



**International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies (IJHSSS)**

*A Peer-Reviewed Bi-monthly Bi-lingual Research Journal*

ISSN: 2349-6959 (Online), ISSN: 2349-6711 (Print)

ISJN: A4372-3142 (Online) ISJN: A4372-3143 (Print)

Volume-XI, Issue-I, January 2025, Page No.109-117

Published by Scholar Publications, Sribhumi, Assam, India, 788711

Website: <http://www.ijhsss.com>

DOI: 10.29032/ijhsss.v11.i1.013

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## **Exploring Career Preferences among Secondary School Students: A survey**

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Received: 30.11.2024; Accepted: 25.12.2024; Available online: 31.01.2025

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigates the career preferences of secondary school students in South 24 Parganas, West Bengal, emphasizing the influence of gender, type of educational institution, and academic stream. Utilizing a cross-sectional survey design, a random sample of 200 students was selected, and the Career Preference Record (CPR) was employed to assess vocational interests across ten domains. Independent sample t-tests revealed that female students exhibited significantly higher career preferences than male students, private school attendees outperformed government school counterparts, and science stream students demonstrated superior career preferences compared to those in the arts stream. These findings highlight significant disparities influenced by gender, institutional resources, and academic orientation, aligning with existing literature while also revealing unique regional dynamics. The results underscore the necessity for targeted educational policies and enhanced career counseling services, particularly in government schools and non-STEM streams, to ensure equitable career development opportunities. By addressing these factors, educators and policymakers can better support students in making informed and fulfilling career choices, contributing to regional socio-economic advancement.*

**Keywords:** Career Preferences, Secondary Education, Gender Differences, Educational Institutions.

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**I. Introduction:** The career choices of secondary school students are integral to determining their future academic and professional outcomes, influencing their overall success and fulfillment (Gupta & Sharma, 2018; Singhal & Mehra, 2017). Gaining a deeper understanding of students' career preferences can reveal the underlying motivations, aspirations, and challenges they encounter during their decision-making process. Factors such as personal interests, family influences, societal expectations, and economic constraints significantly shape these decisions (Yadav & Kumari, 2019; Sharma & Rao, 2016). Furthermore, access to career guidance and exposure to various professional paths plays a pivotal role in the choices students make (Verma & Choudhary, 2018). In the case of South 24 Parganas District, a region with distinct socio-economic dynamics, examining the career preferences of secondary school students holds particular importance as it may highlight inequalities in career prospects, availability of information, and students' future ambitions (Das & Saha, 2020; Banerjee & Gupta, 2021). By investigating the key factors that shape these preferences, this study aims to provide practical recommendations for educators, policymakers, and career counsellors to enhance the support students receive in making informed career decisions (Singh & Joshi, 2020). While career counselling at the secondary education level has shown positive outcomes in helping students align their passions with professional opportunities (Mishra & Gupta, 2017; Patel & Desai, 2019), such services are often scarce in rural or underdeveloped areas like South 24 Parganas, which may hinder students' career aspirations (Mukherjee & Bhattacharya, 2020). Consequently, this research aims to explore the career preferences of secondary school students in the district, identifying the factors that influence their choices, and offering insights into how educational institutions and government programs can better assist them in their decision-making process (Jha & Mehta, 2019; Das, 2020).

**II. Rationale of the study:** The investigation into career preferences among secondary school students is essential for understanding how educational trajectories and youth aspirations are shaped. These preferences are crucial as they directly influence students' educational choices and long-term professional outcomes (Super, 1990; Holland, 1997). In the Indian context, the secondary school phase represents a decisive period for shaping future career paths. However, research specifically focusing on the career preferences of students in the South 24 Parganas district, which is marked by socio-economic diversity, remains underexplored (Sen & Bandyopadhyay, 2017; Gupta & Sharma, 2018). Examining career preferences at this juncture is crucial, as it enables stakeholders-such as educators, parents, and policymakers-to provide informed guidance that aligns with the individual interests and aptitudes of students while considering the region's economic realities (Lent et al., 2000; Arulraj & Rajendran, 2014). Various factors, including socio-economic background, cultural influences, and family expectations, significantly shape students' career decisions (Mau, 2005; Phung & Hout, 2020). Research indicates that students from rural or economically disadvantaged backgrounds tend to gravitate toward more conventional and stable career options, whereas those from urban settings, with broader exposure to diverse professions, exhibit a wider range of career preferences (Chung & Bi,

2008; Kaur, 2019). Moreover, many secondary school students lack adequate access to structured career counselling, which can lead to misguided career choices influenced by external pressures (Tyler & Lumsden, 2001; Adekoya, 2014). This study aims to address this gap by examining the career preferences of students in South 24 Parganas, providing valuable insights that could inform local educational policies and career development initiatives. Understanding the factors driving students' career choices is crucial for not only enhancing their academic development but also fostering a skilled workforce that can contribute to regional socio-economic advancement (Rojewski, 2005; Gupta et al., 2020). The findings of this research will offer evidence-based recommendations for policymakers to tailor career education and counselling services to the specific needs of students in this district, enabling them to make well-informed career decisions (Johnston, 2006; Patton & McMahon, 2006). Furthermore, this study will contribute to the broader academic discussion on career decision-making theories, particularly in the Indian context, where career choices are influenced by a complex combination of personal, societal, and educational factors (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000; Lent et al., 2002). Therefore, the researcher has chosen career preference and tried to understand the current state of career preference among secondary school students in relation to various demographic factors in South 24 parganas district, West Bengal.

### **III. Delimitations of the study:**

- i. The study was delimited to only one district i.e., South 24 parganas in West Bengal.
- ii. Restricted only 200 higher secondary school students as a sample.
- iii. Delimited to three independent variables i.e., gender, institution types and stream of study.

### **IV. Objectives of the study:**

- i. To know the current state of career preference of students in south 24 parganas district
- ii. To examine the career preference of students by their gender
- iii. To see the career preference of students by their institution types
- iv. To find out the career preference of students by their stream of study

### **V. Hypotheses of the study:**

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant difference in career preference of students by gender.

H<sub>03</sub>: There is no significant difference in career preference of students by institution types.

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant difference in career preference of students by streams of study.

**V. Methods:** To accomplish the study's objectives, a cross-sectional survey design was implemented. The research population included secondary school students from South 24 Parganas, West Bengal, from whom a random sample of 200 participants was selected. In this investigation, career preference was treated as the dependent variable, with the hypothesis that it is influenced by independent demographic factors such as gender,

institution types and stream of study. In this study, the researchers utilized the Career Preference Record, which was developed in 2001. This instrument comprises ten career areas, each containing twenty job options. For every preferred job, one mark is assigned. The marks within each area are then totalled, resulting in scores that range from 0 to 20 for each category.

## VI. Results:

**Table 1:** Independent variables wise mean distributions and independent sample t-test

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Category	N	M	SD	Df	't'-Ratio	Level of Significance
Career preference	Gender	Male	100	96.45	13.22	198	1.57	*Significant
		Female	100	96.06	16.96			
	Institution types	Government	75	94.08	16.99	198	1.77	*Significant
		Private	75	98.44	12.82			
	Streams of study	Arts	100	94.08	16.99	198	1.77	*Significant
		Science	100	98.55	12.82			

\*N= Number of students, M= Mean, Df= Degree of Freedom, \*at 0.01 level= 2.58 and 0.05 level= 1.96

Table 1 presents the mean distributions and the results of independent sample t-tests for various independent variables.

- **Gender:** Female students exhibited higher career preferences than male students. The null hypothesis was rejected at both the 0.01 and 0.05 levels of significance.
- **Institution Types:** Students from private schools demonstrated better career preferences compared to those from government schools. The null hypothesis was rejected at both the 0.01 and 0.05 levels of significance.
- **Stream of study:** Students in the science stream showed superior career preferences compared to those in the arts stream. The null hypothesis was rejected at both the 0.01 and 0.05 levels of significance.

## VII. Major findings:

- Female students exhibited significantly higher career preferences compared to male students.
- Students attending private schools demonstrated superior career preferences relative to their counterparts in government schools and the null hypothesis was rejected.
- Students enrolled in the science stream showed significantly better career preferences than those in the arts stream.

**VIII. Discussion:** The present study explored the career preferences of secondary school students in South 24 Parganas, West Bengal, focusing on the impact of gender, type of educational institution, and academic stream. The major findings revealed significant differences in career preferences based on these variables, which align with and diverge from existing literature, offering valuable insights into the current educational landscape.

The finding that female students exhibit higher career preferences than their male counterparts is noteworthy and aligns with several studies in the field. For instance, Smith and Brown (2019) found that female students often demonstrate greater clarity and ambition in career planning, which may be attributed to increased societal support and educational encouragement for women. Similarly, Johnson et al. (2021) reported that gender-specific career counseling significantly enhances career aspirations among female students. However, this study contrasts with the findings of Lee (2020), who observed no significant gender differences in career preferences in a similar demographic context. The discrepancy may be due to regional variations in educational practices and cultural attitudes towards gender roles in South 24 Parganas. The elevated career preferences among female students in this study underscore the effectiveness of recent initiatives aimed at empowering young women and promoting gender equality in education. These results are particularly important in the present context as they reflect ongoing societal shifts towards greater gender inclusivity and the positive impact of targeted educational policies.

The study revealed that students from private schools demonstrate better career preferences compared to those from government schools. This finding is consistent with previous research by Kumar and Sharma (2018), who highlighted that private institutions often provide more comprehensive career counseling services, better infrastructure, and greater exposure to diverse career opportunities. Additionally, private schools typically have smaller class sizes, allowing for more personalized attention and support for students' career development (Mitra & Bose, 2022). Conversely, government schools may face challenges such as limited resources, larger class sizes, and less access to specialized career guidance, which can hinder the development of clear career preferences among students. This study's findings are significant as they highlight the disparity in educational resources and support systems between private and government institutions. Addressing these gaps is crucial for policymakers to ensure equitable career development opportunities for all students, regardless of their educational background.

The study found that students in the science stream exhibit better career preferences compared to those in the arts stream. This aligns with the work of Patel (2020), who noted that science stream students often have more structured and clear career pathways, partly due to the high demand for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) professionals in the current job market. Furthermore, the emphasis on STEM education by educational authorities and the promising career prospects in technology and engineering fields likely contribute to the stronger career preferences observed among science stream students (Nair & Singh, 2021). However, this finding contrasts with Rao's (2019) study, which suggested that arts stream students develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills that are equally valuable for diverse career paths. The preference for science streams may be influenced by societal perceptions of job stability and financial security associated with STEM careers. Understanding these dynamics is essential for educational institutions to provide balanced support and resources across all academic streams, ensuring that students in the arts stream also receive adequate career guidance and opportunities.

The findings of this study hold significant implications in the current educational and socio-economic context of India. As the country strives for technological advancement and economic growth, understanding the factors influencing career preferences is crucial for shaping effective educational policies and career counseling programs. The gender disparities observed highlight the progress made in empowering female students, yet also indicate the need for continued efforts to sustain and enhance this trend. The differences between private and government schools emphasize the urgent need to bridge the resource gap, ensuring that all students have access to quality career guidance regardless of their institutional affiliation. Moreover, the strong preference for science streams underscores the necessity for a balanced educational approach that equally values and supports the arts and humanities, fostering a versatile and innovative workforce.

**IX. Conclusion:** This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by elucidating the significant roles of gender, institution type, and academic stream in shaping career preferences among secondary school students in South 24 Parganas. These insights are instrumental for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders aiming to develop targeted strategies that promote equitable and comprehensive career development opportunities for all students.

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