



The Passion-Package Paradox: Exploring Career Choice Dilemmas in Modern Society

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Abstract

In the evolving landscape of modern employment, individuals are increasingly torn between pursuing their passion and securing a financially stable career package. This tension—coined as the *Passion-Package Paradox*—reflects a fundamental dilemma faced by today's workforce, where personal fulfillment often conflicts with economic necessity. The paper explores how societal expectations, economic pressures, and shifting notions of success shape career choices among young professionals. It also examines the psychological and sociological dimensions of this paradox, emphasizing how social media narratives, family influence, and corporate culture further complicate decision-making. Through qualitative insights and contemporary case analyses, the research aims to highlight the struggle between intrinsic motivation and extrinsic rewards, and its implications on job satisfaction, mental well-being, and long-term professional growth. The study concludes by advocating for a balanced framework where passion and practicality coexist, enabling individuals to pursue meaningful careers without compromising economic security.

Keywords: Career choice, passion-package paradox, modern society, job satisfaction, economic stability, intrinsic motivation, work-life balance, professional dilemma.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

In the twenty-first century, the concept of a “successful career” has undergone a remarkable transformation. Traditional career paths once centered on job security, stable income, and long-term employment have gradually given way to passion-driven professions that promise self-expression and purpose. The global shift toward individualism, technological advancement, and exposure to diverse opportunities has encouraged people to view work as more than a financial necessity—it has become a means of personal fulfillment. However, this cultural redefinition of success has simultaneously intensified the struggle between emotional satisfaction and material comfort, giving rise to what is now termed the Passion-Package Paradox. As economies evolve and competition heightens, individuals increasingly grapple with whether to follow their passions or prioritize practical, financially secure careers.

1.2. Understanding the Passion and Package Paradox

The Passion-Package Paradox represents the internal conflict experienced when individuals must choose between pursuing

what they love and opting for a career that offers stability and economic security. While passion-driven careers often promise happiness, creativity, and self-actualization, they may lack predictable financial returns. Conversely, high-paying jobs may ensure comfort but can leave individuals feeling unfulfilled or emotionally detached from their work. This paradox has become a defining feature of modern professional life, especially among younger generations who are encouraged to “follow their dreams” while simultaneously facing societal pressure to achieve financial independence. Understanding this paradox is crucial to identifying the psychological and socio-economic factors that drive career decision-making in contemporary society.

1.3. Factors Influencing Career Choice in Modern Society

Career choices today are shaped by a combination of social, economic, and psychological influences. Family expectations and societal norms often push individuals toward stable, prestigious professions, while peers and digital culture promote the idea of pursuing passion as a measure of authenticity and self-worth. Economic realities such as inflation, job market volatility, and student debt further

complicate these choices. In addition, education systems and corporate environments play a critical role in shaping aspirations, often valuing performance and productivity over personal satisfaction. The convergence of these factors forces individuals to navigate complex emotional and rational considerations before committing to a career path, making the process both deeply personal and socially conditioned.

1.4. Significance and Purpose of the Study

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2. Review of Literature

i). Theoretical Perspectives of Career Choices:

Understanding the Passion-Package Paradox requires grounding in established theories of career development. Holland's Theory of Vocational Personalities emphasizes the compatibility between an individual's personality type and their occupational environment, suggesting that career satisfaction arises when personal interests align with professional roles. Similarly, Super's Life-Span, Life-Space Theory views career choice as an evolving process influenced by self-concept, life roles, and developmental stages. On the other hand, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) highlights the impact of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and socio-environmental factors on career decisions. Collectively, these theories illustrate that while personal passion is essential for motivation and engagement, external realities such as social expectations and financial constraints significantly influence career trajectories. The literature suggests that no single theoretical model fully resolves the tension between intrinsic passion and extrinsic practicality, reinforcing the need to explore this paradox in contemporary contexts.

ii). The Rise of Passion-Oriented Career Narratives:

In recent decades, the cultural narrative around career success has shifted dramatically toward passion-centric ideals. Modern education systems, entrepreneurial culture, and social media platforms have amplified the message of "doing what you love," positioning passion as the cornerstone of fulfillment.

Studies highlight that exposure to success stories of influencers, artists, and startup founders encourages youth to prioritize creative freedom over conventional stability. Researchers such as Cech (2016) describe this phenomenon as the "passion principle,"⁴ wherein individuals equate meaningful work with personal identity and purpose.

iii). Economic Realities and Career Pragmatism:

Parallel to the romanticization of passion, the global job market continues to emphasize economic stability and pragmatic decision-making. Research consistently underscores that

income, job security, and financial independence remain dominant determinants of career selection, particularly in developing economies. Studies by Blustein (2019) and others note that economic pressures such as inflation, debt, and family obligations compel individuals to prioritize financially rewarding careers over personal interests. The rise of automation, fluctuating employment trends, and competitive labor markets further intensify the demand for practical decision-making. In many cases, individuals compromise their passions for professions that guarantee livelihood and respectability.

Comparative studies across cultural contexts reveal that while Western societies increasingly value self-fulfillment, collectivist societies such as those in Asia often emphasize stability, reflecting the influence of socio-economic norms. Therefore, economic pragmatism remains a central force in shaping the passion-package conflict, illustrating that career decisions are not merely personal but deeply contextual.

iv). Psychological and Social Implications:

The psychological consequences of navigating between passion and practicality are profound. Empirical research links career misalignment to decreased job satisfaction, identity confusion, and mental stress. Individuals pursuing financially driven careers often report feelings of monotony and emotional detachment, while those following their passions may experience anxiety due to financial insecurity.

Social expectations—particularly from family and peers—compound this tension by defining success in material terms. The social identity theory suggests that individuals derive a sense of self-worth from societal validation, leading many to suppress personal aspirations to conform to accepted career norms.

3. Research Methodology

i). Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this study are:

- To examine the factors influencing individuals' career choices between passion-driven and financially rewarding professions.
- To understand the psychological, social, and economic dimensions that contribute to the Passion-Package Paradox in modern career decisions.
- To assess the impact of this dilemma on job satisfaction, mental well-being, and overall professional fulfillment.
- To suggest approaches for achieving a balance between passion and financial security in career planning and development.

ii). Statement of the Problem

In the modern world, individuals, especially young adults, face increasing difficulty in choosing between careers that align with their personal passions and those that offer financial stability. While passion-driven careers often provide intrinsic satisfaction and purpose, they may lack financial assurance and social approval. Conversely, financially secure careers can lead to long-term disengagement and emotional dissatisfaction. This ongoing conflict, referred to as the Passion-Package Paradox, has created a significant psychological and socio-economic dilemma in today's workforce. The increasing influence of digital media portraying idealized notions of success, many individuals experience confusion and discontentment regarding their professional choices. As a result, the need to understand how

individuals navigate this paradox, what factors influence their decisions, and how it affects their long-term well-being has become more critical than ever before.

iii). Research Hypothesis

- **H₀ (Null Hypothesis):** There is no significant relationship between passion-oriented career choices and job satisfaction levels.
- **H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis):** There is a significant relationship between passion-oriented career choices and job satisfaction levels.

iv). Research Design

The research follows a descriptive design aimed at analyzing attitudes, perceptions, and preferences regarding career decision-making among individuals. It employs both quantitative and qualitative methods, focusing on real-life perspectives collected through survey responses to understand the underlying causes and implications of the paradox.

v). Population and Sample Selection

The study's population includes individuals from various educational and professional backgrounds. Data was collected through a Google Form questionnaire, designed to gather insights on career choices, motivations, and challenges. A total of 66 responses were obtained from participants across different age groups and occupational fields, with a particular emphasis on young adults who are in the early stages of career decision-making. The responses represent diverse viewpoints that contribute to understanding the broader social and economic context of the Passion–Package Paradox.

vi). Tools for Data Collection

The primary tool used for data collection was a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms. The questionnaire included both closed-ended and open-ended questions to capture measurable data as well as qualitative insights.

The questions were designed to assess respondents' preferences, motivations, perceptions of success, and the factors influencing their career choices.

vii). Data Analytics Techniques

The collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, including percentage analysis, graphical representation, and tabulation to interpret patterns and trends. Qualitative responses were examined through thematic analysis to identify recurring ideas, attitudes, and emotional factors influencing career choices. This mixed-method approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the paradox from both numerical and conceptual perspectives.

viii). Limitations of the Study

- The sample size of 66 respondents may not fully represent the broader population, limiting generalizability.
- The study primarily focuses on young adults, which may overlook perspectives from older or more experienced professionals.
- Data collected through self-reported questionnaires may be subject to personal bias or social desirability effects.

The research is cross-sectional and reflects responses during a specific period; changes in socio-economic conditions may alter findings over time.

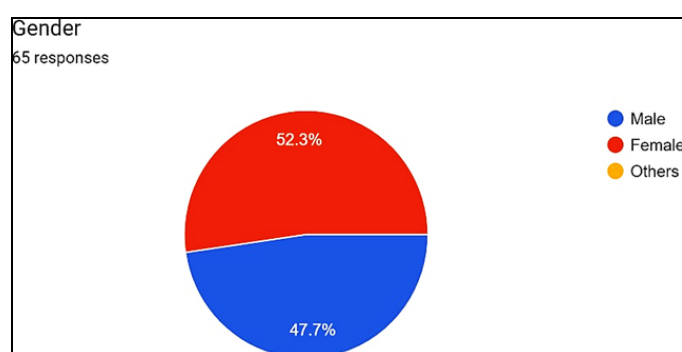
4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

4.1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Understanding the demographic characteristics of the respondents is crucial to contextualize their perceptions regarding the Passion–Package Paradox. The study gathered 66 responses through a Google Form, representing individuals from diverse academic streams and professional stages. These demographic insights help in analyzing how personal background factors — such as age, gender, education, and employment status — influence career choices and perceptions about passion and financial stability.

i). Gender of the Respondents:

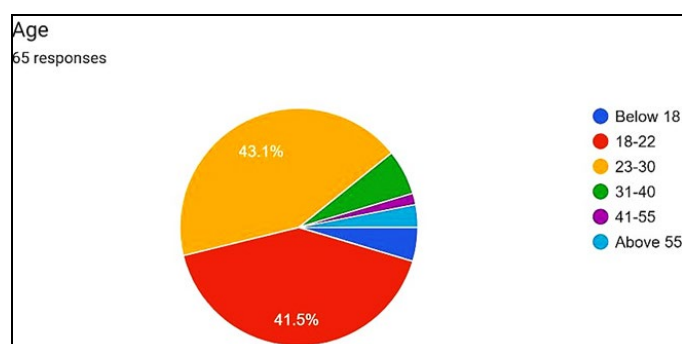
Gender	Percentage	Count
Female	52.3%	34
Male	47.7%	31
Others	0.0%	0



The gender composition of the sample reveals a slight predominance of female respondents, ensuring balanced representation across both genders. This distribution allows for a nuanced understanding of how gender perspectives influence decision-making in career choices. Female respondents frequently expressed a greater emphasis on emotional fulfillment and personal satisfaction, whereas male participants showed stronger concern for financial stability and long-term growth. The overall gender balance strengthens the reliability of comparative interpretations within the study.

ii). Age of the Participants

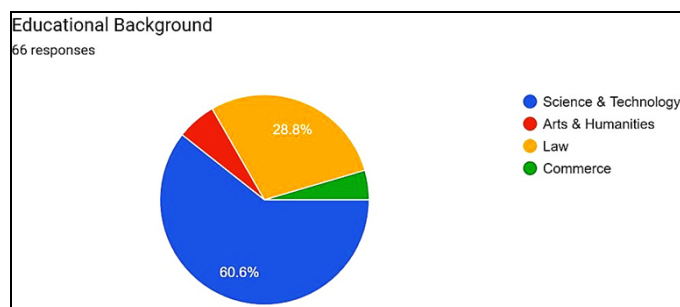
Options	Percentage	Count
Below 18	4.6%	3
18-22	41.5%	27
23-30	43.1%	28
31-40	6.2%	4
41-55	1.5%	1
Above 55	3.1%	3



Most respondents fall within the 23-30 age bracket, signifying that young adults constitute the primary group grappling with the tension between passion and practicality. This stage of life is characterized by exploration and uncertainty, making individuals more vulnerable to societal expectations and financial pressures. The smaller proportion of older respondents provides valuable contrast, highlighting generational differences in defining career success and stability.

iii). Educational Background:

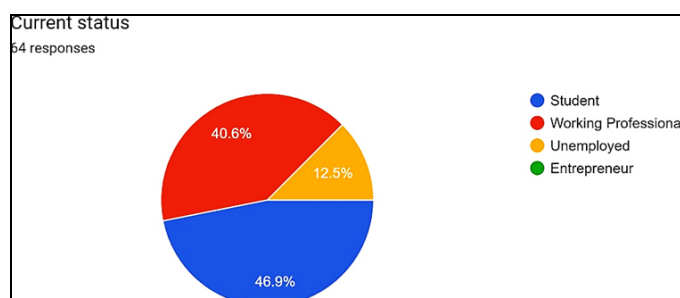
Field	Percentage	Count
Science & Technology	60.6%	40
Arts & Humanities	6.1%	4
Law	28.8%	19
Commerce	4.5%	3



A large share belonged to the Science and Technology disciplines, followed by Legal, Arts and humanities. This diversity underscores that the Passion–Package Paradox transcends specific fields of study whether in law, business, or technology, individuals encounter similar conflicts between intrinsic motivation and financial assurance. The presence of respondents from multidisciplinary domains enriches the analytical depth of this study.

iv). Current Occupational Status

Current Status	Percentage	Count
Student	46.9%	30
Working professional	40.6%	26
Unemployed	12.5%	8
Entrepreneur	0.0%	0



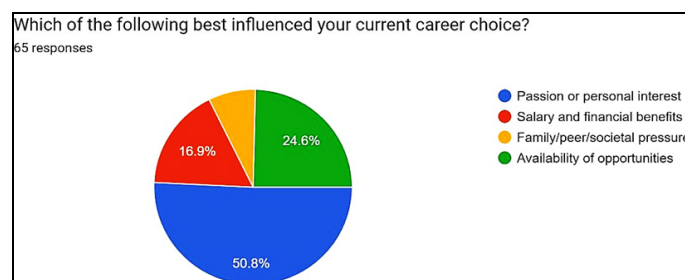
Most respondents identified as students, with a comparatively lesser portion being employed professionals. This distribution reflects that career choice dilemmas begin during academic years, when individuals are preparing to transition from education to employment. The inclusion of professionals, however, adds perspective on how these dilemmas persist even after entering the workforce, revealing that the Passion–

Package Paradox continues to influence long-term career satisfaction. However the considerably high percentage of working professionals also indicate that passion-package paradox continues to exist even after entering into work. This may be caused due to increase competition in the job market these days.

4.2. Factors Influencing Career Choices

Which of the following best influenced your current career choice?

Factors	Percentage	Count
Passion or personal interest	50.8%	33
Salary and financial benefits	16.9%	11
Family/peer/societal pressure	7.7%	5
Availability of opportunities	24.6%	16

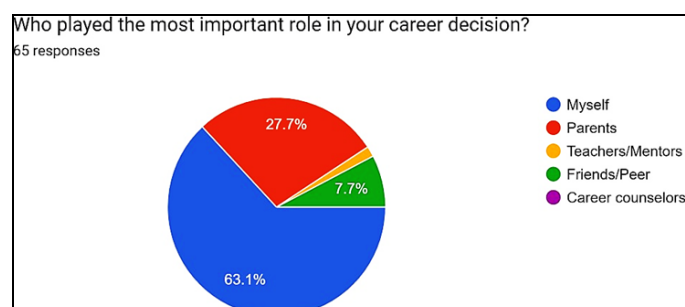


The responses indicate that passion or personal interest is the most significant factor influencing career choices, with 50.8% of participants selecting it. This suggests that personal motivation and satisfaction are key drivers for the majority. Availability of opportunities is the second most influential factor (24.6%), highlighting that practical considerations. Salary and financial benefits were cited by 16.9%, reflecting the role of economic incentives, though they are less dominant than personal passion or opportunities. Finally, family, peer, or societal pressure had minimal impact (7.7%). Overall, the findings suggest that modern career decisions primarily self-driven, with individuals prioritizing personal interests while also considering practical opportunities and financial factors.

4.3. Key Influencers in Career Decision

Who played the most important role in your career decision?

Influencers	Percentage	Count
Myself	63.1%	41
Parents	27.7%	18
Teachers/Mentors	1.5%	1
Friends/Peer	7.7%	5
Career counselors	0.0%	0

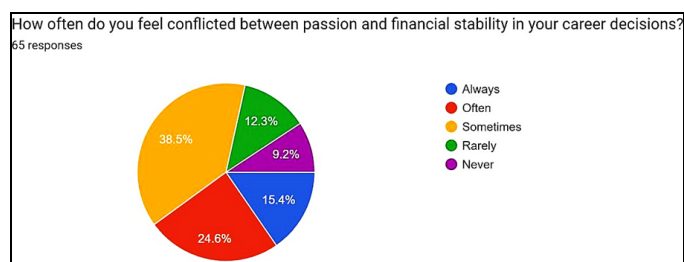


The data reveals that 63.1% of respondents identified themselves as the most important influence in their career decision, reflecting a strong sense of self-awareness. This suggests that most individuals today prefer to take ownership of their professional paths. Parents emerged as the second major influence with 27.7%, indicating that family guidance and emotional support continue to play a significant, though secondary, role in shaping career decisions. Friends or peers accounted for 7.7%, showing that while social circles may provide encouragement or suggestions, their impact remains limited. Meanwhile, teachers or mentors had the least influence (1.5%), is not a primary factor in determining career direction for most respondents. Overall, the results point toward a modern trend of self-directed decision-making, where individuals are driven more by their personal ambitions and inner motivation, while still valuing family input as a source of support and reassurance in their career journey.

4.4. Conflict Between Passion and Financial Stability

How often do you feel conflicted between passion and financial stability in your career decisions?

Responses	Percentage	Count
Always	15.4%	10
Often	24.6%	16
Sometimes	38.5%	25
Rarely	12.3%	8
Never	9.2%	6

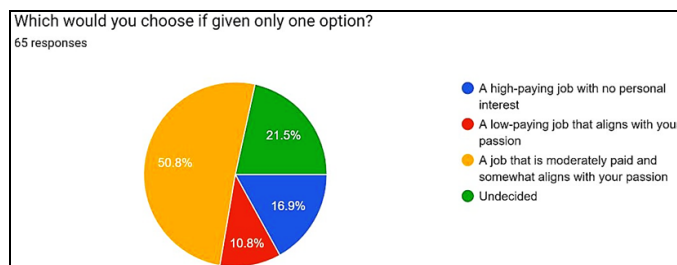


The data shows that a significant portion of respondents experience varying levels of conflict while making career decisions. A majority of 38.5% reported feeling conflicted sometimes, indicating that this dilemma is a common .24.6% stated they often face such conflicts, while 15.4% experience them always, suggesting that for nearly two-fifths of the participants, balancing passion and financial security remains a recurring struggle. On the other hand, 12.3% of respondents rarely feel conflicted, and 9.2% stated they never do, implying that a small portion has found a stable alignment. Overall, the findings highlight that the tension between pursuing one's passion and ensuring economic stability is a prevalent issue among respondents.

4.5. Preference Between Passion and Pay

Which would you choose if given only one option?

Choice	Percentage	Count
Low paying job aligned with passion	10.8%	7
Moderately paid job balancing both	50.8%	33
High paid job with no personal interest	16.9%	11
Undecided	21.5%	14

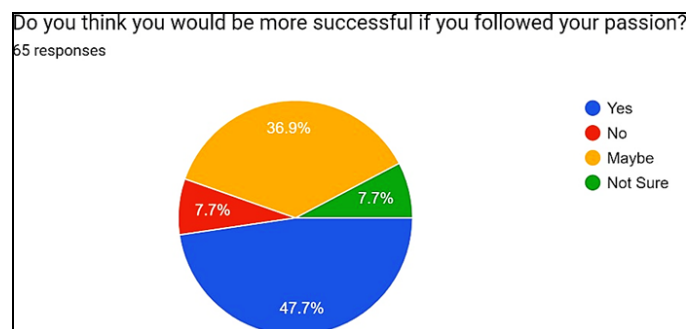


The responses indicate that a majority of participants (50.8%) would choose a moderately paid job that aligns with their passion, suggesting that balancing personal interest with reasonable financial rewards is the most preferred. Only 16.9% opted for a high-paid job with no personal interest, highlighting that financial gain alone is not the primary motivator for most respondents. A smaller segment, 10.8%, preferred a low-paying job that aligns with passion, very few are willing to compromise financial stability entirely. Additionally, 21.5% of participants were undecided, reflecting the inherent difficulty many individuals face when making trade-offs between passion and income. Overall, the findings emphasize that most respondents aim for a balance between personal fulfillment and financial security, rather than prioritizing one extreme over the other.

4.6. Perception of Success and Passion

Do you think you would be more successful if you followed your passion?

Perception	Percentage	Count
Yes	47.7%	31
No	7.7%	5
Maybe	36.9%	24
Not sure	7.7%	5

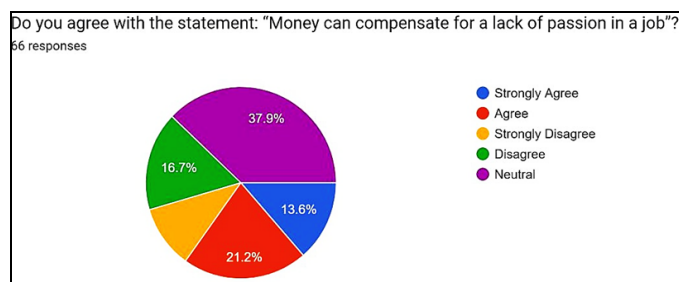


The data shows that nearly half of the respondents (47.7%) believe that they would be more successful if they followed their passion, highlighting a strong perception that personal interest can positively influence career outcomes. A significant portion, 36.9%, responded maybe, reflecting uncertainty or acknowledgment that success depends on multiple factors beyond passion, such as opportunities, skills, and financial considerations. Only a small fraction, 7.7%, felt no difference, suggesting that for them, following passion may not necessarily equate to greater success. An equal 7.7% were not sure, indicating indecision or lack of clarity regarding the impact of passion on professional achievement.

4.7. Money as Substitute for Passion

Do you agree with the statement: "Money can compensate for a lack of passion in a job"?

Response	Percentage	Count
Strongly agree	13.6%	9
Agree	21.2%	14
Neutral	37.9%	25
Disagree	16.9%	11
Strongly disagree	10.6%	7



The responses indicate a diverse perspective on whether money can compensate for a lack of passion in a job. A combined 34.8% of respondents (13.6% strongly agree and 21.2% agree) believe that financial rewards can make up for an unfulfilling career, suggesting that for some individuals, economic security is a significant motivating factor. However, a larger portion, 37.9%, remained neutral, indicating uncertainty or a balanced view that both passion and financial benefits play important roles in career satisfaction. On the other hand, 27.3% of respondents (16.7% disagree and 10.6% strongly disagree) felt that money cannot replace personal interest, highlighting the importance of intrinsic motivation in professional fulfillment. Overall, the findings reveal that while financial incentives are valued, a considerable number of individuals recognize that passion and personal interest are critical for long-term satisfaction and success.

The key observation is that personal passion and interest play the most significant role in influencing career decisions, with the majority of respondents relying on their own judgment rather than external pressures. While parents and family continue to provide guidance, and peers or mentors have some influence, individuals are clearly prioritizing self-directed decision-making. The findings also show that practical considerations, such as the availability of opportunities and financial stability, are important but generally secondary to personal fulfillment.

Many respondents reported experiencing occasional or frequent conflict between pursuing their passion and ensuring financial security, highlighting the common challenge of balancing intrinsic motivation with economic realities. Furthermore, nearly half of the respondents believe that following their passion could enhance their professional success, while a smaller portion felt that money could compensate for a lack of interest, emphasizing the enduring importance of intrinsic motivation. Overall, the data underscores a clear trend toward self-driven, passion-oriented career choices, where individuals aim to harmonize personal satisfaction, practical opportunities, and financial considerations in shaping their professional paths.

5. Research Findings and Discussions

i). Career Influences

The majority of respondents (50.8%) cited passion or personal interest as the main factor influencing their career choice. Availability of opportunities was next (24.6%), followed by salary/financial benefits (16.9%) and family/peer pressure (7.7%).

Discussion: This suggests that individuals prioritize intrinsic motivation over external factors when making career decisions. While practical considerations like job availability and financial rewards are important, they are secondary to personal fulfillment.

This reflects a trend toward self-driven career choices, where personal satisfaction guides professional decisions more than societal expectations.

ii). Key Decision Makers

When asked who played the most important role in career decisions, 63.1% credited themselves, 27.7% cited parents, 7.7% mentioned friends/peers, and only 1.5% selected teachers/mentors.

Discussion: The findings highlight the predominance of self-determination, with family support serving as a secondary influence. Peers and mentors have minimal impact, suggesting that respondents trust their own judgment over external guidance in shaping career paths.

iii). Passion VS Financial Stability

Respondents experience varying levels of conflict between passion and financial stability: 38.5% sometimes, 24.6% often, 15.4% always, 12.3% rarely, 9.2% never.

Discussion: The data indicates that balancing passion with financial considerations is a common challenge. While some face frequent dilemmas, most encounter this conflict occasionally, reflecting awareness of the need to compromise between personal interests and economic realities.

iv). Career Choices under Constraints

When forced to choose, 50.8% preferred a moderately paid job aligned with passion, 16.9% chose a high-paid job with no personal interest, 10.8% selected a low-paying passion job, and 21.5% were undecided.

Discussion: Respondents generally favor a balance between personal fulfillment and financial security. Few prioritize pay alone, while very few are willing to compromise financial stability entirely for passion. This illustrates a pragmatic approach to career decision-making.

v). Passion and Success

Nearly half (47.7%) believe following their passion would make them more successful, 36.9% responded maybe, and small percentages answered no (7.7%) or not sure (7.7%).

Discussion: Most respondents perceive a strong connection between passion and career success, highlighting the importance of intrinsic motivation. The uncertainty among others suggests awareness that external factors, like skills and opportunities, also contribute to professional achievement.

vi). Money VS Passion

Regarding the statement "Money can compensate for a lack of passion", 34.8% agreed, 37.9% were neutral, and 27.3% disagreed.

Discussion: While some respondents value financial compensation, a significant number recognize that passion cannot be fully replaced by money. This underscores the continuing importance of interest and fulfillment in career satisfaction.

vii). Overall Insights

The study highlights key trends: self-driven decision-making, passion as a primary motivator, balancing passion with stability, and the perceived link between passion and success.

Discussion: Overall, the findings reflect a modern, balanced approach to career planning, where individuals prioritize personal satisfaction while considering practical opportunities and financial security. This suggests an evolving mindset toward autonomous and passion-oriented career decisions.

6. Suggestions and Recommendations

Based on the survey findings regarding career choices, passion, and financial considerations, the following suggestions and recommendations are proposed:

- **Self-Awareness and Career Planning:** Educational institutions and career counselors should encourage individuals to identify their interests, strengths, and long-term goals. Tools such as aptitude tests, personality assessments, and career workshops can help participants make informed decisions aligned with their personal motivations.
- **Balancing Passion and Financial Stability:** Career guidance programs should emphasize the importance of finding a balance between personal fulfillment and economic security. Providing awareness about realistic job opportunities and salary expectations can help individuals plan for sustainable careers without compromising their interests.
- **Mentorship and Guidance:** While most respondents rely on themselves, structured mentorship programs can provide practical insights and industry knowledge. Guidance from experienced professionals can help individuals understand career challenges, opportunities, and growth prospects, supporting more informed decision-making.
- **Experiential Learning Opportunities:** Internships, apprenticeships, and short-term projects can allow individuals to gain practical experience before committing to a career path. Such exposure helps assess job satisfaction, skill requirements, and financial viability, reducing potential conflicts between passion and practicality.
- **Family and Peer Support:** Although self-directed decision-making dominates, family guidance remains important. Awareness programs for parents and peer groups can help them provide constructive support without exerting pressure, fostering a healthy environment for career exploration.

7. Conclusion

The study highlights that personal passion and interest are the primary drivers of career choices among respondents, with most individuals taking a self-directed approach to decision-making. While family guidance, peers, and mentors play a secondary role, respondents clearly prioritize their own judgment and aspirations when shaping professional paths. The findings also reveal that balancing passion with financial stability is a common challenge, and individuals tend to prefer careers that offer a moderate income while aligning with personal interests.

Respondents largely perceive a strong connection between following their passion and achieving career success, although many recognize that external factors, such as opportunities, skills, and economic realities, also influence outcomes. The mixed responses regarding whether money can compensate for a lack of passion indicate that while financial rewards are valued, intrinsic motivation and personal fulfillment remain central to long-term career satisfaction.

Overall, the study underscores a modern, balanced approach

to career decision-making, where individuals aim to harmonize personal interests, practical opportunities, and financial considerations. The findings suggest that fostering self-awareness, mentorship, experiential learning, and family support can further enhance effective career planning, helping individuals pursue meaningful and sustainable professional paths. Moreover, creating an environment that encourages reflection on personal goals, exposure to real-world experiences, and informed guidance can reduce the conflict between passion and financial stability.

By promoting such a holistic approach, educational institutions, career counselors, and families can empower individuals to make well-informed, confident, and fulfilling career choices, ultimately contributing to greater professional satisfaction and long-term success.

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