

Family Background and Peer Influence as Determinants of Career Aspirations among Criminology Students

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ABSTRACT

Career aspirations play a crucial role in shaping students' future professional paths, particularly among criminology students who aim to pursue careers in law enforcement, public safety, and the justice system. This study examined the influence of family background and peer relationships on the career aspirations of criminology students in a private Higher Education Institution in Zamboanga del Sur using a quantitative approach with a descriptive–correlational research design. A total of 238 respondents were selected through stratified random sampling, and data were collected using modified survey questionnaires. Statistical tools such as mean, standard deviation, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, and multiple regression analysis were utilized in the analysis. Findings revealed that respondents generally have a good to very good family background, with parental occupation receiving the highest rating, while peer influence was high, particularly in peer modeling. Students also demonstrated a high level of career aspirations, especially in motivational aspects. Results showed significant positive relationships between family background and career aspirations, as well as between peer influence and career aspirations. Regression analysis further indicated that parental education, socioeconomic status, family structure, and peer modeling significantly predict career aspirations, with parental education as the strongest predictor. The study concludes that supportive family environments and positive peer interactions play a vital role in strengthening students' motivation, skill development, career planning, and confidence in pursuing their professional goals, while personal motivation and both family background and peer modeling jointly shape students' preparedness and commitment toward future careers in criminology.

Keywords: Career Aspirations, Criminology Students, Family Background, Parental Education, Peer Influence, Peer Modeling

INTRODUCTION

Rationale of the study

Career aspirations play a critical role in shaping students' professional identity and long-term career trajectories, particularly among criminology students who intend to pursue careers in law enforcement, public safety, and the criminal justice system. In the Philippine context, these aspirations are influenced by a combination of personal, social, and environmental factors, including family background and peer relationships, which collectively shape students' motivation and career decision-making processes (Commission on Higher Education, 2022; Philippine National Police, 2023).

This study is anchored in Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which posits that career development is influenced by the interaction of self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals, all of which are shaped by environmental factors such as family and peers (Robert W. Lent et al., 2021; Albert Bandura, 1986). Within this framework, family background contributes to the development of self-efficacy and expectations through parental guidance, socioeconomic resources, and role modeling, while peer influence operates through observational learning and social reinforcement (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2021).

Family background serves as a primary socializing agent that shapes students' values, discipline, and perceptions of career opportunities. Parental education, occupation, socioeconomic status, and family structure influence not only access to resources but also students' confidence in pursuing specific career paths (Elliott & Bachman, 2021; Georgescu & Herman, 2020). In criminology, where careers demand discipline, ethical responsibility, and commitment to public service, parental influence plays a crucial role in reinforcing these values and shaping career direction (Nobis, 2025).

Similarly, peer influence significantly affects students' attitudes, motivation, and career-related behaviors. Through peer modeling and support, students develop aspirations aligned with group norms and shared goals (Laursen, 2021; Wentzel et al., 2020). In criminology programs, peer groups that emphasize discipline, leadership, and professional identity can strengthen students' commitment to careers in law enforcement and public safety (Lopez & Kim, 2023; Chen & Alvarez, 2024).

Despite existing research, limited studies have examined the combined influence of family background and peer relationships within the SCCT framework, particularly in the Philippine criminology context. This study addresses this gap by investigating how these factors jointly shape students' career aspirations, providing both theoretical and practical insights (Lent & Brown, 2020).

METHODS

This study utilized a quantitative descriptive–correlational design to examine relationships among variables (Creswell, 2014; Ary et al., 2018). It was conducted in a private Higher Education Institution in Zamboanga del Sur, with the sampling frame comprising all enrolled criminology students based on registrar records. Using stratified random sampling with proportional allocation by year level, 238 respondents were selected, with sample size determined via Raosoft (5% margin of error, 95% confidence level). Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire anchored in Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 2021). The instrument, constructed through literature-based item generation and refinement, included three sections: family background, peer influence, and career aspirations, measured on a 5-point Likert scale. Content validity was established through expert review, and pilot testing indicated high reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.92–0.93).

Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression were used for data analysis. Regression assumptions were tested, including multicollinearity, normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity, ensuring analytical robustness. Ethical standards were upheld through informed consent, confidentiality, and compliance with the Philippine Data Privacy Act of 2012 (RA 10173).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study examined the family background, peer influence, and career aspirations of 238 criminology students in a private Higher Education Institution in Zamboanga del Sur, revealing that respondents generally possess a good to very good family background, a high level of peer influence, and high career aspirations. The descriptive results indicate that parental occupation obtained the highest rating in family background, peer modeling emerged as the strongest dimension of peer influence, and motivational factors recorded the highest mean in career aspirations, suggesting that students' career development is strongly shaped by both family and peer environments as well as intrinsic motivation.

Table 1 presents the respondents' family background in terms of parental education, socioeconomic status, parental occupation, and family structure. Parental occupation obtained the highest mean ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.61$), interpreted as Very Good, followed by socioeconomic status and family structure ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.59$), both rated Good, while parental education had the lowest mean ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.60$), also interpreted as Good. Overall, the composite mean of 4.16 ($SD = 0.60$) indicates a generally supportive family background. The findings suggest that stable parental occupation and favorable socioeconomic conditions contribute to students' academic development and career formation by providing resources, guidance, and role modeling. Consistent with prior studies, family support, structure, and parental involvement play a significant role in shaping students'

motivation, self-efficacy, and career aspirations (OECD, 2021; UNESCO, 2022; UNICEF, 2021; World Bank, 2023; Lent & Brown, 2020).

Table 1 Family Background of Respondents

Constructs	M	SD	Remarks
Parental Education	4.03	0.60	Good
Socioeconomic Status	4.18	0.59	Good
Parental Occupation	4.24	0.61	Very Good
Family Structure	4.18	0.59	Good
Overall background	4.16	0.60	Good

Note: 4.20-5.00 (Very Good); 3.40-4.19 (Good); 2.60-3.39 (Fair); 1.30-2.59 (Poor); 1.00-1.29 (Very Poor)

Table 2 shows the level of peer influence in terms of peer support, peer pressure, and peer modeling. Peer modeling recorded the highest mean ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 0.62$), followed by peer support ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.66$) and peer pressure ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 0.72$), all interpreted as High. The overall mean of 3.93 ($SD = 0.67$) indicates that peer influence is substantial, shaping respondents' attitudes, behaviors, and decisions. The findings suggest that students are strongly influenced by observing peers and receiving support, which enhances motivation and engagement, while peer pressure reflects continued susceptibility to group norms. These results align with studies emphasizing the role of peer relationships in academic motivation and psychosocial development, where positive interactions promote engagement and self-confidence, and negative pressures may lead to conformity (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Smith & Anderson, 2020; Wentzel et al., 2020).

Table 2 Level of Peer Influence among the Respondents

Constructs	M	SD	Remarks
Peer Support	3.95	0.66	High
Peer Pressure	3.79	0.72	High
Peer Modeling	4.04	0.62	High
Overall background	3.93	0.67	High

Note: 4.20-5.00 (Very High); 3.40-4.19 (High); 2.60-3.39 (Moderate); 1.30-2.59 (Low); 1.00-1.29 (Very Low)

Table 3 shows the level of career aspirations in terms of motivational factors, educational and skills development, and socioeconomic and family influence. Motivational factors had the highest mean ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.50$), followed by socioeconomic and family influence ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.61$) and educational and skills development ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 0.64$), all indicating high levels. The overall mean of 4.18 ($SD = 0.58$) reflects strong career aspirations among respondents. The findings emphasize the role of intrinsic motivation, alongside family support and educational preparation, in shaping career goals, consistent with studies linking these factors to career persistence, readiness, and long-term success (Locke & Latham, 2020; Brown & Page, 2020).

Table 3 Level of Career Aspirations Among the Respondents

Constructs	M	SD	Remarks
Motivational Factors	4.24	0.5	Very High
Educational and Skills Development	4.14	0.64	High
Socioeconomic and Family Influence	4.15	0.61	High
Overall Aspirations	4.18	0.58	High

Note: 4.20-5.00 (Very High); 3.40-4.19 (High); 2.60-3.39 (Moderate); 1.30-2.59 (Low); 1.00-1.29 (Very Low)

Table 4 shows a significant positive relationship between family background (parental education, socioeconomic status, parental occupation, and family structure) and career aspirations across all dimensions ($r = 0.208-0.416$, $p < 0.01$), leading to rejection of the null hypothesis. Parental education had the strongest link with educational and skills development ($r = 0.416$, $p < 0.001$), while parental occupation was most related to socioeconomic and

family influence ($r = 0.358, p < 0.001$). These findings indicate that stronger family support and resources enhance motivation, skill development, and career planning. Consistent with prior studies, family background provides opportunities, role modeling, and support systems that shape students' aspirations and persistence (Eccles & Roeser, 2020; García Coll et al., 2021; Seginer, 2022), aligning with Social Cognitive Theory on the role of environmental factors in self-efficacy and career goals.

Table 4 Test of Relationship Between Family Background of Respondents and their Level of Career Aspirations

Variables		Motivational Factors	Educational and Skills Development	Socioeconomic and Family Influence
Parental Education	<i>r</i>	0.31**	0.42**	0.35**
	<i>p</i>	< .001	< .001	< .001
Socioeconomic Status	<i>r</i>	0.34**	0.24**	0.35**
	<i>p</i>	< .001	< .001	< .001
Parental Occupation	<i>r</i>	0.21**	0.25**	0.36**
	<i>p</i>	0.001	< .001	< .001
Family Structure	<i>r</i>	0.28**	0.30**	0.35**
	<i>p</i>	< .001	< .001	< .001

Notes: Ho: There is no significant relationship between the the family background of respondents and their level of career aspirations

*** $p < 0.01$ (Very Highly Significant); ** $p < 0.01$ (Highly Significant); * $p < 0.05$ (Significant)

Table 5 shows that peer support and peer modeling have significant positive relationships with all dimensions of career aspirations ($r = 0.233-0.338, p < 0.01$), indicating that encouragement and observed behaviors from peers enhance motivation, skill development, and career planning, leading to rejection of the null hypothesis. Peer pressure showed weaker relationships, being significant only with motivational factors ($r = 0.156, p = 0.015$) and educational and skills development ($r = 0.189, p = 0.003$), but not with socioeconomic and family influence ($r = 0.087, p = 0.180$). These findings suggest that positive peer interactions play a stronger role than peer pressure in shaping career aspirations. Consistent with prior studies, peer support and modeling influence motivation, goal-setting, and persistence, while also contributing to self-efficacy and career readiness (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Wentzel et al., 2020; Seginer, 2020; Brown & Larson, 2022; UNICEF, 2021).

Table 5 Test of Relationship Between the Level of Peer Influence of Respondents and their Level of Career Aspirations

Variables		Motivational Factors	Educational and Skills Development	Socioeconomic and Family Influence
Peer Support	<i>R</i>	0.31**	0.27**	0.23**
	<i>P</i>	< .001	< .001	< .001
Peer Pressure	<i>R</i>	0.16**	0.19**	0.087
	<i>P</i>	0.015	0.003	0.180
Peer Modeling	<i>R</i>	0.29**	0.34**	0.28**
	<i>P</i>	< .001	< .001	< .001

Notes: Ho: There is no significant relationship between the level of peer influence among the respondents and their level of career aspirations

*** $p < 0.01$ (Very Highly Significant); ** $p < 0.01$ (Highly Significant); * $p < 0.05$ (Significant)

Table 6 shows that parental education ($\beta = 0.242, p < 0.001$) is the strongest predictor of career aspirations, followed by socioeconomic status ($\beta = 0.190, p < 0.001$), family structure ($\beta = 0.131, p = 0.005$), and peer modeling ($\beta = 0.130, p = 0.003$). The model is significant ($F = 37.7, p < 0.001$) and explains 32.5% of the variance (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.325$), leading to rejection of the null hypothesis. The stronger effect of parental

education likely reflects the structured and licensure-based nature of criminology careers, where informed parental guidance supports goal-setting and preparation. Socioeconomic resources and stable family environments further enable access to training and reinforce discipline, while peer modeling strengthens professional norms and motivation. These findings align with prior studies showing that family and peer factors shape students' aspirations, self-efficacy, and career planning (Eccles & Roeser, 2020; García Coll et al., 2021; Seginer, 2020; Schroeder & Loughheed, 2021; Wang & Eccles, 2022).

Table 6 Predictors of Respondents' Career Aspirations

Predictors	Coef (β)	SE Coef	T	p-value
(Constant)	1.333	0.2576	5.17	< .001
Parental Education	0.242	0.0442	5.47	< .001
Socioeconomic Status	0.190	0.0457	4.16	< .001
Family Structure	0.131	0.0464	2.83	0.005
Peer Modeling	0.130	0.0431	3.02	0.003
Adjusted r^2	0.325			
F value	37.7			
p-value	< .001			
Respondents' Career Aspirations = 1.333 + (0.242 * Parental Education) + (.190 * Socioeconomic Status) + (.131 * Family Structure) + (.130 * Peer Modeling)				

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that a supportive family background, characterized by parental education, socioeconomic status, parental occupation, and family structure, plays a vital role in fostering students' motivation, educational development, and career goal setting. Students who come from stable and supportive home environments tend to demonstrate stronger career aspirations, clearer direction, and higher motivation to pursue criminology-related careers. In addition, positive peer influence, particularly through peer modeling and peer support, significantly contributes to students' motivation, skill development, and career decision-making, indicating that both family and peer environments are essential in shaping students' academic and professional growth.

Furthermore, the study concludes that personal motivation is a strong driving force in students' career aspirations, as it empowers them to pursue educational and skills development opportunities and maintain focus on future professional success. The findings also confirm that family background significantly enhances career aspirations by providing guidance, stability, and socioeconomic support, while peer influence strengthens goal-directed behaviors through encouragement and modeling. Ultimately, both family background and peer modeling are significant predictors of career aspirations, highlighting that students' motivation, preparedness, and confidence in pursuing their future careers are shaped by the combined influence of home environment and peer relationships.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study's findings and conclusions lead to several recommendations aimed at strengthening the role of family and peer influence in enhancing criminology students' career aspirations. Educational institutions may engage families through structured programs and workshops to strengthen parental support, guidance, and involvement in students' career planning, emphasizing the importance of parental education, socioeconomic support, and family stability. Schools may also develop initiatives that promote positive peer influence, such as peer mentoring, collaborative learning activities, and student leadership programs, to enhance motivation, skill development, and career goal setting. In addition, programs aimed at improving students' career aspirations may focus on fostering intrinsic motivation and goal-setting skills, while providing opportunities for educational and skills development tailored to students' interests and career goals. Institutions may further create mechanisms to recognize and reinforce supportive peer networks and family involvement, helping students feel valued, motivated, and confident in pursuing their future careers.

Furthermore, continuous evaluation of career guidance programs and mentorship initiatives using surveys or feedback tools is recommended to ensure that institutions can identify areas for improvement and provide effective support systems for students. Schools may also integrate career guidance with skill-building workshops and experiential learning opportunities, such as internships or simulation exercises, to help students apply knowledge and develop competencies relevant to their career aspirations. Lastly, future researchers may explore the long-term effects of family background and peer influence on career aspirations across different educational contexts, including the role of digital platforms, online mentoring, and cross-cultural comparisons in enhancing students' motivation, skill development, and engagement in career planning.

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