, the study gauged the comprehension of 12th-grade female students in Pakistan concerning career counseling services and the efficacy of the extant career counseling facilities accessible to them. The findings revealed a prevalent lack of future planning among the majority of students, with only a minority having sought guidance from educators. Notably, Pakistani female students encountered discouragement in pursuing their professional objectives, contributing to a discernible gender disparity within the national economy. The selection of academic disciplines appeared to be predominantly influenced by peer choices, with minimal guidance from experienced career counselors. These outcomes underscore the imperative for augmented accessibility to career counseling resources, given that a considerable portion of students remains devoid of such services. This underscores the criticality of addressing this issue, as informed decisions regarding future trajectories can be facilitated through equitable access to comprehensive guidance.*

**Keywords:** Career Counseling, Guidance, High school, focus group interviews, gender disparity

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### **Introduction:**

Counseling endeavors to create a supportive environment, fostering individuals in addressing their challenges, acquiring essential skills, and effectively managing their emotions, thereby empowering them to lead more enriched and fulfilling lives (Hauenstein, 2019). Counseling serves as a professional intervention aimed at supporting individuals in navigating and addressing mental health concerns, with the ultimate goal of enhancing their overall well-being and enabling them to lead more purposeful and productive lives. It involves a collaborative process between the counselor and the individual, fostering a safe and confidential space for open communication (Khan, 2020). The primary objective of counseling is to assist individuals in managing mental health challenges and facilitating their capacity to lead lives that are both productive and imbued with significance (Ahmed & Qureshi, 2021). Additionally, it helps in creating healthy coping strategies, working on areas of personal growth, and building interpersonal skills (Qureshi, 2020). Moreover, counseling can also help individuals to increase their self-esteem, improve communication skills, and take responsibility for their own decisions (Syed et al., 2019). Thus, counseling is an effective approach to aid individuals in Pakistan to manage mental health issues and lead a more meaningful and fulfilling life. If we talk about career counseling it is related to the field of education and career guidance. Over the last three years, there has been a 20 percent spike in the number of Pakistani students who are receiving career counseling, mainly due to the changing job market and heightened competition for educational and career opportunities.

This heightened awareness of the need for career planning, especially among the young, is highlighted in a report by the Ministry of Human Rights and Social Development (2019-2022) which also suggests that the demand for career counseling in Pakistan has grown significantly in the past few years. With gender disparities in Pakistan still persistently high, career counseling for female citizens has become an increasingly important issue.

A report from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2020) highlights the fact that only two out of five females are currently active in the workforce, with most of them working in menial jobs with limited room for professional growth. According to (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2020) the gender gap in Pakistan is still very wide, with women making up only 24% of the total labor force in the

country. This percentage is much lower than the global average of 40%. As a result, female students often face greater challenges in terms of accessing career opportunities and understanding the labor market. To overcome this situation, career counseling for females in Pakistan has become a necessity to help women recognize their abilities and identify suitable career paths, as well as secure the right job opportunities. So in this study, the factors that affect female students' reach to career counseling will be discussed and the importance of career counseling among female students in grade 12 will be discussed. This is a qualitative study and the goal is to investigate the significance of career counseling and examine the various elements that influence a student's choice to pursue a degree after completing secondary school Focus group is used as a data collection tool.

### **Problem statement**

This research study seeks to investigate the significance of career counseling for female students in grade 12 in Pakistan. In particular, the study concentrates on investigating the aspects that shape female students' career decisions, the influence of career counseling on their career preferences, and how career counseling affects the academic performance of female students. Additionally, this research assesses the knowledge among female students of grade 12 in Pakistan about career counseling services. Ultimately, the research intends to assess the efficiency of career counseling for female students of grade 12 in Pakistan.

### **Purpose of Study**

This research aimed to investigate the significance of career counseling for 12th-grade female students in Pakistan. It examined the impact of career counseling on their educational and career decisions, cognitive performance, employment prospects, and psychological well-being. The study also explored the accessibility and utility of career counseling services, investigating female students' awareness of career counseling and identifying potential barriers to accessing these services.

Additionally, the research evaluated how career counseling can assist female students in overcoming challenges during their decision-making processes. Finally, it assessed the effectiveness of career counseling in supporting female students in achieving their educational and career aspirations. This study explored the importance of career guidance for 12th-grade female students in Pakistan, analyzing the challenges they face in shaping their career paths, the influence of career counseling on academic performance and future prospects, the role of family, society, and culture in establishing career objectives, and the effectiveness of available career counseling services.

### **Research Questions**

1- What are the primary elements shaping the perspectives of career counseling among high school female students in Karachi?

1. How do high school female students assess the efficacy of career counseling in Karachi?
2. What are the main challenges that high school female students face when accessing career counseling services in Karachi?

### **Significance of study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to find out how career counseling is important among female students and also to explore if female students of high school in Karachi know about career counseling and if they are aware of the effectiveness and potency of career counseling. This study was conducted in one high school in Karachi. Focus group interviews were held as an instrument to gain affirmative results from high school. The result of this study is important for Karachi and all over Pakistan as according to my view our country lacks career sufficiency among students most of our generation is unaware of career counseling specifically females. This study aims to equip female students in Karachi, Pakistan with the tools to make informed career decisions. It provides parents and teachers with the necessary information to make the right career choices for secondary-level students, ultimately reducing the number of failure rates, drop-out speeds, and possible wastage of resources. Authorities in Pakistan can use this research to arrange career counseling services at the high school level, guaranteeing that students have an organized design for career preparation.

### **Literature review**

This study explores the correlation between career counseling and students' academic accomplishments. In this section, the literature is examined, shedding light on the central theme. The researcher reviews the perspectives of others on the study. The process of making a career choice is highly personal, significantly shaped by an individual's interests, values, skills, and prior experiences. (Farnam, 2019; Klenke, 2020; Johnson, 2021; Mckinney, 2022). To make an educated decision, it is important to think deeply, evaluate oneself, do research, and network (Farnam, 2019; Johnson, 2021). Additionally, it is vital to be aware of job market trends and the potential implications of a chosen career on one's personal and professional life (Klenke, 2020; Mckinney, 2022). Ultimately, to guarantee career satisfaction and success in the long run, it is essential to pick a job that aligns with one's interests and values (Klenke, 2020; Mckinney, 2022).

Career counseling: Recent studies conducted by the American Psychological Association (2020), the Australian Psychological Society (2021), and the National Career Development Association (2018) have illustrated that career counseling is an effective and advantageous means of career development and decision-making. These studies found that career counseling can be beneficial to those trying to make decisions about their future, by helping them to recognize their interests and experiences, build up abilities like goal-setting and decision-making, and

comprehend their strengths and weaknesses better. As a whole, career counseling is a helpful tool that individuals can utilize to create a successful career path.

The research conducted by M.F. Martinez, et al. (2020) and K.M. Miller, et al. (2021) both concluded that career counseling had positive effects on career and job satisfaction. The former study reported that college students who received counseling had higher levels of career satisfaction than those who did not, while the latter showed an increase in job satisfaction among unemployed individuals who had received it.

These studies suggest that career counseling is an effective tool for improving individuals' satisfaction with their careers and jobs.

#### Importance of career counseling

A career counseling process is a beneficial tool for those wishing to gain insight into their abilities and evaluate job opportunities, as well as create a plan to achieve their goals. It allows for an introspective analysis of interests, values, and skills, providing individuals with the opportunity to explore potential occupations (Riggio, 2021). Furthermore, with the help of a professional, it allows individuals to receive personalized advice to help them reach their goals (Konstantinova, 2021).

Additionally, career counseling can provide individuals with the support they need to transition successfully into the job market (Riggio, 2021). This support may include resume writing, job interview preparation, and job search strategies to help them find a job that suits their interests and abilities (Konstantinova, 2021).

A study conducted in Pakistan showed that career counseling has a significant effect on students' success. It was discovered that students who underwent career counseling had higher levels of educational attainment and job satisfaction. Furthermore, the study revealed that career counseling enabled students to more effectively handle stress and gave them direction for their future career choices (Bashir et al., 2020).

#### **Significance of Career Counseling for Female Students in Pakistan**

Career counseling is an important tool for female students in Pakistan to help them better understand their potential and find their ideal career path. According to a study conducted by the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC) in 2019, only 18% of female students had access to career counseling services. This lack of access to career counseling can limit the potential of female students and harm their educational and career prospects.

Furthermore, career counseling can help female students to overcome the gender-based barriers and cultural taboos that often prevent them from participating in higher education and the job market. Through counseling, female students can become aware of their rights and the opportunities available to them. This can help them to gain confidence and become more independent and empowered. (HEC, 2019-2021).

Providing career counseling to female grade 12 students in Pakistan is of

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utmost importance. In this country with a complex social structure, women are often deprived of basic rights and access to education. Studies have shown that offering career counseling to these students can lead to higher levels of academic success. For instance, Sahar et al. (2018) conducted a study that demonstrated an increase in the number of female students enrolling in higher education and a decrease in the number of students dropping out. Additionally, the program decreased the gender gap in educational attainment. Moreover, career counseling offers female students a supportive environment in which to explore and make informed decisions about their future. According to Hussain & Mehmood (2015), when females have access to career counseling, they are more likely to make better decisions about their future and be aware of the opportunities available to them.

A study conducted in a city of Pakistan “sukkur”. Shah et al. (2020) explored the importance of career counseling at the grade-12 level at a public sector school in Sindh, Pakistan. This was qualitative research and for data collection, they used structured interviews. This study explored the significance and necessity of Career Counseling at the Grade 12 level, focusing on six students from a semi-public sector school located in Sukkur City. Six learners from three different boards were investigated; three of them were male and three were female. Five inquiries were posed to direct the investigation, delving into the degree to which career counseling is provided at this level, the advantages it can bring, and the obstacles associated with it, as well as how these can be overcome. The results of the study demonstrated that career counseling is fruitful for Grade 12 students, aiding them to pick the correct study program. This research discovered that pupils experienced difficulty in settling on what career they wanted to pursue, usually settling on an option based on inaccurate personal reflections and perspectives of the world around them. In addition, the environment of the family and the influence of friends had a notable effect on the self-image and occupational identity of young people.

### **Research design**

This study is designed as a qualitative case study, aiming to investigate a specific phenomenon within its natural context. A case study involves a thorough examination of an individual, group, event, or organization (Robson, 2021). In the realm of qualitative research, a case study is characterized by an in-depth analysis of an individual, group, event, or society, spanning a considerable duration (Creswell, 2014). This approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of the details and nuances associated with the chosen subject, providing a rich and detailed understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Ashiq & Habib, 2020).

This study selected a government college exclusively for female students as its population. Participants with diverse backgrounds and cultural

affiliations took part in the research, with the majority falling within the age range of 18 to 19. The sample comprised 50 participants, evenly distributed between the Arts and Commerce groups, totaling 25 individuals from each. Purposive sampling served as a crucial tool in conducting this qualitative research, allowing researchers to deliberately choose participants who were deemed highly likely to offer valuable insights into the study's focus. The study specifically concentrated on high school female students in Karachi and aimed to explore their perspectives on career counseling.

As such, the sample of participants was chosen thoughtfully to confirm that the data assembled is meaningful and appropriate. The first step in the purposive sampling process is to decide upon the target population. For this study, the target population is female students in high school in Karachi. The next step is to determine the size of the sample. For this study, focus groups will be used as the primary data collection method. Focus groups typically depend on the type of topic you have to discuss. It is also important to ensure that the sample is not too small, as this could limit the depth and breadth of the data collected. So there was a total of 50 participants, 25 from the Arts group and 25 from the commerce group as two focus groups were conducted separately.

The study is purely qualitative as it involves exploring the importance of career counseling for a specific group of people (female students in grade 12 in Pakistan) through a Focus group method of gathering data. Qualitative research is a practical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within its realistic context utilizing a combination of methods such as interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis (Maree, 2021).

Focus groups were considered a good research instrument for data collection in this study. Focus groups were used to gain insights into the experiences and outlooks of female students in grade 12 considering the importance of career counseling.

Participants in the focus groups were asked to discuss their thoughts, feelings, and statements on the case, as well as to share their occasions with career counseling. This type of data collection will provide valuable insight into the participants' beliefs, encouragements, and worries related to career counseling, which can be used to inform guidelines and policies. A focus group is a form of qualitative research in which participants are brought together to discuss a respective case or topic. It is a sort of group discussion that normally involves 10-20 participants who share their opinions and understandings on a given case (Miles, 2020).

## **Findings**

### **Knowledge about career counseling**

Following the completion of the consent form signing, students were queried about their anticipations for the study, having already perused the study topic on the consent form. Responses included statements such as (AG-P2): "We are going to explore perspectives on psychology as

counseling." Notably, an Arts student, due to the proximity of their curriculum to the term psychology, inferred a connection between career counseling and psychology. In order to segue into the study's main focus, the initial question posed pertained to their life goals and the factors influencing their choice of academic field. Below are summarized excerpts from a few of the responses received.

*"My aim was to become a doctor but one of my aunty failed and told me its way too difficult so I dropped the idea of becoming a doctor due to her bad experience my family also thought I can't do it..."* (CG-P10)

*"My aim was to join army but it's not allowed from our dad's side of the family so I just thought of doing intermediate from Arts because I was not interested in anything rather than joining Army".* (AG-P11)

*"I want to become a psychiatrist".* (AG-P15)

My father had objection on me to attend college and you are asking about my University plans? (CG-P20)

I don't know but I think I won't have to think about it as my family is already planning to get me married... (AG-P19)

Mostly students were not planning on to study further. Others were planning to get married and further students where in the wrong field by chance or by means. Next they were asked this question: Are you knowledgeable about the concept of career counseling, what age do you think is most suitable for career counseling?

Responses were limited but unique.

Career is what job we are going to do in the future and so counseling is talking about it with someone who can give advice. It should be decided by the age of 18.(CG-P10)

*I think when someone tells you about your field and helps you regarding your career decisions. It is done in universities to choose better job.* (CG-P12)

Career counselors are people who guide us about our future. It should start from 10<sup>th</sup> grade. (CG-P14)

Finally, it was wrapped up at this stage and finalized that the majority of participants had no future planned. Some of them were getting married some of them were not allowed to study further and others were just confused. In a rare case there was a couple of students from both groups who were receiving guidance from their tutor as stated by one of the student: *I am still working on deciding my future plan with my tutor He guide me with my studies and my future planning.* (CG-P7).

*My tuition teacher guides me about my career.* (AG-P17).

So study examined the responses of students about their future plans and knowledge of career counseling. Most of the responses were that they had no plans for the future and some were getting married, while a few were receiving guidance from their tutors. The responses when asked about career counseling were that it should be done at the age of 18 or 10th grade and that it is used to help guide people in their studies and future job choices. Overall, most of the participants had no future plans and the few



that did had received guidance from their tutors.

### **Counseling impacts on professionalism in Pakistan**

Both groups were agreeing on this that a person should choose what they like or have an interest in. Next, they were asked if they are satisfied with the extent of their goal in Pakistan and what they think are the major factors that make Pakistanis unaware of their goals. Their responses were: *My family did not allow me to join Army because they knew there is no place for a girl of our culture in the Army as I'm Urdu speaking. Even if I had gone for that I would not have been selected.* (AG-P11)

Girls here are not contributing to society's economy because they are taught from the beginning that you have to get married or you are dependent on a man and that's your only goal so they are unaware of what they can achieve.

This was summarized by both groups who agreed with the statement that female students are not really contributing to the economy as much as men are and they are also not taught to do so.

Also according to (AG-P11), *i have no idea about my scope in Army*".

What are your views on girls' education and professional development in Pakistan? About this question the statements were:

Girls are often not financially supported to study further. (CG)-(AG).

Some girls that are at some good stage right now are because of their financial stability and parental support, otherwise this government does not support us in any way.(AG- P17)

*In comparison to male students, we girls are way too far, and we are not standing the same in our professional lives.* (AG-P11).

Both groups agreed that female students in Pakistan are not encouraged to pursue their professional goals and are not financially supported in their educational pursuits. This contributes to the lack of female contribution to the economy and highlights the gender inequality that exists. Even though some girls have achieved success due to parental and financial support, this is not the norm. The government is not doing enough to support female students in reaching their goals.

### **Barriers that occur in choosing the right career**

This third theme interviews about the barriers that they face when going for any profession. The question was (Did you take the time to do research before deciding on your career, or you are receiving any assistance in achieving your goal?)

I once was told that my cousin was a counselor, not specifically a career counselor but a psychologist/counselor, so I went to meet him he asked me some questions regarding my interest and guided me to choose commerce and then start my business studies along with my food stall as it's my dream. (CG-P1)

Also couple of students said:

*Career counseling is important from 8th grade in Pakistan because after that many of us had to choose from biology, computer science, or other*

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*subjects/fields.* (AG-P3)(CG- P13).

Students who talked about the importance of career development said: Career counseling is important, we believe this. (AG-CG).

We don't have the resources to get counseling, and the colleges or schools did not provide us with this kind of program. (AG) – (CG).

This thematic segment explores the challenges encountered by students in the process of selecting a profession. The findings indicate that a significant number of students opt for a particular field primarily because their peers are pursuing the same course or discipline, suggesting a trend of conformity. Furthermore, participants were queried about whether they had received professional career counseling, with a notable proportion indicating that they had not. However, there were instances where students acknowledged the importance of such guidance, emphasizing its value. Notably, some participants expressed the viewpoint that career counseling should commence as early as the 8th grade in Pakistan. In essence, the responses underscore the insufficiency of available career counseling resources, emphasizing the pressing need for increased accessibility to such services, given that a considerable portion of students lacks access to them.

In contrast, the findings of an international empirical study by Kainth (2020) revealed an opposite trend, where students displayed greater awareness of counseling services and acknowledged their importance. Particularly, female participants in that study emphasized a greater need for and significance of career counseling compared to their male counterparts.

Similarly, when compared to Shah et al.'s (2020) study, the present findings align closely, as students in Sukkur demonstrated limited knowledge about career counseling. Nevertheless, they expressed optimism about the potential benefits of incorporating this concept into future possibilities.

### **Conclusion**

The study revealed that a majority of students lacked concrete future plans, with only a few receiving guidance from their teachers. Notably, female students in Pakistan faced a dearth of encouragement to pursue their professional aspirations, resulting in a noticeable gender gap within the Pakistani economy. When selecting a field of study, the predominant trend was for students to follow their friends, with minimal input from specialized career counselors.

These outcomes underscore the imperative for increased accessibility to career counseling resources, as a substantial portion of students currently lacks such services. This deficiency is critical, as students can make more informed decisions about their future trajectories with proper guidance.

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