

Impact of Family Income on Career Choices of College Students in Pune

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Abstract- This research examines the influence of family income on the career choices of college students in Pune, Maharashtra. Given the rapid socio-economic shifts in urban India, understanding how financial backgrounds shape academic and professional trajectories is crucial for educational planning and career counseling. A quantitative research design was employed, involving a survey of 121 college students across various fields of study, including Science, Engineering, Medical, Commerce, Arts, and Management. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, linear regression, and analysis of variance (ANOVA). The findings indicate that while family influence remains a significant factor (28.9%), personal interest has emerged as the primary driver for career choices (46.3%) in the urban Pune context. Statistical analysis revealed that family income did not have a significant impact on career choice scores ($p = 0.867$) in this specific cohort, and no significant differences in perceived income impact were observed across various fields of study ($p = 0.76$). These results suggest a shifting paradigm where individual aspirations and job market trends are becoming more prominent than traditional socio-economic constraints among urban students. The study concludes that while economic context provides a background, it is no longer the sole architect of career destinations for students in Pune's modern educational ecosystem.

Keywords: *Family Income, Career Choice, College Students, Pune, Socio-economic Status, Personal Interest, Social Cognitive Career Theory, Urban India.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Choosing a career path is one of the most critical decisions in a student's life, often determined by a complex interplay of internal and external factors. This decision is not merely a choice of profession but a long-term commitment that determines one's socio-economic trajectory, social status, and personal satisfaction. In the Indian context, the family has traditionally played a central role in guiding, and sometimes dictating, the professional futures of the

younger generation. The deeply ingrained values of filial piety and the collective nature of Indian families often mean that a career choice is a family-wide decision, influenced by the family's social standing, cultural capital, and most importantly, its economic resources.

However, as India transitions through a phase of rapid economic modernization, digital transformation, and increased access to global information, the traditional dynamics of career decision-making are undergoing significant change. The emergence of the digital economy has opened up new avenues in creative arts, content creation, technology, and entrepreneurship that were previously unavailable or considered high-risk. This shift is challenging the traditional hegemony of "secure" careers like medicine, engineering, and civil services, particularly among the urban youth who have greater exposure to these global trends.

Pune, often referred to as the 'Oxford of the East,' serves as a major educational and industrial hub in India. It attracts students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, from across the country and abroad. The city's unique mix of traditional educational institutions, prestigious universities, and a booming IT and manufacturing sector provides a rich environment for studying career trends. In Pune, the student experience is shaped by a high concentration of peer networks, access to internships, and a vibrant culture of competitive exams and specialized training.

Central to this investigation is the role of family income—a proxy for socio-economic status—in shaping the choices made by students in this dynamic environment. Does a higher family income provide a "safety net" that allows students to pursue their passions in the Arts or Humanities, or does it push them toward high-prestige fields like Management and Engineering to maintain their social status?

Conversely, how do students from low-income families navigate these choices? Do they prioritize immediate financial security above all else, or are they increasingly emboldened to pursue high-growth technical careers through education loans and scholarships?

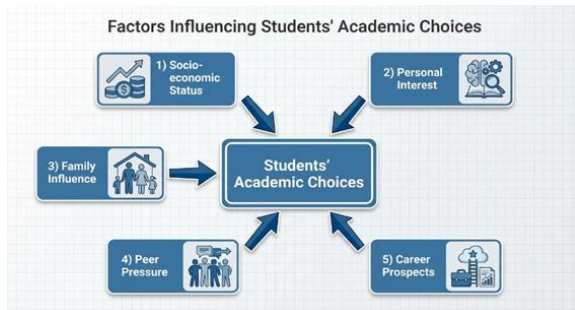


Figure 1.1: Conceptual Flowchart showing the decision-making process for academic choices. The diagram illustrates how background factors like family income feed into psychological mediators and ultimately lead to field selection. Source: Questionnaire Survey (2026)

Previous literature, such as the work of Arulmani et al. (2003), highlights that socio-economic status (SES) significantly influences career beliefs and the level of difficulty students face during the decision-making process. While lower SES is often linked to higher career-related anxiety and negative beliefs, higher SES families often provide a safety net that allows for exploration of less conventional fields. This study aims to quantify these relationships specifically within the student population of Pune, testing whether family income still holds the same weight in an era of diversified job opportunities and digital democratization of information. By focusing on Pune, we can capture the nuances of an urban educational ecosystem that is at the forefront of India's development, providing insights that are both locally relevant and broadly applicable to other major Indian cities.

1.2. Research Objectives

The primary aim of this study is to analyze the relationship between family income and career decision-making among college students in Pune. The study seeks to provide a data-driven perspective on how financial backgrounds intersect with personal

aspirations and academic interests. Specifically, the research objectives are as follows:

1. To analyze the demographic profile of college students in Pune and their current distribution across major academic disciplines such as Science, Engineering, Medical, Arts, Commerce, and Management.
2. To identify and examine the primary factors influencing students' career choices
3. To determine the extent to which family income impacts the perceived importance and difficulty of career selection
4. To assess whether there are significant differences in the impact of family income across different academic fields

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Background

The study of career choices through the lens of socio-economic status has been a long-standing theme in vocational psychology. Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) provides a robust framework for understanding how background variables, like family income, influence learning experiences, self-efficacy, and ultimately, career interests and goals. According to SCCT, individuals develop career interests based on their self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations, which are themselves shaped by their contextual background, including economic resources and social support systems.

In India, the intersection of culture and economics adds a layer of complexity. Arulmani et al. (2003) conducted a seminal study on Indian high school students, finding that lower socio-economic status was strongly correlated with negative career beliefs. These students often perceived their options as limited by financial constraints rather than their own abilities. The study highlighted that students from lower SES backgrounds exhibited higher levels of "career belief" issues, such as perceived lack of opportunity and fatalistic views toward their professional futures. This can constrain perceived options and aspirations early in life, often leading to a cycle of limited career advancement. Conversely, students from higher SES families often demonstrate higher career-decision making self-efficacy (CDMSE), likely due to the

presence of role models and access to career counseling resources.

Joshi et al. (2015) further explored this by investigating urban adolescents across different economic strata in Udaipur. Their research indicated that high-income adolescents tended to gravitate toward "influential" fields, such as management and higher-level administration, where they could leverage their family's social capital. In contrast, middle-income adolescents preferred venturesome careers, while low-income adolescents often prioritized technical and clerical fields that offered more immediate financial stability and lower risk. This suggests that family income acts as both an enabler for long-term aspirations and a constraint that necessitates short-term pragmatic choices.

Further research by Murry (2017) on undergraduate emerging adults revealed a significant negative correlation between socioeconomic status and career decision-making difficulties. Lower middle SES individuals experienced higher difficulties in areas such as lack of information and inconsistent information in career choices. This highlights that the impact of family income is not just on the final choice but on the entire process of information gathering and evaluation. Higher SES was consistently associated with fewer career decision-making difficulties, likely due to better access to professional networks and information.

Ray et al. (2020) found that family expectations and financial stability strongly influence career decisions in India. Many students choose careers that ensure steady income rather than passion. The study also highlighted that students from lower-income families often avoid high-risk or unconventional careers due to fear of financial instability. Parental pressure and responsibility toward family further push students toward secure and traditional job options. Additionally, limited access to career guidance and resources was seen as a key factor affecting informed decision-making.

2022 – National Sample Survey Office Data indicated that household income directly affects higher education enrollment rates in India, influencing long-term career opportunities. The report also showed that students from higher-income families are more likely

to pursue professional and specialized courses, while lower-income students often opt for affordable or local education options. Financial constraints were identified as a major reason for dropouts and limited career advancement. Additionally, access to coaching, skill development programs, and quality institutions was found to be unequal across income groups, further widening career gaps.

2023 – OECD studies show that students from economically stronger families are more likely to pursue high-risk, high-reward careers, while others prefer stable employment due to financial pressure. The study also found that high-income students have better access to inequality in resources leads to differences in skill development and confidence levels among students.

2025 – OECD / Recent Studies Recent studies in 2025 indicate that family income continues to play a crucial role in shaping career choices among college students. Students from higher-income families are more likely to invest in advanced education, international exposure, and skill development courses. In contrast, lower-income students often prioritize job security and early employment due to financial responsibilities. The studies also highlight that the gap in digital access, internships, and networking opportunities still exists. Additionally, financial support from family allows greater flexibility in career exploration and long-term planning.

2.2 Research Gap

Although research like Murry (2017), Joshi et al. (2015), and Arulmani et al. (2003) illustrate how socioeconomic status affects job choices, they primarily concentrate on higher education or general population groups. Family wealth continues to have an impact on professional choices and potential clients, according to recent research like Ray et al. (2020), the National Sample Survey Office (2022), and the OECD (2023, 2025). But there is a dearth of quantitative, city-specific studies on Pune, especially for post-pandemic college students. Furthermore, little research has been done on the relationship between family income, self-efficacy, and job choices in contemporary professions like engineering and management. This study uses

statistical analysis using a sample from Pune to try to close this gap.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sampling

The study utilized a convenience sampling technique to recruit 121 college students currently enrolled in various institutions across Pune. The sample was designed to be diverse, including students from undergraduate and postgraduate levels across multiple disciplines. Participants were invited to complete an online questionnaire that captured their demographic information, family income, and perceptions of career choice influences. The recruitment focused on reaching students from a variety of colleges, from government-aided institutions to private universities, ensuring a broad representation of Pune's educational landscape.

3.2 Data Analysis

Data were processed using statistical software. The analysis included:

1. Descriptive Statistics: To summarize the demographic profile and frequency of different influences.
2. Linear Regression: Used to test Hypothesis 1 (H1) regarding the impact of family income on the career choice impact score. This allowed for the determination of whether income acts as a significant predictor of the pressure felt during the career selection process.
3. ANOVA (Analysis of Variance): Used to test Hypothesis 2 (H2) regarding differences across fields of study. This test was essential for identifying whether students in high-cost disciplines like Medicine or Engineering perceive

the role of family income differently than their peers in the Arts or Sciences.

3.3 Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated for testing, reflecting the core inquiry into the relationship between financial background and career outcomes:

- H1: Family income significantly impacts the career choice impact score of college students.
- H01: Family income does not significantly impact the career choice impact score of college students.
- H2: There are significant differences in the impact of family income on career choices across different fields of study.
- H02: There are no significant differences in the impact of family income on career choices across different fields of study.

3.4 Limitation

This study is subject to certain limitations that must be acknowledged. The sample size of 121, while sufficient for exploratory analysis and providing statistically meaningful insights for this cohort, may not fully represent the vast and diverse student population of Pune, which counts hundreds of thousands of individuals. Additionally, as a convenience sample, the results may be subject to selection bias, as students who are more engaged with digital platforms were more likely to participate. The reliance on self-reported data for family income and "impact scores" may also introduce subjective bias into the findings, as perceptions of financial status can vary widely regardless of objective income levels. Finally, the cross-sectional nature of the study provides a "snapshot" in time and cannot capture the evolving influence of family income over a student's entire academic journey.

IV. DATA INTERPRETATION & ANALYSIS

4.1 Demographic Profile

The demographic profile of the 121 respondents provides a context for interpreting the career choice findings. The sample represents a cross-section of students in Pune, one of India's most significant educational centers.

Table 4.1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	70	57.9%
Female	50	41.3%
Prefer not to say	1	0.8%
Total	121	100%
<i>Source: Questionnaire Survey (2026)</i>		

The gender distribution indicates a slight skew towards male respondents (57.9%), reflecting broader trends in some technical fields, though the representation of female students (41.3%) remains robust. This balance is crucial as prior studies (Liang et al., 2023) suggest that gender can interact with family influence in complex ways.

The age profile indicates that the majority of the students fall within the 18-23 age bracket, which corresponds to the standard period for undergraduate and early postgraduate studies in India.

Table 4.2: Age Group Distribution

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
18-20	54	44.6%
21-23	56	46.3%
24-26	11	9.1%
Total	121	100%
<i>Source: Questionnaire Survey (2026)</i>		

The participants represented six major academic disciplines. The prominence of Science, Engineering, and Medical fields (collectively representing nearly 60% of the sample) reflects Pune's identity as a hub for technical and professional education.

Table 4.3: Distribution by Field of Study

Field of Study	Frequency	Percentage
Science	25	20.7%
Engineering	23	19.0%
Medical	23	19.0%
Commerce	21	17.4%
Arts	19	15.7%
Management	10	8.3%
Total	121	100%
<i>Source: Questionnaire Survey (2026)</i>		

The family income distribution shows a varied economic background among the students. While the largest group (38.8%) belongs to the 25,000 - 50,000 INR per month bracket, there is significant representation across the entire spectrum.

Table 4.4: Family Monthly Income Distribution

Monthly Income (INR)	Frequency	Percentage
Below 25,000	30	24.8%
25,000 - 50,000	47	32.8%
50,000 - 75,000	22	18.2%
Above 75,000	22	18.2%
Total	121	100%
<i>Source: Questionnaire Survey (2026)</i>		

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

To measure the impact of income on career choices, students were asked to rate their perception on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = No impact, 5 = High impact). The results provide an overview of the "perceived weight" of financial background.

Table 4.5: Descriptive Statistics of Impact Score

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Impact Score	2.87	1.44
<i>Source: Questionnaire Survey (2026)</i>		

The mean score of 2.87 suggests that, on average, students perceive family income as having a "moderate" impact on their career choices. However, the standard deviation of 1.44 is notably high, indicating that students' perceptions are highly varied. Some students feel income is a dominant factor, while others feel it has almost no influence.

This variance is further visualized in Figure 2, which examines how these choices are distributed across income levels.

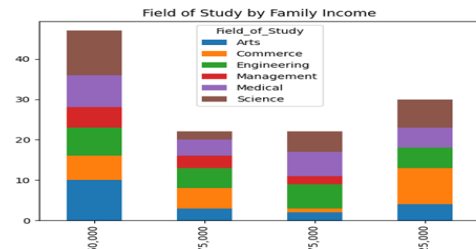


Figure 4.1: Distribution of student fields across different income levels.

The chart reveals that students from all income levels are represented in high-cost fields like Medical and Engineering, suggesting that income alone is not the barrier it once was. Source: Questionnaire Survey (2026)

4.3 Hypothesis Testing

Variable	Coefficient	p-value	Significance Level
Family Income	-	0.867	Not Significant

4.3.1 Linear Regression (Testing H1)

A linear regression was conducted to explore the predictive power of family income on the career choice impact score.

- Predictor: Family Income Level.
- Dependent Variable: Impact Score.
- Result: The p-value obtained was 0.867.
- Interpretation: Since the p-value is far above the standard alpha level of 0.05, we fail to reject the null hypothesis (H01). This indicates that in this

sample, family income is not a statistically significant predictor of the career choice impact score. This suggests that the level of financial pressure or influence a student feels is not directly proportional to their actual family income level. A student from a low-income family might feel low impact, while a student from a high-income family might feel high impact, or vice-versa. This highlights the subjective nature of "financial impact" in a modern educational setting.

4.3.2 ANOVA (Testing H2)

An ANOVA was performed to see if the perceived impact of income differed across different academic fields.

Source of Variation	p-value	Significance Level	Result
Between Groups	0.76	0.05	Not Significant

- Result: The p-value obtained was 0.76.
- Interpretation: Since $p > 0.05$, we fail to reject the null hypothesis (H02). There are no statistically significant differences in the impact of income between students in Arts, Science, Commerce, Engineering, Medical, or Management. This

contradicts the traditional stereotype that certain fields are more "income-sensitive" than others in an urban educational environment like Pune. It appears that the concerns regarding family income are uniformly distributed across all academic paths.

4.3.3 Analysis of Primary Influences

Students were asked to identify the single most important factor that influenced their career decision.

Table 6: Primary Factors of Influence

Primary Influence	Frequency	Percentage
Personal Interest	56	46.3%
Family Influence	35	28.9%
Job Market	16	13.2%
Peer Pressure	14	11.6%
Total	121	100%
<i>Source: Questionnaire Survey (2026)</i>		

As shown in Figure 3, personal interest is clearly the dominant factor, cited by nearly half of the respondents.

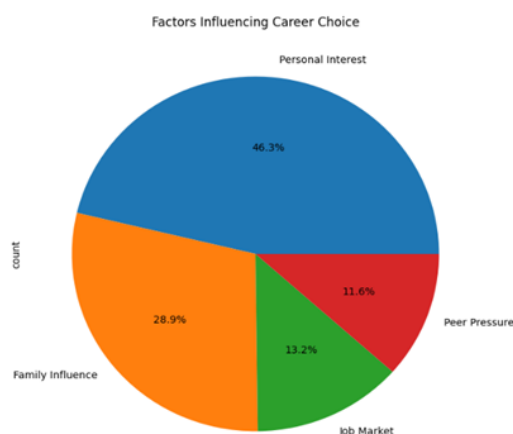


Figure 4.2: Pie chart depicting the percentage of various career choice influencers. Personal interest leads by a wide margin (46.3%), followed by family influence (28.9%). Source: Questionnaire Survey (2026)

Interpretation: 46.3% of students cite personal interest as their primary driver compared to 28.9% for family influence. This finding indicates a significant shift toward individual agency in Pune's student population. While families still provide support and guidance, the "final say" and the primary motivation are increasingly centered on the student's own passion and interest.

V.FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION

5.1 Principal Findings

- The analysis shows that family income does not significantly impact career choice decisions ($p = 0.867$). This indicates that students are not heavily dependent on their financial background when making career choices.
- There is no significant difference in income influence across different academic fields ($p = 0.76$). This suggests that financial concerns are perceived similarly among students from all disciplines.
- Personal interest is the most influential factor (46.3%), making it the primary driver of career decisions among students. This confirms a shift toward individual preference over traditional influences.
- Personal Interest Overrides Income: In the contemporary student population of Pune, personal interest is the single most significant factor in career selection (46.3%). This marks a shift from traditional models that emphasized family status and financial stability above all else. This trend suggests that urban Indian students are becoming more aligned with global career-choice patterns, where individual fulfillment is highly valued.
- Income as a Background Variable, Not a Direct Predictor: While students are aware of their family's financial status, the statistical analysis ($p = 0.867$) suggests that family income does not directly dictate the "impact" or difficulty felt in choosing a career. This may be attributed to the proliferation of education loans, government

scholarships, and the availability of affordable public education in Pune. Income provides the context, but personal agency provides the direction.

- **Cross-Disciplinary Consistency in Perceptions:** The lack of significant differences across fields ($p = 0.76$) suggests that the influence of income is relatively uniform across Science, Arts, and Management. The perceived barriers or advantages conferred by family income do not significantly vary between a medical student and an arts student in the Pune context.
- **Persistent and Collaborative Family Influence:** Although personal interest is primary, family influence remains substantial (28.9%). This indicates that career decision-making in Pune is still a collaborative family process. Families are likely shifting from a "directive" role to a "supportive" one, where they facilitate the student's interests rather than imposing their own.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made for various stakeholders in the Pune educational ecosystem:

1. For Educators and Institutional Leaders:

- **Interest-Based Counseling:** Career counseling programs should prioritize identifying and nurturing personal interests early in the academic journey. Programs like interest-inventory tests and vocational workshops should be standard.
- **Financial Literacy:** Given the moderate impact scores across all income groups, institutions should provide better information about education financing and scholarship opportunities to reduce the perceived "financial burden" of career choices.

2. For Parents and Guardians:

- **Transition to Supportive Roles:** Parents should continue to provide a supportive environment but recognize the increasing importance of student agency. Encouraging exploration based on talent and passion rather than purely on perceived economic security can lead to

higher career satisfaction and long-term success.

- **Open Dialogue:** Maintaining an open dialogue regarding the family's financial realities while respecting the student's aspirations is key to a balanced decision-making process.

3. For Policy Makers and Government Bodies:

- **Targeted Support:** Since family income did not show a statistically significant impact in this urban sample, financial aid should perhaps be more targeted toward students who face specific high-cost barriers (like specialized medical equipment or international exchange programs) rather than just broad income categories.
- **Promoting Diverse Careers:** Continued efforts to promote vocational and alternative career paths can further reduce the pressure on traditional high-prestige fields.

4. For Students:

- **Informed Passion:** Students should feel empowered to pursue their interests but should also do so with a clear understanding of the job market realities and financial planning.
- **Leveraging Resources:** Students from lower-income backgrounds should proactively seek out the many scholarships and mentorship programs available in Pune to bridge any resource gaps.

5.3 Conclusion

This study concludes that family income, while an important contextual factor, is not the primary determinant of career choice for college students in Pune in 2026. The empirical evidence from this research clearly shows that personal interest has emerged as the dominant force in the career decision-making process, followed by family influence. The statistical analysis, including the linear regression ($p = 0.867$) and ANOVA ($p = 0.76$), failed to show that income directly predicts the perceived impact on choice or that this impact varies significantly by field.

These findings point to a positive trend in Pune's educational landscape: a move toward a more meritocratic and individual-centric model of professional development. The "Oxford of the East" is fostering a generation of students who are increasingly driven by their own aspirations, supported by a family structure that is evolving to become more facilitative than restrictive. While economic realities cannot be ignored, they are being navigated through a combination of personal agency, family support, and institutional resources. This study underscores that for the students of Pune, the future is increasingly a canvas of their own design, rather than a blueprint dictated solely by their family's bank balance.

5.4 Future Scope

While this research provides valuable insights, it also opens up several avenues for further investigation:

1. Longitudinal Study Designs: Tracking students from their first year of college through to their first job and into their early careers would provide a more dynamic view of how family income affects not just the *choice* but the *attainment* and *advancement* within a career.
2. Rural-Urban Comparative Analysis: A comparison between students in Pune and those in rural Maharashtra would help determine if the dominance of personal interest is an urban phenomenon driven by exposure and resources, or if it is part of a broader cultural shift.
3. Qualitative Exploration of "Moderate" Impact: Conducting in-depth interviews with students who reported high impact scores despite belonging to high-income families, or low impact scores from low-income families, would help uncover the psychological and social nuances that "income" alone cannot explain.
4. The Role of Digital Influence: Investigating how social media, online career influencers, and digital learning platforms (like Coursera or LinkedIn) are shaping "personal interest" and providing alternative pathways that bypass traditional family constraints.
5. Gendered Economic Impact: A deeper dive into how family income affects career choices differently for male and female students, particularly in terms of "risk-taking" vs. "stability-seeking" behaviors.

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