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## Perceived Career Barriers among Female University Students in Nepal.

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### Abstract

*Educational qualification is considered one of the major fundamental competencies in developing a successful career. Access to higher education and employability is closely associated by universities and policymakers. Increasing enrollment of female students in higher education has diversified the argument on female employment and the barriers to overcome for career advancements. This paper attempts to discuss the major career barriers considered by female university students and their awareness of overcoming such barriers. A descriptive study was conducted to analyze the responses of 162 female students studying BBA, BBS, and MBS in Bhadrapur, Jhapa, collected through a convenience sampling method. The study highlighted work-life balance and stereotypes about women as a major barrier to career planning. Skill development workshop and career counseling programs are identified as major support activities to help them better organize their career planning. The outcome suggests that dedication and educational qualifications are primary factors to achieve success in a professional environment.*

**Keywords:** Career awareness, employment, institutional support, professional success

**JEL Classification:** J<sub>16</sub>,

J<sub>24</sub>, I<sub>23</sub>

### Introduction

Nepal has experienced a significant shift in workforce composition with an increasing number of female participants in the workforce of the country (Adhikari, 2016). The increasing enrollment of female students in higher education institutions has made a significant shift in the labor market as more female students graduate each year. The changing workforce structure should also be realized with the barriers that have been prevailing in the country that limit female students' progress in their desired sector. The hindrances to female education and employment are closely associated with culture, economic conditions, stereotypes, and discrimination that limit women's access to decent employment opportunities (Rana et al., 2024). The female workforce is likely to face strict restrictions on their physical mobility, which directly impacts their job search (Field & Vyborny, 2022).

There is a strong desire to achieve career success among female students who are on the verge of starting their careers (Biju et al., 2021). Duru (2022) analyzes the relationship between high school students' career decision-making difficulties, career maturity, and self-efficacy with students' confidence in making decisions related to career choice.

In the process of developing a career, balancing work and family responsibilities is the major challenge females are likely to experience (Prozesky & Mouton, 2019). Alsharif (2018) revealed that cultural, family, individual, institutional, geographical, economic, and legal factors are influential in females' career development. Smetana et al. (2024) identified family pressure, caste stereotypes, and limited networking opportunities as the major hurdles females face while developing a career. Salwani and Cahyawulan (2022) revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between family and social support and students' self-efficacy in career decisions.

Maheshwari and Nayak (2022) highlighted work-life balance issues, stereotypes towards female leadership, limited social networks, and personal factors as major barriers to women's career advancement. In a study conducted by Kumara (2018), it was discussed that specific factors like networking, gender discrimination, segregation, prolonged working hours, and work-life balance are common in the employment environment across industries. Galsanjigmed and Sekiguchi (2023) discussed how gender bias and stereotypes can hinder women's confidence in taking challenging projects during employment.

Thiem and Dasgupta (2022) discussed the supportive environment provided by higher education institutions to the students, considering the existing systemic barriers and psychological challenges. Shen (2022) conducted a systematic review highlighting the need for institution-led mentoring programs for career advancement and workplace equity for women.

Abdalnour (2023) recommended the need for expert guidance and development of training and employability skills for female students before graduating from the specific program. Some of the barriers faced by females during their career advancement can be overcome through networking and providing mentoring and supportive associates (O'connell & McKinnon, 2021).

The socio-economic environment of the country is crucial in shaping the educational and career aspects of female graduates. From access to education to choosing career options, the surrounding environment, government policy, and individual prospects play a dominant role. Female students are exposed to different circumstances from start of their higher education journey that eventually limits their employment prospects. The cognitive realization of the barriers eventually develops as hurdles in career advancements. In this context, this paper analyzes the perceived barriers by female students while studying at the graduate and post-graduate levels in management. The study especially focuses on finding out the major perceived career barriers by female university students in Nepal. The article also attempts to explore female students' awareness towards overcoming career barriers in Nepalese context.

## Methods

The study primarily aims at identifying the major career barriers perceived by the female university students in Nepal. To conduct the study, a descriptive research design was used. A self-administered questionnaire developed in Google Form was circulated to the students studying BBA, BBS, and MBS in the Bhadrapur region. A convenience sampling method was used to collect the sample data from 162 students studying at bachelor's and master's levels in government and community colleges of Bhadrapur. Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS and Excel to analyze the collected data.

## Data Presentation and Analysis

Female university students in Nepal often face various perceived career barriers that influence their educational aspirations and future employment opportunities. These barriers arise from social, cultural, economic, and institutional factors. Traditional gender roles, family expectations, and societal norms sometimes discourage women from pursuing certain professions or higher career goals. In addition, limited access to professional networks, lack of female role models, safety concerns, and gender discrimination in the labor market can also reduce their confidence and career motivation. Economic constraints and unequal access to training or internships further restrict their career development. As a result, many female students perceive significant challenges in achieving their desired careers despite having the necessary qualifications and abilities. Understanding these perceived barriers is important for developing policies and support systems that promote gender equality and empower female students to participate fully in the labor market in Nepal.

**Table 1**

*Distribution of Respondents by Academic Program*

Academic Program	Frequency	Percent
BBA	51	31.5
BBS	72	44.4
MBS	39	24.1
Total	162	100

Table 1 depicts the composition of female students enrolled in the BBA, BBS, and MBS programs at the Bhadrapur region. Out of the total 162 respondents, about 44 percent are studying BBS, whereas about 31 percent and 24 percent students are studying BBA and MBS, respectively.

**Table 2**

*Distribution of Respondents by Age Group*

Age Group	Frequency	Percent
Below 20	16	9.9
20-22	71	43.8
23-25	54	33.3
Above 25	21	13.0
Total	162	100.0

Table 2 shows that out of the total 162 female students, about 44 percent are in the age group 20-22. The above 25 age group consists of 13 percent of students, whereas only about 10 percent of the students are below 20. About 33 percent are in the age group 23-25.

**Figure 1**  
*Perceived barriers while considering career options*

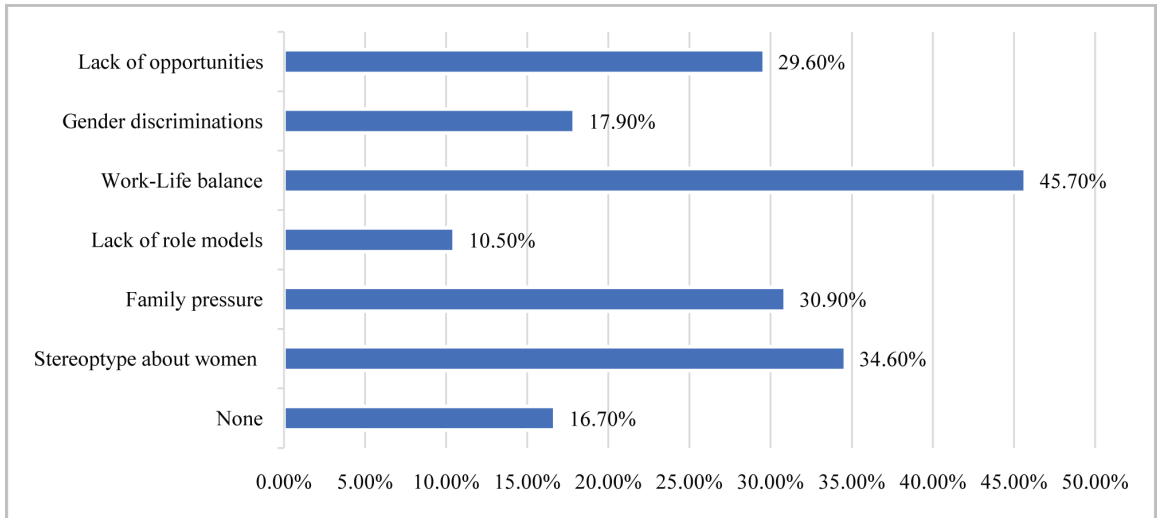


Figure 1 shows that work-life balance concerns are the primary factor when considering career options for female students. About 35 percent considers that stereotypes about women in certain professions are another major barrier to career advancements. About 31 percent claim that family pressure is a barrier to career selection. Similarly, about 30 percent considers that the lack of opportunities for females is another barrier to female employment. About 18 percent considers that gender discrimination affects employment for females. However, about 17 percent claim that there are no barriers for them to advance in their career aspirations.

**Figure 2**  
*Willingness to leave hometown for higher education/work*

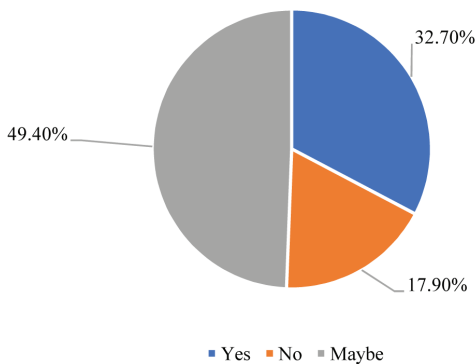
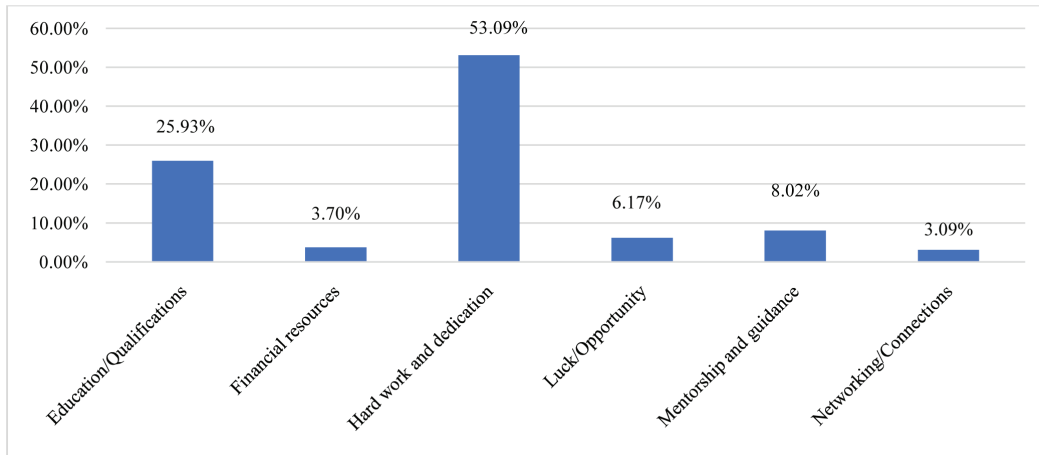


Figure 2 illustrates the female students' willingness to leave their hometown for better career options. While the majority of the students, i.e., about 49 percent, are not sure about the possible relocation for career advancements, a significant proportion, i.e., about 33 percent, are ready to

leave their hometown for better career opportunities. About 18 percent are still reluctant to relocate themselves for any kind of career opportunities.

**Figure 3**  
*Major factors for professional Success*



Relating to some of the important factors for career achievement, Figure 3 highlights that about 53 percent of the students feel hard work and dedication are the primary factors for success in a career. About 26 percent consider education qualification plays a key role in career success, and 8 percent of them believe mentorship and guidance are important factors of success in their career.

**Figure 4**  
*Campuses/Colleges provide adequate career support.*

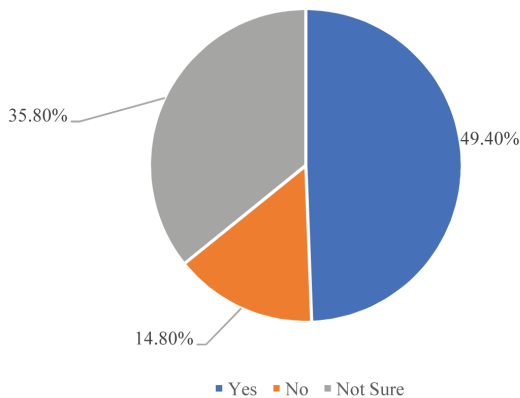
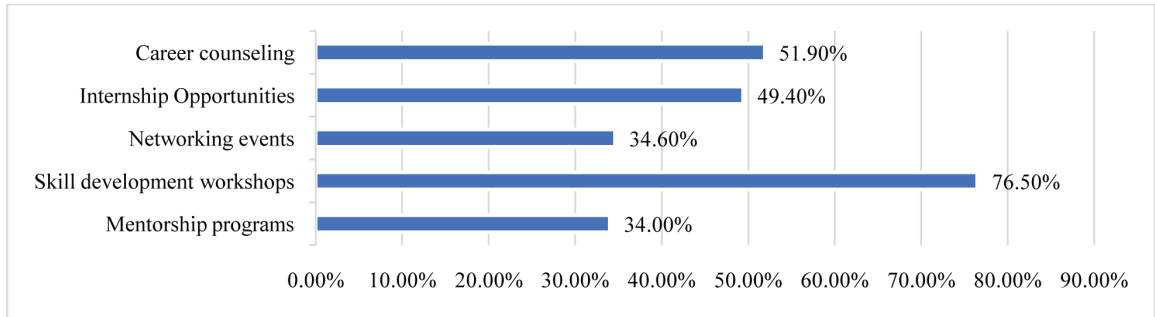


Figure 4 highlights the role of the college where the students are currently studying in shaping their careers. About 50 percent believe that the college provides the required support for achieving their career goals. About 36 percent of the student are still not sure about the institutional role in their career decision. About 15 percent believe that the institution they are currently enrolled in does not provide adequate support for career advancements.

**Figure 5**  
*Additional support for Career Planning*



Considering the additional support students require to support their career planning, Figure 5 shows that about 77 percent students believe that skill development workshops are important. About 52 percent believe that career counseling helps them in career planning, and about 49 percent consider internship opportunities as an important aspect in career planning. About 34 percent believe that networking events and mentorship programs are key to career planning.

**Table 3**  
*Mean Score of Female Students' Perception towards Career Choice*

Items	Mean Score
Being female plays a role in career choice	3.54
Work-life balance is important in career choice	4.59
Confidence in achieving career goals	4.27
Updated on national and global opportunities	3.88

Within the four individual factors affecting the career choice of female students, work-life balance is the most important aspect with the highest mean score (M=4.59). In the case of being female playing any role in career choice, the mean score of M=3.54 explains that the majority of students consider it as an influential factor in making career decisions. The mean score of M= 4.27 shows a strong positive perception towards achieving career goals. Similarly, the mean score M = 3.88 suggests that there is a high level of awareness towards national and international opportunities for career advancement.

## Results and Discussion

The study highlighted the career hurdles perceived by female university students in Nepal. Though the outcome of the study suggest that female students are well aware about the existing employment opportunities, they still believe that just being a female can limit their career advancements (Rana et al.,2024; Field & Vyborny, 2022).

Women still bear additional responsibilities in the family and has to face biasness and stereotype of being female on specific sector that has significantly restricted their access to educational and career growth. Work life balance is the major issue that defines the career selection and mobility of

female students (Maheshwari & Nayak, 2022; Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi 2023; Kumara ,2018).

When hard work, dedication and educational qualifications are considered vital for professional growth, female students seek additional support form educational institutions in the form of skill development workshops, internship, counselling and networking opportunities so that they remain competitive with higher employability prospects (Thiem & Dasgupta, 2022; Shen,2022; Abdalnour, 2023; O’connell & McKinnon, 2021).

### **Conclusion and Policy Implications**

Female students are more determined in terms of their employment and career prospects in recent days. With increasing access to information about the job opportunities that exist at the domestic and international level, female graduates are more confident in achieving their dream career. The determination of female graduates is challenged by the perceived barriers existing in the form of discrimination, lack of opportunities, stereotypes, mobility for jobs and education, and family pressure. Work-life balance is the most determining factor identified by the majority of female students impacting their career prospects. Female students believe that skill development workshops, internship opportunities, counseling, mentoring, and networking opportunities are essential aspects in their career planning. The study also highlighted that dedication and educational qualifications are primary factors for professional success.

As educational achievement is closely linked with employment prospects and career success, the outcome of the study can help the universities and policymakers to diversify their approach in terms of female employment. This study can also expand to other educational programs to gain a collective approach for female employment, where common barriers can be identified for immediate solution. The specific needs of a certain program can be identified by extending the educational background of the sample data.

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