iDREAM CAREER

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Bharat Career Aspirations Report

2025

Table of Contents

Preface

With one of the youngest populations in the world, over 65% under the age of 35, our nation has an unprecedented opportunity to harness the energy, creativity, and potential of its youth. But to do so meaningfully, we must empower young people with the tools, information, and support systems they need to make informed career decisions.

The Bharat Career Aspirations Report (BCAR) 2025, now in its third edition, plays a vital role in this mission. Developed through a collaboration between iDreamCareer, UNICEF-YuWaah, and the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation (MSDF), this report is not just a study, it is a reflection of the dreams, dilemmas, and determination of over 21,000 students across seven states of India. It sheds light on the factors that shape their career decisions, the aspirations they nurture, the guidance they seek, and the systemic gaps they continue to face.

BCAR 2025 takes a deeper dive into the socio-economic determinants of career awareness, exploring how variables like gender, school type, social category and location affect not just career aspirations, but also access to resources and decision-making process. The findings are both revealing and thought-provoking. They serve as a call to action for policymakers, educators, civil society, and the private sector to co-create an enabling environment for aspiration-led, informed career journeys.

This report makes a compelling case for embedding structured career guidance into our education system, and ensuring that every student, irrespective of background, has a fair chance at success. It also reminds us that behind every data point is a young individual with a unique dream, a voice that deserves to be heard, and a future that deserves to be shaped with care.

We extend our gratitude to all the participants and stakeholders who have contributed to this endeavour. BCAR 2025 is more than just a report, it is a blueprint for change, an invitation to collaborate, and a reaffirmation of our shared belief that with the right guidance, every young person in Bharat can chart their own path to a meaningful and fulfilling career.

Acknowledgements

We extend our deepest gratitude to all those who have contributed to the creation and successful launch of the Bharat Career Aspirations Report (BCAR) 2025. This report is the result of a remarkable collective effort, and it would not have been possible without the unwavering support, commitment, and collaboration of numerous individuals and institutions.

We are especially grateful to our partners, UNICEF-YuWaah, who has been instrumental in offering strategic insights, contributing design expertise, and ensuring institutional continuity from earlier editions of the report. Their involvement in structuring the vision and direction of the BCAR 2025 has ensured that the study remains grounded in youth-centric perspectives and committed to driving meaningful change. We also thank the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation (MSDF) for their generous financial support, which enabled us to significantly broaden the scope and depth of the study. Their support facilitated engagement with a larger and more diverse student cohort, enhancing the quality and inclusiveness of the insights presented in this report.

A special note of appreciation is due to our career counsellors, who not only conducted school-level data collection but also led career awareness workshops. Their dedicated engagement with students helped ensure that participants fully understood the purpose and importance of this survey. Their tireless efforts and deep commitment to empowering youth have added significant value to this study.

We express our profound gratitude to the school principals and teachers across government and private schools who extended their cooperation and facilitated our interactions with students. Their support ensured a conducive environment for meaningful participation. We are equally grateful to the students who participated in the study and diligently responded to the survey. Their inputs form the very foundation of this report, and their engagement has been instrumental in generating the insights presented herein.

We would like to thank the senior leadership at iDreamCareer, in particular Mr. Ayush Bansal, Mr. Praveen Kumar, Founder and Co-Founder respectively, and Mr Ankit Bansal, Director - PathShila, for their visionary leadership, deep sectoral insight, and strategic direction throughout the research process. Their guidance has shaped every stage of this initiative, from conception to publication.

Our sincere thanks also go to all our colleagues at iDreamCareer across partnerships, admin and communications teams who provided relentless support during the study.

A special appreciation to the design team, whose creativity and attention to detail brought this report to life in an engaging and accessible format. Finally, we acknowledge the efforts of the Monitoring and Evaluation team at iDreamCareer, who led the research with rigour, ensuring methodological soundness and analytical integrity.

Through this collaborative effort, we hope the findings of the BCAR 2025 serve as a critical resource for policymakers, educators, development professionals, and investors working to enable informed career decision-making for India's youth.

It is our collective aspiration that every young individual in Bharat has access to the opportunity, guidance, and resources they need to realise their full potential.

With sincere appreciation,

Team iDreamCareer

Message from UNICEF-YuWaah

India stands at a pivotal moment in shaping the future of its young people. With nearly 65 percent of the population under the age of 35, ensuring that every adolescent and young person has the skills, guidance, and opportunities to make informed choices, is not just an aspiration, but a national imperative.

The Bharat Career Aspirations Report (BCAR) series reflects our shared commitment to advancing this goal. Since its inception, the report has provided critical insights into the aspirations, awareness, and decision-making processes of students across India. Each edition has added depth to our understanding of how young people navigate their journey from education to employment, and the barriers they face along the way.

This year's edition, BCAR 2025, makes an important contribution by deepening the analysis of how socio-economic background, gender, and geography influence students' aspirations and access to career guidance. The findings underscore the urgent need to strengthen structured guidance systems in schools, embed career awareness in curricula, and create enabling environments that support all students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to pursue aspiration-driven careers.

We are deeply grateful to all partners who have contributed to this effort. Most importantly, we thank the thousands of students who shared their experiences and aspirations with us. Their voices remind us of the importance of investing in systems that ensure every child and young person has the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

It is our hope that BCAR 2025 will serve as both a resource and a call to action - guiding policymakers, educators, and practitioners in strengthening India's career guidance ecosystem, and ensuring that all young people can turn their aspirations into action and make empowered choices about their futures.

Giorgia Varisco
Chief of Youth and Adolescent Development
YuWaah (Generation Unlimited India) at UNICEF

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Glossary

Abbreviation	Full Form
B.A.	Bachelor of Arts
B.Com	Bachelor of Commerce
B.Sc.	Bachelor of Science
B.Tech	Bachelor of Technology
BCAR	Bharat Career Aspirations Report
iDC	iDreamCareer
ILO	International Labour Organisation
M.A.	Master of Arts
M.Sc	Master of Science
M.Tech	Master of Technology
MBA	Master of Business Administration
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoRD	Ministry of Rural Development
MSDF	Michael & Susan Dell Foundation
NEP	National Education Policy
OBC	Other Backward Classes
PG	Post-graduation
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PLFS	Periodic Labour Force Survey
SC	Scheduled Castes
ST	Scheduled Tribes
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
SWOT Analysis	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats Analysis
UG	Under-graduation
WPR	Workforce Participation Rate

Career Counsellor in Odisha, orienting students on the survey used in the Bharat Career Aspirations Study

1

Executive Summary

The Bharat Career Aspirations Report (BCAR) 2025 is the third edition of a flagship report series aimed at empowering young people in India to make informed career choices. It captures the career aspirations and awareness of youth in India, uncovers factors governing career decisions, identifies barriers in a student's journey towards an aspiration-based career, and proposes actionable solutions so that every young individual has the opportunity, support, and resources to achieve their career ambitions.

Building on the insights from the last two editions, BCAR 2023 and 2024, this year's edition makes a pivot to deepen the understanding of **how socio-economic background, including gender, social category, geographical location, etc., shapes students' career aspirations, awareness, access to career guidance and decision making.**

BCAR 2025 is developed by **iDreamCareer, in collaboration with YuWaah, UNICEF India, and the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation (MSDF),** continuing the mission to understand the evolving career landscape for India's youth.

India is one of the youngest countries in the world, with about 65% of its people under the age of 35 (Ministry of Finance, 2025). These young people are faced with an unprecedented and rapidly evolving education and career landscape.

Their career aspirations and decisions are shaped by numerous factors, including immediate environment (teachers, family, and peers), prevalent career trends, success stories, access to resources, and financial goals, among others. The interplay of all these factors makes it difficult for young people to navigate their journey towards a fulfilling career. In this scenario, guidance, exposure to real-world experiences, and an enabling environment that embraces flexibility and lifelong learning are essential.

BCAR 2025 serves as the foundation to understand the young voices, to co-create a future with them where they are empowered to make aspiration-driven career choices. This edition marks an expansion in the reach, through a survey of 21,239 students from Grades 9th to 12th across 14 rural and urban districts of seven Indian states - Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Gujarat, Punjab, Karnataka, and Rajasthan.

The report reveals meaningful insights about how young people in India perceive and plan their career journeys, especially those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, gendered differences in decision-making, and awareness of self and diverse career options. Despite growing exposure, career aspirations remain largely concentrated in mainstream areas, with 70% of students preferring only 7 out of 21 career clusters. Service-oriented careers in areas such as Government & Defence, Medical Sciences, and Business Management are most aspired for.

Career Counsellor in Odisha briefing students on the Bharat Career Aspirations Study

Additionally, levels of career awareness vary significantly across socio-economic indicators - students in urban areas showcase greater diversity in aspirations, better access to resources, and more clarity in the course and college planning compared to their rural counterparts.

The report brings to attention the critical gaps that need urgent attention. **Only 10% of students have access to structured career counselling, 90% are unaware of course-related expenses and 78% lack a backup career plan.** Female students, in particular, report lower confidence in decision-making and are constrained by societal and familial norms and expectations. The study also found a **strong preference for government colleges,** driven largely by affordability and accessibility, although nearly one in five students remain uncertain about their college choices.

The BCAR series has evolved to provide deeper insights into students' career awareness levels, with BCAR 2023 and 2024 focusing on gender differences and access to career guidance.

However, BCAR 2025 takes a significant step forward by incorporating socio-economic factors, such as geographical location, school type, and social categories, into its analysis. Furthermore, the comparison of career awareness across various parameters like access to professional career guidance, awareness of course-related expenses, and backup career plans reveals consistent challenges over the years in all the Bharat Career Aspiration Reports. Access to professional guidance and usage of self-assessment tools remains low and declining, while awareness of course expenses and backup plans fluctuates.

To address these gaps and empower students to make more informed career-related decisions, BCAR 2025 underscores several areas where focused interventions can create impact, including:

- **Embedding structured career guidance programs** into academic curriculum from Grade 9th onward, including exercises on self-awareness, counselling, and exposure to diverse courses and sectors beyond mainstream career choices.

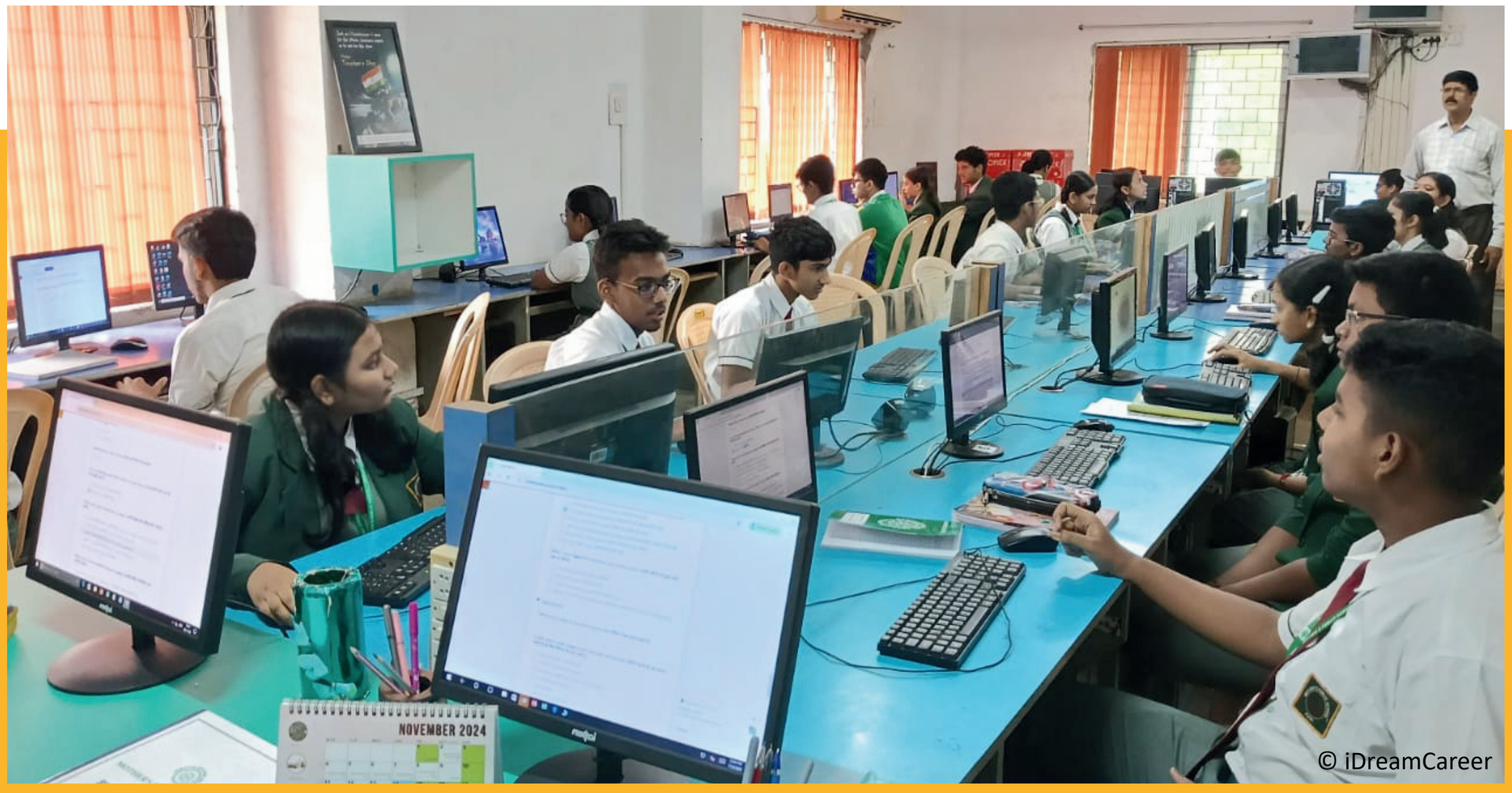
- **Strengthening digital infrastructure and access** to enable students to benefit from emerging opportunities in the digital economy.

- **Expanding support for underrepresented groups**, including females, students from rural areas, through gender-responsive guidance**,** teacher and parent engagement, and financial planning tools.

- **Improving infrastructure and awareness of diverse educational pathways**, including government colleges, private and semi-government institutions, and options such as diplomas, postgraduate degrees, and PhDs.

- **Broadening the scope of career counselling services** to provide more holistic support, including career portfolio building, financial literacy, and fostering purpose-driven thinking in career choices.

Collectively, these findings highlight critical shifts needed in India's career guidance ecosystem so that every student, regardless of socio-economic background, can confidently navigate their journey from education to employment.



Data collection in Odisha: Students filling out surveys on the Kobo platform

1.1 BCAR: Y-o-Y Transition

The BCAR (Bharat Career Awareness Report) series has evolved over the years, each edition deepening our understanding of the career awareness levels of students across India.

While BCAR 2023 and 2024 mainly focused on understanding students' career awareness levels from a gender lens, BCAR 2025 expands the scope by considering critical socio-economic factors that play a significant role in a student's career trajectory.

What makes BCAR 2025 stand out is its effort to paint a comprehensive picture of how external factors influence career decisions.

The comparative analysis of career awareness and aspirations across key socio-economic indicators, such as state, district (urban vs. rural), school type (government vs. private), and gender, allows for a nuanced understanding of the gaps that still exist in career education.

In essence, while BCAR 2023 and 2024 laid the groundwork by identifying key parameters of career awareness and exploring the impact of gender, **BCAR 2025 takes a bold step in identifying socio-economic disparities as a major determinant in students' career choices and decision-making.**

BCAR	Key Focus Areas	Sampling Method	Sample Size
BCAR 2023	Access to career counselling and understand the career awareness level of the students.	Convenience Sampling	5225
BCAR 2024		Convenience Sampling	4968
BCAR 2025	BCAR 2025 broadens scope of BCAR series by incorporating key socio-economic factors, alongside examining awareness of career parameters and access to career counselling.	Mixed Sampling Design	21239

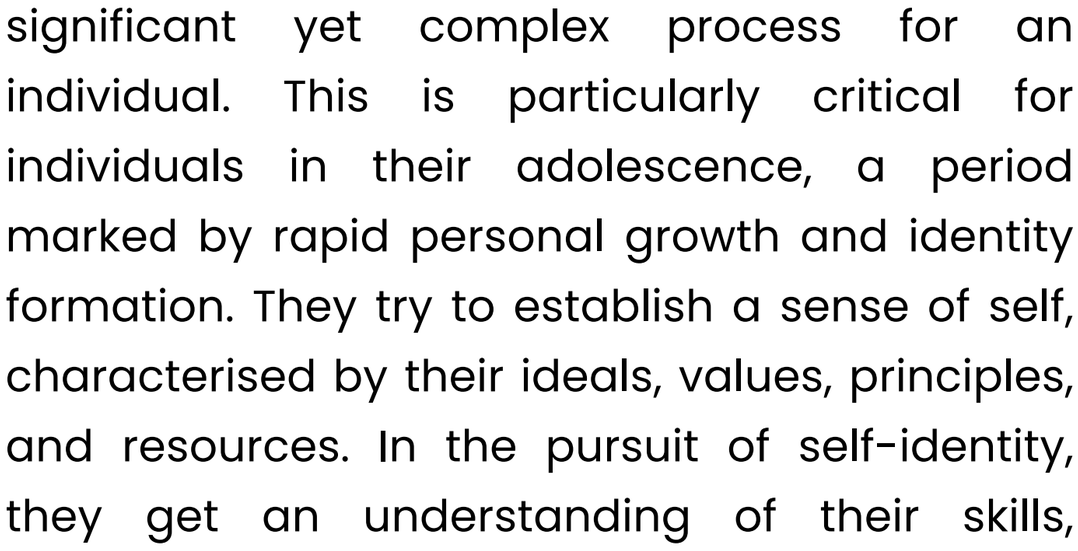
2

Background

2.1 Career and decision making process

A career is defined as an individual's journey through various work and life experiences. Organisational researchers term it as an individual's work-related and associated experiences, both inside and outside of an organisation, that define their journey through life (Shaito, 2019). The word, its meaning, and its application have changed with time. Today, a career is seen not just as a linear path but as a dynamic, lifelong process of growth and reinvention.

Career cannot only be determined through an individual's affinity, but also through their aptitude, their options at hand, and the larger economic and social milieu. This makes choosing or navigating a career choice a significant yet complex process for an individual. This is particularly critical for individuals in their adolescence, a period marked by rapid personal growth and identity formation. They try to establish a sense of self, characterised by their ideals, values, principles, and resources. In the pursuit of self-identity, they get an understanding of their skills, weaknesses, values, perceptions, and decision-making abilities.



Career Counsellor in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, guiding students on filling the survey form

It is also a time when adolescents start to think about their careers and goals in alignment with their self-identity.

Self-awareness and career awareness are, therefore, fundamental to making informed choices that affect the future of one's work and life. However, career-related decision-making is not just an individual's journey but is also determined by a plethora of external factors. It is influenced by socioeconomic status, gender, family expectations, community support, school education, and other contextual factors. The financial conditioning of individuals based on these contextual parameters is another key determinant for their choice of career.

Along with these factors influencing career decisions, the global and Indian employment landscape also shapes an individual's transition into the workforce, bringing forth their own set of challenges, uncertainties, and opportunities.

Career Counsellor in Banda, Uttar Pradesh, conducting Career Awareness Workshop for students

2.2 Youth Employment Trends and Challenges - World and India

In the year 2023, the global youth unemployment rate was at 13%, which was at a 15-year low and the total unemployed young population worldwide was 65 million, which is the lowest since the start of the millennium (ILO, 2024). Despite there being promising strides in youth employment across the globe, young people continue to feel uncertain about the future pertaining to the economy, job opportunities, and achieving long-term financial independence. A key factor contributing to this uncertainty is the mismatch between education and labor market demands. This is reflected in the fact that although **48% of the global youth population is currently enrolled in some form of schooling or training, the transition from education to productive and meaningful employment remains weak and inadequate (ILO, 2024).**

In contrast to the global trend, **India has witnessed a rising unemployment rate over the past two decades, increasing from 8.1% in 2000 to about 18% in 2022 (World Bank, 2022).** The labor force participation for youth aged 15-29 years continues to be low, which was only 41.4% during 2020-21 (PLFS, 2021). Women are disproportionately affected, with female workforce participation being 31% in India in 2021 (Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2021).

Students being briefed on the purpose of the Bharat Career Aspirations Study

Additionally, in 2024, women accounted for 77% of the educated unemployed in the country, with a higher share in urban areas than in rural areas (ILO, 2024). Although the employment situation in India is concerning, the country finds itself at a critical turning point. India's 1.4 billion population has an average age of 29 years, which makes it one of the youngest populated countries in the world, reflecting an unprecedented opportunity for the economy to benefit from its demographic dividend. However, a very small number of young people are able to gain meaningful employment, evident by the fact that **only 10-15% of over 3 million graduates and postgraduates are considered employable, reflecting the education and skill mismatch in the country (NPCI, n.d.).**

Career Awareness and Planning Session

There are challenges around accessibility, quality, and equity in education, which can offset the potential dividend that the 'youth bulge' can provide to the economy of the country. The following challenges reflect an 'education mismatch' contributing to thenon-participation of youth in the labor force (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2018):

- **Access to schools** – Access to secondary schools varies greatly with distance from households, decreasing significantly with the increase in distance. 52% of the households have access to a secondary school within 1 km, 22% within 2 km, 12% within 2-3 km, and 7% within 3-5 km (Das & Das, 2021).

- **Shortfall of teachers in schools** – There is a shortage of over one million teachers in schools. Over one lakh schools in India are single-teacher entities. 19% or 11.16 lakh teaching positions in schools lie vacant in the country (UNESCO, 2021).

- **Dropouts** – The dropout rate at the secondary education level is 17%, which is not only due to financial constraints but also due to a general lack of interest in education among the students (MoE, 2019).

- **Exclusion from education** – Exclusion from quality education based on gender, social caste, economic class, etc., is prevalent in both urban and rural areas.

- **Expectation mismatch** – There is a mismatch of expectations of industry and the availability of skills in academia for students (Dutta, 2022).

- **Absence of structured counselling** - The absence of educational and vocational counselling to them at the right time hinders the academic and professional growth of students (Akhter et al., 2021).

2.3 Need Analysis of Structured Career Guidance Programmes

- India is home to 1.5 million schools educating over 260 million students (Majumdar, 2023). Despite the availability of over 250 career options across 40 fields and 5,000 job types in the country, a staggering **80% of the students in the age group 13-18 years are mostly aware of mainstream career options such as Government and Defense Services, Engineering, Medicine, Finance and Banking, Science and Mathematics, IT and Management (UNICEF-YuWaah & iDC, 2024).** Furthermore, recent studies have revealed that 90% of the student population cannot judge which career best suits their skills, aspirations, and aptitudes (India Today, 2022).

- Additionally, **lack of career guidance is a major reason for students dropping out of secondary education (Ramanujan, 2015).** As per studies, about 40% of the student population in the country has no access to any kind of structured or formal career guidance and thus are not able to navigate their career aspirations and exercise any choice (FLAME University, 2024). **Limited self-understanding, along with a lack of information about college majors and future job prospects, often leaves young adults unsure about their career choices (Shah, 2023)**. Due to this confusion, coupled with other socio-economic triggers, many students struggle to find relevance in their education, ultimately leading them to exit the school system prematurely. In India, most students drop out during secondary school, with only about 67% transitioning from Grade 10th to Grade 11th (Suhag & Rao, 2016).

For the youth to unleash their potential and become productive assets for the fast-paced economy of the country, they need to be guided and supported at the right age and in the right hands. Adolescents aged 13-19, particularly those in secondary and senior secondary school, are most in need of career guidance interventions, as this stage forms the foundation for both personality development and future career choices.

Snapshot of students from Punjab who participated in the study

2.4 Role of Career Guidance programmes in Meeting the Gap

Given the limited ability of students to understand and achieve self and career awareness, they should be adequately supported and directed. Support from parents, teachers, and friends is important for students to feel confident. However, a professional approach to career guidance helps them achieve self-awareness, preparedness, and confidence in career decision-making.

There is an immense potential for structured career guidance in supporting the smooth transition of a student from the education system to the labor market. It requires the intervention of various stakeholders through programs and policies that provide adequate self and career-related awareness, capacity building, and training facilities for the youth to make informed career decisions, along with participating in new-age job opportunities and thereby contributing to the economy. By providing everyone with access to information on job markets and opportunities, it helps promote social equity and inclusion.

It also helps reduce labour market failure and helps bring efficiency by facilitating a match between the demand and supply factors.

Also, at an individual level, career guidance programs encourage youth to plan their careers and engage in lifelong learning to suit the dynamic job market shaped by technological, political, and financial disruptions. Such programmes not only help individuals manage their careers but also help them make informed education and training choices.

Students participating in the Bharat Career Aspirations Study by filling forms on tablets

2.5 Policy Ecosystem of Career Counselling in India

At a global level, career counselling is provided with a student to counsellor ratio of 3:1. **India requires 1.4 million more counselors to reach this ratio for its 315 million students (India Today, 2022).**

In cognisance of the gaps in career guidance among students of the country and the need for focused efforts to improve access, the Government of India has envisioned a career guidance programme under the National Education Policy, 2020. The policy provides for the appointment of Academic Resource Persons to offer career counselling services for students from Class 9th to Class 12th at the block level (MoRD, 2020).

Under the 2023 guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education, Government of India, career counselling has been given top priority for secondary and senior secondary school students. As per the guidelines, Academic Resource Persons are responsible for administering aptitude tests and maintaining interest inventories. Their one-on-one engagement with students is also expected to be supported by the use of technology, such as online career portals.

The section that follows details the Bharat Career Aspirations Study, making a strong case for the nationwide establishment of structured career counselling services.

Career Awareness Session being conducted in a private school in Lucknow

Snapshot of students from the Government School in Banda who participated in the Bharat Career Aspirations Study

3

Introduction

3.1 The Bharat Career Aspirations Study

The Bharat Career Aspirations Report (BCAR) was introduced in 2023 with the vision to empower young people to pursue careers aligned with their interests and passion, rather than societal pressure or obligation.

To date, two editions of BCAR have been released - BCAR 2023 and BCAR 2024. This year marks the launch of the third edition of the BCAR series - BCAR 2025. These reports are grounded in research studies aimed at understanding the career aspirations and awareness levels of students across the country. The foundational purpose of these reports is to:

- Capture the career aspirations of students across the nation.
- Understand the influence and impact of various stakeholders in shaping career aspirations.
- Identify the barriers that hinder students from pursuing their desired careers.
- Propose actionable solutions that empower and enable the youth to transition into aspired professional journeys.

3.2 BCAR 2025 - Scope, Objectives, and Significance

BCAR 2025 is an exploratory study based on large-scale survey data to find how socio-economic background influences career aspirations, career awareness levels, and access to career counselling services. The **participants of the study were secondary and higher secondary students of government and private schools across seven Indian states, including Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Gujarat, Punjab, Karnataka, and Rajasthan**. BCAR 2025 delves deep into the aspirations and awareness levels of students with respect to their grades, gender, socio-economic background, and geographical locations. The broad objectives of BCAR 2025 are as follows:

- Understand the career aspirations of students.
- Assess students' self-awareness and career awareness, including their understanding of strengths and weaknesses, knowledge of course and college options, awareness of
- course-related expenses, and backup career choices.
- Measure the extent of access to career counselling among students
- Identify the challenges and key influencing factors that shape students' career decisions
- Conduct a comparative analysis of all these parameters across key socio-economic indicators including state, district (urban/rural), school (government/private), grade (9th to 12th), and gender

BCAR 2025 also seeks to highlight the socio-economic barriers that hinder students from pursuing their desired career paths.

By examining the impact of these underlying factors on career awareness and aspiration levels, the report offers valuable, evidence-based insights into the pressing need for structured career guidance. It emphasises the vital role of dedicated counselling services during the formative years of education in supporting a smooth and efficient transition from school to professional life.

This report is intended to serve as a strategic resource for both government and non-government bodies, enabling the design of targeted interventions that equip young people to navigate their career journeys with confidence. By advocating for structured, accessible, and equitable career counselling, BCAR 2025 draws attention to the necessity of systemic reform to bridge the divides in access, quality, and equity within the education system. Moreover, the report stands as a comprehensive repository of knowledge for policymakers, implementation agencies, educators, parents, and other key stakeholders.

It encourages widespread advocacy and implementation of counselling services that empower students to make informed and confident career choices aligned with their interests, strengths, and aspirations.

At its core, BCAR 2025 envisions a future where every young individual in Bharat has the opportunity, support, and resources to achieve their career ambitions. This report lays the groundwork for a more aware, aspirational, and future-ready generation.

3.3 Partnership

iDreamCareer has partnered with UNICEF-YuWaah and the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation (MSDF) to develop BCAR 2025. With a shared vision of systemic change to foster student success, the three organisations aim to empower young people to achieve financial independence through tertiary education, vocational courses, and apprenticeships. Recognising that professional career guidance reduces dropouts and leads to more satisfying career choices (Sheorey, 2024), they collaborated to measure the current awareness levels and career aspirations of young people in India.

The study has been led by iDreamCareer, India's largest career guidance platform, which reaches over one million students through partnerships with 17 state government schools, more than 200 private schools, and over 50 corporate collaborators. UNICEF-YuWaah has contributed design expertise and institutional continuity from earlier report editions.

It has played a key role in offering strategic insights into the career development landscape of youth and has been instrumental in structuring and setting the vision for the report. Its ongoing collaboration has ensured that the report remains grounded in youth-centric perspectives and actionable data.

MSDF has provided financial support that has expanded the study's reach and depth, enabling engagement with a larger and more diverse student cohort and yielding richer, more comprehensive insights into the career development process. MSDF has also been an active advocate of such research efforts, reinforcing the importance of data-driven understanding in transforming student outcomes.

Through this collaborative report, the partners envision a future where every young individual in Bharat has the opportunity, guidance, and resources needed to realise their professional dreams.

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Data collection in progress: Students filling out the questionnaire on school systems

3.4 Sampling Framework and Methodology

Study Design:

To ensure that the sample was representative of the student population across geographies, genders, grades, and school types, the study used a mixed sampling design comprising purposive first-stage selection of states, followed by multistage stratified sampling of districts and schools, and quota sampling at the final stage to achieve predetermined targets across subgroups.

Selection of States (Sampling method - Purposive Sampling): Seven states across India were identified - Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh. These states were purposely selected to ensure uniform geographical representation from North, South, East, and West India (Gujarat- West; Karnataka - South; Madhya Pradesh - Central; Odisha - East; Punjab - North; Rajasthan - North-West; Uttar Pradesh - North).

Selection of Rural and Urban Districts (Sampling method - Stratified Random Sampling): For each state, one rural and one urban district were selected, totalling 14 districts. The complete list of districts for every selected state was collated from the Integrated Government Online Directory (IGOD). These districts were classified into urban or rural categories based on the percentage of the population residing in urban and rural areas, calculated using the rural and urban population data from the 2011 Census. If more than 50% of the population resided in urban areas, the district was categorised as urban; otherwise, it was considered rural. From each category (urban and rural) within every state, one district was randomly selected using Microsoft Excel's randomisation formula function, ensuring an unbiased selection process.

The selected rural districts were **Chota Udaipur** (Gujarat), **Dungarpur** (Rajasthan), **Banda** (Uttar Pradesh), **Cuttack** (Odisha), **Patiala** (Punjab), **Tumakuru** (Karnataka), and **Ujjain** (Madhya Pradesh). The urban districts included **Ahmedabad** (Gujarat), **Bengaluru Urban** (Karnataka), **Chandigarh** (Punjab), **Bhopal** (Madhya Pradesh), **Khordha** (Odisha), **Jaipur** (Rajasthan) and **Lucknow** (Uttar Pradesh).

Selection of Government and Private Schools (Sampling method - Stratified Random Sampling): Similarly, for each chosen district, a list of government and private schools was obtained from the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) platform.

A minimum of 10 government and 10 private schools were then randomly selected in each district using the same Excel randomisation formula. All the selected schools were approached, and permission was sought for data collection. Data collection was conducted in only those schools where permission was granted.

The student population from these schools was further divided into subgroups based on grade and gender. A predetermined quota of students was selected from each subgroup to ensure a uniform and diverse representation across the selected states, districts, types of schools, grade and gender. A predetermined quota of students was selected from each subgroup to ensure a uniform and diverse representation across the selected states, districts, types of schools, grade and gender **(Quota Sampling).**

Calculation of Sample Size: For the study, we aimed to include a minimum of four schools per district, two government and two private. It was assumed that each school would have approximately 350–400 students in Grades 9 to 12, after accounting for absenteeism and other factors. This meant that each district would contribute around 1,500 students, and with two districts selected per state, the target per state was 3,000 students. With seven states included in the study, the overall goal was to reach approximately 21,000 student responses for BCAR 2025. However, due to time constraints, high absenteeism, and permission issues with some classes, we had to increase the number of schools to reach the proposed target. Overall, **21,239 students were surveyed across 115 schools,** almost uniformly distributed across states, districts, school types, grades, and genders.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval:
For this study, ethical approval was obtained by HML Ethics Review Board on 18th November 2024 to ensure compliance with UNICEF's ethical standards for research involving human subjects. The IRB review ensured that the rights, dignity, and welfare of all participants were protected in accordance with the UNICEF Procedure for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis. This process involved a thorough examination of the study protocols to confirm that:

- Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study and any associated risks,
- Participation was voluntary, with confidentiality and privacy strictly maintained,
- Informed consent was obtained from all schools prior to their involvement,
- Appropriate measures were in place to safeguard participant safety and well-being,
- Data collection and analysis procedures were designed to prevent any violations of privacy or discriminatory practices.

The IRB's oversight helped ensure that the study adhered to the highest ethical principles, including respect for persons, justice, and beneficence, thereby upholding the rights and protection of both child and adult participants throughout the research process.

Ethical Considerations:

a. Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation of Schools: Prior to student's participation in the study, informed consent was sought from all schools. All the schools were informed about the purpose of the study, the procedure, the voluntary nature of participation, the potential risks, and benefits.

Students filling survey form in Ahmedabad, Gujarat

[1] Consent form used to seek permission from schools to conduct data collection has been attached in Annexure 1

- It was clarified that the school can choose to withdraw at any point without any consequences.

b. Emotional Safety and Potential Discomfort: The survey included topics such as career aspirations, career awareness, financial backgrounds, and access to resources, which could have been sensitive for students coming from marginalised communities. In case the participants felt the need to reach out for support, they had the option of contacting a helpline operated by iDC. The helpline number was mentioned in the school consent form.

c. Risk and Benefit Assessment: There were no significant risks involved in the study, as it focused on students' career aspirations, levels of career awareness, and access to career counselling. The potential benefits of the research, such as improved career counselling services and policies for low-income students, were anticipated to outweigh any potential risks. Researchers continuously monitored the conduct of the study to mitigate any unforeseen harm to the participants.

d. Privacy, Confidentiality, and Anonymisation: Participants' privacy was maintained throughout the study. All identifying information, including names and phone numbers, is securely stored separately from the collected survey data. Access to this information has been restricted to the authorized members of the research team. In the publication of the research findings, all data has been aggregated and anonymised to prevent identification of individual participants.

e. Data Security, Storage, and Sharing: Data was collected online, necessitating stringent data security measures.

[2]More details on the survey tool has been covered in Section 3.5.

After the study was completed, data was retained according to the applicable policies and will be securely destroyed thereafter, after the report is generated. If data are to be shared with external parties, the data will be de-identified to protect participants' privacy, and any data sharing will comply with relevant data protection regulations.

Training of Counsellors:

For the BCAR study, a career counsellor was appointed for each selected district. Each counsellor was responsible for their assigned district, which involved obtaining permissions from the selected schools, ensuring to get the signed consent form from schools, coordinating with school authorities, conducting data collection activities, and facilitating career awareness workshops for the students participating in the study. Data collection was carried out using a structured questionnaire administered through the Kobo platform.

Prior to field implementation, all counsellors underwent comprehensive training to ensure the quality, consistency, and ethical integrity of the study. The training covered the following key areas:

- **Ethical and Legal Considerations:** Understanding the ethical responsibilities of research, including obtaining informed consent from schools, ensuring voluntary participation, and safeguarding participant welfare.

- **Purpose and Scope of the Study:** Clearly communicating the study's objectives to students and school staff in a way that is accurate, concise, and context-appropriate.

- **Effective Communication Skills:** Using suitable, age-appropriate, and culturally sensitive language to engage students while avoiding technical jargon.

- **Confidentiality and Anonymity:** Maintaining privacy of participant responses, avoiding disclosure of identifiable information, and ensuring data is handled only by authorised personnel.

- **Data Collection Protocols:** Step-by-step guidance on administering the questionnaire through the Kobo platform, ensuring complete and accurate responses, and avoiding leading or influencing answers.

- **Data Accuracy and Quality Assurance:** Cross-checking entries, resolving discrepancies in real time, and adhering to validation checks built into the Kobo system.

- **Handling Sensitive Questions:** Recognising potentially sensitive topics, responding empathetically, and ensuring students feel safe and respected during the process.

- **Workshop Facilitation and Techniques:** Training on conducting Career Awareness Workshops, engaging students in career awareness activities, using participatory methods, and encouraging interaction without bias.

- **Data Security and Storage:** Following standard operating procedures (SOPs) for secure data transfer, encryption (if applicable), and safe storage of digital data.

- **Reporting and Documentation:** Maintaining activity logs, documenting challenges, and providing timely updates to the project management team.

Students attending an orientation session on the Bharat Career Aspirations Study

This structured training ensured that all counsellors had the necessary skills and knowledge to conduct the study in a professional, ethical, and standardised manner, thereby enhancing the credibility and reliability of the findings.

3.5 Survey Tool

A 40-question survey was developed as the primary tool for this exploratory research. The questionnaire was designed using the KoboCollect app in English and other regional languages such as Hindi, Kannada, Odia, and Gujarati, based on state-specific requirements. The app was chosen for its ability to function offline, allowing surveys to be conducted in locations without internet access. The survey was administered among school students across selected districts and schools and all responses were recorded digitally using the Kobo form link on tablets and computers.

The questionnaire was designed to collect primary data from students and generate key insights on students' career awareness, and related factors. It included a mix of qualitative and quantitative questions categorised under the following thematic areas:

- **Participants' information -** Basic information on the student participants, such as their name, age, gender, grade, phone number of a parent, district, state, and school name, was collected to know them better.

- **Self-Assessment Practices -** The questionnaire included a question to determine whether students had used any tools, such as SWOT analysis or psychometric tests, to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses.

- **Career Awareness -** To find the level of awareness regarding careers and the decision-making process among students, career awareness parameters were divided into basic career awareness and advanced career awareness parameters. To understand the basic career awareness levels of students, their knowledge of various career options was assessed. Furthermore, they were also asked about the type of course they would like to pursue in the future. To assess students' advanced level of awareness, the survey included questions on the specific courses they intended to pursue to realise their aspiration, the college they aspire to attend, the estimated minimum expenditure required to pursue the course, any alternative or backup course they had in mind and their clarity on how the course would help them realise their career aspirations.

- **Challenges in Career Planning and Factors Influencing Career Decision Making -** To find the gaps and challenges that are evident in the career planning process among students, questions were asked on their confidence level in deciding on a future career, factors/reasons influencing their career planning and choice of career, and cognisable challenges in choosing a career path.

- **Stakeholders influencing Career Planning and Access to Professional Counselling -** Students were asked to identify the various stakeholders who influenced their career decisions. This included family members, peers, teachers, and schools, among others. In addition to understanding these influences, the study also assessed students' access to professional career counselling, both through school-based counsellors and external counselling services, to gain a comprehensive view of the support systems available to them during their career planning process.

3.6 Execution and Roll-Out Strategy

The following process was followed in the roll-out and execution of the survey:

- Identification of a career counsellor in each district who was responsible for data collection, coordinating with schools, and conducting career awareness workshops.

- Visiting the selected government and private schools in each district to collaborate, coordinate, and seek permission from the school, and keeping the school administration informed about the study's purpose and agenda.

- Sharing the permission letter with the school and getting it signed by the school authority.

- Conducting a 20-minute survey using the Kobo form link on tablet and computers with 1,500 students across government and private schools where permission was granted.

- The students who took part in the survey were provided with a 1-hour Career Awareness Workshop by trained career counsellors, and were also given an opportunity to take a Psychometric Assessment to understand their personality, aptitude, and interest areas, along with a list of suitable career options for them.

- Based on the responses of students in the survey, the research team at iDC analysed it to derive meaningful insights.

Career Awareness Workshop in Bangalore introducing students to the importance of career planning

3.7 Limitations and Biases in the Study

- **Restricted Geographic Coverage/Selection Bias:** Although the study aimed for wide geographic coverage, it was limited to seven states. Findings may not fully represent the entire student population of India.

- **Operational Accessibility Influence:** States were also selected based on operational ease of obtaining responses. This might have excluded regions where data collection was more challenging but where student experiences could differ significantly.

- **Exclusion of Schools Without Permission/Permission-Based Sampling Bias:** Data collection was only conducted in schools where permission was granted. Schools that refused participation might differ in important ways (e.g., administrative attitude, student exposure to career guidance). Schools granting permission might have better infrastructure, more openness to research, or stronger administrative engagement, which could correlate with higher career awareness levels.

- **Limited School Types:** Only government and private schools were included, excluding other types (e.g., aided schools, alternative education setups, residential schools), which may have different student profiles.

- **Quota Sampling Bias:** While quotas ensured representation by gender and grade, they may not proportionally reflect the actual distribution of these demographics in the population.

- **Reporting Bias:** Students might overestimate or underestimate their awareness due to peer influence, fear of judgment, or guessing answers.

- **Analytical Limitations:** This study did not undertake an in-depth analysis of certain areas, such as cross-tabulations between a few career awareness parameters and socio-economic indicators. Future research could explore these dimensions to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

Capturing student career aspirations and awareness levels through surveys under the Bharat Career Aspirations Study

Orienting students on the purpose of Bharat Career Aspirations Study in Bangalore

4

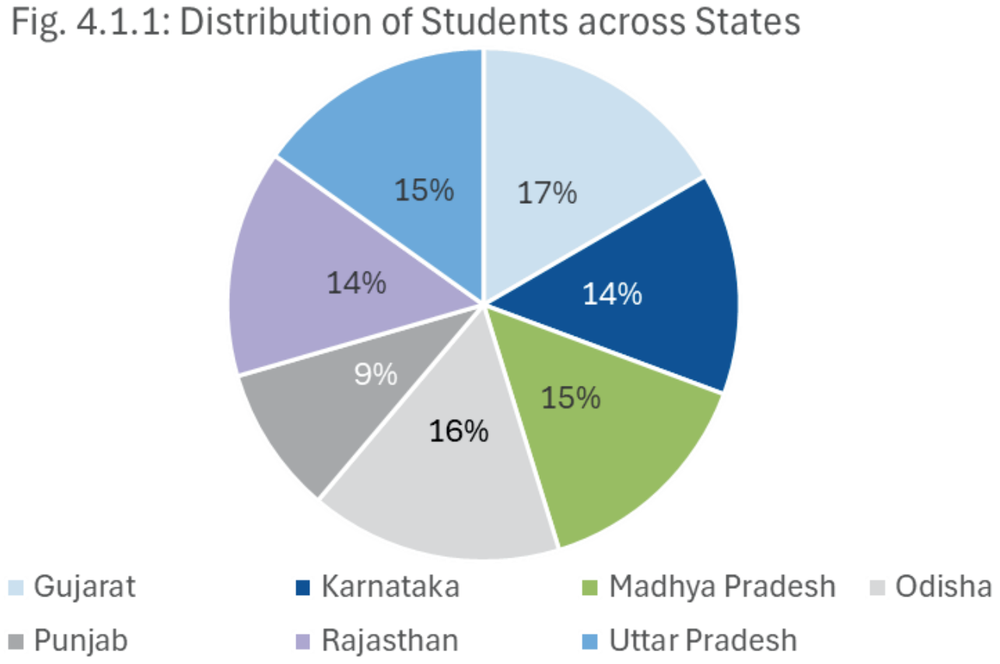
Overview of BCAR Participants

4.1 Overall Distribution of Survey Respondents[1]

4.1.1 State-wise Distribution of Survey Respondents

BCAR 2025 surveyed a total of **21,239 students across 115 schools in 14 districts from seven states - Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh.** The highest share of respondents was from Gujarat (**17%**), followed by Odisha (**16%**), Madhya Pradesh (**15%**), and Uttar Pradesh (**15%**). Rajasthan and Karnataka accounted for **28%** of the students, with an equal share of **14%** each. Participation from Punjab was comparatively lower (**9%**) due to logistical constraints during data collection.

Fig. 4.1.1: Distribution of Students across States



Sample Size - 21,239

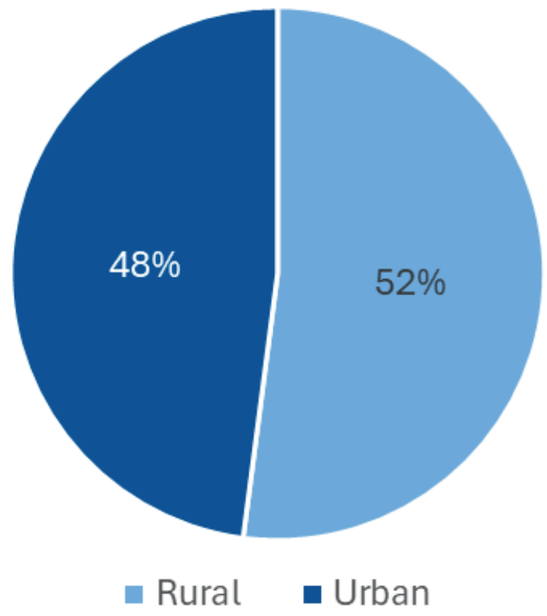
4.1.2 Distribution of Survey Respondents by Type of District (Urban/Rural)

A balanced sample distribution across rural and urban districts is important to capture the social, economic, and educational contexts that shape students' experiences and aspirations.

Rural and urban participants have varying levels of access to infrastructure, educational resources, career counselling, and employment opportunities, with these factors influencing their educational outcomes and career trajectories. For instance, urban students are more likely to benefit from better school facilities, digital connectivity, and exposure to diverse career options. In contrast, rural participants have gaps in the form of limited infrastructure, fewer qualified educators, and greater reliance on traditional livelihoods (ASER Centre, 2023).

With the objective of ensuring a balanced representation of districts from each state, two districts, one rural and one urban, were selected. It resulted in a total of 14 districts across all states. Participants from rural districts comprised comprised **52%** of the sample, while those from urban districts comprised **48%.** This near-even distribution enabled comparisons of outcomes across distinct socio-economic and infrastructural contexts.

Fig. 4.1.2: Distribution of Survey Respondents by Type of District



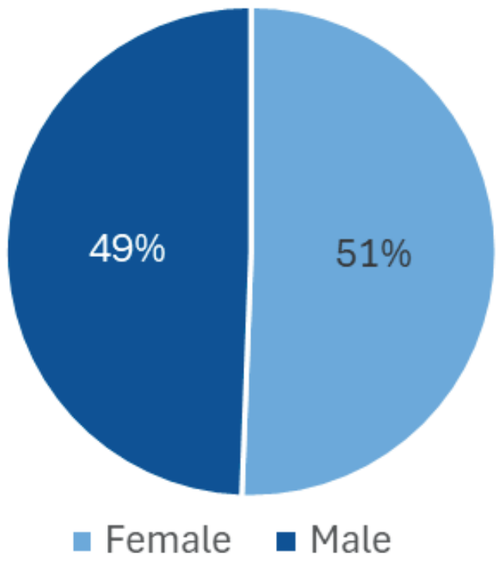
Sample Size - Urban: 10,180; Rural: 11,059

[1]Additional tables detailing the distribution of sample by state, gender, grade, type of district, and social category are provided in Annexure 1.

4.1.3 Distribution of Survey Respondents by Gender

A balanced gender-based distribution is vital to build an understanding of how career aspirations, access to opportunities, and decision-making processes differ between male and female students. Social expectations, norms, and socio-economic background influence how young individuals envision and pursue their careers. For example, female students often face constraints related to mobility, safety concerns, traditional gender roles, and family responsibilities, which can restrict their career choices (Tewari, 2024). In contrast, male students may experience pressure to earn early and take on financially demanding roles (Krishnakumar, 2022). By ensuring a balanced representation of male and female students, the study aims to identify gender-specific barriers and motivations that influence career choices. This, in turn, will enable the design of more inclusive and effective career counselling services.

Fig. 4.1.3: Distribution of Survey Respondents by Gender

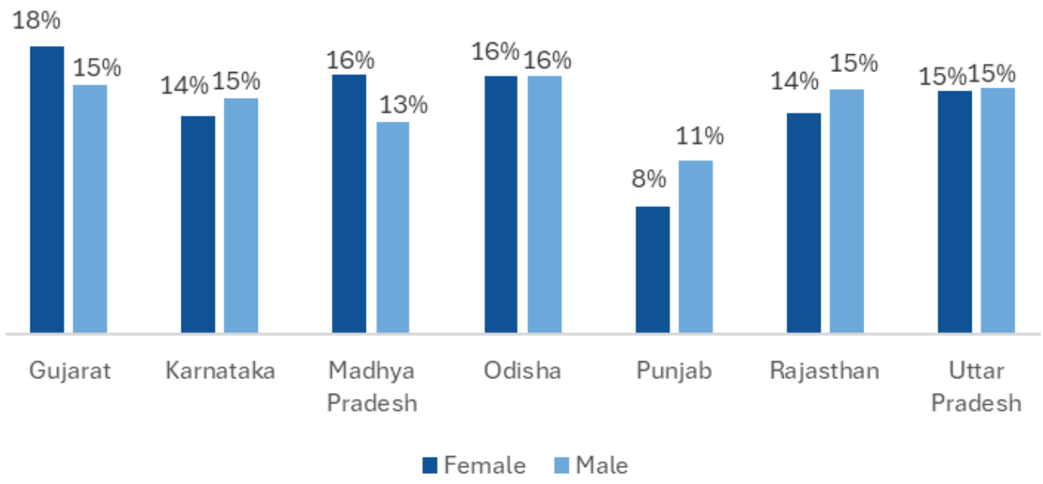


Sample Size - Females: 10,749; Males: 10,490

In the BCAR study, the gender distribution among student participants was nearly equal, with 51% identifying as females and 49% as males.

Gender-based participation was also relatively balanced across most states (Odisha, Rajasthan, Karnataka, and Uttar Pradesh), with a few exceptions. In Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, the percentage of female participants was slightly higher than the percentage of male participants. In contrast, Punjab had a slightly higher percentage of male participants (11%) as compared to female participants (8%).

Fig. 4.1.3.1: Distribution of Male and Female Respondents across States

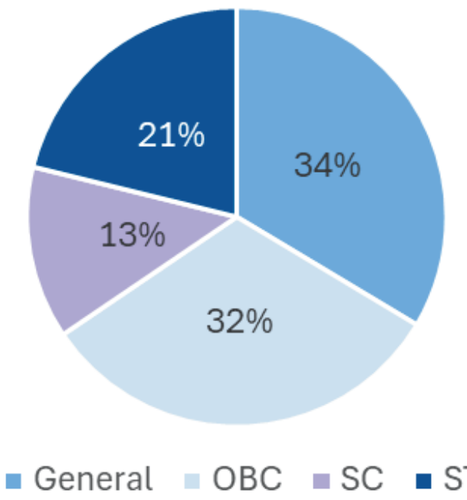


Sample Size - Gujarat: 3,533; Karnataka: 2,980; Madhya Pradesh: 3,096; Odisha: 3,387; Punjab: 1,979; Rajasthan: 3,050; Uttar Pradesh: 3,214

4.1.4 Distribution of Survey Respondents by Social Category

The social category that a student belongs to often influences their access to education, employment, and other opportunities. By capturing responses from a diverse range of social groups, including Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and the General Category, disparities and systemic barriers can be identified, leading to informed and targeted policy interventions. This categorisation helps in understanding how social identify affects career aspiration, course prefrences, barriers and overall access to counselling services. **In BCAR 2025, students from the General category accounted for the highest proportion of participants (34%), followed by those identifying as OBCs (32%), STs (21%), and SCs (13%).**

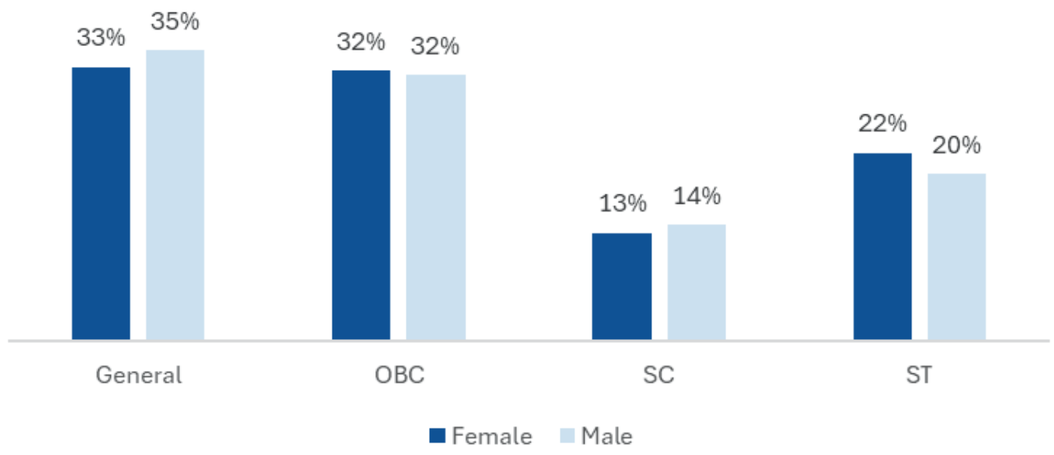
Fig. 4.1.4.1: Distribution of Survey Respondents across Social Category



Sample Size - General: 7,135; OBC: 6,782; SC: 2,827; ST: 4,495

Gender participation was largely balanced across all social categories. However, in the General and SC categories, the percentage of male participation slightly exceeded that of females. In contrast, in the ST category, the percentage of the female population slightly exceeded that of males.

Fig. 4.1.4.2: Distribution of Males and Females Across Social Categories



Sample Size - Females: 10,749; Males: 10,490

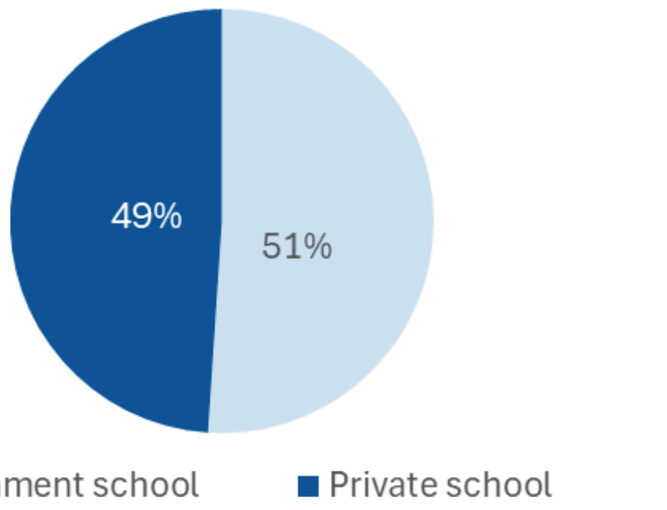
4.1.5 Distribution of Survey Respondents by School Type and Grade

To perform inclusive research, representation from all categories of schools, including government and private schools, is essential. Each of these school categories provides a different ecosystem for students to flourish. **These could pertain to resources, teaching quality, student exposure, fee structure, and socio-economic background.** For example, since the education fees of government schools are usually subsidised, there is a higher probability of the enrollment of students from low-income households in government schools as compared to private schools.

By ensuring diverse school representation, BCAR 2025 aims to capture the varied experiences, aspirations, and challenges of students from these schools. This would help create curated career guidance programs for students from different school backgrounds. A brief overview of the categories and characteristics of schools in India as referred to in the study is provided in Annexure 1, Table A1.10.

In BCAR 2025, roughly 51% of the participants were from government schools and 49% were from private schools.

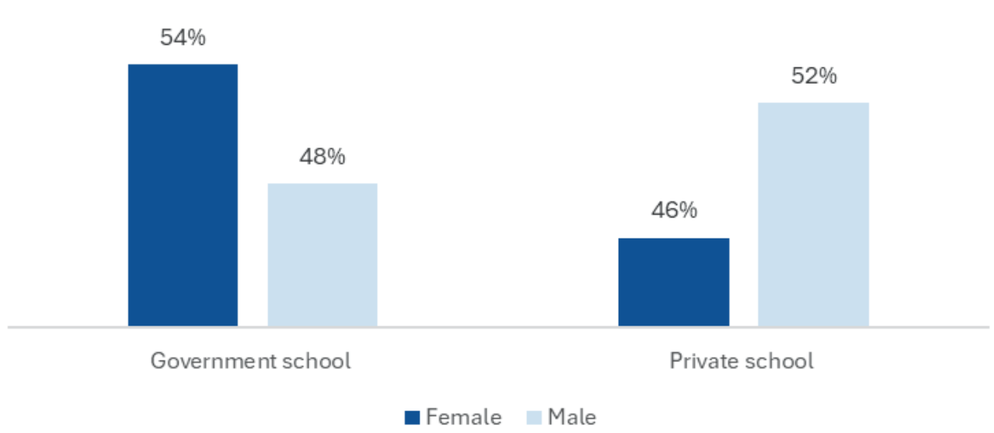
Fig. 4.1.5.1: Distribution of Survey Respondents by School Type



Sample Size - Private: 10,388; Government: 10,851

In private schools, the percentage of male participants (52%) was higher than female participants (46%), whereas in government schools, the percentage of female participants (54%) was higher than that of males (48%).

Fig. 4.1.5.2: Distribution of Males and Females by School Type



Sample Size - Females: 10,749; Males: 10,490

Data collection in a Government School in Lucknow

5

Career Aspirations of Students

Students in Gujarat attending the Career Planning and Awareness Workshop

The rapid expansion of work in today's evolving world is reflected in the aspirations of youth, which vary by geography, socio-economic context, and access to resources. **This section explores the career aspirations of students across seven states, aiming to uncover patterns and preferences and identify gaps that affect young people's ability to effectively navigate their career journeys.** By analysing these aspirations through a socio-economic lens, it identifies where support systems like career guidance, exposure, and education planning are most needed.

To understand what students aspire as a career, the BCAR study tool asked them to categorise their career aspirations into different career clusters. These clusters were formed to assess how well participants recognise clear links between their aspirations and real-world career opportunities. The development of these clusters is based on the following broad categories:

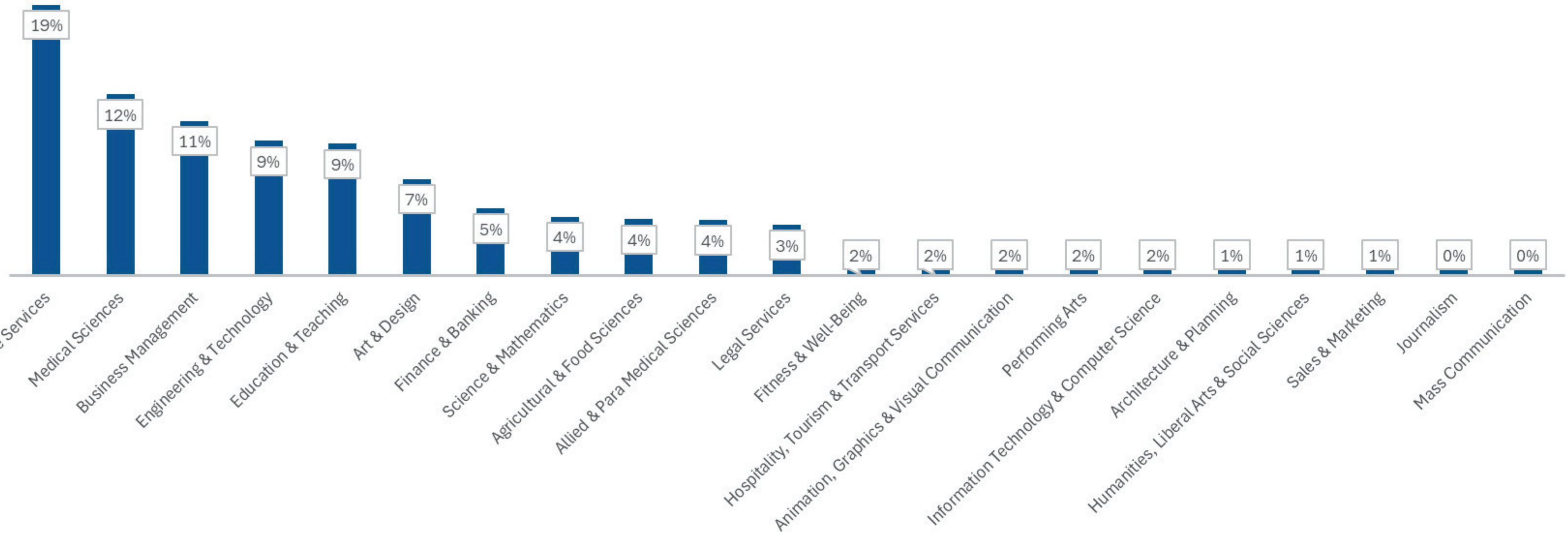
Students in Gujarat attending the Career Planning and Awareness Workshop

The development of these clusters is based on the following broad categories:

CATEGORY	CAREER CLUSTERS	RATIONALE
Science, Technology & Engineering	• Engineering & Technology • IT & Computer Science • Medical Sciences • Allied & Para Medical Sciences • Agricultural & Food Sciences • Science & Mathematics	Technically rigorous fields rooted in STEM disciplines focused on innovation, healthcare, and research.
Arts, Design & Communication	• Art & Design • Performing Arts • Animation • Graphics & Visual • Journalism • Mass Communication	Creative fields centred on visual, performing, and media arts, requiring expression and storytelling skills.
Business, Finance & Management	• Business Management • Finance & Banking • Sales & Marketing	Commercial careers focusing on leadership, economics, and strategic market engagement.
Social Sciences, Law & Education	• Humanities, Liberal Arts & Social Sciences • Education & Teaching • Legal Services	People-focused careers involving societal understanding, teaching, advocacy, and law.
Hospitality, Travel & Lifestyle	• Hospitality, Tourism & Transport Services • Fitness & Well-being	Service-oriented roles promoting individual well-being, lifestyle services, and guest experience management.
Public Administration & Defence	• Government & Defence Services	Roles focused on governance, national security, and public administration.

These career clusters are a structured representation of various career opportunities for students in India. They comprise of both mainstream career options such as Engineering or Medicine, Commerce or Science, Finance or Management, which are commonly visible and known for providing security, social status and upward mobility (Juneja, 2025), as well as modern and emerging career options, depending on the nature of work, required skill sets, educational qualifications, and sectoral affiliation they carry.

Fig 5.1.1: Overall Student's Career Apirations



Sample Size: 21,239

5.1 Career Aspirations of Students (Overall)

Student participants reported a wide range of career aspirations, spanning both mainstream as well as emerging fields. Popular sectors included the Armed Forces, Civil Services, Government Jobs, Medical, Engineering, Chartered Accountancy, Law, Business, Banking, Agriculture, Teaching, Sports, and Arts.

Government and Defence Services ranked as the top career choice, with 19% of participants reporting it as their aspiration, followed by Medical Sciences (12%), Business Management (11%), Engineering and Technology (9%), and Education & Teaching (9%). On the other end of the spectrum, careers in Journalism and Mass Communication, Humanities, Liberal Arts, Sociology, Sales and Marketing, and Architecture and Planning saw relatively lower interest.

Out of the 21 available career clusters, over 70% of students have shown interest in just 7 clusters. Students' aspirations hint towards a preference for more mainstream professions. This could be attributed to the perceived value of these career categories in terms of job security, prestige, and social recognition.

The India Employment Report 2024 also highlights a similar trend, with a majority of individuals aspiring to pursue government jobs, teaching positions, and high-end professional and technical careers (ILO, 2024).

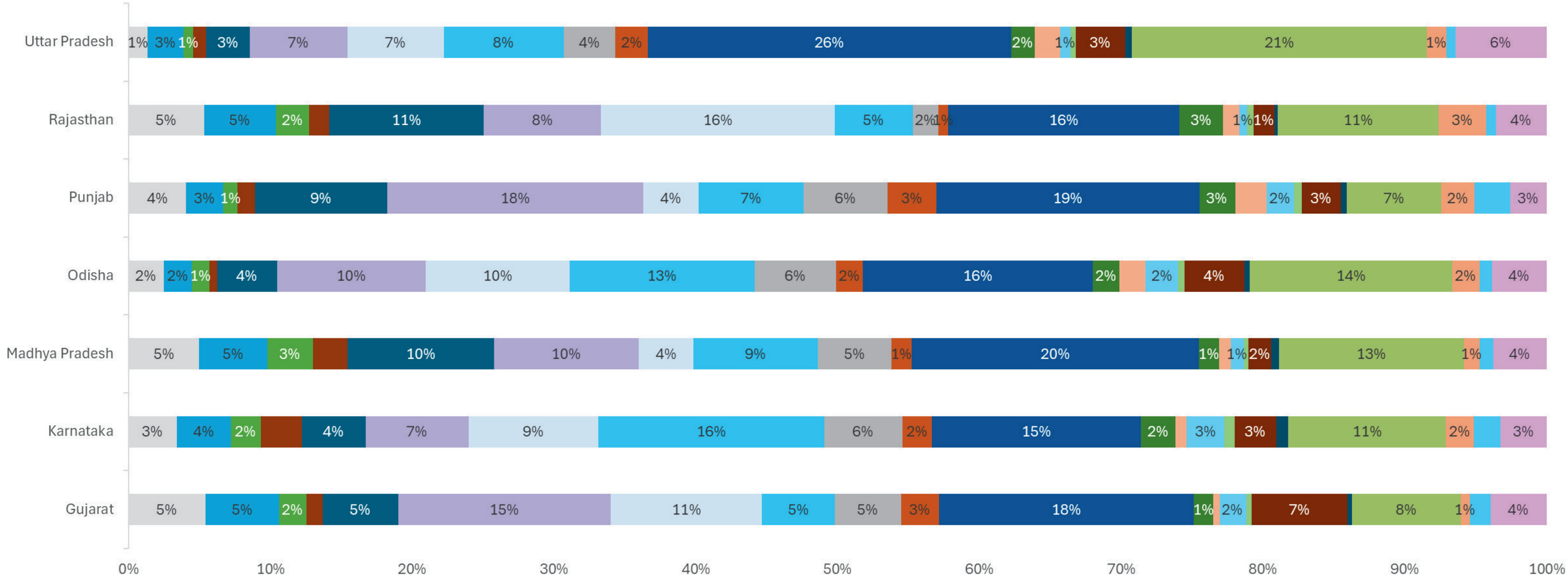
5.2 Career Aspirations across States

To better understand how students' career aspirations vary across states and what factors shape these aspirations, a state-level analysis was conducted.

The preference for mainstream career paths is evident in states like Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, where such jobs offer well-defined career trajectories. Uttar Pradesh recorded the highest percentage of students (26%) aiming for careers in Government and Defence Services, followed by Madhya Pradesh (20%) and Punjab (16%). This preference is also reflected in the vast number of individuals applying for government jobs in Uttar Pradesh, with 5 million students applying for the police force and 4.7 million applying for positions in the central government security agencies (The Economic Times, 2024).

Counsellor briefing Gujarat students for the Bharat Career Aspirations Study

Fig. 5.2.1: State-wise Distribution of Students' Career Aspirations



Sample Size - Gujarat: 3,533; Karnataka: 2,980; Madhya Pradesh: 3,096; Odisha: 3,387; Punjab: 1,979; Rajasthan: 3,050; Uttar Pradesh: 3,214

Medical Sciences emerged as the second most common preference among students across most states, with strong interest from students in Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, and Madhya Pradesh. Business Management emerged as the third most popular career track, especially in Punjab and Gujarat. A career in Education and Teaching was most favoured in Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Odisha, while Engineering and Technology attracted many students from Karnataka and Odisha.

5.3 Career Aspirations across Rural and Urban Districts

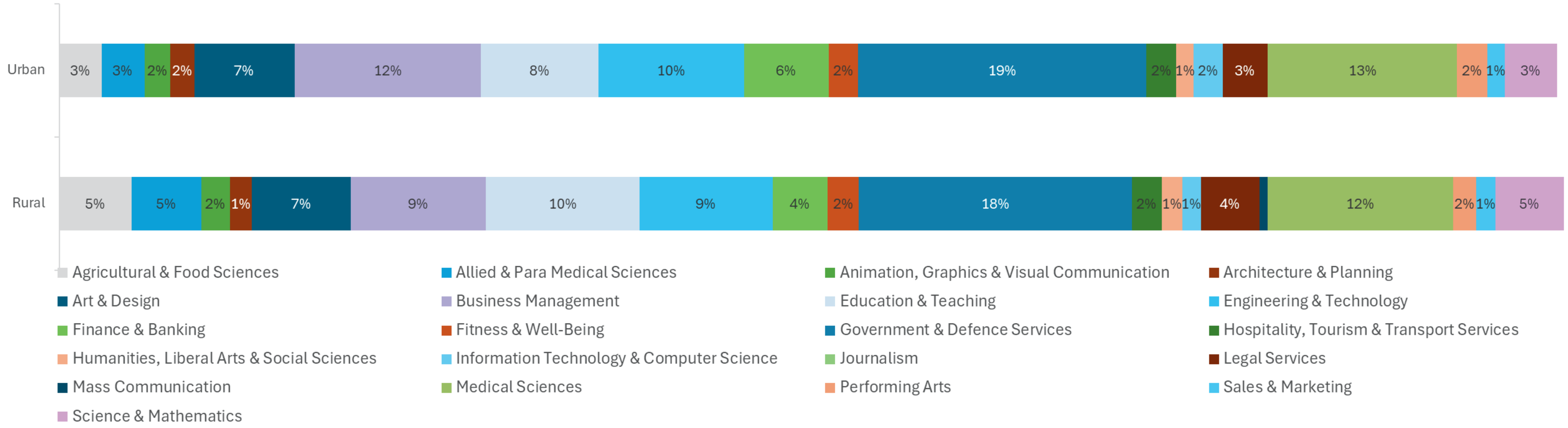
Understanding the career aspirations of students across rural and urban geographies is critical for building inclusive career guidance systems. Access to information, exposure to diverse career options, and socio-economic conditions vary between rural and urban areas. This section explores how career choices differ across these contexts, helping identify gaps in awareness and opportunities for targeted interventions.

Overall, rural and urban students showed similar top career preferences, with Government and Defence Services and Medical Sciences leading the list. In rural districts, most students aspired for careers in the Government and Defence Services (18%), followed by Medical Sciences (12%) and Education and Teaching (10%). The fields of Science and Mathematics, Agricultural and Food Sciences, and Allied and Para Medical Sciences were preferred by an equal percentage of students (5%), while fields such as Mass Communication and Journalism attracted minimal interest. Notably, only 1% of rural students indicated an interest in Information Technology and Computer Science, despite its growing demand and strong industry outlook.

Among urban students, Government and Defence Services (19%) remained the top career choice, followed by Medical Sciences (13%) and Business Management (12%). **Unlike rural districts, a higher proportion of urban students expressed interest in Engineering and Technology (Rural - 9%, Urban - 10%), Business Management (Rural - 9%, Urban - 12%) and Finance and Banking (Rural - 4%, Urban - 6%).** On the other hand, **a higher percentage of rural students showed interest in Education and Teaching (Rural - 10%, Urban - 8%), Allied and Paramedical Services (Rural - 5%, Urban - 3%), and Agriculture and Food Sciences (Rural - 5%, Urban - 3%) as compared to students from urban districts.**

This shows that rural aspirations are more aligned with locally available and perceived secure professions, such as teaching or government roles (Deb, 2024), whereas comparatively a higher percentage of urban students tend to pursue a broader range of fields, including Engineering, and Business Management. Mass Communication, Sales and Marketing, and Journalism remain the least preferred fields among both rural and urban students. Similarly, non-traditional careers like Humanities and Liberal Arts, Hospitality and Tourism, Architecture and Planning, and Animation and Graphics attract limited interest, despite their increasing relevance and future opportunities.

Fig. 5.3.1: Career Aspirations by District Type (Rural vs Urban)



Sample Size - Urban: 10,180; Rural: 11,059

5.4 Career Aspirations across Genders

Gender plays a significant role in shaping students' career aspirations. Societal norms, cultural expectations, and access to role models often influence the types of careers considered acceptable or achievable for males and females. These gendered conditioning and expectations can limit exposure, confidence, and ambition, especially for girls in conservative communities.

Additionally, safety concerns, mobility restrictions, and household responsibilities disproportionately affect females' choices (Raman et al., 2022). This section explores how career aspirations vary across genders and their underlying reasons.

Female students predominantly aspired for careers in Medical Sciences (17%), Government & Defence Services (17%), and Education & Teaching (13%). In contrast, male students indicated a high preference for Government & Defence Services (20%), Business Management (15%), and Engineering & Technology (12%). Fields like Animation, Architecture, and Law saw minimal interest from both genders, and careers in liberal arts, journalism, and mass communication received notably low responses across the board.

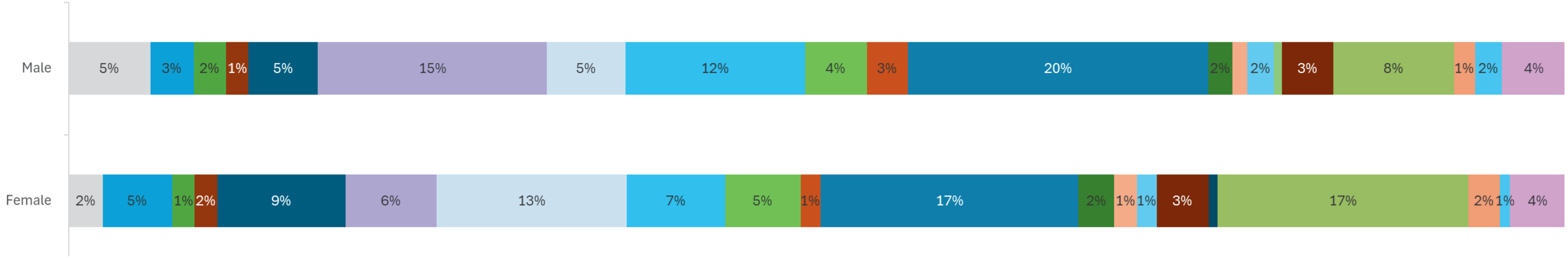
A. Career Aspirations by Gender and Type of District

Female students in rural districts predominantly prefer careers in Medical Sciences (17%), followed by Government and Defence Services (16%). Additionally, careers in Science and Mathematics, Allied and Para Medical Sciences, and Education and Training were more preferred among female students in rural areas compared to those in urban districts. Business Management was more popular among male students than female students, with rural females showing the least interest in this field. In urban areas, a higher percentage of females preferred careers in Finance and Banking, Government and Defence Services, Information Technology & Computer Science and Arts and Design than the females in rural districts.

Among male students, Government and Defence Services remained consistently popular in both urban and rural areas. However, Agriculture and Food Sciences, Legal Services, Allied and Para Medical Sciences, and Education and Training were more favored by rural male students than by those in urban regions.

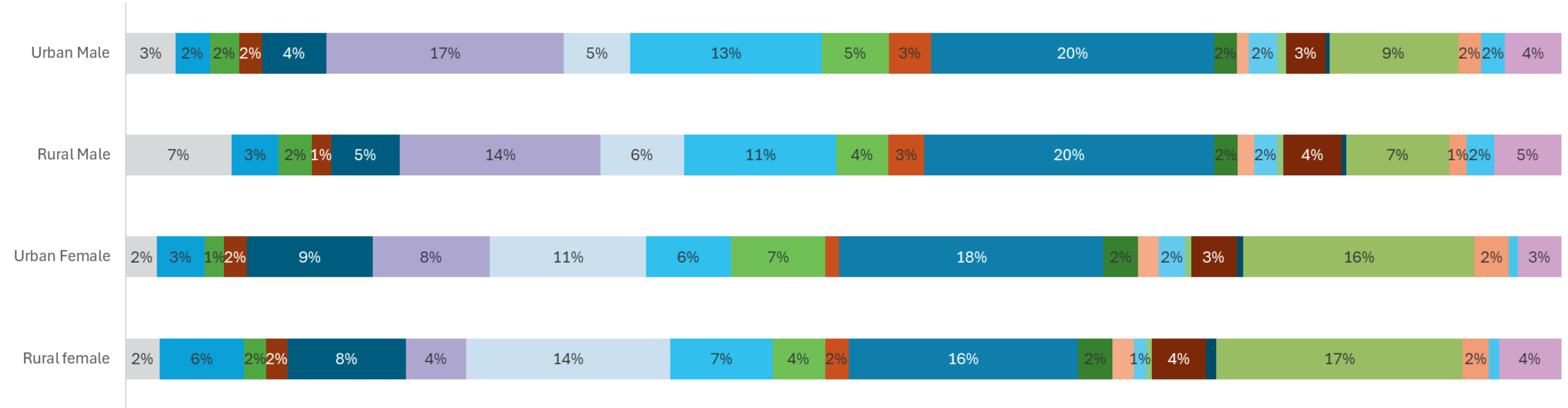
On the other hand, careers in Business Management, Engineering and Technology, Finance and Banking were more preferred by urban males as compared to rural males.

Fig. 5.4.1: Career Aspirations by Gender



Sample Size - Females: 10,749; Males: 10,490

Fig. 5.4.1.1 Career Aspirations by Gender and Type of District



Sample Size - Rural Females: 5,651; Rural Males: 5,408; Urban Females: 5,098; Urban Males: 5,082

A similar analysis was performed to see how career aspirations for male and female students differ by state (Annexure 2, Fig. A.2.1 and Fig. A.2.2). **Overall, Medical Sciences emerged as a consistently strong aspiration among female students across most states.** For male students, there was a strong preference for Defence Services, as it consistently appeared among the top two preferred careers across all states. Notably, Gujarat had the highest proportion of female students aspiring for Legal careers among all states.

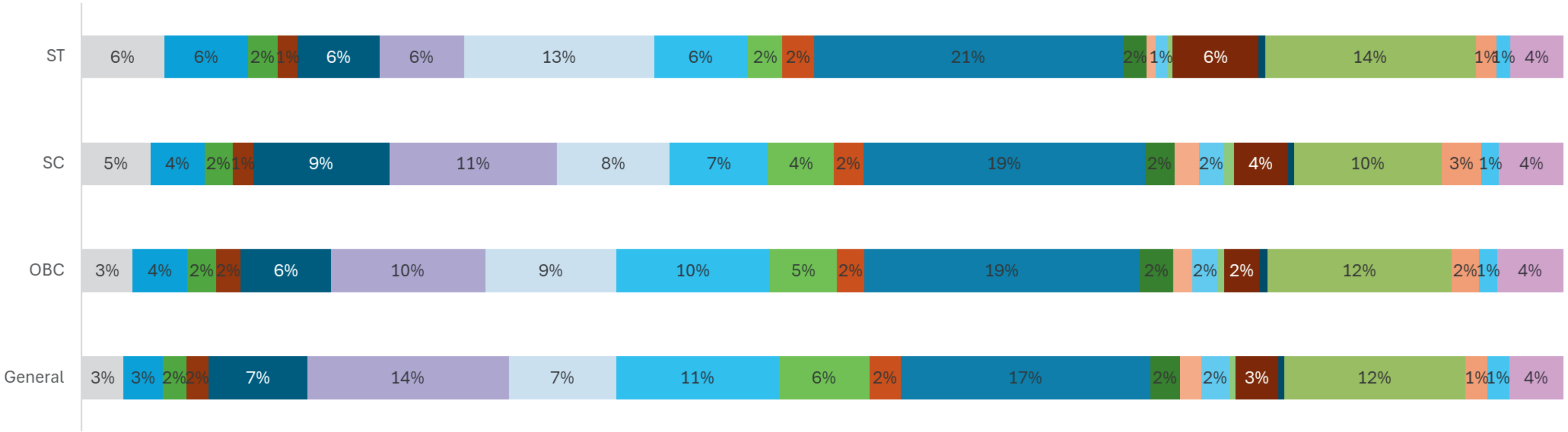
5.5 Career Aspirations across Social Categories

This section analyses how social categories such as Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and General Category, influence students' career aspirations. This shapes a student's exposure to opportunities, access to resources, and the aspirations they develop. For instance, students from certain social categories may have greater awareness of diverse career options and more confidence in pursuing ambitious career paths. This section also explores how these socio-economic differences contribute to disparities in career aspirations.

Interest in Government and Defence Services was consistently high across all social categories, reflecting a widespread aspiration for stability and public service. Among General category students, Government Services (17%) was the top preference, followed by Business Management (14%), Medical Sciences (12%), and Engineering & Technology (11%). Students from the OBC category also prioritised Government Services (19%) and Medical Sciences (12%), with Business Management and Engineering at 10% each. Similarly, SC category students also exhibited a strong inclination towards Government and Defence Services (19%), followed by Business Management (11%) and Medical Sciences (10%). For ST category students, Government Services (21%) remained the most aspired-to career path, with Medical Sciences and Education & Teaching ranking next at 14% and 13%, respectively. This pattern highlights the broad appeal of Government Services, especially among marginalised communities (SCs, STs, and OBCs), as it's often seen as an avenue for upward mobility and social impact (Mangal, 2021).

Another probable reason for a greater preference for Government Services among marginalised communities is that these students often face systemic barriers such as limited access to quality education, financial constraints, and social discrimination. These factors significantly influence their career choices, steering them toward professions perceived as stable (Raziq, 2024). Because government positions are widely perceived as secure, with reliable salaries, benefits, and long-term employment, they naturally appeal to students seeking assurance (Sundaresan, 2024). Furthermore, public-sector reservation policies enhanced access and created additional opportunities for these groups, reinforcing the attractiveness of government roles (Lee, 2020).

Fig. 5.5.1: Career Aspirations by Social Category



- Agricultural & Food Sciences
- Allied & Para Medical Sciences
- Animation, Graphics & Visual Communication
- Architecture & Planning
- Art & Design
- Business Management
- Education & Teaching
- Engineering & Technology
- Finance & Banking
- Fitness & Well-Being
- Government & Defence Services
- Hospitality, Tourism & Transport Services
- Humanities, Liberal Arts & Social Sciences
- Information Technology & Computer Science
- Journalism
- Legal Services
- Mass Communication
- Medical Sciences
- Performing Arts
- Sales & Marketing
- Science & Mathematics

Sample Size - General: 7,135; OBC: 6,782; SC: 2,827; ST: 4,495

5.6 Career Aspirations across School Categories and Grades

A. Career Aspirations across School Categories

Career aspirations are also influenced by the type of school a student attends, as factors such as availability of career counsellors, school culture, peer influence, quality of teaching, and opportunities for extracurricular engagement can collectively shape a student's understanding of and aspiration towards various career paths.

The analysis of career aspirations between government and private school students revealed notable patterns. Government and Defence Services (18% and 19%) and Medical Sciences (13% and 12%) emerged as the most preferred career paths for both groups, reflecting a shared aspiration for job security and stability.

However, **private school students showed a higher preference for careers such as Business Management (12% vs. 9%), Engineering & Technology (11% vs. 8%), and Finance & Banking (6% vs. 4%). This preference is likely influenced by greater exposure to diverse career options and better access to resources, better infrastructure, and learning environments (Sharma and Singh, 2017).** Students from government schools demonstrated stronger interest in Education & Teaching (12% vs. 6%), Legal Services (4% vs. 3%), and Allied and Paramedical Services (4% vs. 3%).

Career Aspirations by School Category and Gender

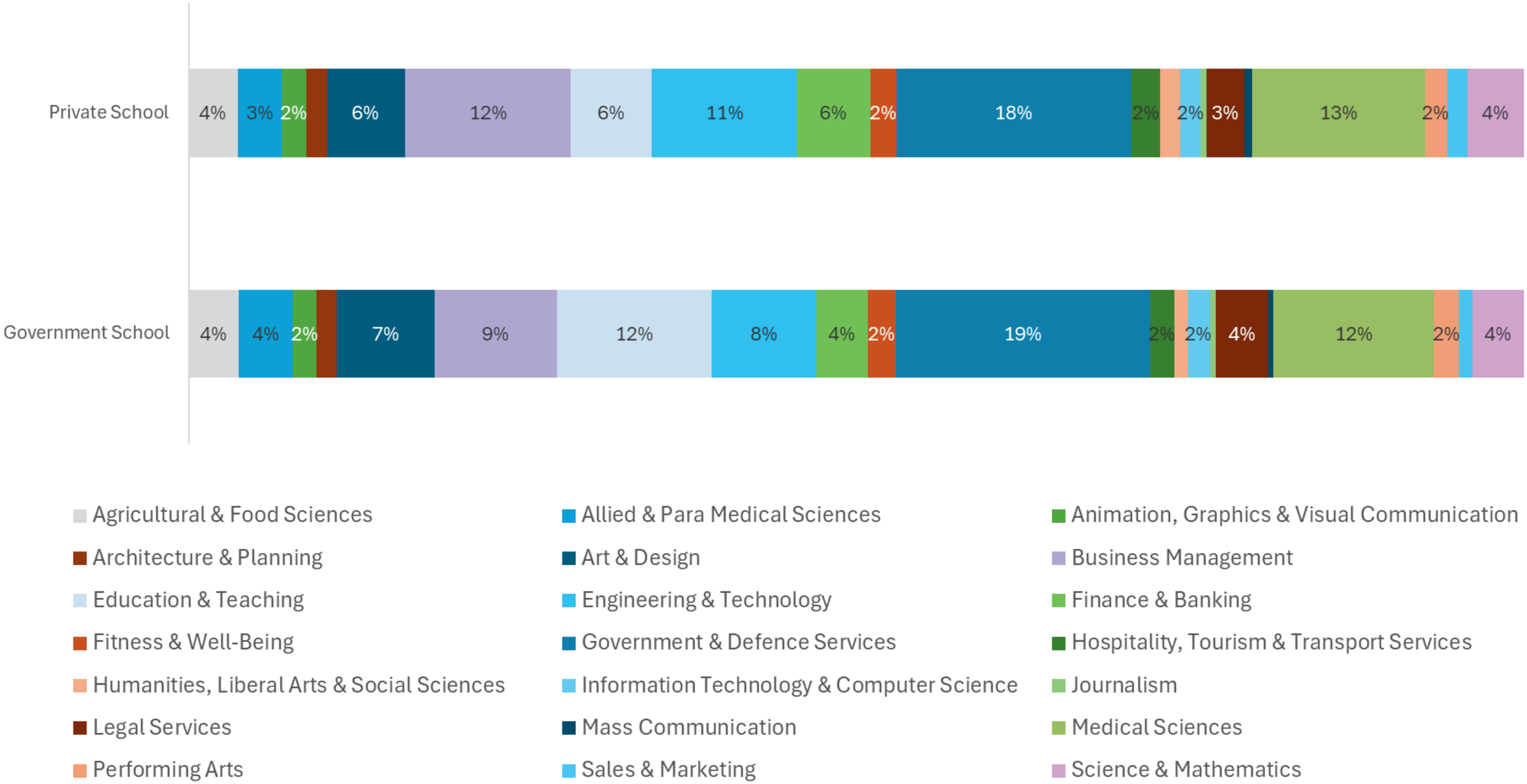
Analysis of career aspirations by type of school and gender revealed that for female students in government schools, the preference for Education & Teaching was particularly high. Additionally, IT and Computer Science emerged as a strong preference for male students, in both government and private schools (Annexure 2, Fig. A.2.3).

B. Career Aspirations across Grades

Career aspirations tend to evolve as students progress through grades, shaped by factors such as academic exposure, family expectations, and access to information. This section examines how students' career preferences vary across different grade levels.

In Grade 9th, 21% of students were interested in Government and Defence Services, followed by 13% in Medical Sciences, 10% in Business Management, and 8% each in Education and Engineering. In Grade 10th, Government and Defence Services remained the top choice at 16%, with 12% opting for Medical Sciences, and 10% each for Business Management and Engineering. By Grade 11th, 18% still preferred Government and Defence Services, 13% chose Medical Sciences, 12% aspired for Business Management, and 9% each wanted to pursue Education and Engineering. In Grade 12th, Government and Defence Services continued to lead at 18%, followed by 12% in Medical Sciences, 11% each in Business Management and Education, and 9% in Engineering and Technology.

Fig. 5.6.1: Career Aspirations by Type of School

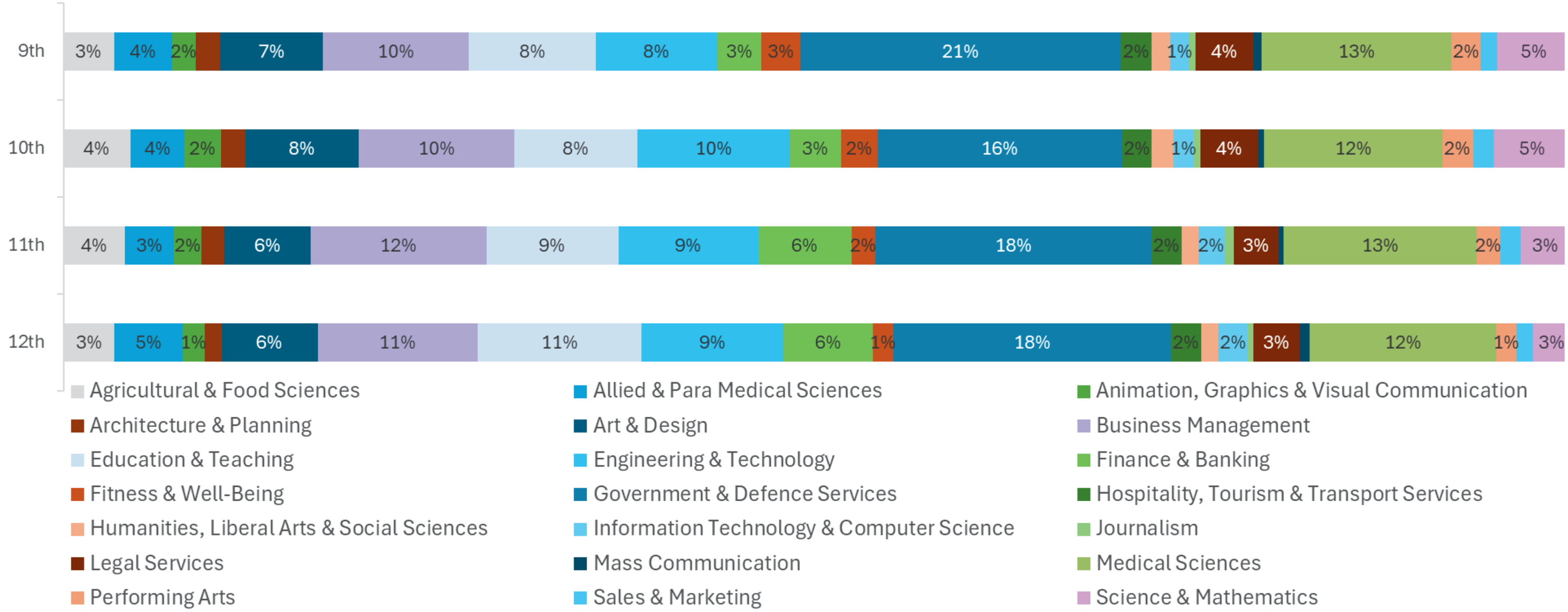


Sample Size - Private: 10,388; Government: 10,851

Overall, Government and Defence Services emerged to be the most aspired career category among participants across all grades, followed closely by Medical Sciences. Additionally, interest in commerce-related fields such as Business Management and Finance & Banking increased with higher grade levels. This could be attributed to a growing awareness of market dynamics and economic opportunities, an insight also evident in the India Skills Report 2024.

Career Orientation and Awareness Workshop in Gujarat

Fig. 5.6.2: Grade-wise Distribution of Students' Career Aspirations



Sample Size - 9th: 5,386; 10th: 5,393; 11th: 5,815; 12th: 4,645

Furthermore, careers in Education & Teaching also witnessed rising interest in higher grades from 8% in Grade 9th to 11% in Grade 12th. These careers continue to be relevant and have a perceived social value, making them a strong choice among students (Global Development Incubator, 2024).

Participants from a Punjab school engaging in the Career Planning and Awareness Workshop

Career Planning and Awareness Session in Banda

6

Self-Assessment Practices Among Students and Career Awareness Levels of Students

A. Self-Assessment Practices Among Students

Understanding how well students can evaluate their own abilities is essential to guiding them effectively toward their goals. The ability to recognise both strengths and weaknesses helps students make informed career choices that align with their skills and interests, ultimately leading to more fulfilling and successful career outcomes. In this section, we examine students' understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and whether they have used any tools to assess them. This was done to gauge how well students can identify their personal qualities, which directly influence their ability to make thoughtful career decisions.

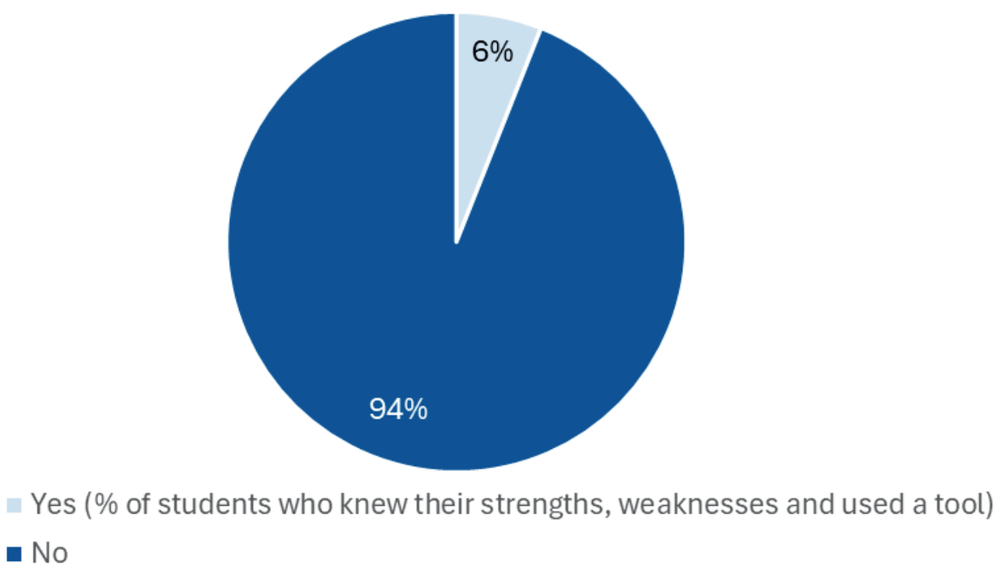
To give a holistic understanding of this indicator, it is analysed across socio-economic variables such as geographical regions, genders, social categories, school type, and grade levels, among others.

6.1 Self-Assessment Practices

6.1.1 Self-Assessment Practices among Students (Overall)

Only 1,289 out of the total 21,239 participants, approximately 6%, identified their strengths and weaknesses and used a tool to develop this understanding. In the survey, students also reported the particular tool they used to find their strengths and weaknesses.

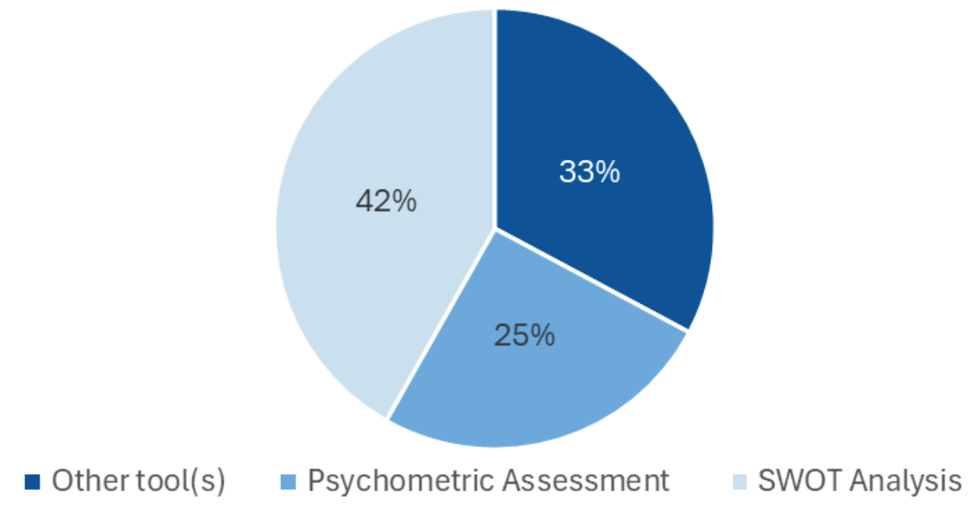
Fig. 6.1.1.1: Self Assessment Practices among Students



Sample Size: 21,239

Among those who utilised some tool to assess their strengths and weaknesses, about 42% of participants used Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) analysis, 25% used psychometric assessment and 33% used some other tool(s).

Fig. 6.1.1.2: Tool used to know Strengths and Weaknesses



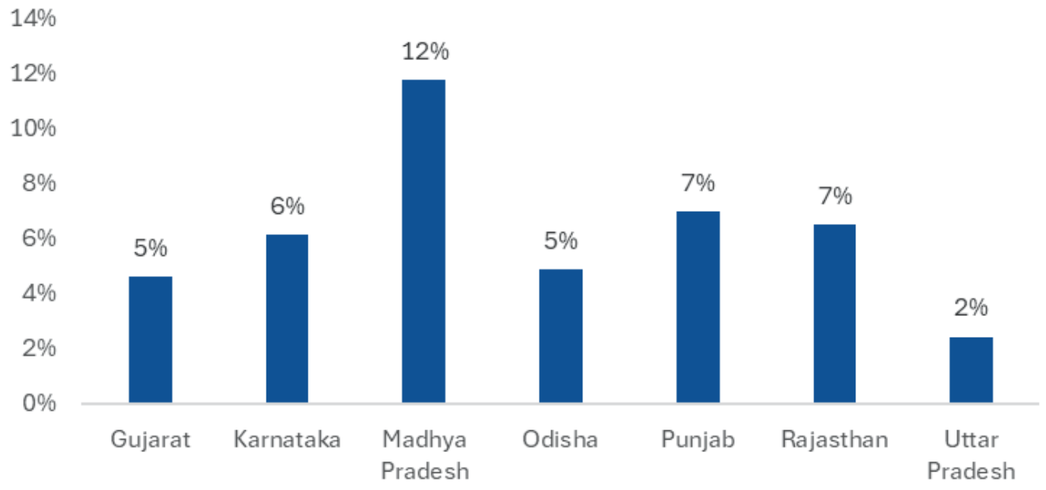
Sample Size: 1,289

[2]Parameters used to define and assess self awareness in the study are outlined in Section 3.5

6.1.2 Self-Assessment Practices by State

The percentage of students who used any kind of tool to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses was highest in Madhya Pradesh (12%), followed by Punjab and Rajasthan at 7% each, and Karnataka (6%). This percentage was 5% in Gujarat and Odisha and was lowest in Uttar Pradesh at 2%.

Fig 6.1.2.1: Self Assessment Practices across States



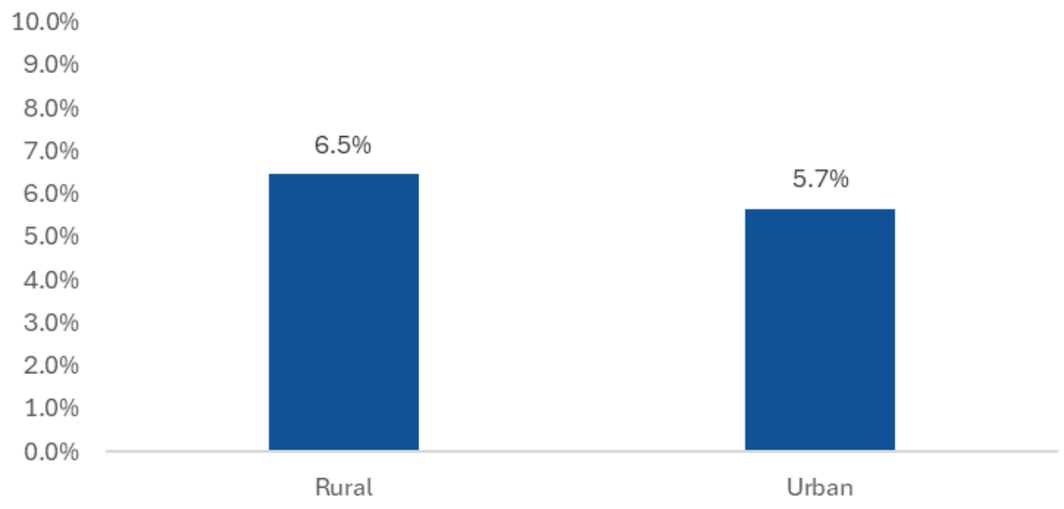
Sample Size - Gujarat: 3,533; Karnataka: 2,980; Madhya Pradesh: 3,096; Odisha: 3,387; Punjab: 1,979; Rajasthan: 3,050; Uttar Pradesh: 3,214

6.1.3 Self-Assessment Practices by Type of District

Across both rural and urban districts, almost an equal proportion of participants (6%) used a tool to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. In rural areas (Annexure 2, Fig. A.2.4), the highest proportion of participants using any tool for evaluating strengths and weaknesses was found in Madhya Pradesh (14%), followed by Rajasthan (11%) and Punjab (6%). In urban areas, the highest proportion of participants using any tool for evaluating strengths and weaknesses was found in Punjab (14%), followed by Karnataka (11%) and Madhya Pradesh (8%).

Orientation session being conducted by the counsellor in Gujarat as part of the Bharat Career Aspirations Study

Fig 6.1.3.1: Self Assessment Practices by Type of District

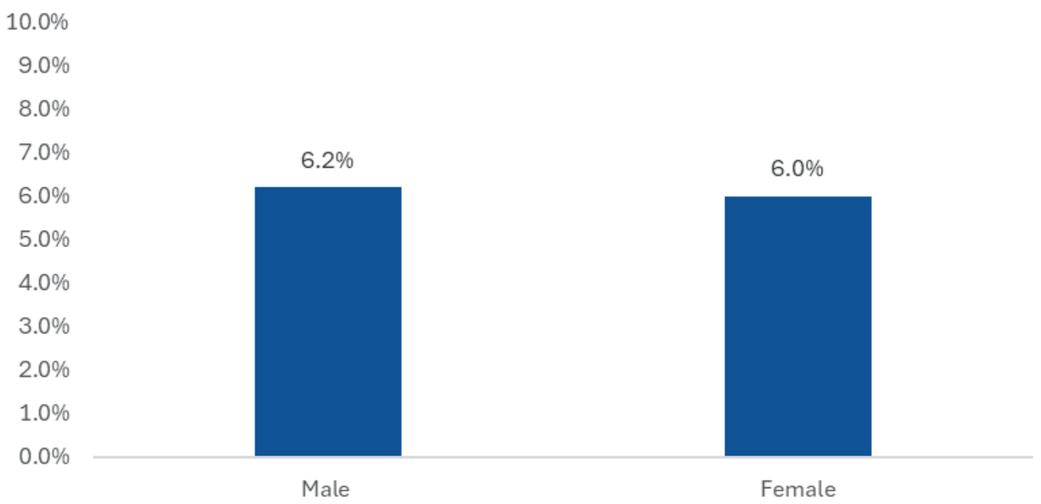


Sample Size - Urban: 10,180; Rural: 11,059

6.1.4 Self-Assessment Practices by Gender

The usage of tools to evaluate strengths and weaknesses was the same for both genders, with only 6% of males and females using them.

Fig. 6.1.4.1: Self Assessment Practices by Gender

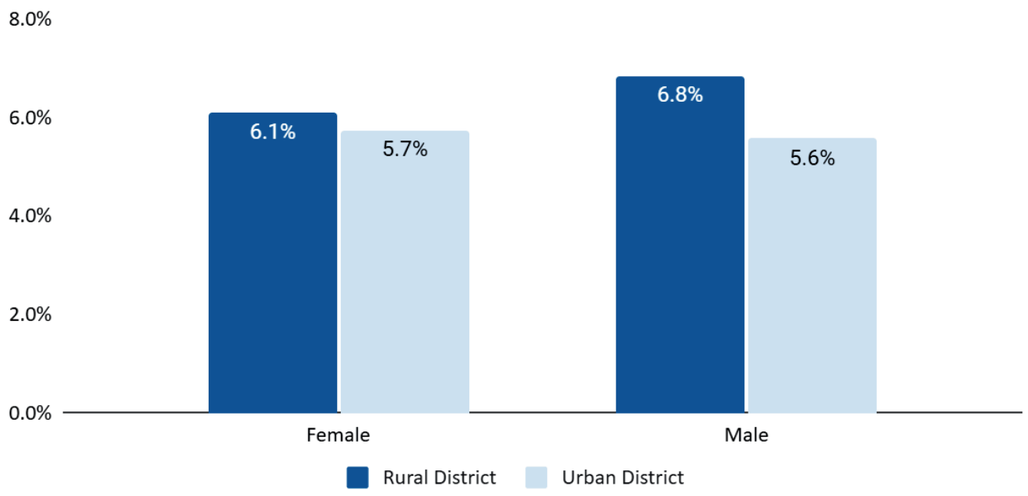


Sample Size - Females: 10,749; Males: 10,490

A. Self-Assessment Practices by Gender and Type of District

6.8% of rural male students used a tool to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, followed by 6.1% of rural female students. Among urban students, 5.7% of females and 5.6% of males used a tool for the same.

Fig: 6.1.4.2: Self Assessment Practices by Gender and Type and District

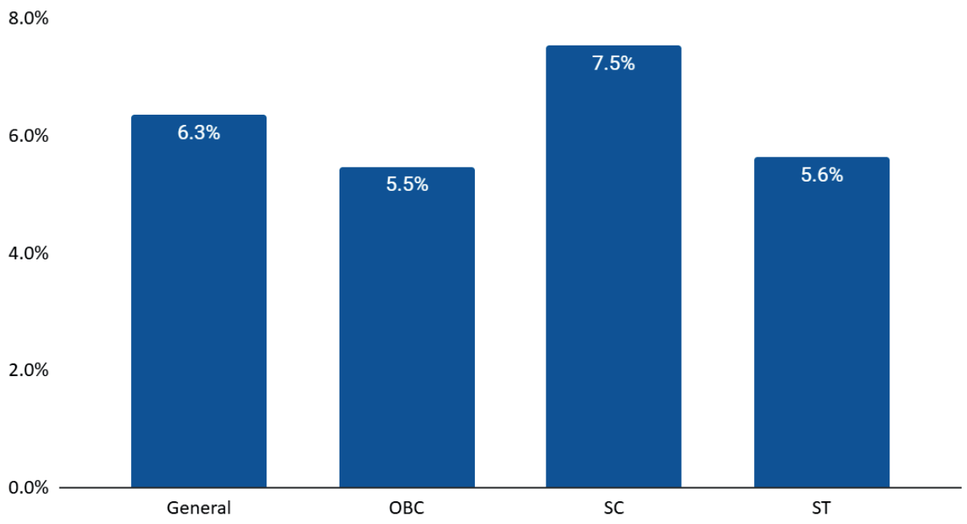


Sample Size - Rural Females: 5,651; Rural Males: 5,408; Urban Females: 5,098; Urban Males: 5,082

6.1.5 Self-Assessment Practices by Social Category

The percentage of students using a tool to evaluate strengths and weaknesses varies across social categories. 7.5% of SC category students used a tool, the highest among all social categories, followed by 6.3% of General category students. On the other hand, 5.6% of ST and 5.5% of OBC students used a tool to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses.

Fig. 6.1.5.1: Self Assessment Practices across Social Categories



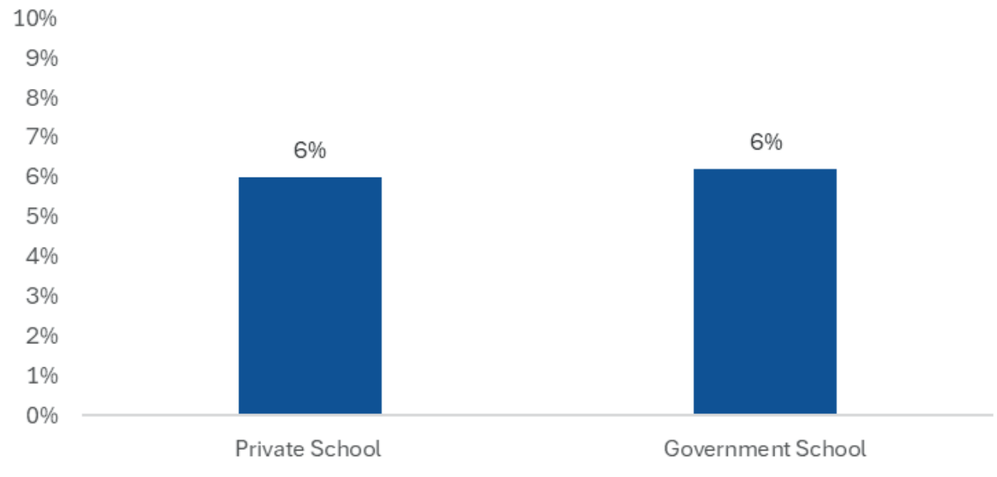
Sample Size - General: 7,135; OBC: 6,782; SC: 2,827; ST: 4,495

6.1.6 Self-Awareness Levels by Type of School and Grade

There was no difference in the percentage of students using a tool to determine their strengths and weaknesses in private and government schools. Analysis by school type and gender (Annexure 2, Fig. A.2.4') revealed that 6.3% of government school male students used a tool, closely followed by 6.1% of private school males. On the other hand, 6.0% of government school female students and 5.8% of private school females used a tool.

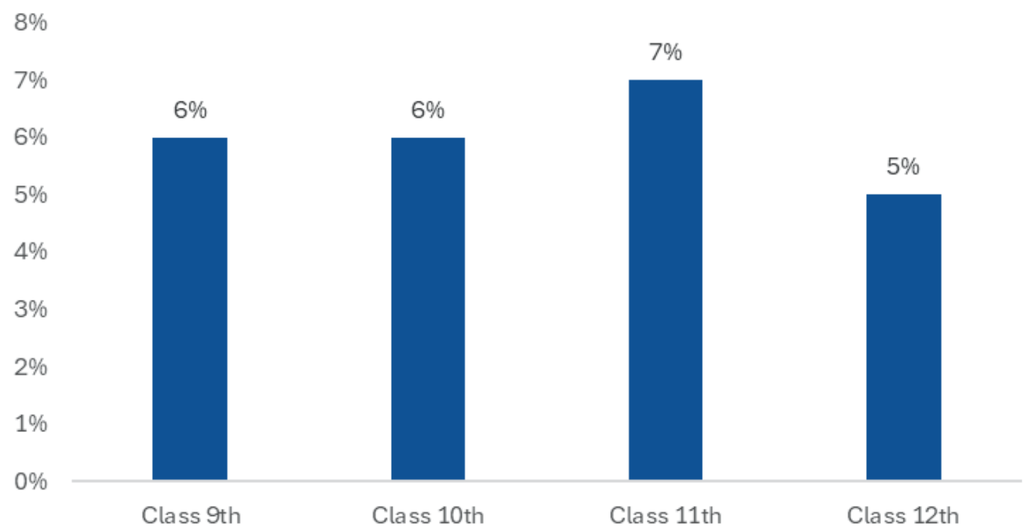
However, there was a marginal difference when this parameter was calculated across grades. Comparatively, a greater percentage of students used a tool in class 11th (7%). Only 5% of students used a tool in class 12th and 6% in class 9th and 10th each.

Fig. 6.1.6.1: Self Assessment Practices by School Type



Sample Size - Private: 10,388; Government: 10,851

Fig. 6.1.6.2: Self Assessment Practices by Grade



Sample Size - 9th: 5,386; 10th: 5,393; 11th: 5,815; 12th: 4,645

[4]Parameters used to define and assess self awareness in the study are outlined in Section 3.5

B. Career Awareness Levels

While self-awareness forms the foundation, career awareness[3] plays an equally vital role by enabling students to set clear goals and recognize the academic and professional pathways needed to achieve them.

The section on career awareness explores various parameters of career awareness, such as identifying the education qualification aspired, choosing an appropriate college, understanding cost implications, and having a backup career plan. To provide a comprehensive view of this indicator, the analysis is further broken down across socio-economic dimensions like geographical location, gender, social category, school type, and grade level.

Students in Gujarat being oriented on the purpose of the Bharat Career Aspirations Study.

6.2 Awareness and Aspirations for Educational Qualification

Understanding the types of educational qualifications students hope to pursue after school can provide valuable insight into their level of career awareness and long-term planning. While students may not yet have detailed career plans, their aspirations regarding future courses often reflect their understanding of the pathways needed to reach specific job roles or sectors.

In India, students can choose from a range of academic and vocational pathways after completing school - from short-term skill-based certifications to long-term academic degrees. Awareness of these options often depends on access to guidance and socio-economic background.

Common types of educational qualifications or courses in the country include:

- Diploma or certification courses are short-term and skill-oriented courses, usually taken after Class 10th or 12th. Examples include ITI courses like Electrician, or certifications like Computer Applications, aimed at quick employability.
- Graduation or degree courses or Under-graduation (UG) are traditional 3 to 4-year undergraduate programs such as B.A., B.Sc., B.Com, or B.Tech, pursued after Class 12th, and crucial for most formal sector jobs.
- Post-graduation (PG) refers to advanced 2-year programs like M.A., M.Sc., MBA, or M.Tech, undertaken after a graduation course to specialise in a particular subject.
- Integrated courses combine undergraduate and postgraduate studies into a single program (usually five years), such as B.A.+M.A. or B.Tech+M.Tech, offering continuity and academic depth.
- Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) is a research-based degree pursued after post-graduation, ideal for careers in academia, research, or policy-making, with examples like a PhD in Economics or Education.

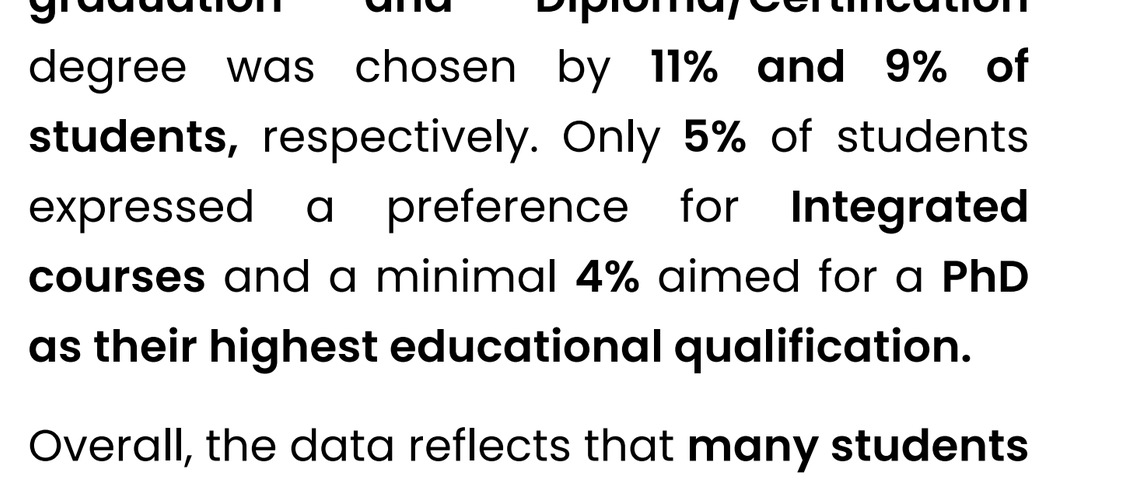
The section also covers how preferences for educational qualifications or courses vary based on various demographic and contextual factors such as geographical location, gender, type of school, and academic grade.

6.2.1 Awareness and Aspirations for Educational Qualification (Overall)

A significant portion of students (38%) were uncertain about their course preferences after school. About **32%** of students indicated they aspired to complete an **undergraduate degree** (e.g., B.A., B.Sc., B.Com, or B.Tech). Attaining a **Post-graduation and Diploma/Certification** degree was chosen by **11% and 9% of students,** respectively. Only **5%** of students expressed a preference for **Integrated courses** and a minimal **4%** aimed for a **PhD as their highest educational qualification.**

Overall, the data reflects that **many students may still be unfamiliar with the full range of educational pathways available**, or unclear on which academic qualification most align with their career goals.

Fig. 6.2.1.1: Awareness and Aspirations for Educational Qualification (Overall)



Sample Size: 21,239

[4]Parameters used to define and assess self awareness in the study are outlined in Section 3.5

6.2.2 Awareness and Aspirations for Educational Qualification across States

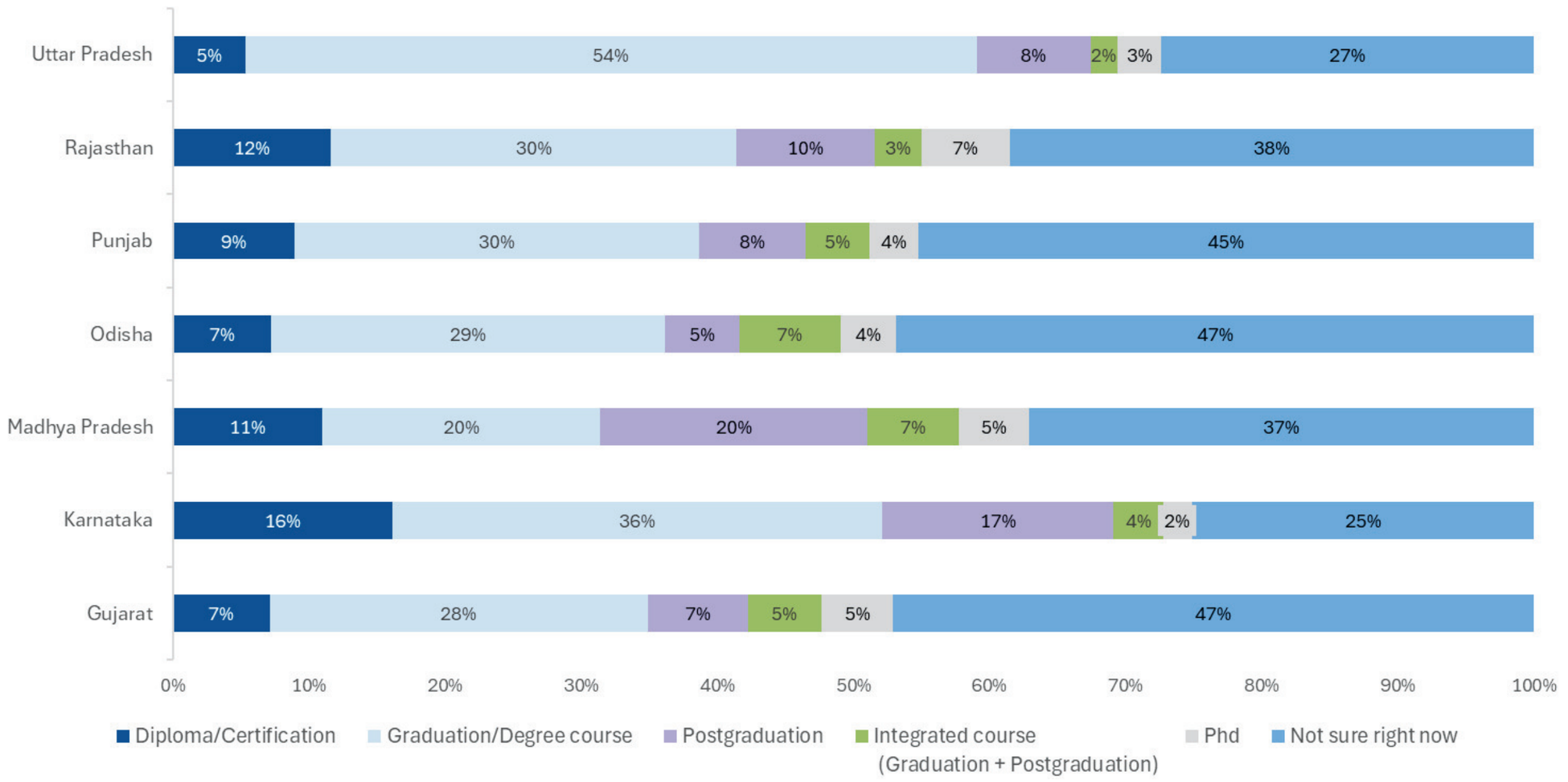
The data on students' awareness and aspirations for educational qualifications across states revealed significant variations shaped by regional factors. A large proportion of students in Gujarat **(47%)**, Odisha **(47%),** and Punjab **(45%)** were **uncertain about their educational aspirations, highlighting a clear need for enhanced career guidance in these states.** Conversely, 25% and 27% of students from Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh showed uncertainty, suggesting better access to information or stronger academic planning.

Additionally, in **Uttar Pradesh,** qualification up to graduation was most preferred (54%), and one possible hypothesis is that it is likely due to a **strong government push for undergraduate enrollment and growing awareness** through various state-level initiatives in the state, such as **Uttar Pradesh Higher Education Incentive Policy 2024, Pradhan Mantri Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (PM-USHA),** etc. (Goyal, 2025).

Attaining a Graduation or Post-graduation degree as the highest educational qualification was preferred the most in Madhya Pradesh (20% each), reflecting aspirations for higher qualifications and improved job prospects in the state. This is supported by Mahajan & Navin (2024), who found that individuals in Madhya Pradesh with higher educational attainment, such as graduate and postgraduate degrees, have a significantly higher Workforce Participation Rate (64.5%), indicating that students' educational choices are shaped by evident employment advantages.

Diploma and Certificate courses attracted more students in Karnataka (16%) and Rajasthan (12%). Preference for Integrated courses as well as enrolling in doctorate programs, however, drew limited interest among students, perhaps due to the higher cost and specialised focus that they demand. This is also at par with the national data, as only about 0.5% of the total student enrollment in India is at the PhD level, indicating a relatively low inclination towards doctoral studies among students. Possible contributing factors for low inclination toward a PhD include lack of adequate financial incentives and job security, and uncertain career opportunities (Dharmapalan, 2025).

Fig. 6.2.2.1: Awareness and Aspirations for Educational Qualification across States

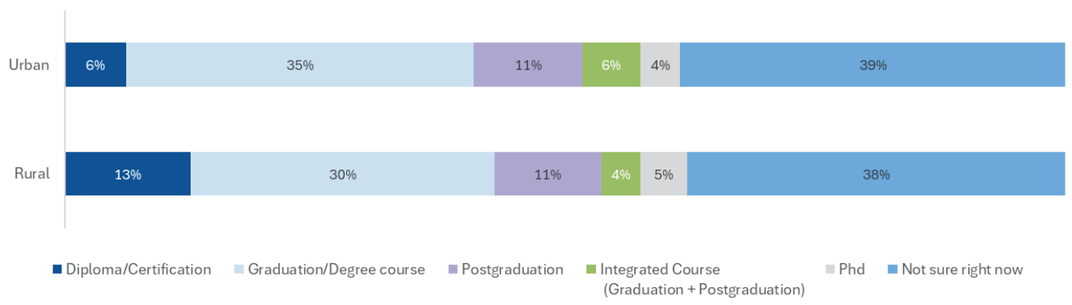


Sample Size - Gujarat: 3,533; Karnataka: 2,980; Madhya Pradesh: 3,096; Odisha: 3,387; Punjab: 1,979; Rajasthan: 3,050; Uttar Pradesh: 3,214

6.2.3 Awareness and Aspirations for Educational Qualification across Districts

38% of participants from rural areas and **39% of urban participants were indecisive about the course to be pursued.** Additionally, studying up to graduation emerged as the most preferred in both settings, with **35%** of urban and 30% of rural participants considering it most suitable to achieve their career aspirations. Integrated courses tend to be more popular among students in urban areas **(Urban - 6% vs. Rural - 4%),** while Diploma courses are generally preferred by students in rural areas **(Urban - 6% vs. Rural - 13%)**. According to Barot (2023), the reason for this could be the short duration, better affordability, and easy employment prospects of Diploma courses, especially for rural students who face resource constraints and less exposure to other career opportunities in their vicinity.

Fig. 6.2.3.1: Awareness and Aspirations for Educational Qualification across Urban and Rural Districts

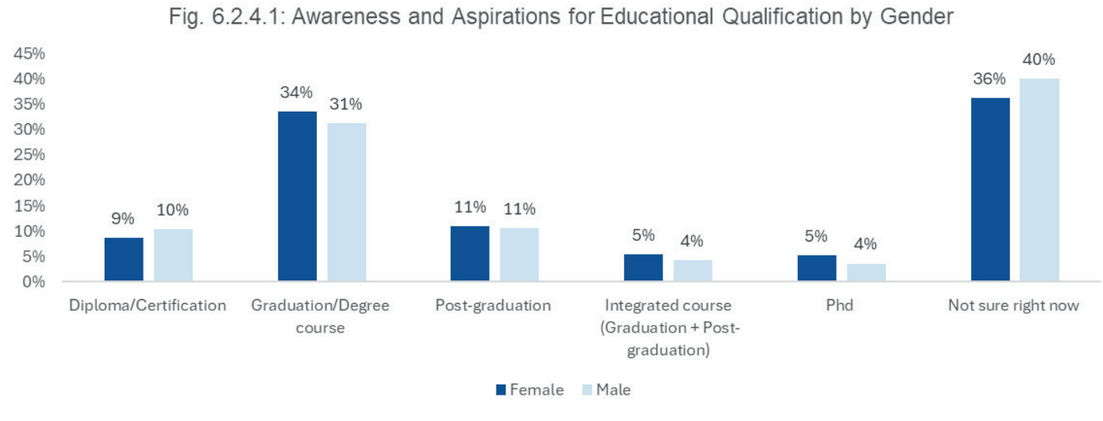


Sample Size - Urban: 10,180; Rural: 11,059

6.2.4 Awareness and Aspirations for Educational Qualification across Genders

Female participants were found to be more decisive about the educational qualification they plan to pursue, with a greater proportion of male students (40% vs. 36%) reporting uncertainty. Gautam (2015) finds that family and school environments play pivotal roles in influencing these decisions for female students. This guidance often leads female students to make more definitive choices about their academic paths.

Fig. 6.2.4.1: Awareness and Aspirations for Educational Qualification by Gender



Sample Size - Females: 10,749; Males: 10,490

Attaining a Graduation degree as the highest educational qualification was the most preferred option among both groups, with 34% of females indicating it as their choice compared to 31% of males. Interest in securing a **Post-graduation degree was equal among male and female students,** with 11% from each group considering it necessary to achieve their career goals. Pursuing **doctoral programs, however, attracted minimal interest,** as only 5% of females and 4% of males viewed them as a preferred highest educational qualification.

Students engaging with the survey of the Bharat Career Aspirations Study

Across all levels of education, including Graduation, Post-graduation, Integrated Courses and PhD, **a higher percentage of female students showed a preference for pursuing these courses as compared to male students.** This could be attributed to the deliberate and early attempt of female participants as well as their families at finding an '**appropriate' career path that aligns with the societal norms related to gender roles, mobility, and safety of the job roles** (Gautam, 2015). Additionally, targeted government initiatives such as **'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao**' have raised awareness and encouraged females and their family members to think seriously about females' educational goals (Ashraf, Agarwal, & Mukherjee, 2025).

A. Awareness and Aspirations for Educational Qualification by Gender and Type of District

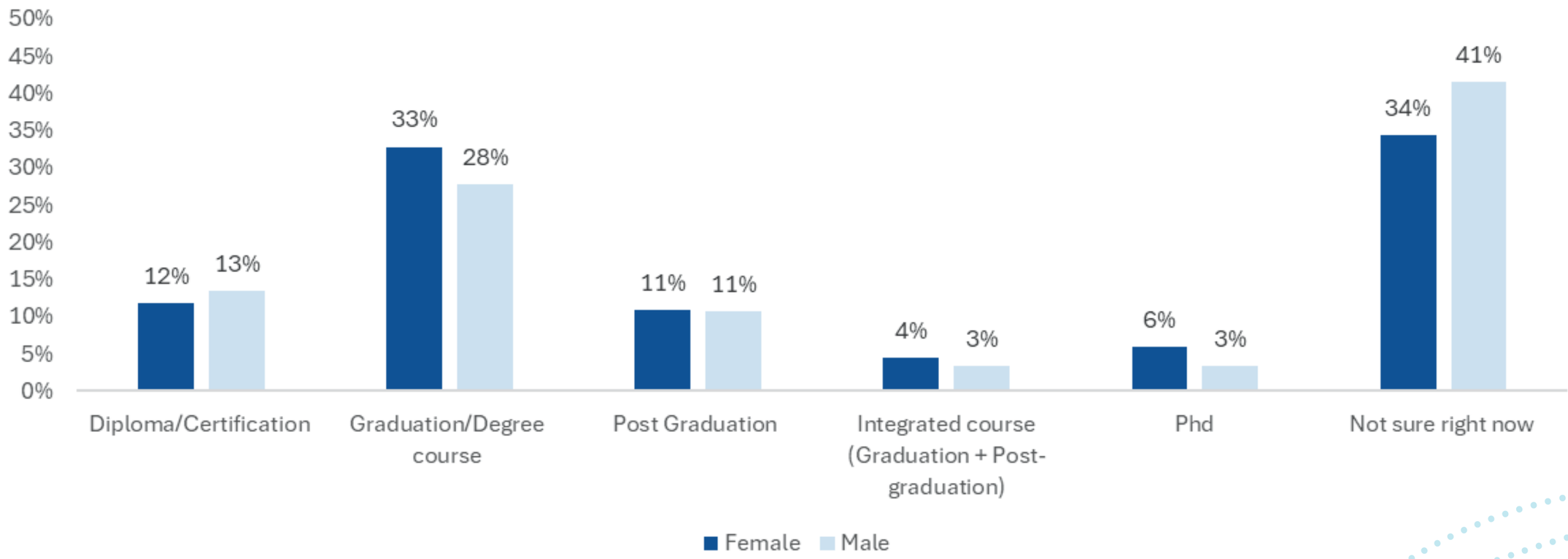
In rural districts, **more female students (33%) preferred studying up to Graduation than male students (28%).** About 41% of male and 34% of female students in rural districts were unsure of the course to be pursued.

Additionally, 13% of male students and 12% of female students wanted to pursue a Diploma course or a Certification after school. Interestingly, enrolling in PhD programs and pursuing Integrated courses were preferred by a higher proportion of rural females as compared to rural males.

In urban districts, male and female students exhibited similar preferences for Graduation, Post-graduation and PhD as their highest educational degree, while pursuing Diploma courses were more popular among male students compared to their female counterparts.

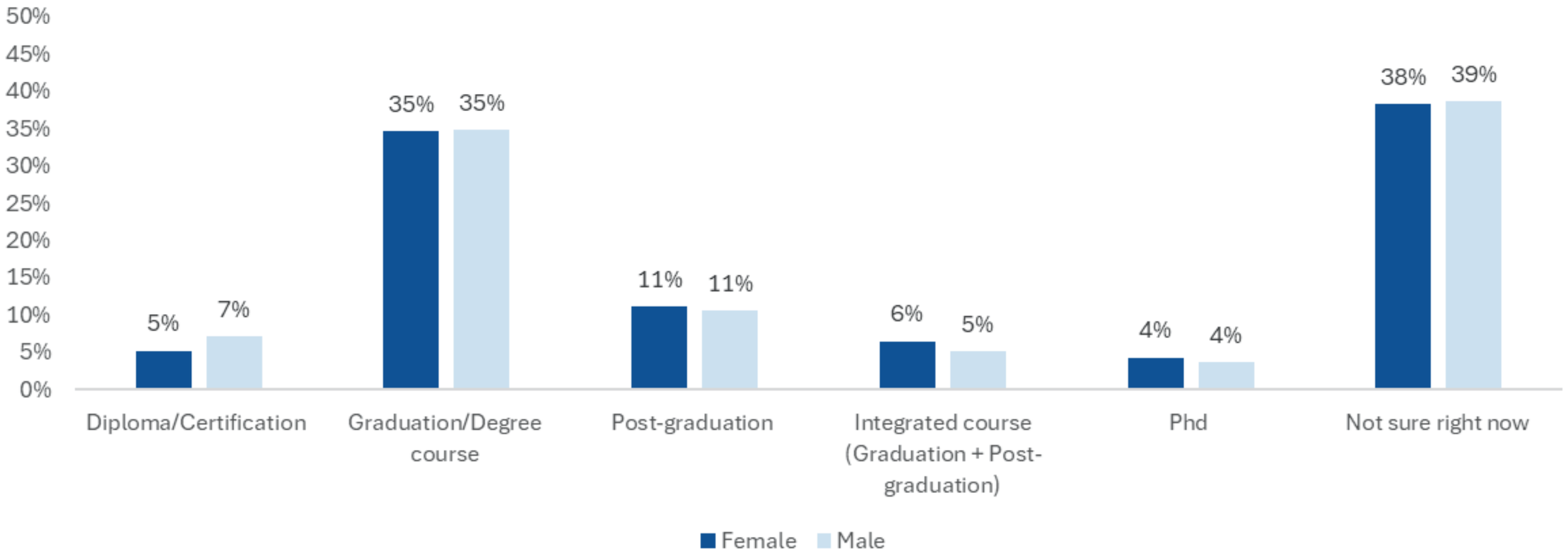
In conclusion, a comparison of rural and urban career preferences revealed that **male participants in urban districts were more certain about their course choices than those in rural areas,** suggesting a lack of adequate career guidance and awareness in rural areas. On the other hand, **urban female students showcase a stronger inclination toward higher education,** with higher preferences for Graduation (35%) compared to their rural counterparts (33%), indicating better access to academic resources and awareness in urban settings.

Fig. 6.2.4.2: Awareness and Aspirations for Educational Qualification in Rural Districts by Gender



Sample Size - Rural Females: 5,651; Rural Males: 5,408

Fig. 6.2.4.3: Awareness and Aspirations for Educational Qualification in Urban Districts by Gender

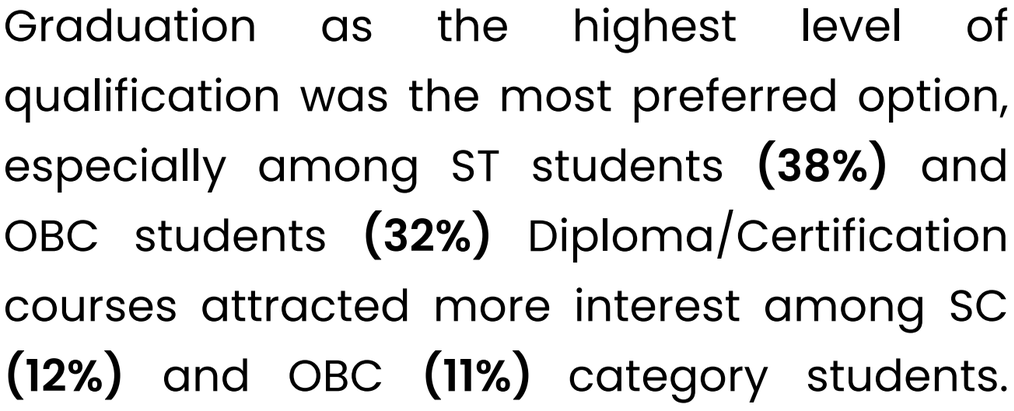


Sample Size - Urban Females: 5,098; Urban Males: 5,082

6.2.5 Awareness and Aspirations for Educational Qualification by Social Category

A significant proportion of students across all social categories were uncertain about their educational aspirations, with **41% of General, 39% of SC, 37% of OBC, and 35% of ST category students reporting uncertainty.** Graduation as the highest level of qualification was the most preferred option, especially among ST students **(38%)** and OBC students **(32%)** Diploma/Certification courses attracted more interest among SC **(12%)** and OBC **(11%)** category students. Aspirations for studying up to Post-graduation ranged from 10% to 12% across all groups. Preferences for Integrated Courses as well as pursuing a PhD program remained low and relatively consistent.

Fig. 6.2.5.1: Awareness and Aspirations for Educational Qualification by Social Category



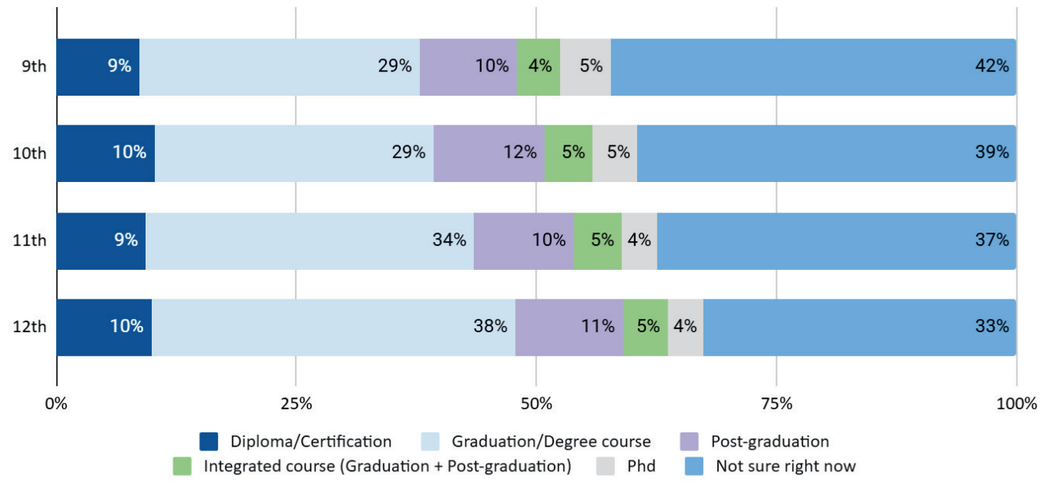
Sample Size - General: 7,135; OBC: 6,782; SC: 2,827; ST: 4,495

6.2.6 Awareness and Aspirations for Educational Qualification across School Types and Grades

A. Awareness and Aspirations for Educational Qualification by Grade

A few clear patterns emerge regarding the highest level of qualifications that students want to attain. Interestingly, uncertainty about future course choices decreases as students move to higher classes, suggesting that students become more aware and decisive about their career plans over time.

Fig. 6.2.6.1: Awareness and Aspirations for Educational Qualification by Grade



Sample Size - 9th: 5,386; 10th: 5,393; 11th: 5,815; 12th: 4,645

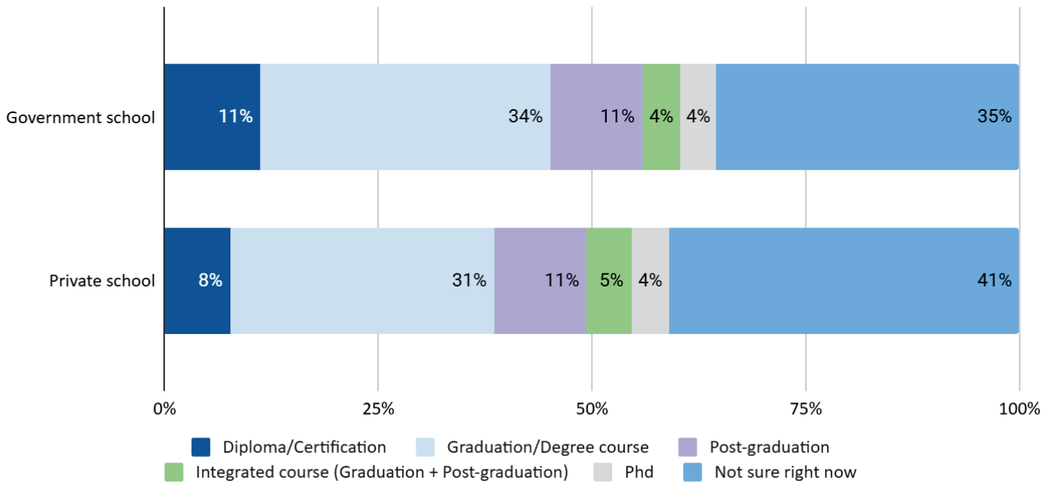
The percentage of students who responded "Not sure right now" dropped steadily from 42% in 9th Grade to 33% in 12th Grade. Preference for studying till Graduation increases with grade levels, rising from 29% in 9th Grade to 38% in 12th Grade.

On the other hand, aspirations to pursue Diploma/Certification courses, Integrated courses, PhD, and Post-graduation as the highest qualification remain relatively stable across grades, with only minor differences. Overall, the data points to a positive trend in clarity and ambition as students advance through grades.

B. Awareness and Aspirations for Educational Qualification across School Types

The analysis of awareness and aspirations for educational qualification among students from private and government schools revealed minor differences across categories of courses. Preferences for undertaking Integrated courses (4-5%), as well as studying up to PhD (4%) and Post-graduation (11%) remain nearly the same between the two groups. However, a slightly higher percentage of government school students (34%) preferred attaining a Graduation degree as compared to private school students (31%). Similarly, 11% of government school students were inclined towards undertaking Diploma or Certification courses, while only 8% of private school students expressed the same preference. A larger proportion of private school students (41%) reported being unsure about their post-school plans, compared to 35% from government schools, a 6 percentage point difference, indicating relatively higher uncertainty among private school students.

Fig. 6.2.6.2: Awareness and Aspirations for Educational Qualification across School Types



Sample Size - Private: 10,388; Government: 10,851

Awareness and Aspirations for Educational Qualification by School Type and Gender

Analysis by gender and school type (Annexure 2, Fig. A.2.5) highlighted that the category of male students in private schools had the highest percentage of students **(42%)** being uncertain about their course preference, followed by female students in private schools **(40%).**

In summary, **38% of students were uncertain about the highest level of qualifications** they wish to attain, with higher uncertainty among males, rural students, and those in Grade 9th. Also, as highlighted above, most preferred undergraduate courses, interest in options like diplomas and PhDs remained low.

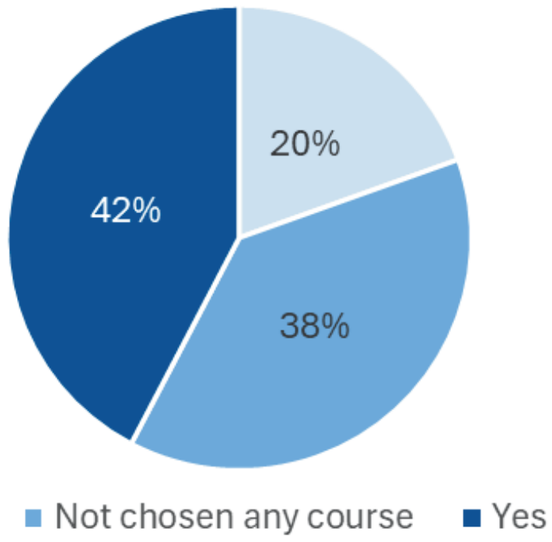
Orientation session in Lucknow: Students being guided on completing the questionnaire

6.2.7 Clarity on the Effectiveness of the Aspired Educational Qualification

Choosing an educational qualification as part of a certain career choice should be backed by a clear understanding of the course content and objectives. Clarity on how a particular qualification contributes to achieving a desired career goal is a key indicator of a student's level of career awareness.

As per the analysis, out of the total **21,239 participants, 42%** of the participants had a clear idea of how the educational qualification they chose would be helpful to achieve their career aspirations. **20% of the students** didn't have any idea about how the chosen qualification would help them meet their career goals. As mentioned above, **38% of students** did not choose any course and selected the option of **"not sure right now"**.

Fig. 6.2.7.1: Clarity on the Effectiveness of the Aspired Educational Qualification



Sample Size: 21,239

Students attending the orientation session on Bharat Career Aspirations Study

6.3 College Preferences among Participants

Choosing a college is a significant milestone in shaping a student's career path, as it shapes the academic, professional, and social profile of students. As **centres of higher learning, colleges provide a door to equip students with advanced knowledge, technical skills, and critical thinking to become future-ready.** These institutions serve as a bridge between secondary education and jobs, laying a foundation for both personal and professional development. The specialisation that these institutions provide helps the students explore their interests and meaningfully contribute to society.

Based on the management and funding structure of the colleges of higher learning, three categories have been identified:

- **Government Colleges** - These are fully owned, managed, and funded by the government (central or state), with government-employed teachers and professionals. These colleges provide a very low fee or subsidised education, as the government bears most of the cost. \

- **Private Colleges** - These are owned and operated by private bodies such as Trusts, Companies, or Individuals. They are fully self-financed, and the employees are appointed by the management. The fee is usually high in these colleges as there is no government aid provided.

- **Semi-Government Colleges** - These colleges are funded jointly by the government and private bodies. The fee is moderate and they are managed by a Trust with some government oversight.

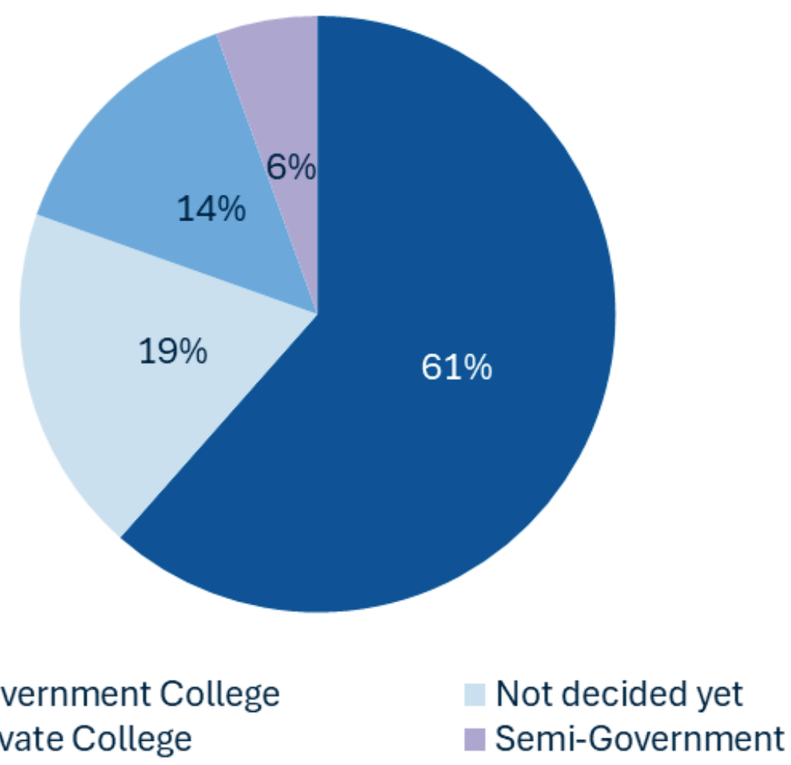
Several factors shape students' preferences for choosing a college. These include location and its proximity to the student's residence, the availability of preferred courses and specialisations, the reputability of the college, the fee structure, the duration of the course, and the student's socio-economic background. This section explores various factors that influence the preference for college among students

6.3.1 College Preferences among Participants (Overall)

A significant percentage of students (61%) expressed a preference for enrolling in government colleges to pursue their desired courses. This is also reflected in the actual enrolment patterns, with 73.7% of total higher education enrolment in India being in government-owned or managed institutions (AISHE, 2022), indicating that students' preferences are largely in line with broader national trends.

Another 14% preferred private colleges, and only 6% aspired for semi-government colleges. Additionally, 19% of students were unsure about the type of college they would choose.

Fig. 6.3.1.1: College Preferences among Participants (Overall)



Sample Size: 21,239

These will not only ensure that the government colleges meet the growing demand without compromising quality, but also empower students to make more informed choices with respect to the college they want to join.

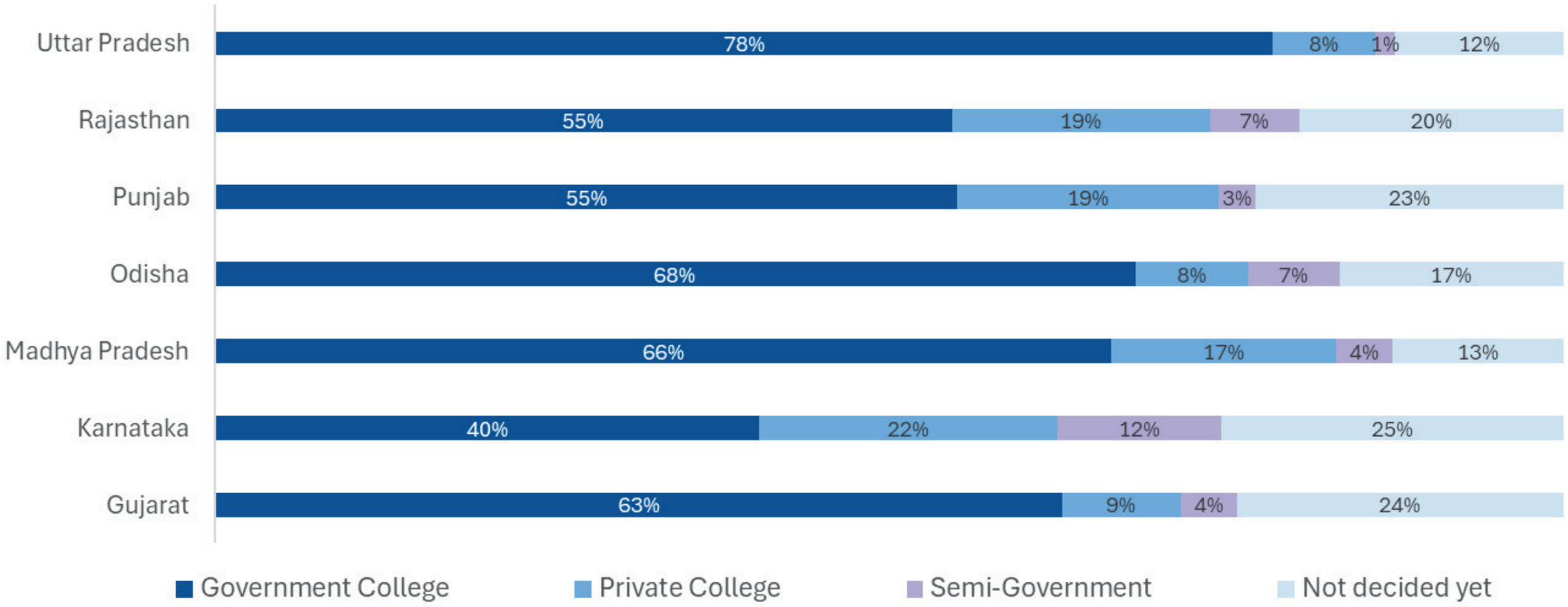
6.3.2 College Preferences across States

Most participants across all states showed an inclination to join a government college for further studies. Among states, **Uttar Pradesh had the highest number of participants** (78%) willing to get admission into government colleges, followed by Odisha (68%), Madhya Pradesh (66%) and Gujarat (63%). This likely reflects the **affordability and perceived reliability of public institutions** (Gupta, 2016).

Although the overall preference for private colleges is significantly lower than for government institutions, a notable percentage of students in **Karnataka (22%)**, **Punjab (19%)**, **Rajasthan (19%)**, and **Madhya Pradesh (17%) have expressed a strong aspiration to study in private colleges.** Semi-government colleges are the least preferred across all states, with very low percentages (1-12%).

Additionally, 25% of students from Karnataka, followed by 24% in Gujarat, 23% in Punjab, and 20% in Rajasthan, were unsure about which type of college to consider for higher education.

Fig. 6.3.2.1: College Preferences across States

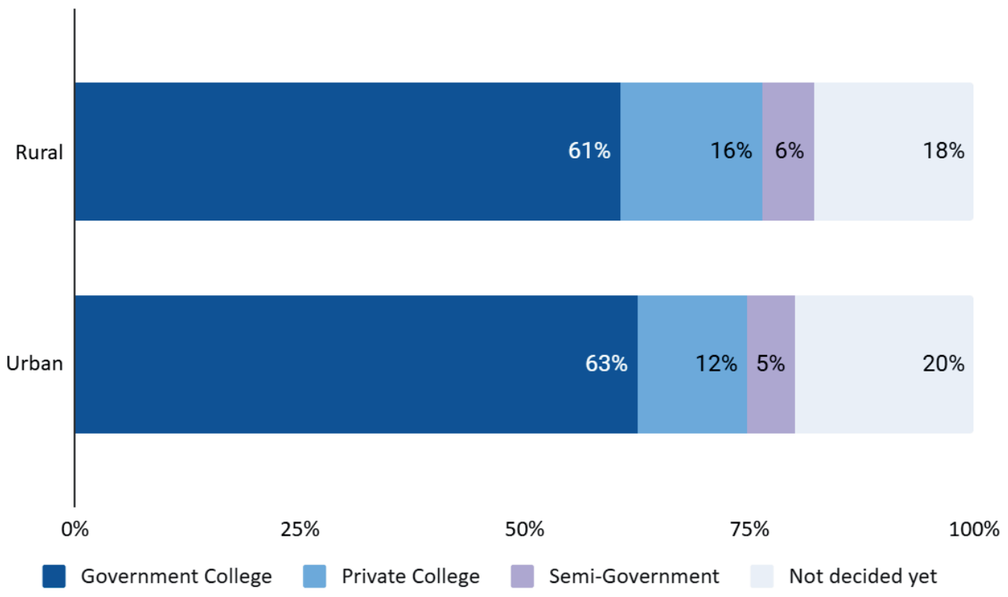


Sample Size - Gujarat: 3,533; Karnataka: 2,980; Madhya Pradesh: 3,096; Odisha: 3,387; Punjab: 1,979; Rajasthan: 3,050; Uttar Pradesh: 3,214

6.3.3 College Preferences by Type of District

Students from both **rural and urban districts showed a strong preference for government colleges,** with **61%** of rural students and **63%** of urban students opting for them. Private colleges were chosen by 16% of rural and 12% of urban students. Semi-government colleges attracted only a small fraction, 6% of rural and 5% of urban students. 18% of rural students and 20% of urban students had not yet decided on their preferred type of college.

Fig. 6.3.3.1: College Preferences by Type of District

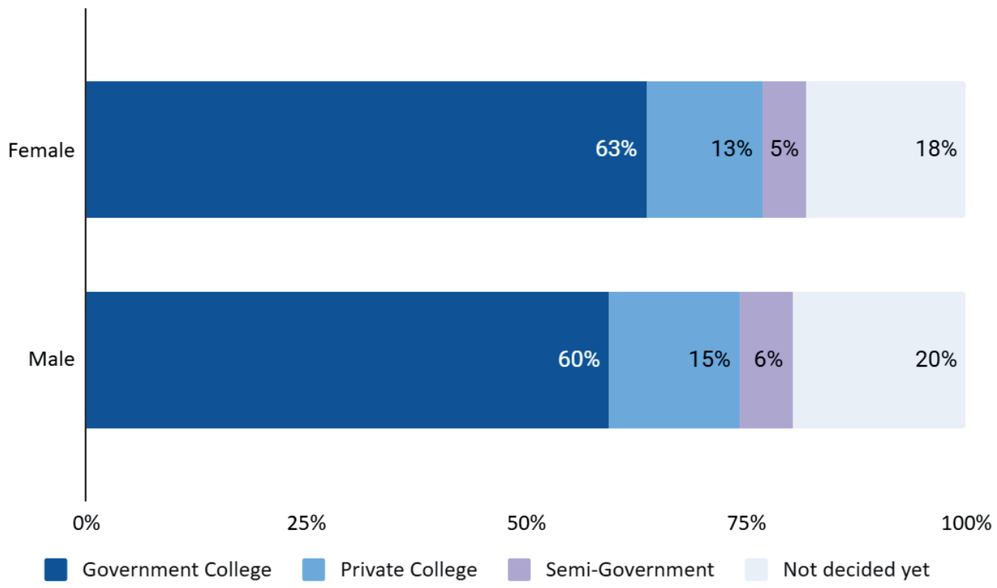


Sample Size - Urban: 10,180; Rural: 11,059

6.3.4 College Preferences across Genders

Both male and female participants showed a clear preference for government colleges over other types of colleges. However, private colleges were slightly more favored by male students (15%) compared to female students (13%). Additionally, a slightly higher proportion of male participants (20%) were uncertain about their college preference, compared to 18% of female participants. This aligns with the earlier observation that **female students tend to be more decisive about different aspects of their careers because their decisions are shaped by many factors such as societal barriers, family influence, mobility, and safety considerations.**

Fig. 6.3.4.1: College Preferences by Gender



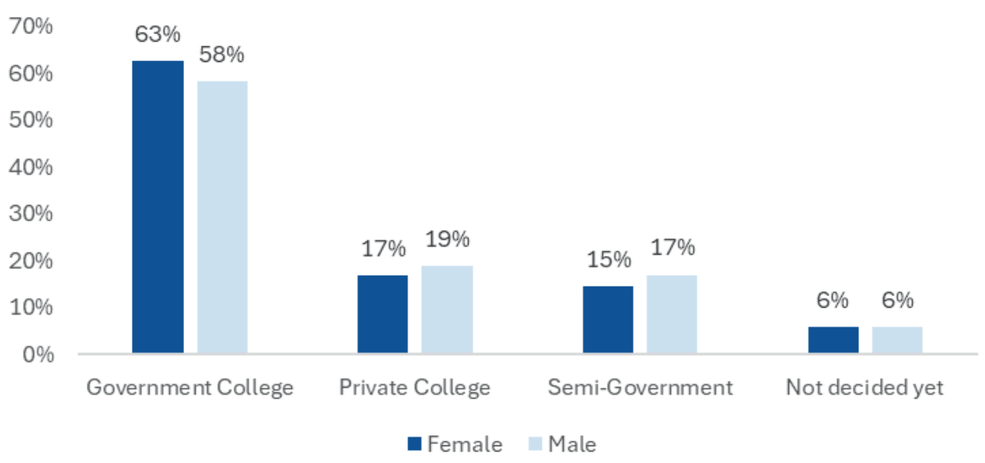
Sample Size - Females: 10,749; Males: 10,490

A. College Preferences by Gender and Type of District

In rural districts, a **higher proportion of female students (63%) prefer government colleges than male students (58%)**. 17% of male and 15% of female students prefer private colleges.

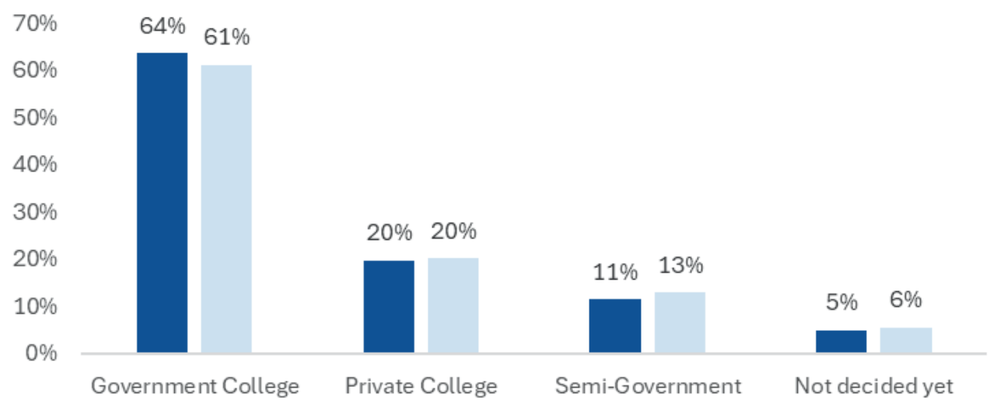
In urban districts, **64% of female and 61% of male students showed a preference for government colleges,** as against 13% of male and 11% of female participants who preferred private colleges. Only 5% of female and 6% of male students preferred to pursue a course in semi-government colleges.

Fig. 6.3.4.2: College Preferences by Gender and Rural District



Sample Size - Rural Females: 5,651; Rural Males: 5,408

Fig. 6.3.4.3: College Preferences by Gender and Urban District

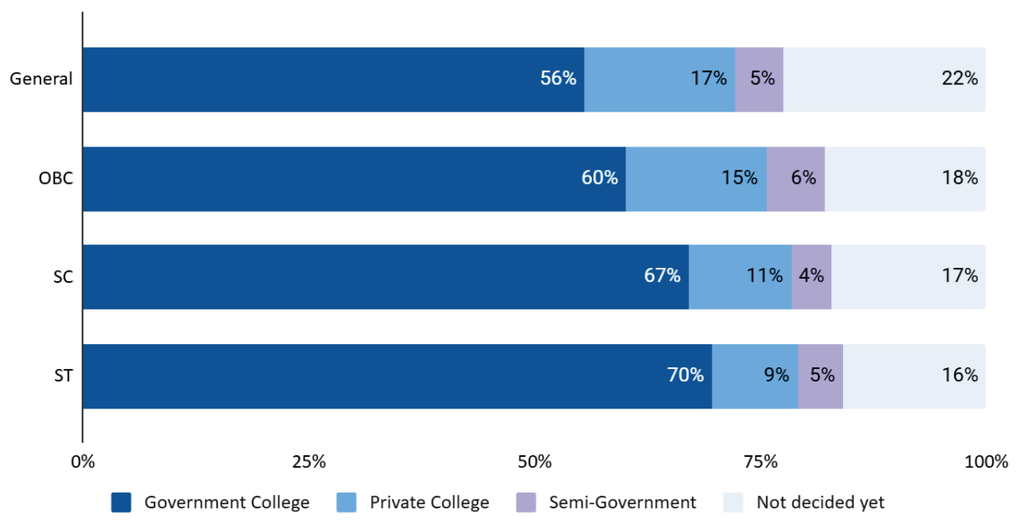


Sample Size - Urban Females: 5,098; Urban Males: 5,082

6.3.5 College Preferences across Social Categories

Across all social categories, **government colleges were the most preferred choice, with 70% of ST, 67% of SC, 60% of OBC,** and 56% of General category students opting for them. **Private colleges were least preferred by ST students (9%)** and **most by General category students (17%)**. 22% of the General category students remained undecided, the highest across all groups. Overall, the trends suggest that students from marginalised communities (SC/ST) showed a marginally higher inclination towards government colleges, likely due to cost considerations and reservation benefits.

Fig. 6.3.5.1: College Preferences across Social Categories



Sample Size - General: 7,135; OBC: 6,782; SC: 2,827; ST: 4,495

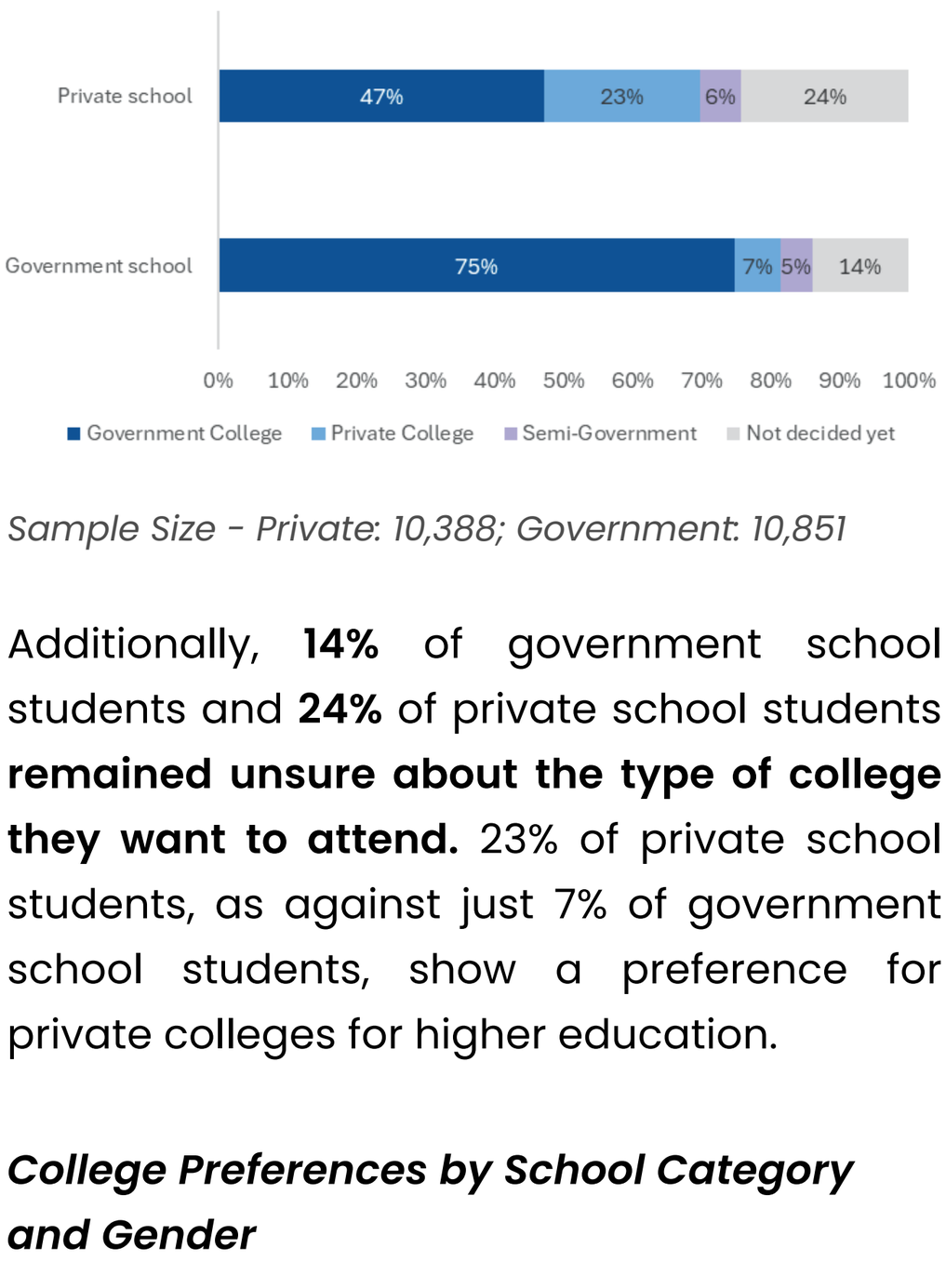
6.3.6 College Preferences across School Categories and Grades

A. College Preferences across School Categories

About **75%** of the students currently enrolled in government schools preferred a government college for higher studies, as compared to **47% of private school students** who preferred a government college for higher studies. It hints towards a **potential bias or inclination students may have toward colleges that align with the type of secondary school they currently attend.**

Career Planning and Awareness Session in Odisha

Fig. 6.3.6.1: College Preferences across School Categories



Sample Size - Private: 10,388; Government: 10,851

Additionally, **14%** of government school students and **24%** of private school students **remained unsure about the type of college they want to attend.** 23% of private school students, as against just 7% of government school students, show a preference for private colleges for higher education.

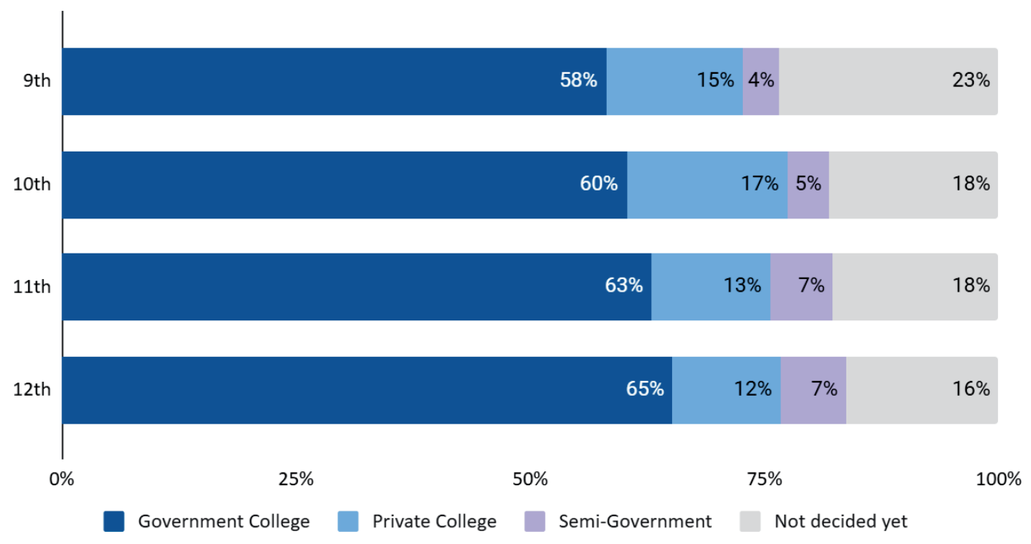
College Preferences by School Category and Gender

A similar pattern emerged in the analysis of college preference by school type and gender (Annexure 2, Fig. A.2.6).

B. College Preferences across Grades

The grade-wise data shows a consistently **strong preference for government colleges across all grades, peaking at 65% in Grade 12th.** Preference for private and semi-government colleges remains low across all grades. Notably, the percentage of students who were undecided about their college preference was high for students in Grade 9th at 23% and decreased to 16% in Grade 12th, suggesting that students become more decisive about their college choices as they progress to higher grades. It also **clearly shows that as students become more decisive in the higher grades, they still tend to favour government colleges.**

Fig. 6.3.6.2: College Preferences across Grades



Sample Size - 9th: 5,386; 10th: 5,393; 11th: 5,815; 12th: 4,645

Students being oriented on the questionnaire for Bharat Career Aspirations Study in Gujarat

6.4 Knowledge of Course-related Expenses among Students

As the questionnaire used in the study focussed on students' aspirations regarding the specific course they wanted to pursue and the type of college they wanted to join, it also measured their awareness of the minimum expenditure required to enroll in the desired course and college. Such awareness is critical because knowing the minimum expenditure[5] needed in advance streamlines decision-making, enables early financial planning, and reduces the likelihood of dropouts due to unexpected costs. By understanding minimum expenses, students can align their aspirations with financially viable options and plan accordingly. The following analysis examines how awareness of the minimum expenditure required to pursue the desired course varies across genders, grade levels, school types, and geographic locations.

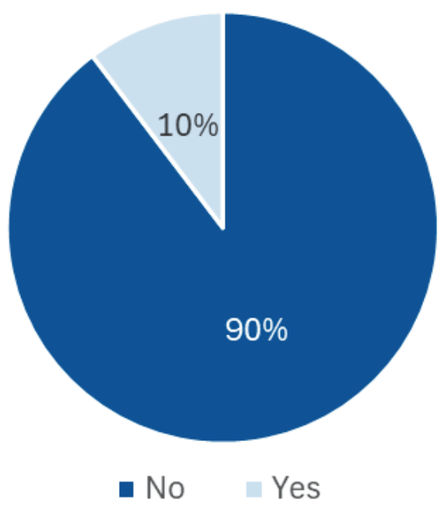
Snapshot of students from Banda, Uttar Pradesh, who participated in the Bharat Career Aspirations Study

[5]For the purpose of the study, minimum expenditure is defined as the essential, non-negotiable costs for tuition, registration, examination fees, and basic textbooks, to pursue the desired selected course.

6.4.1 Knowledge of Course-related Expenses (Overall)

90% of students were unaware of the expenses associated with the courses they intended to pursue at the desired college. This figure of 90% includes all students who had selected their aspired course and college but answered “no” when asked if they were aware of the minimum expenditure. It also includes students who did not choose any college or course, as by default, they were considered unaware of the minimum expenses. Other sections of 6.4 also report the percentages of students aware of the minimum expenditure, by using a similar approach.

Fig. 6.4.1.1: Knowledge of Course-related Expenses (Overall)



Sample Size: 21,239

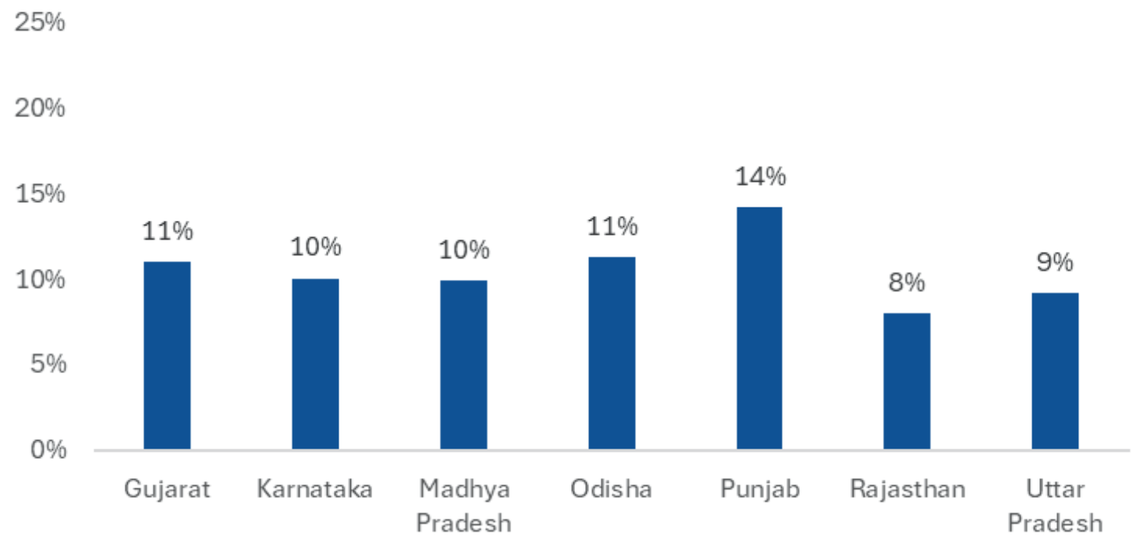
This widespread unawareness reflected a lack of proper financial planning, which could result in increased dropouts or the selection of courses that don’t align with students’ aspirations.

Tripathi (2024) also highlights how students and their families often underestimate the total costs involved in higher education, overlooking expenses such as living costs, travel, and miscellaneous expenditures. This lack of comprehensive financial planning often leads to unforeseen financial burdens and in some cases, results in students dropping out. EdexLive Desk (2023) also reports that financial constraints are among the most common reasons for college dropouts in India.

6.4.2 Knowledge of Course-related Expenses across States

Overall, awareness levels among students about the minimum expenditure required to pursue a desired course remain low across all states. With percentages ranging only between 8% and 14%, the data shows a consistent pattern of limited financial awareness, regardless of region.

Fig. 6.4.2.1: Knowledge of Course-related Expenses across States



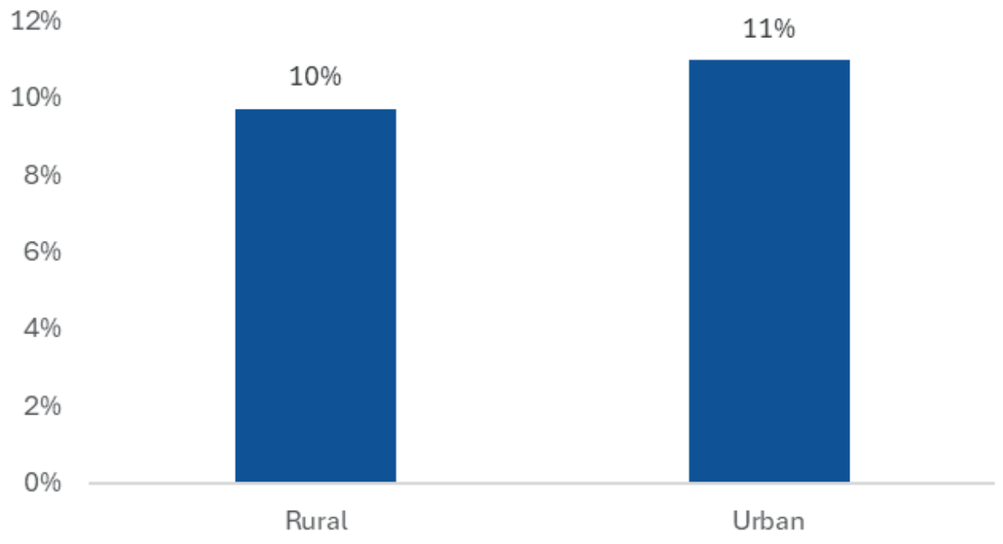
Sample Size - Gujarat: 3,533; Karnataka: 2,980; Madhya Pradesh: 3,096; Odisha: 3,387; Punjab: 1,979; Rajasthan: 3,050; Uttar Pradesh: 3,214

Among all the states, students from Punjab demonstrated relatively higher awareness, with 14% knowing the expenditure required for their preferred course, followed by Odisha and Gujarat at 11%. In contrast, only 9% and 8% of participants from Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, respectively, were aware of the associated costs, indicating low awareness levels.

6.4.3 Knowledge of Course-related Expenses across Urban and Rural Districts

Nearly equal proportions of urban (11%) and rural (10%) students had knowledge about the minimum expenses required for pursuing the aspired course from the desired college.

Fig. 6.4.3.1: Knowledge of Course-related Expenses across Rural and Urban districts



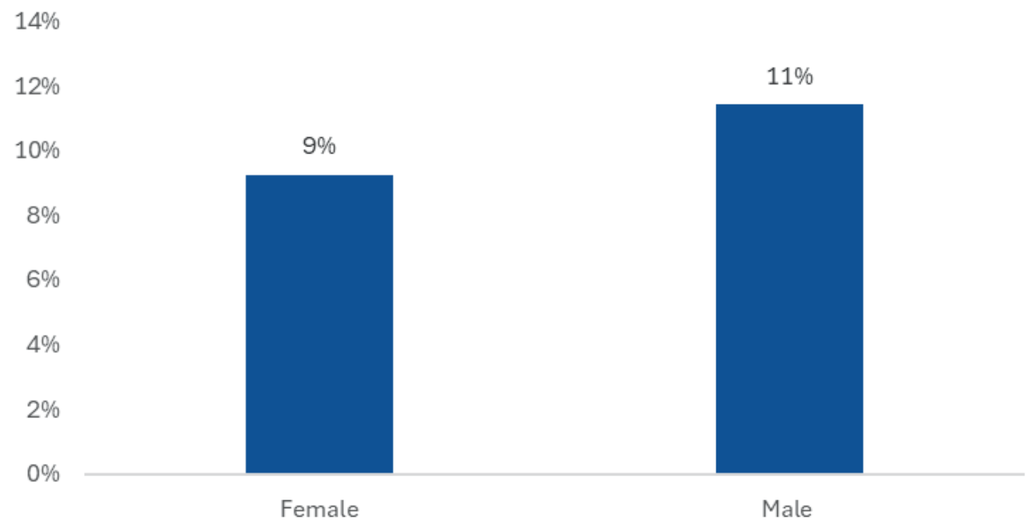
Sample Size - Urban: 10,180; Rural: 11,059

6.4.4 Knowledge of Course-related Expenses across Genders

A nearly equal proportion of male participants (11%) were aware of the minimum expenses required to pursue the desired course from the aspired type of college, as compared to 9% of the total female participants.

Students in Bangalore being briefed on the process of Bharat Career Aspirations Study

Fig. 6.4.4.1: Knowledge of Course-related Expenses across Genders

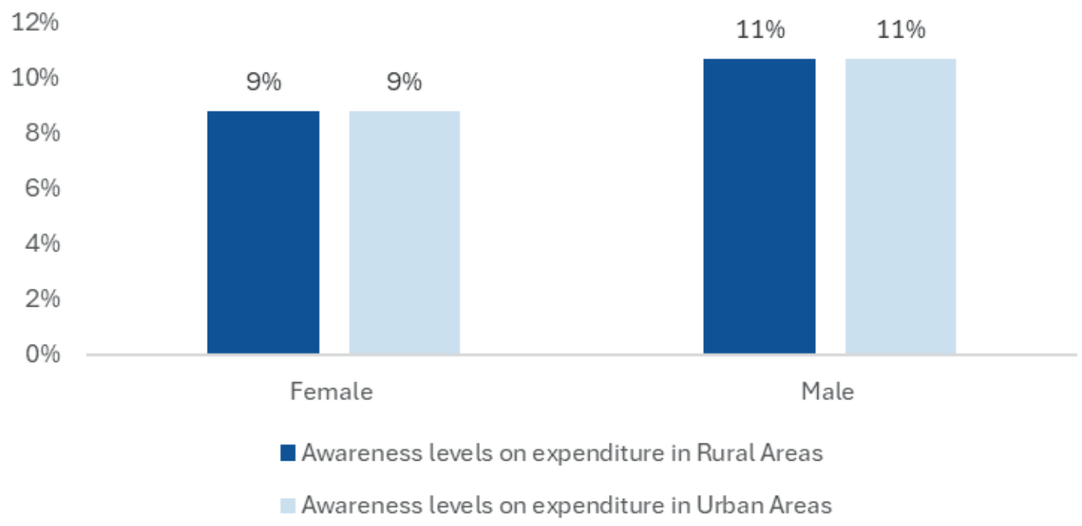


Sample Size - Females: 10,749; Males: 10,490

A. Knowledge of Course-related Expenses by Genders and Type of District

In rural areas, the proportion of female participants who were aware of the minimum expenditure was equal to that in urban districts. The same holds true for male participants as well.

Fig. 6.4.4.2: Knowledge of Course-related Expenses by Gender and Type of District

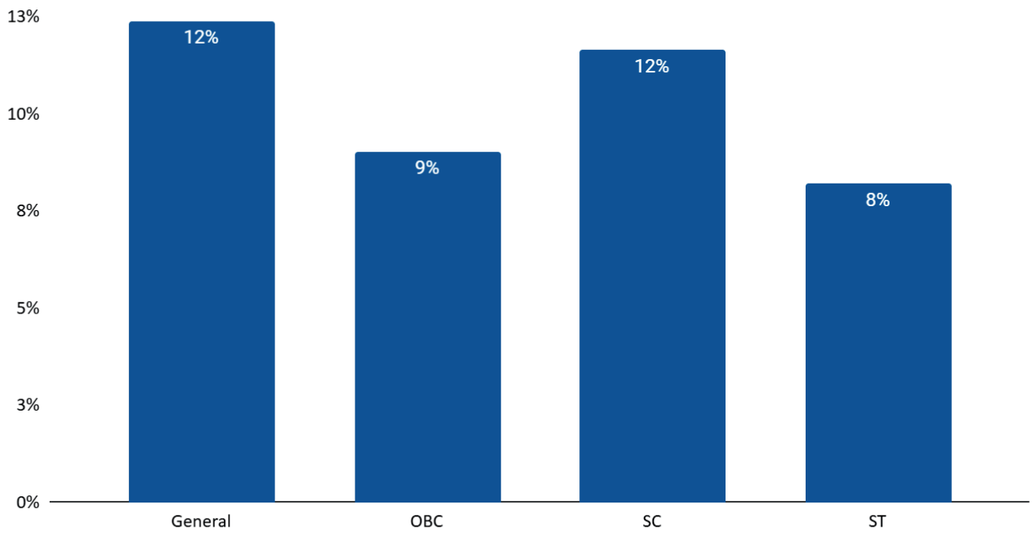


Sample Size - Rural Females: 5,651; Rural Males: 5,408; Urban Females: 5,098; Urban Males: 5,082

6.4.5 Knowledge of Course-related Expenses across Social Categories

Awareness of course-related expenses remained low across all social categories, with only 12% of students from the General and SC categories reporting knowledge in this area. This awareness dropped further among OBC (9%) and ST (8%) students. The data highlights a clear information gap, particularly among students from OBC and ST categories, which may hinder their ability to plan effectively for higher education.

Fig. 6.4.5.1: Knowledge of Course-related Expenses across Social Categories



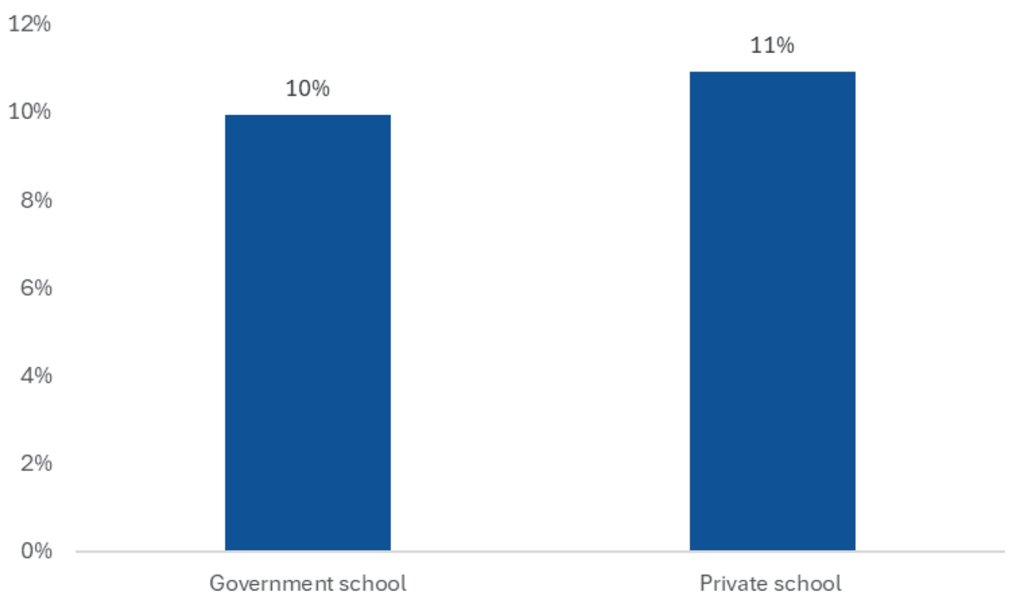
Sample Size - General: 7,135; OBC: 6,782; SC: 2,827; ST: 4,495

6.4.6 Knowledge of Course-related Expenses across Types of Schools and Grades

A. Knowledge of Course-related Expenses across Types of Schools

Participant's clarity on the minimum expenditure required for the course they were willing to pursue was almost equal across government (10%) and private schools (11%).

Fig. 6.4.6.1: Knowledge of Course-related Expenses across Types of Schools



Sample Size - Private: 10,388; Government: 10,851

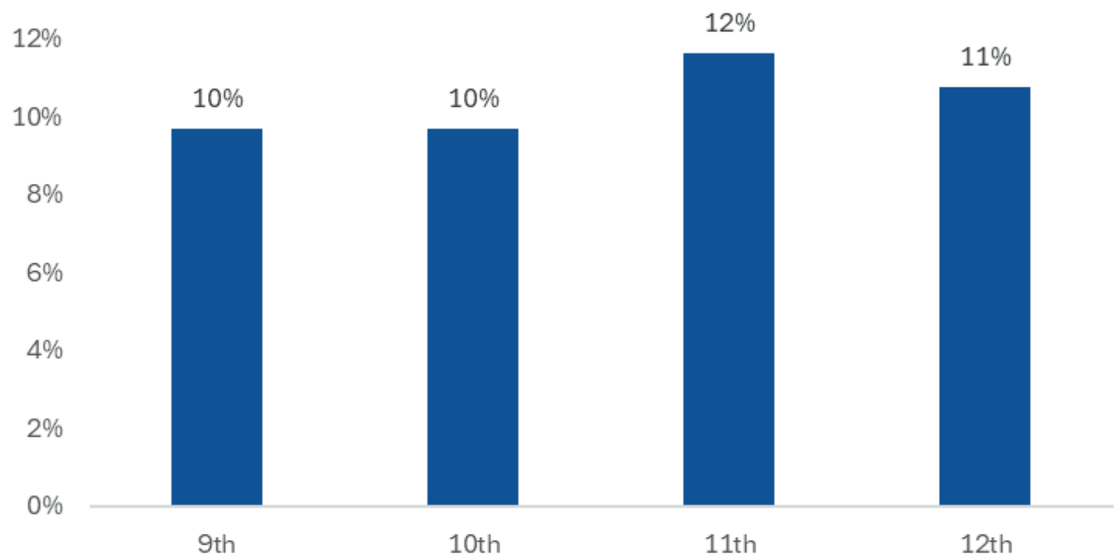
Knowledge of Course-related Expenses by School Type and Gender

Analysis of awareness of course-related expenditure by school type and gender (Annexure 2, Fig. A.2.7) revealed that male students in government schools reported having the highest awareness levels (12%), while it was lowest among female students in government schools (8%).

B. Knowledge of Course-related Expenses across Grades

Awareness of the minimum expenditure required for courses increased slightly from Grade 9th (9%) to Grade 10th (10%), peaked in Grade 11th (12%), and then declined in Grade 12th (11%).

Fig. 6.4.6.2: Knowledge of Course-related Expenses across Grades



Sample Size - 9th: 5,386; 10th: 5,393; 11th: 5,815; 12th: 4,645

6.5 Career Backup Planning among Students

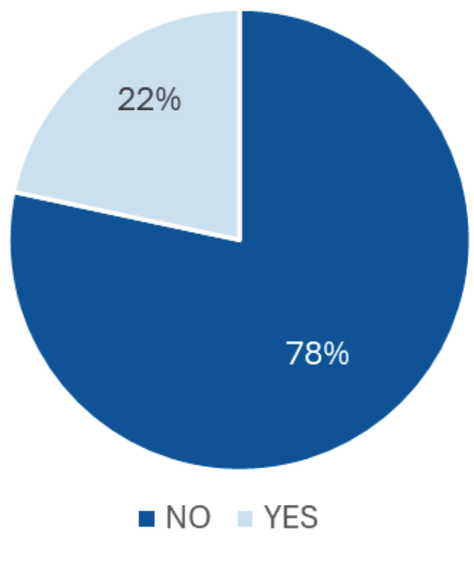
Career backup planning is essential for school students as it helps them prepare for uncertainties in their primary career path, such as increasing competition, limited seats, financial constraints, or shifting personal interests. Having a backup career plan brings flexibility, and builds resilience, ensuring students stay focused on long-term goals even if their first career choice doesn't materialise. This section analyses students' awareness of having a career backup plan and how it varies across states, geographical regions, genders, school categories, and grades.

6.5.1 Career Backup Plan (Overall)

When students were asked whether they had an alternative career plan in case their primary career did not materialise, 78% of students marked Yes, while 22% marked No.

This indicates a considerable gap in career preparedness and highlights the need for guidance on contingency planning.

Fig. 6.5.1.1: Awareness of Career Backup Plan (Overall)



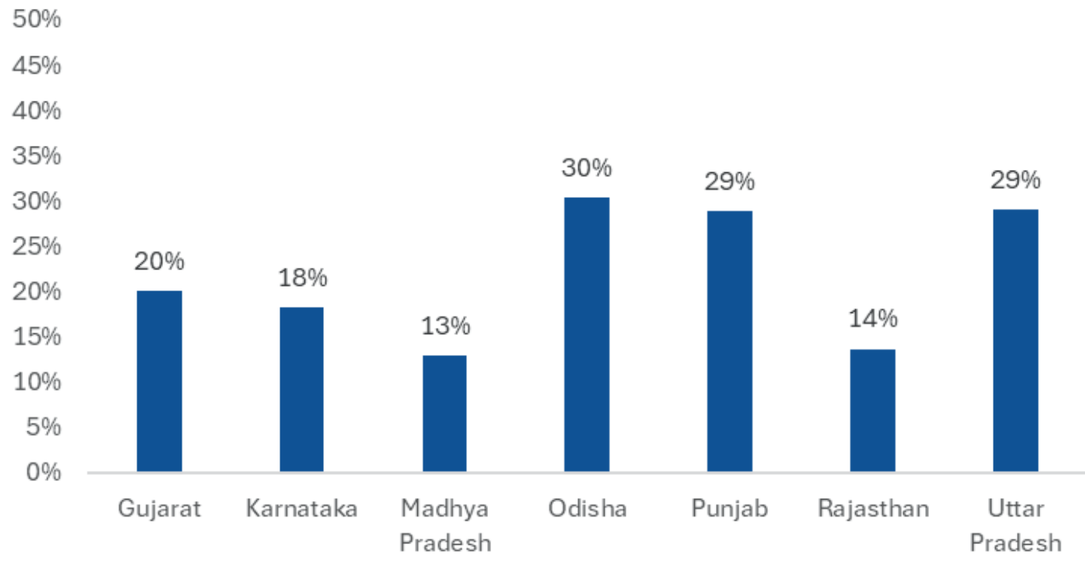
Sample Size: 21,239

Without alternative options, these students may face increased uncertainty and stress-induced anxiety if their primary career choices do not materialise. Chen and Zeng (2021) found that having well-developed career plans enables students to experience lower levels of anxiety in the face of uncertainty.

6.5.2 Career Backup Planning across States

The proportion of participants having career backup plans varies from state to state. In Odisha, about 30% of participants had a career backup plan. Similar levels of awareness were found in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, where about 29% of participants had a career backup plan. In contrast, a massive 87% and 86% of participants didn't have such alternative career plans in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, respectively. Similarly, just 20% of students in Gujarat and 18% in Karnataka reported having a backup career plan.

Fig. 6.5.2.1: Career Backup Planning across States

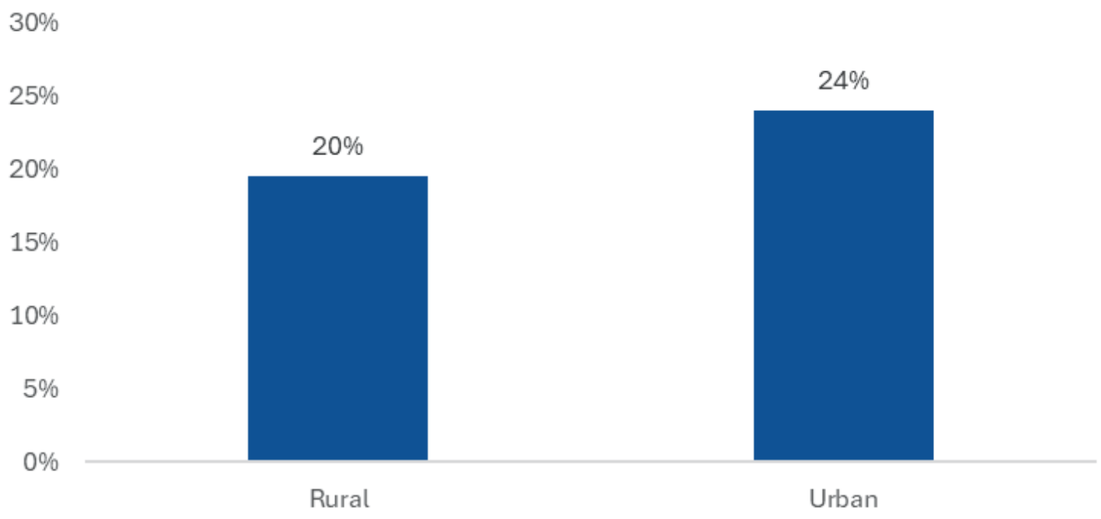


Sample Size - Gujarat: 3,533; Karnataka: 2,980; Madhya Pradesh: 3,096; Odisha: 3,387; Punjab: 1,979; Rajasthan: 3,050; Uttar Pradesh: 3,214

6.5.3 Career Backup Planning across Rural and Urban Districts

24% of urban participants (24%) had a career backup plan as compared to their rural counterparts (20%).

Fig. 6.5.3.1: Career Backup Planning across Rural and Urban Districts

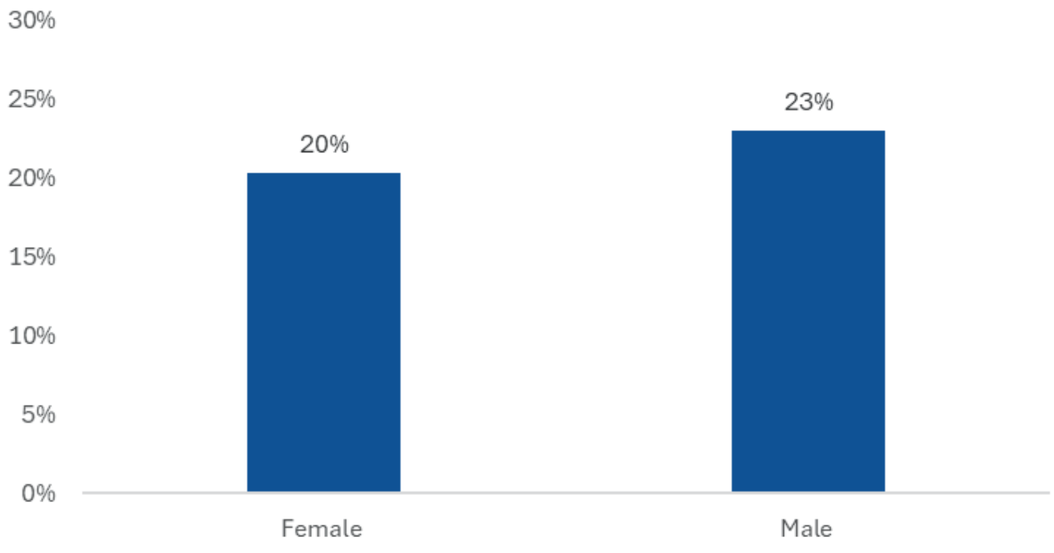


Sample Size - Urban: 10,180; Rural: 11,059

6.5.4 Career Backup Planning by Gender

23% of the male participants reported having a career backup plan for themselves, while only 20% of female participants reported so.

Fig. 6.5.4.1: Career Backup Planning by Gender

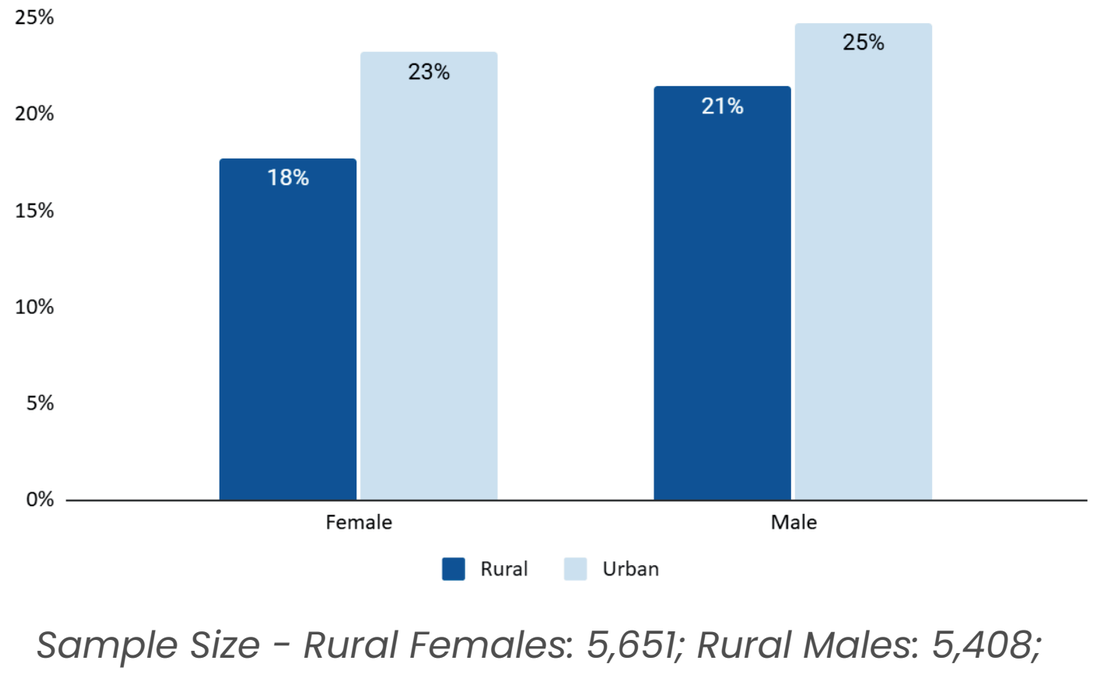


Sample Size - Females: 10,749; Males: 10,490

A. Career Backup Planning by Gender and Type of District

Career backup planning remained marginally higher among urban students than rural counterparts across both genders. 25% of urban male students had a career backup plan, followed by 23% of urban females. Among rural students, 21% of males and 18% of females had a career backup plan.

Fig. 6.5.4.2: Career Backup Planning by Gender and District

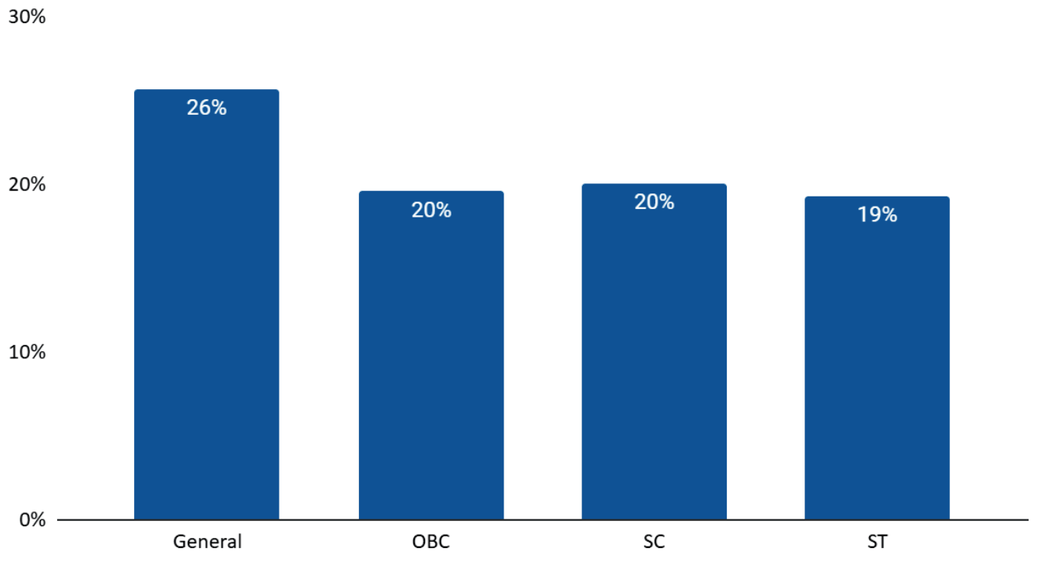


Sample Size - Rural Females: 5,651; Rural Males: 5,408; Urban Females: 5,098; Urban Males: 5,082

6.5.5 Career Backup Planning across Social Categories

26% of General category students had a career backup plan, the highest among all other categories. In comparison, 20% of both OBC and SC category students and 19% of ST category students reported the same. This suggests a a marginal gap in backup planning between General category students and those from marginalised communities.

Fig. 6.5.5.1: Career Backup Planning across Social Categories



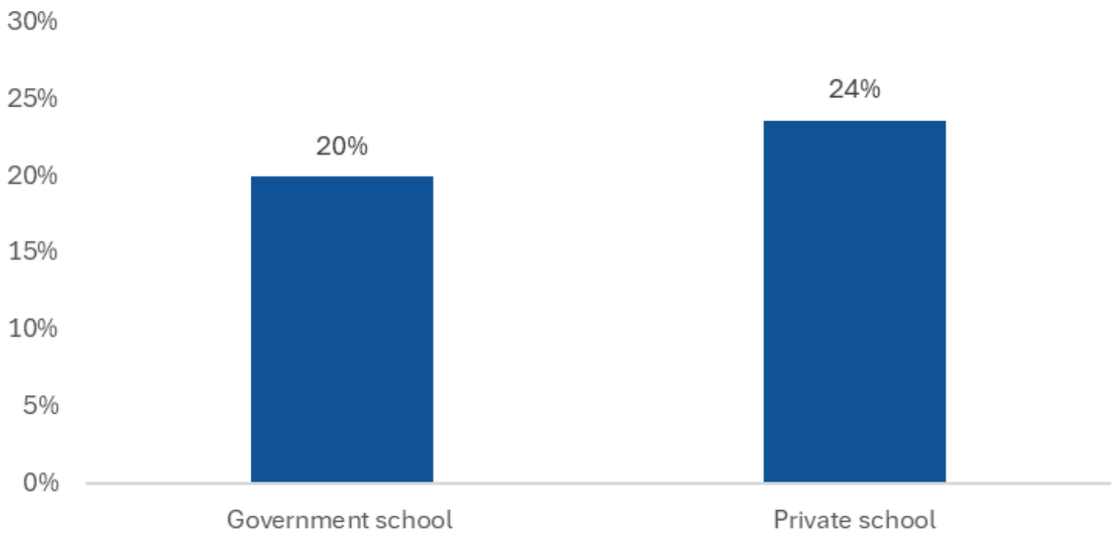
Sample Size - General: 7,135; OBC: 6,782; SC: 2,827; ST: 4,495

6.5.6 Career Backup Planning across School Categories and Grades

A. Career Backup Planning across School Categories

A slightly higher number of students from private schools (24%) reported having a career backup plan, compared to those from government schools (20%).

Fig. 6.5.6.1: Career Backup Planning across School Categories



Sample Size - Private: 10,388; Government: 10,851

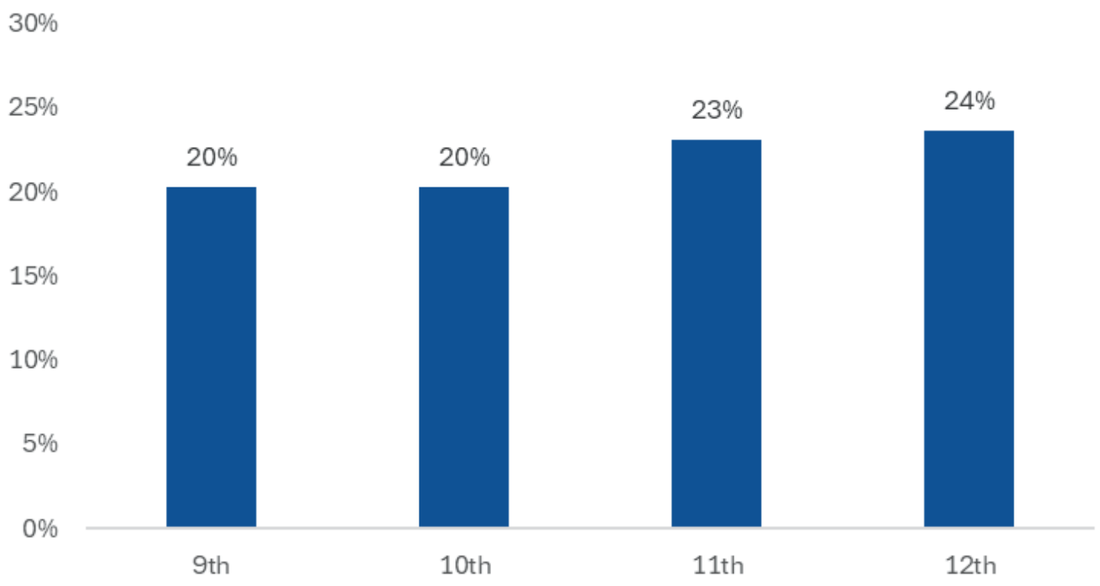
Career Backup Planning by School Category and Gender

Analysis of backup planning by school type and gender (Annexure 2, Fig. A.2.8) highlighted that backup planning was highest among male students in private schools (25%).

B. Career Backup Planning across Grades

Across different grades, 20% of students in Grade 9th reported having a career backup plan. This figure remained consistent in Grade 10th at 20%, increased to 23% in Grade 11th, and peaked at 24% in Grade 12th.

Fig. 6.5.6.2 Career Backup Planning across Grades



Sample Size - 9th: 5,386; 10th: 5,393; 11th: 5,815; 12th: 4,645

Career guidance and awareness session with students in Gujarat

7

Stakeholders Influencing Career Planning and Access to Professional Career Counselling

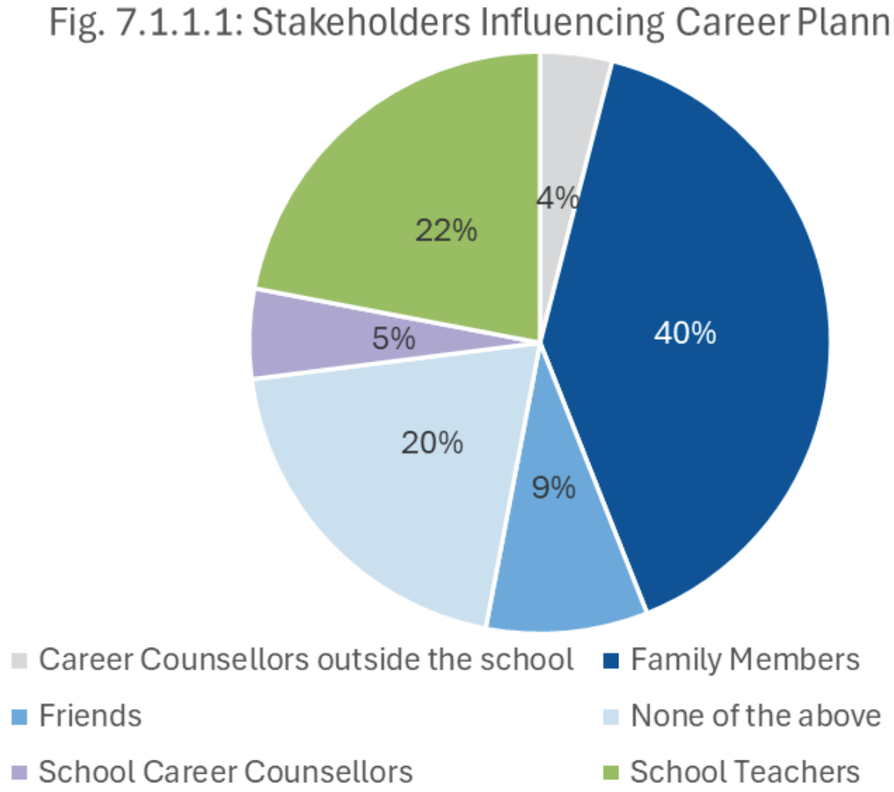
7.1 Stakeholders Influencing Career Planning

A diverse set of stakeholders, such as family members, peer groups, teachers, and career counsellors, plays a critical role in shaping career decision-making and choices among students, thereby significantly impacting their career paths. In this section, we aim to understand the extent to which each of the different stakeholders influences students' career aspirations and choices and how it varies across geographical location, gender, school category, and grades.

7.1.1 Stakeholders Influencing Career Planning (Overall)

Around **40% of participants reported that their families had the greatest influence on their career decision-making**. Among other sources, teachers were cited by 22% of the participants, followed by friends (9%) and school-based career counsellors (5%). Only 4% were influenced by external career counsellors, while a significant 20% stated they were not influenced by any of these sources.

Fig. 7.1.1.1: Stakeholders Influencing Career Planning (Overall)



Sample Size: 21,239

This implies that family members and teachers were the primary influencers of students' career decisions. On the other hand, professional sources of career guidance, including school and external career counsellors, collectively influenced only 9% of students.

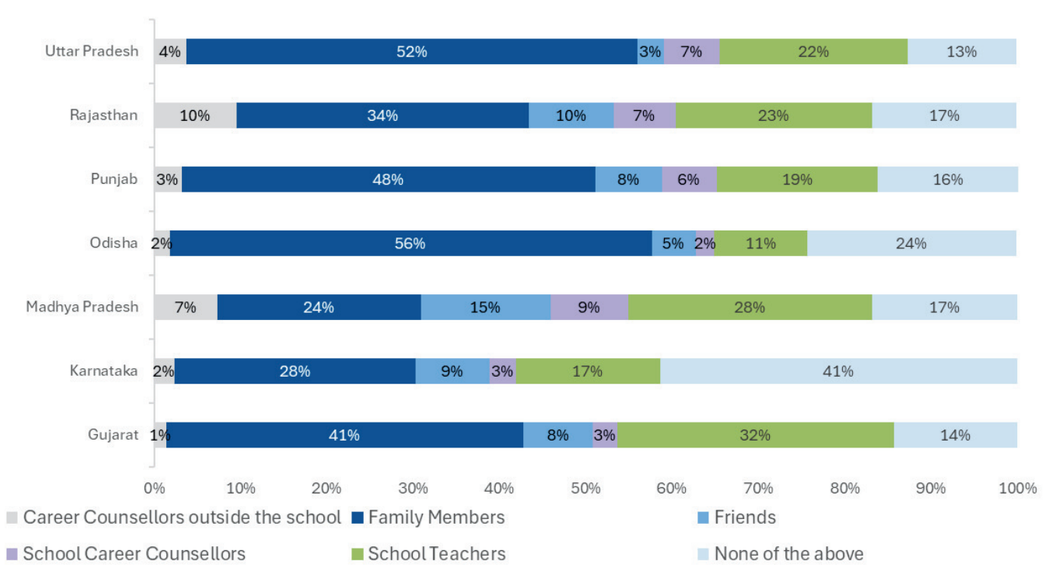
Amin (2023) underscores that in the absence of structured career counselling services, students often depend on family and societal expectations, which may not align with their personal interests or aptitudes. This strongly reflects that there is a lack of institutionalised career counselling that can ensure students receive informed, unbiased, and holistic support in their career planning journey.

7.1.2 Stakeholders Influencing Career Planning across States

The data highlights a concerning trend that in all states, **students were primarily influenced by non-professional sources, such as family members and friends, in making career-related decisions**. In Odisha (56%), Uttar Pradesh (52%), and Punjab (48%), over half of the students relied on family members for guidance. A significant 20-30% of students were also guided by school teachers in making career-related decisions. In contrast, professional stakeholders like career counsellors outside school and school-based counsellors had minimal influence, hardly exceeding 10% in any state.

This limits students' exposure to informed and objective career advice, especially in critical decision-making phases of their lives.

Fig. 7.1.2.1: Stakeholders Influencing Career Planning across States



Sample Size - Gujarat: 3,533; Karnataka: 2,980; Madhya Pradesh: 3,096; Odisha: 3,387; Punjab: 1,979; Rajasthan: 3,050; Uttar Pradesh: 3,214

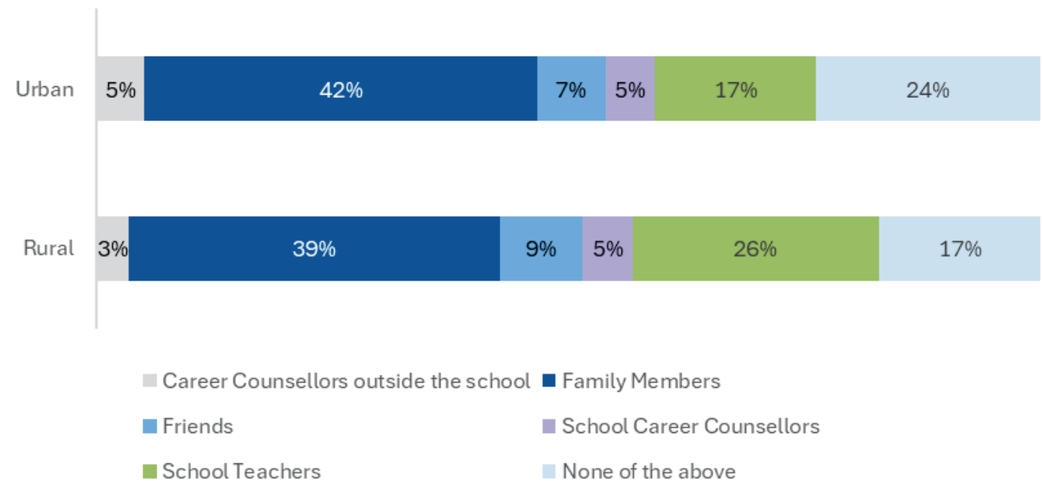
7.1.3 Stakeholders Influencing Career Planning across Urban and Rural Districts

Analysis of stakeholders influencing career planning across rural and urban districts presents three key insights. **Family members emerged as the most significant influence in both urban (42%) and rural (39%) districts.**

Additionally, professional career counsellors, both outside the school and within, were among the least influential stakeholders.

Only 5% of urban students and 3% of rural students reported being guided by external career counsellors, while school career counsellors influenced just 5% in both areas. Also, school teachers played a stronger role in rural areas (26%) compared to urban areas (17%).

Fig. 7.1.3.1: Stakeholders Influencing Career Planning across Rural and Urban Districts

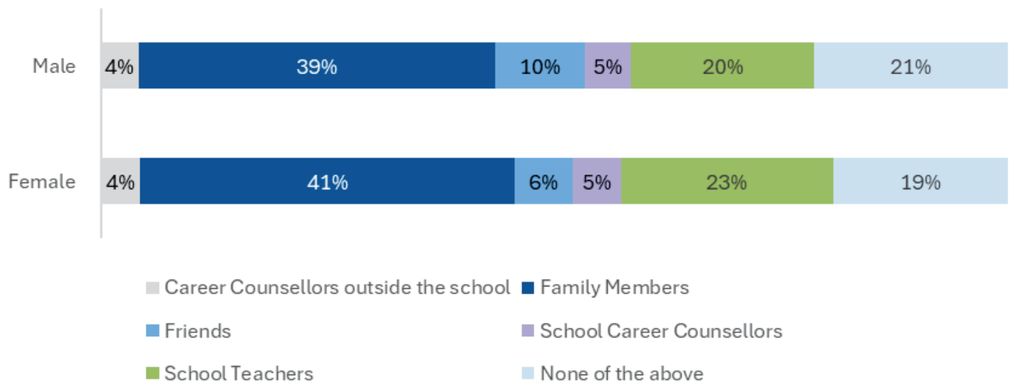


Sample Size - Urban: 10,180; Rural: 11,059

7.1.4 Stakeholders Influencing Career Planning across Genders

Among male students, 39% were influenced by their family members. The other 20% were influenced by their school teachers, 10% by their friends, and 5% by career counsellors in school. **More female participants were influenced by their family members (41% vs. 39%) as well as school teachers (23% vs. 20%), as compared to the male students**. Overall, 9% of both male and female participants reported being influenced by professional career counsellors.

Fig. 7.1.4.1: Stakeholders Influencing Career Planning (Gender-wise)



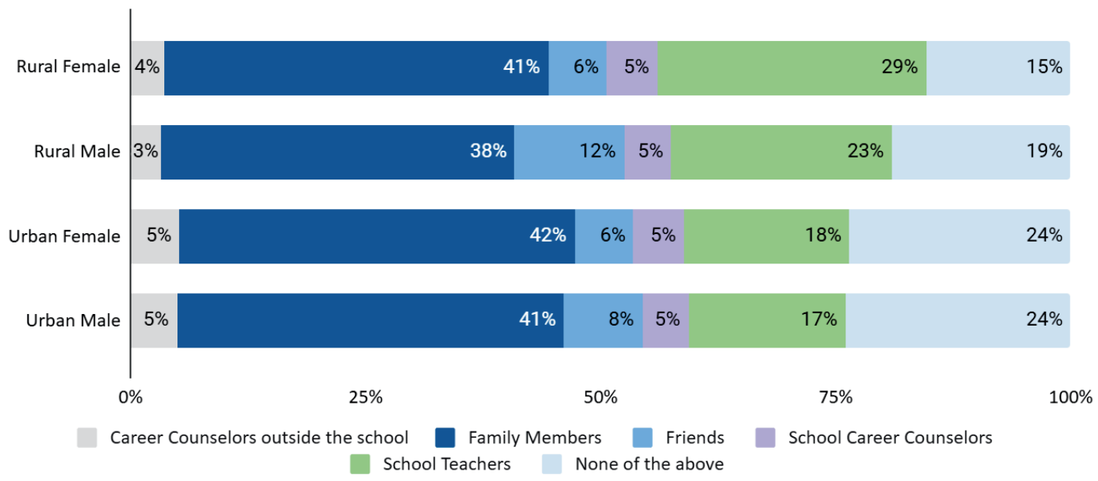
Sample Size - Females: 10,749; Males: 10,490

A. Stakeholders Influencing Career Planning by Gender and Type of District

Family members played the most influential role in students' career planning across all groups. School teachers had more influence in rural areas for both genders (29% for females, 23% for males) than in urban areas (18% for females, 17% for males).

Across all groups, career counsellors, both inside and outside school, had minimal influence overall.

Fig: 7.1.4.2: Stakeholders Influencing Career Planning by Gender and Type of District



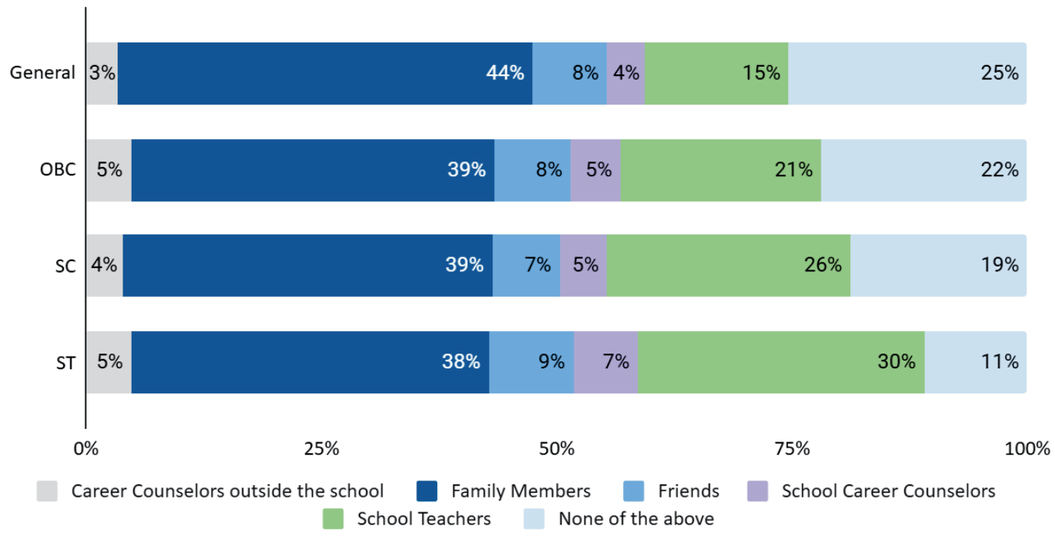
Sample Size - Rural Females: 5,651; Rural Males: 5,408; Urban Females: 5,098; Urban Males: 5,082

7.1.5 Stakeholders Influencing Career Planning across Social Categories

Family members were the most influential stakeholders in career planning across all social categories, with their influence highest among General category students (44%), followed by SC (39%), OBC (39%), and ST (38%).

However, school teachers played a more prominent role for marginalised groups, especially ST category students, where 30% cited them as key influencers, compared to only 15% among General category students. Interestingly, General category students had the highest proportion of students (25%) who selected "none of the above,".

Fig. 7.1.5.1: Stakeholders Influencing Career Planning by Social Category



Sample Size - General: 7,135; OBC: 6,782; SC: 2,827; ST: 4,495

7.1.6 Stakeholders Influencing Career Planning across School Types and Grades

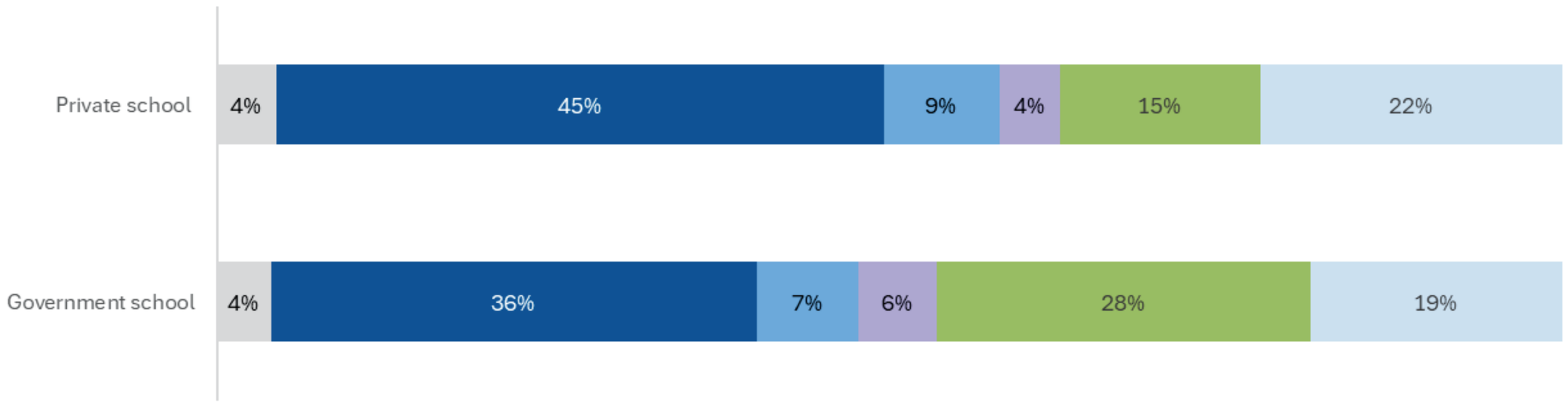
A. Stakeholders Influencing Career Planning by School Type

Among participants from private schools, 45% reported family members as the biggest career influencers, followed by 22% who did not choose any, and 15% who were influenced the most by their teachers. 8% of participants reported having been influenced by career counsellors from the school and counsellors outside the school.

Among government school participants, 36% reported their family members as the biggest career influencers, followed by 19% not choosing any stakeholder influencing their career planning, and 28% who were influenced the most by their teachers. 10% of participants reported being influenced by career counsellors from the school and counsellors outside the school. This suggests that students from government schools are more likely to rely on their school teachers for career guidance compared to those from private schools.

Students being oriented in Gujarat for the purpose of Bharat Career Aspirations Study

Fig. 7.1.6.1: Stakeholders Influencing Career Planning across School Type



Sample Size - Private: 10,388; Government: 10,851

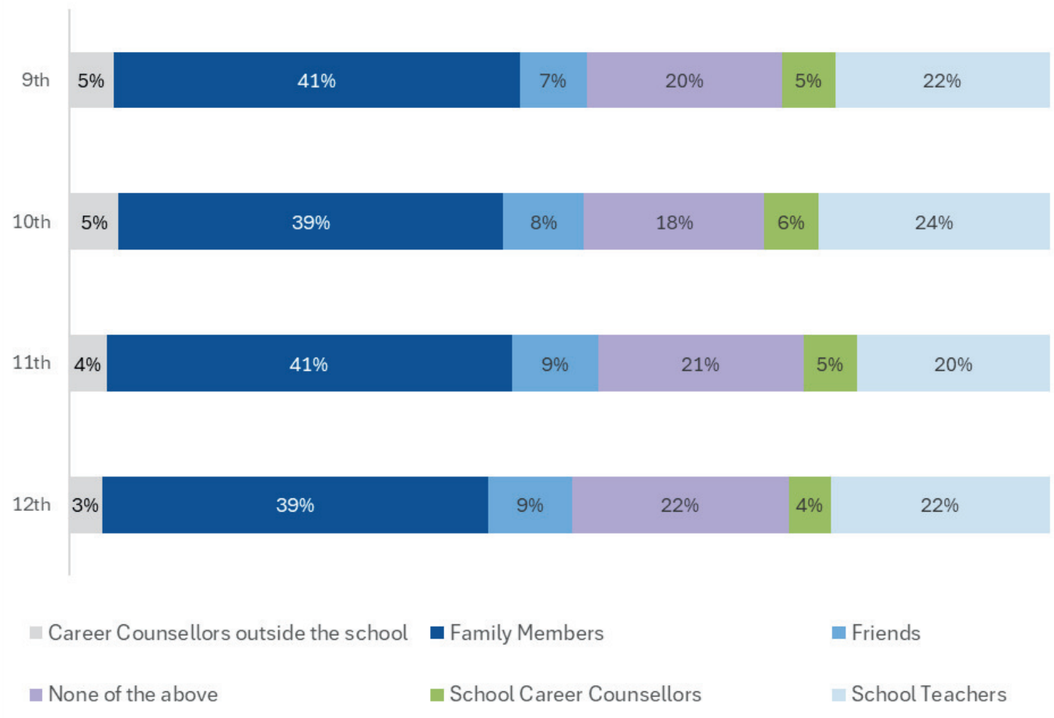
Stakeholders Influencing Career Planning by School Type and Gender

Analysis by school type and gender suggested that there is no significant difference across the stakeholders influencing career planning for male and female students, both in the case of government schools as well as private schools (Annexure 2, Fig. A.2.9).

B. Stakeholders Influencing Career Planning by Grade

Across Grades (9th to 12th), career planning influencers show consistent patterns, with family members being the most influential, ranging between 39% and 41%. Additionally, the influence of friends, career counsellors, and school-based counsellors remains relatively similar throughout.

Fig. 7.1.6.2: Stakeholders Influencing Career Planning across Grades



Sample Size - 9th: 5,386; 10th: 5,393; 11th: 5,815; 12th: 4,645

However, some difference is observed in the influence of school teachers, which is highest in Grade 10th at 24% and falls to 20% in Grade 11th. This suggests that while most stakeholder influence remains steady, the role of school teachers shows a modest fluctuation.

7.2 Access to Professional Career Counselling

Professional career counselling involves one-on-one sessions of students with trained professionals who help them navigate the complexities of career choices. It plays a crucial role in guiding students in career-related decision-making.

It not only helps them find their strengths, weaknesses, interests, and aptitudes but also provides them with structured information on various career paths and associated skills and educational requirements. The students are provided with tailored guidance on goal setting, overcoming fears and challenges, and emotional support for a well-rounded approach to life planning. **This structured approach to career guidance helps reduce confusion among students, builds their confidence, and promotes better academic and professional outcomes (Alnajjar & Abou Hashish, 2024).**

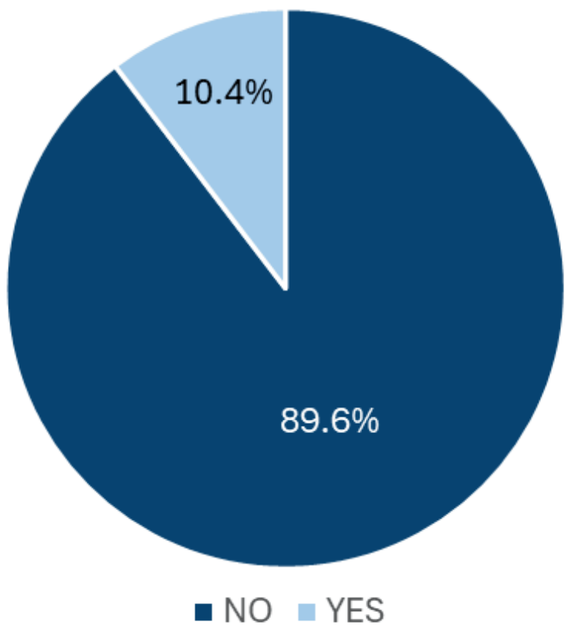
In the rapidly evolving job market, career guidance also has the potential to lead to benefits to GDP through increasing skills utilisation, improving the efficiency of education funding, lowering crime rates, improving health, increasing tax receipts, and improving workplace efficiency (Hughes, 2004).

In this section, we aim to understand the access to professional career counselling, defined in our study as counselling and guidance provided by both school-based and external career counsellors, among participants from different socio-economic and geographical backgrounds.

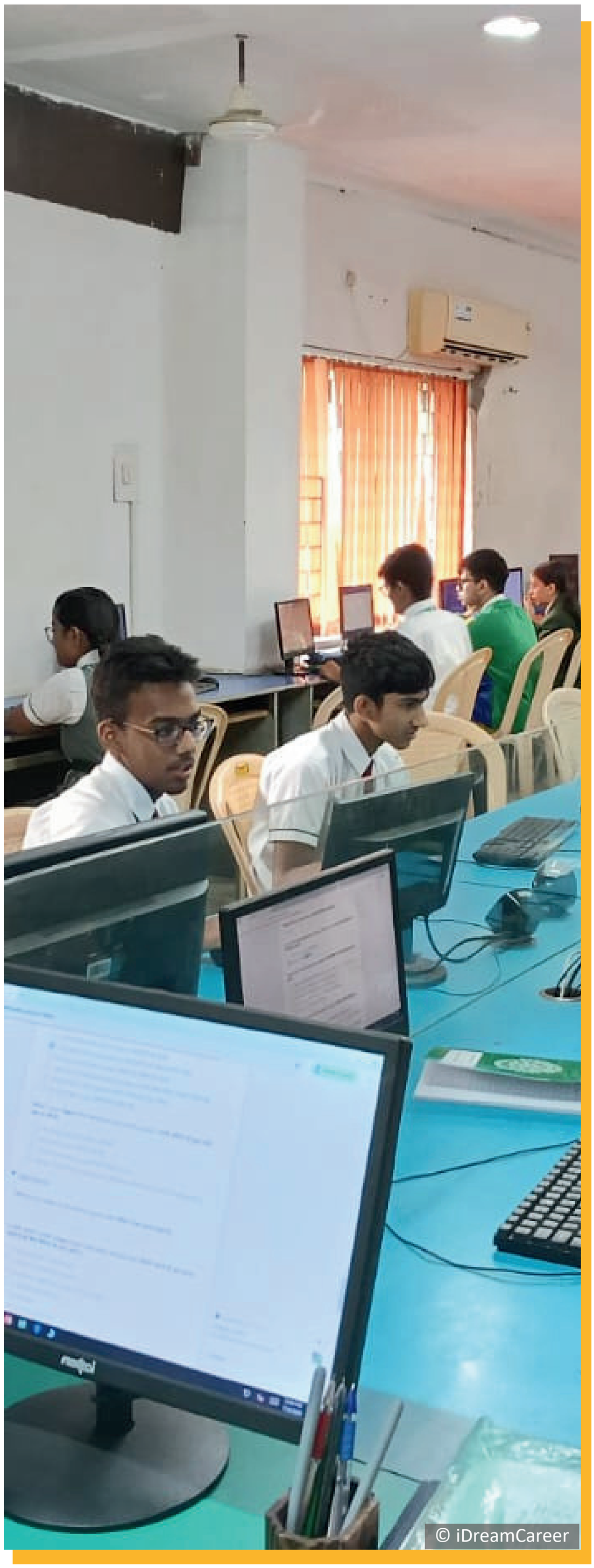
7.2.1 Access to Professional Career Counselling (Overall)

Overall, **only 10.4% of students indicated that they received professional career counselling from school counsellors or through external professional sources**. A striking 89.6% of respondents reported not having access to any kind of professional career counselling. This data underscores the lack of accessibility to structured career guidance and counselling among students. This contributes to uncertainty, reliance on unqualified sources, and limited awareness of alternative career paths (Akhter et al., 2021).

Fig. 7.2.1.1 Access to Professional Career Counselling (Overall)



Sample Size: 21,239



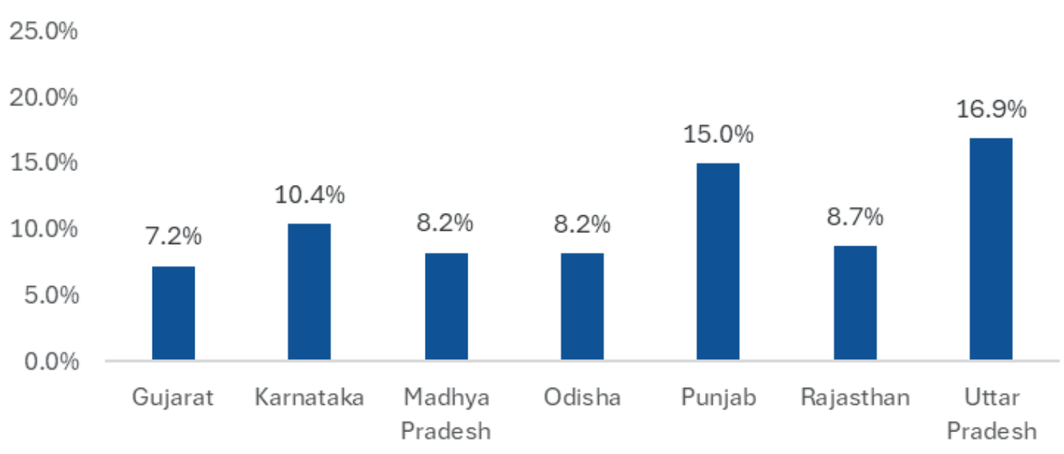
Students filling out the questionnaire as part of the BCAR Study

7.2.2 Access to Professional Career Counselling across States

The accessibility to professional career counselling services varied across states. 17% of students from Uttar Pradesh reported access to professional career counselling, which is the highest among all states, followed by students from Punjab (15%). A probable reason for comparatively better access to career counselling among students from Uttar Pradesh could be attributed to the proactive measures taken by the state government, like the implementation of large-scale platforms such as UP Pankh Portal[6], specifically to offer career guidance and counselling to government school students of secondary and senior secondary level. The state has also collaborated with various non-profit organisations and private bodies to provide career counselling programs to government school students, with a focus on rural districts.

In Punjab, there has been a trend of overseas migration largely for skill-based jobs such as those in logistics, mechanics, plumbing, etc. In consideration of this, the Government of Punjab is focusing on providing career counselling to its students (The Hindu Bureau, 2025), reflected in 15% of students reporting access to professional career counselling. Access to professional career counselling across states like Karnataka, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Rajasthan remained low at 10.4%, 7.2%, 8.2%, 8.2%, and 8.7%, respectively.

Fig. 7.2.2.1: Access to Professional Career Counselling across States

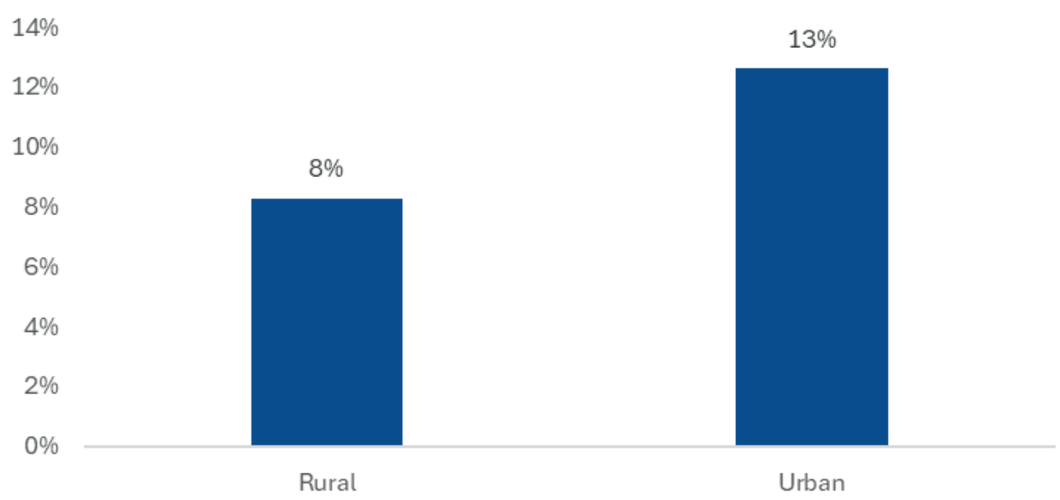


Sample Size - Gujarat: 3,533; Karnataka: 2,980; Madhya Pradesh: 3,096; Odisha: 3,387; Punjab: 1,979; Rajasthan: 3,050; Uttar Pradesh: 3,214

7.2.3 Access to Professional Career Counselling across Rural and Urban Districts

Only 8% of the participants in rural areas, in contrast with 13% of the participants in urban areas, reported having access to professional career counselling. This indicates that there is an absence of structured and professional career guidance and counselling, particularly in rural regions, that can equip students with the necessary information, resources, and support to make informed decisions about their educational and career paths. Enhancing such access can help bridge the urban-rural gap, reduce uncertainty, and empower students to pursue careers aligned with their interests and potential (Joshi et al, 2016).

Fig. 7.2.3.1: Access to Professional Career Counselling across Rural and Urban Districts



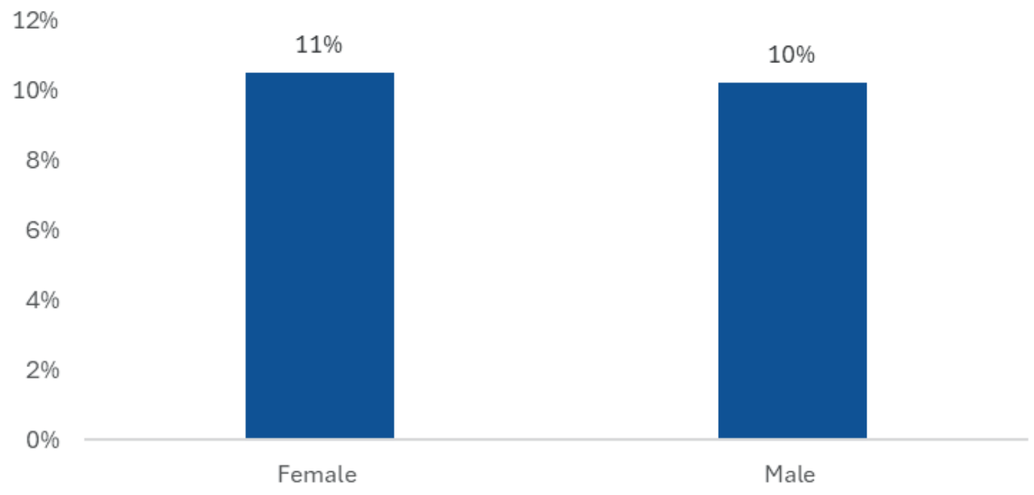
Sample Size - Urban: 10,180; Rural: 11,059

[6]The UP Pankh Portal is a comprehensive career guidance initiative launched by the Uttar Pradesh government to support students in government and government-aided schools, particularly those in classes 9 to 12. Developed in collaboration with UNICEF and iDreamCareer (iDC), the portal aims to bridge the information gap regarding career options, college admissions, scholarships, and vocational training opportunities. Since its inception, the portal has reached over 6 lakh students, providing them with resources to make informed career choices. It offers a range of features, including career assessments, information on various professions, details about colleges and entrance examinations, and guidance on scholarship opportunities. Additionally, the portal supports teachers through training programs, enabling them to assist students effectively in their career planning.

7.2.4 Access to Professional Career Counselling across Genders

Slightly more female participants (11%) had access to professional career counselling services compared to male participants (10%).

Fig. 7.2.4.1: Access to Professional Career Counselling across Genders

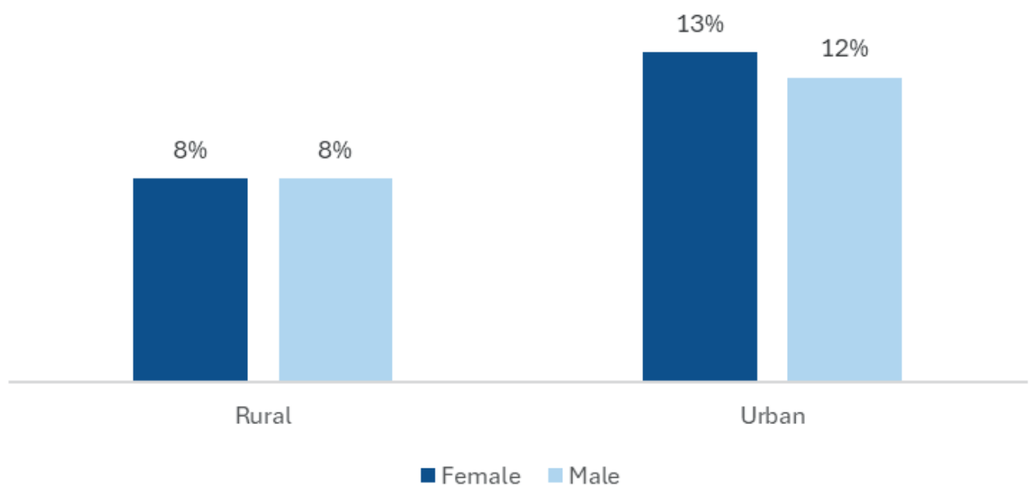


Sample Size - Females: 10,749; Males: 10,490

A. Access to Professional Career Counselling by Gender and Type of District

There is no major difference in the access to professional career counselling across genders in rural and urban areas, with both having a similar trend. In urban districts, a marginally higher percentage of female participants (13%) reported access to career counselling than male participants (12%).

Fig. 7.2.4.2: Access to Professional Career Counselling by Gender and Type of District

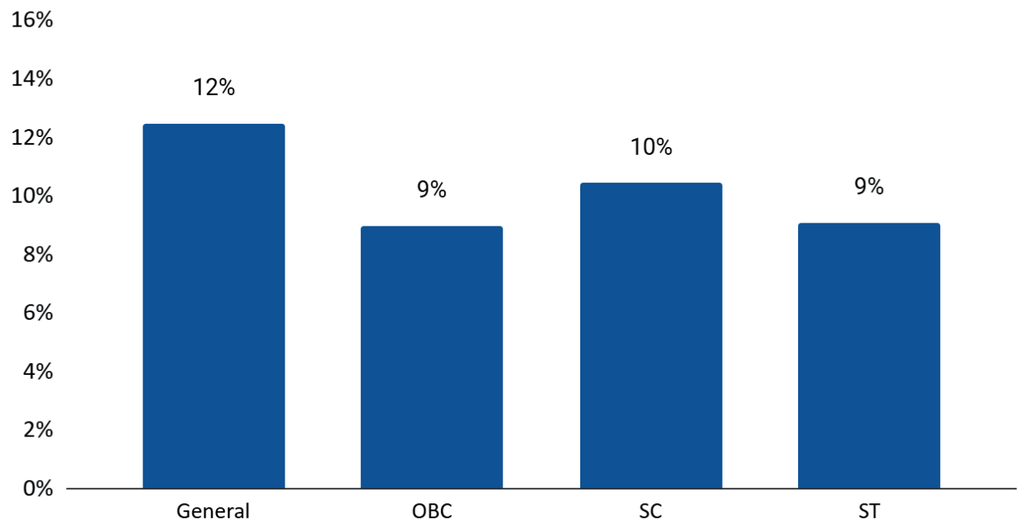


Sample Size - Rural Females: 5,651; Rural Males: 5,408; Urban Females: 5,098; Urban Males: 5,082

7.2.5 Access to Professional Career Counselling across Social Categories

Access to professional career counselling remains low overall, with 12% of General category students reporting access compared to 9% of OBC and ST category students and 10% of SC category students. While the gap is not wide, access is marginally lower for marginalised communities.

Fig. 7.2.5: Access to Professional Career Counselling across Social Categories



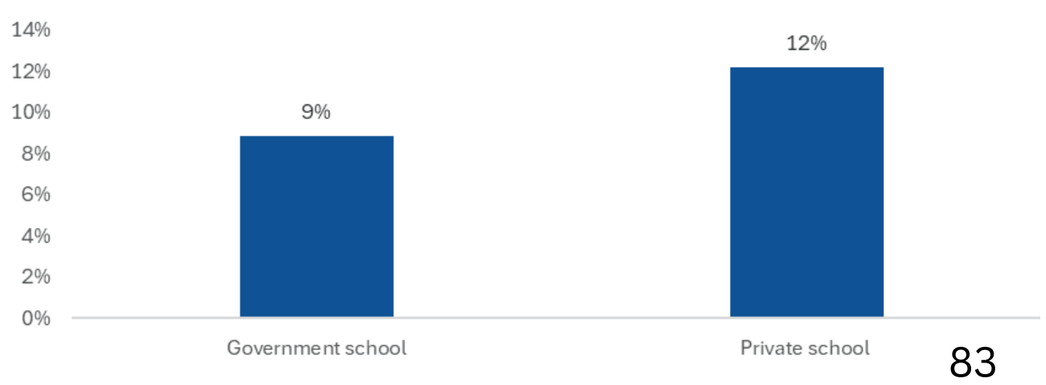
Sample Size - General: 7,135; OBC: 6,782; SC: 2,827; ST: 4,495

7.2.6 Access to Professional Career Counselling across Schools Types and Grades

A. Access to Professional Career Counselling across School Types

Access to professional career counselling is low in both types of schools. Participants from private schools (12%) had slightly better access to these services compared to those from government schools (9%). Interestingly, despite private schools generally having greater financial resources, access to professional career counselling in these schools remains limited.

Fig. 7.2.6.1: Access to Professional Career Counselling across Schools



Sample Size - Private: 10,388; Government: 10,851

Access to Professional Career Counselling by School Type and Gender

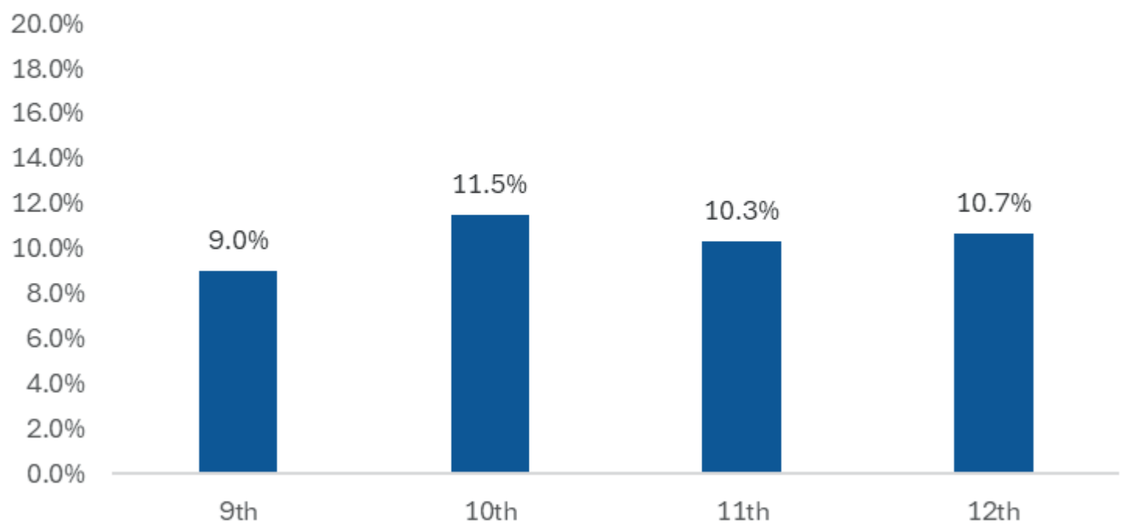
A similar pattern is observed in the case of analysis by school type and gender, with a higher percentage of both male and female students in private schools having access to professional career counselling, as compared to students in government schools (Annexure 2, Fig. A.2.10).

B. Access to Professional Career Counselling across Grades

There was a marginal increase in access to professional career counselling across grades, with 9% of 9th Grade students reporting access to counselling services. It rose to 11% in both the 10th and 12th grades, indicating that career counselling services were accessible to more students in these grades.

Interestingly, there was a slight dip in grade 11th, with only about 10% of students having access, suggesting a potential inconsistency in efforts to reach out to students for career counselling during this transitional academic phase.

Fig. 7.2.6.2: Access to Professional Career Counselling across Grades



Sample Size - 9th: 5,386; 10th: 5,393; 11th: 5,815; 12th: 4,645

Students being oriented on career planning and awareness during the workshop in Punjab

Students participating in the Career Planning and Awareness workshop in Gujarat

8

Confidence-levels, Key Factors and Barriers in Career Decision-Making

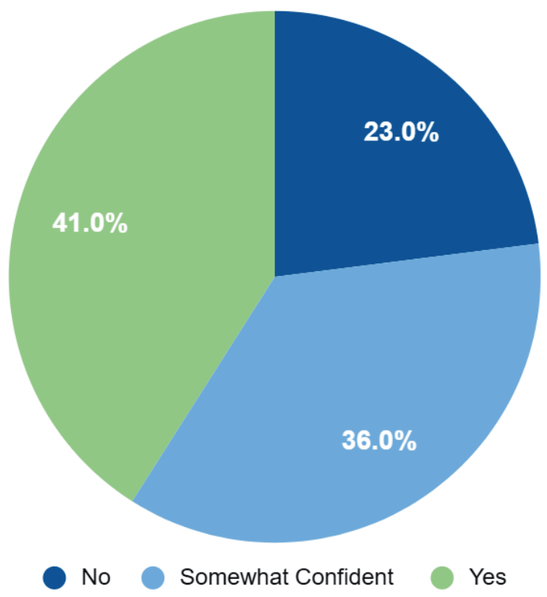
8.1 Confidence in Career Decision Making

Students, with support from various stakeholders, make important career decisions that shape their future. However, understanding how confident they are in making these decisions is equally crucial. This section of the report explores the confidence levels of students regarding their future career choices and examines how this confidence varies across different variables such as gender, grade level, school type and geographical location.

8.1.1 Confidence in Career Decision Making (Overall)

About 41% of the participants felt confident in making career choices, followed by 36% who felt somewhat confident and 23% of students reported that they do not feel confident.

Fig. 8.1.1.1 Confidence in Career Decision Making (Overall)

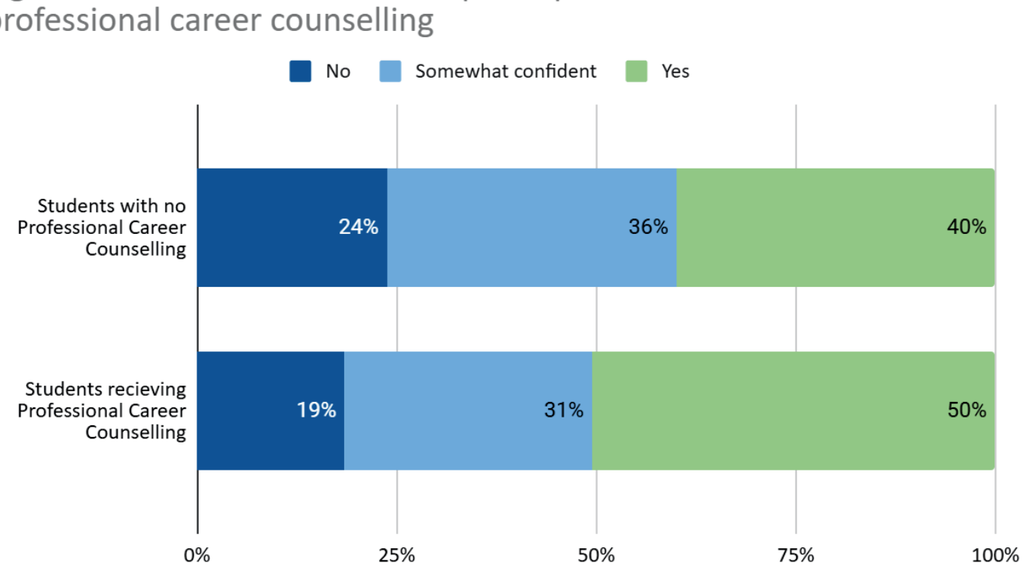


Sample Size: 21,239

The data also clearly indicates a positive correlation between professional career counselling and students' confidence in making future career decisions.

Among students who received professional counselling, 50% reported feeling confident, compared to only 40% of those without such support. Additionally, fewer students with counselling (19%) said they lacked confidence, compared to 24% of students without it. These findings suggest that professional career counselling plays a crucial role in enhancing students' self-assurance and clarity regarding their career choices, reinforcing the importance of integrating structured guidance into the school system.

Fig. 8.1.1.2: Confidence levels of participants with or without professional career counselling



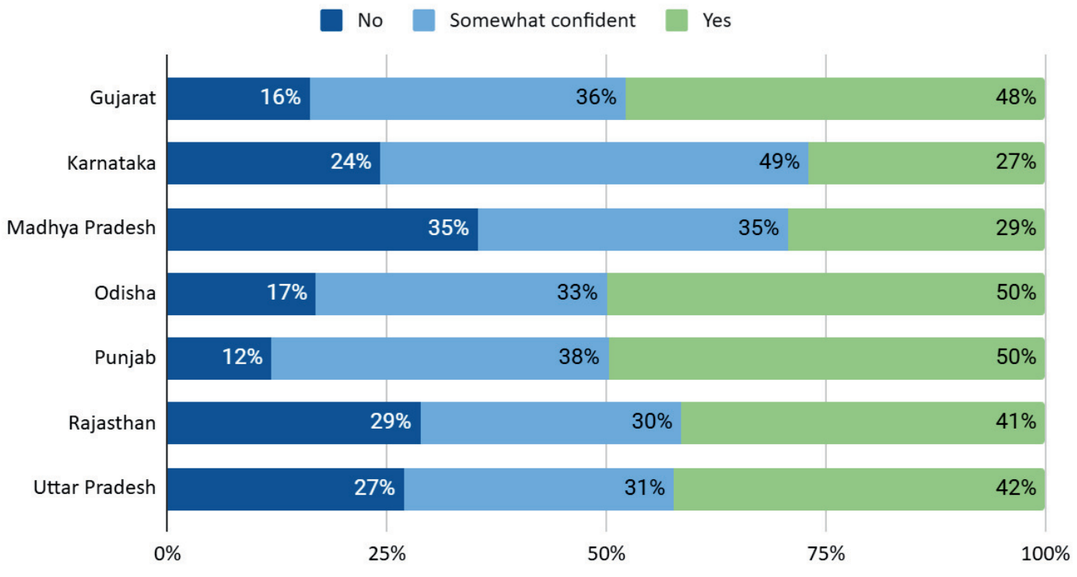
Sample Size (Students with no professional counselling): 19,030 Sample Size (Students receiving professional counselling): 2,209

Students being oriented on accessing their psychometric assessment report through the iDC Career Dashboard

8.1.2 Confidence in Making Career Choices across States

Confidence in making career choices varies significantly across states. Odisha and Punjab had the highest proportion of confident students (50%) followed closely by Gujarat (48%). in contrast, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh had the lowest confidence levels, with only 27% and 29% of students, respectively, expressing certainty. Notably, Madhya Pradesh had the highest percentage (35%) of students who lacked confidence altogether.

Fig. 8.1.2.1: Confidence in Making Career Choices across States



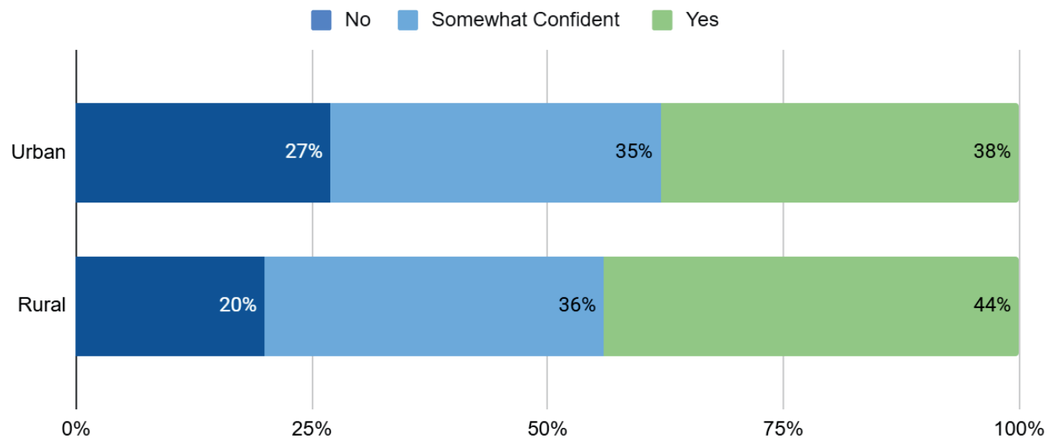
Sample Size - Gujarat: 3,533; Karnataka: 2,980; Madhya Pradesh: 3,096; Odisha: 3,387; Punjab: 1,979; Rajasthan: 3,050; Uttar Pradesh: 3,214

8.1.3 Confidence in Making Career Choices across Rural and Urban Districts

Confidence in making career choices and decisions varies slightly between rural and urban participants. **Among rural students, 44% reported being confident, compared to 38% of their urban counterparts**. 36% of rural and 35% of urban participants responded that they were somewhat confident. 27% of urban participants and 20% of rural participants expressed a lack of confidence in making career-related decisions.

BCAR Orientation session in Gujarat

Fig. 8.1.3.1 Confidence in Making Career Choices across Rural and Urban Districts

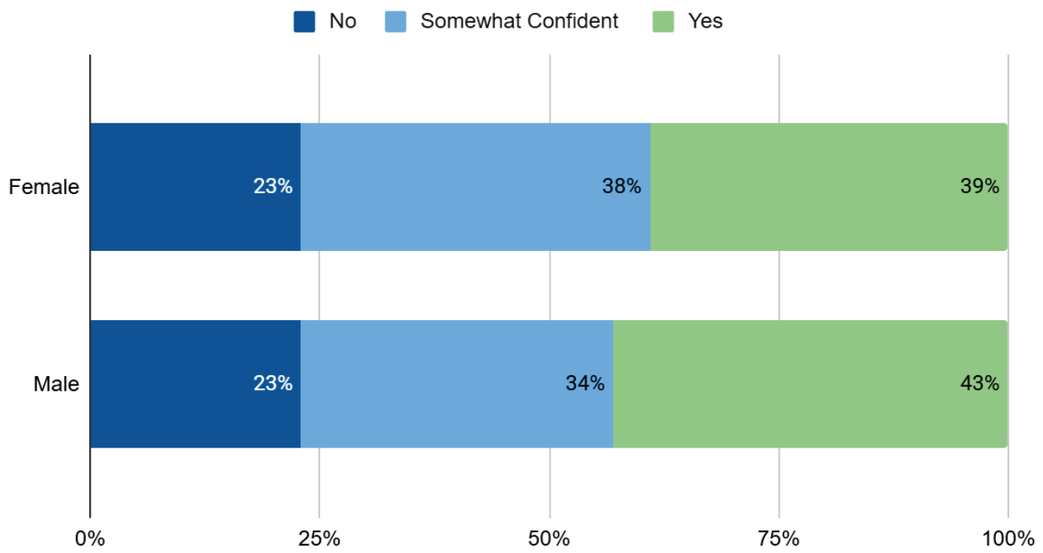


Sample Size - Urban: 10,180; Rural: 11,059

8.1.4 Confidence in Making Career Choices across Genders

There is a considerable difference in the confidence levels of male and female participants regarding career decision-making. While **43% of the male participants reported being confident in making career-related decisions, 39% of female participants reported so**. Wulandari and Purnama (2024) also found in their study that male high school students exhibited higher career decision-making self-efficacy compared to female students, suggesting that male students feel more confident in their career planning abilities.

Fig.8.1.4.1 Confidence in Making Career Choices across Gender



Sample Size - Females: 10,749; Males: 10,490

Additionally, 38% of the female participants and 34% of the male participants felt somewhat confident in making career decisions. An equal proportion of 23% of both male and female participants expressed their lack of confidence in career decision-making.

A. Confidence in Making Career Choices by Gender and Type of District

Analysis of confidence levels by gender and district type revealed that rural males showed the highest confidence at 46%, followed by rural females at 42%. Urban males and females were comparatively less confident, with 39% and 36% respectively. The "somewhat confident" category was relatively consistent across all categories. The lowest confidence levels appeared among 28% of urban males, followed by urban females (26%). Notably, only 19% of rural males reported low confidence levels.

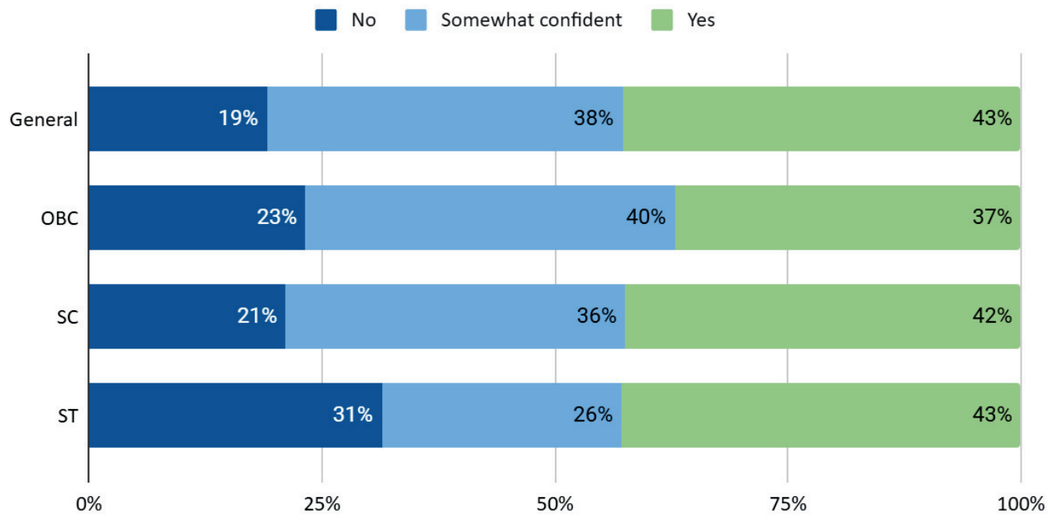
Fig. 8.1.4.2: Confidence in Making Career Choices by Gender and Type of District

Sample Size - Rural Females: 5,651; Rural Males: 5,408; Urban Females: 5,098; Urban Males: 5,082

8.1.5 Confidence in Making Career Choices across Social Categories

Confidence in making career choices varied across social categories. 43% of General and ST category students had the highest confidence levels, followed by 42% of SC and 37% of OBC category students. Students who reported lack of confidence were highest among SC category students (31%), while the General category students were 19%. "Somewhat confident" responses were highest among OBC (40%) and lowest among ST (26%).

Fig. 8.1.5.1: Confidence in Making Career Choices across Social Categories



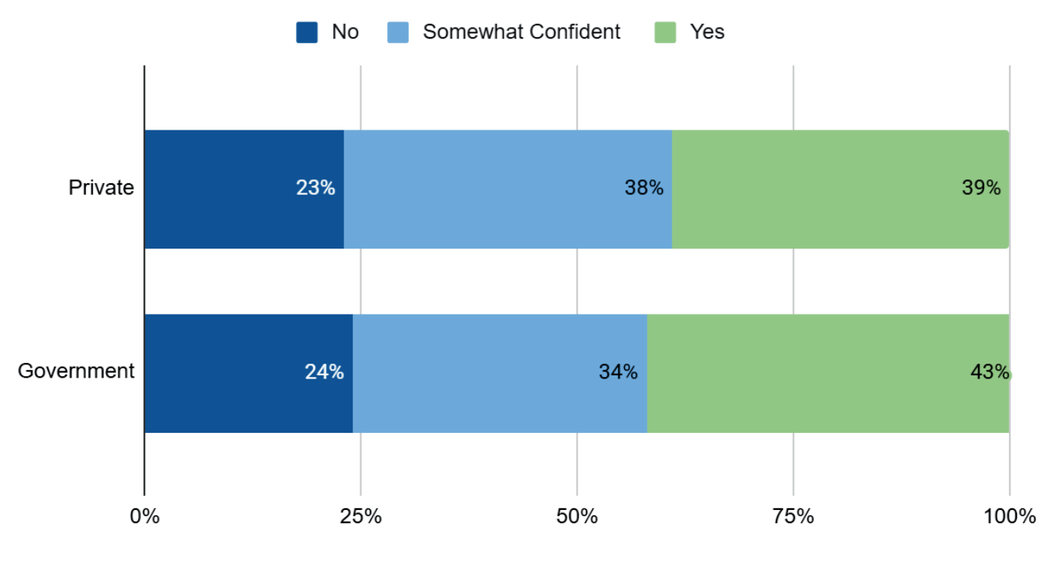
Sample Size - General: 7,135; OBC: 6,782; SC: 2,827; ST: 4,495

8.1.6 Confidence in Making Career Choices across School Categories and Grades

A. Confidence in Making Career Choices across School Categories

43% of the participants from government schools felt confident in making career-related decisions in comparison to 39% of the private school participants. In addition to this, 34% of participants from government schools and 38% from private schools said they were somewhat confident. A nearly equal percentage of participants from both government and private schools said they were not confident at all in making such decisions.

Fig. 8.1.6.1 Confidence in Making Career Choices across School Categories



Sample Size - Private: 10,388; Government: 10,851

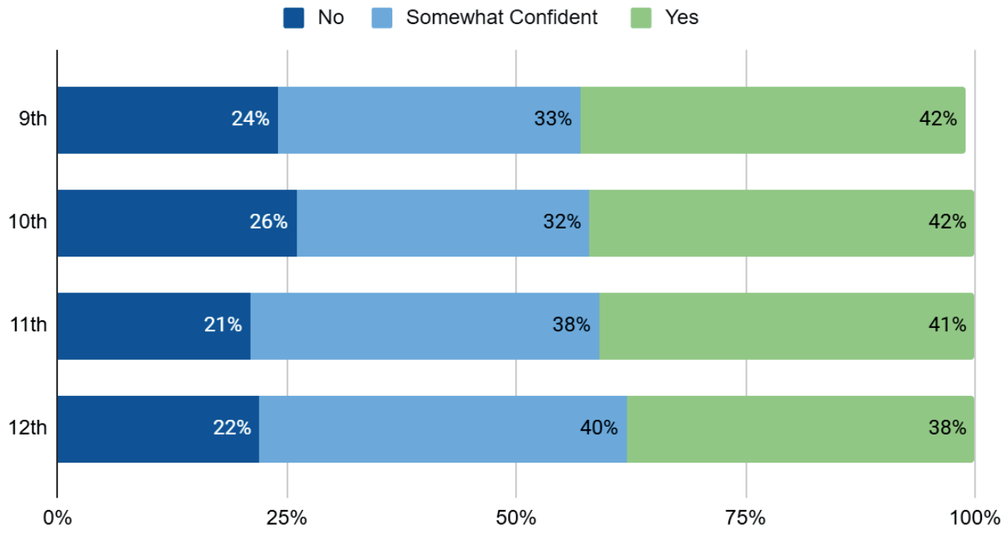
Confidence in Making Career Choices by School Category and Gender

When analysed by school type and gender, it is observed that female students in private schools had the lowest percentage of students who were confident in making career choices (Annexure 2, Fig. A.2.11).

B. Confidence in Making Career Choices across Grades

The confidence of participants in making career decisions decreases as they progress through grades, reflected by a declining trend across higher grades. While 42% of Grade 9th students felt confident in making career decisions, this proportion dropped to 38% in Grade 12th. However, the proportion of students who felt somewhat confident substantially increased from 33% in Grade 9th to 40% in Grade 12th. Similarly, the share of students not confident decreased from Grade 9th through Grade 12th.

Fig 8.1.6.2 Confidence in Making Career Choices across Grades



Sample Size - 9th: 5,386; 10th: 5,393; 11th: 5,815; 12th: 4,645

Career Planning Orientation in Odisha

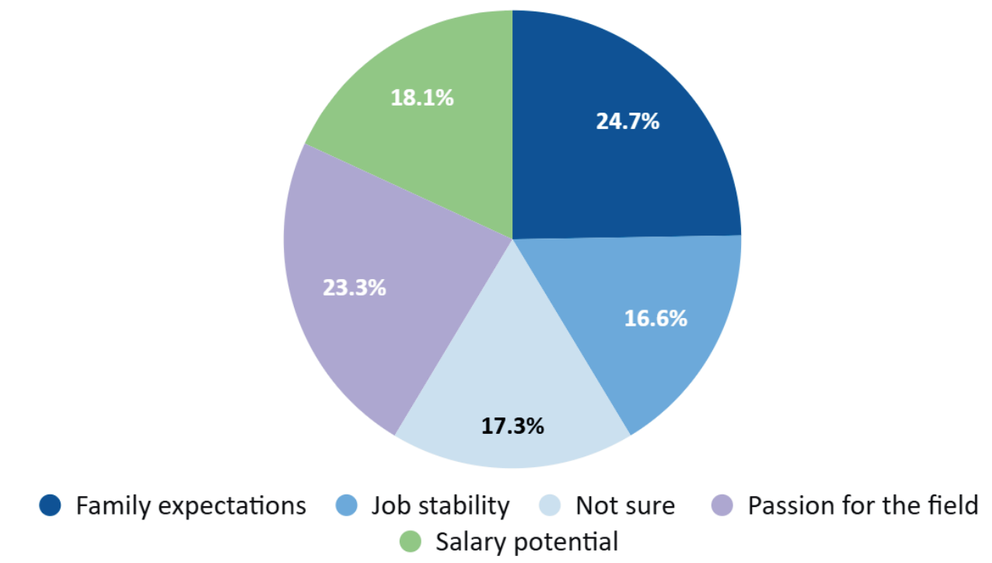
8.2 Factors Influencing Career Aspirations

Career aspirations among students are influenced and shaped by a complex interplay of factors, which are personal, social, and environmental. From early on, children are influenced by their family background, socio-economic status, cultural norms, and public figures, all of which help form a perception and ambition of students. In addition, educational experiences, peer influence, access to career guidance, and media representation broaden or limit their perspectives. As the students progress in their formative years, these factors often collectively steer academic choices and long-term goals. This section delves deeper into these factors and assesses how students from various socio-economic backgrounds are influenced by these factors.

8.2.1 Factors Influencing Career Aspirations (Overall)

Expectations of family and parents had a dominant influence on students' career choices. 25% of students identified it as the most influential factor. 23% of students prioritised personal passion, that is choosing a career that caters to their interests and intrinsic motivations. 18% of students considered salary potential as an important factor in making career choices, reflecting practical concerns about financial security.

Fig. 8.2.1.1: Factors Influencing Career Aspirations (Overall)



Sample Size: 21,239

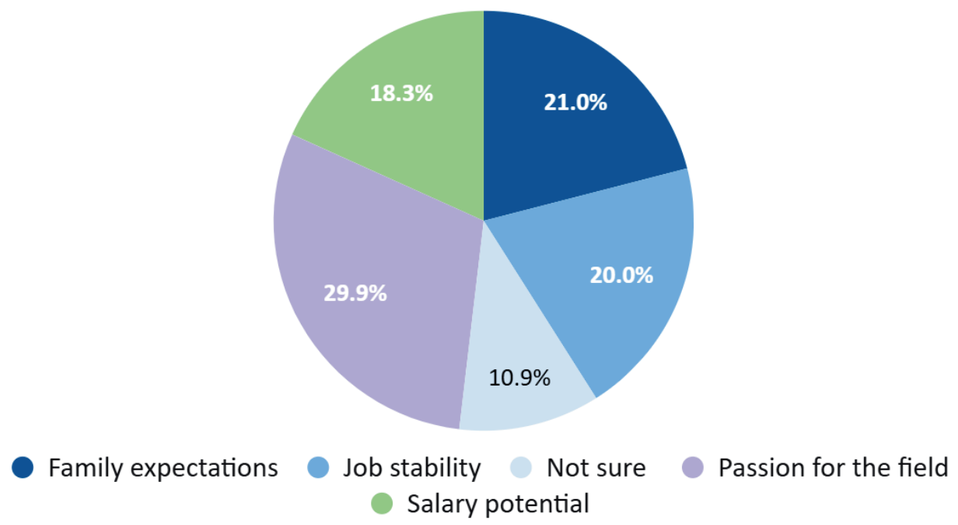
17% valued job stability, suggesting that long-term security remains a significant concern for many when planning their futures. This provides a detailed understanding of how external as well as internal motivations guide students in career decision-making.

This also implies that students are navigating their career choices by balancing external influences with personal interests and practical concerns. The fact that family expectations are the top factor suggests that many students may feel pressured to align their aspirations with what their families consider acceptable or prestigious (Thomas & Joseph, 2024).

However, the near-equal importance given to passion indicates a shift toward more individual-driven choices, especially among students who value personal satisfaction and fulfillment. The consideration of salary potential and job stability shows that students are also thinking pragmatically about their future, weighing financial security and career longevity.

Furthermore, **structured career counselling plays a crucial role in shaping students' decision-making and their career choices.**

Fig. 8.2.1.2: Factors Influencing Career Aspirations (for students who received Professional Career Counselling)



Sample Size (Students receiving professional counselling): 2,209

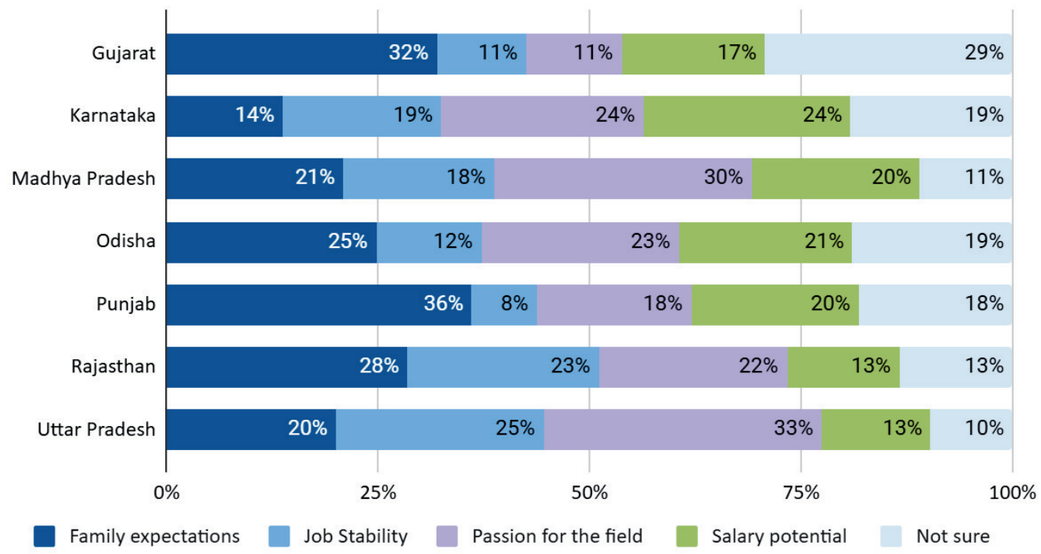
Among participants who received career guidance, the largest proportion (30%) reported passion for the field as their primary influence, indicating counselling may help students align their interests with viable career paths. 21% of students cited family expectations as the most important factor. A significant 20% of students identified job stability as a major factor, followed by 18% of students who pointed to salary potential. Only 11% of students reported being unsure of the factors that influenced their career choices.

This suggests that **exposure to professional career guidance may encourage students to think more independently and realistically about their futures, weighing practical aspects like stability alongside personal interests, rather than being primarily influenced by family or financial concerns.**

8.2.2 Factors influencing Career Aspirations across States

Family expectations emerged as a major influence in states like Punjab (36%), Gujarat (32%), and Rajasthan (28%), reflecting the strong role of family in shaping career decisions in these regions. In contrast, passion for the field was the most significant factor in Uttar Pradesh (33%), and Madhya Pradesh (30%).

Fig. 8.2.2.1: Factors influencing Career Aspirations across States



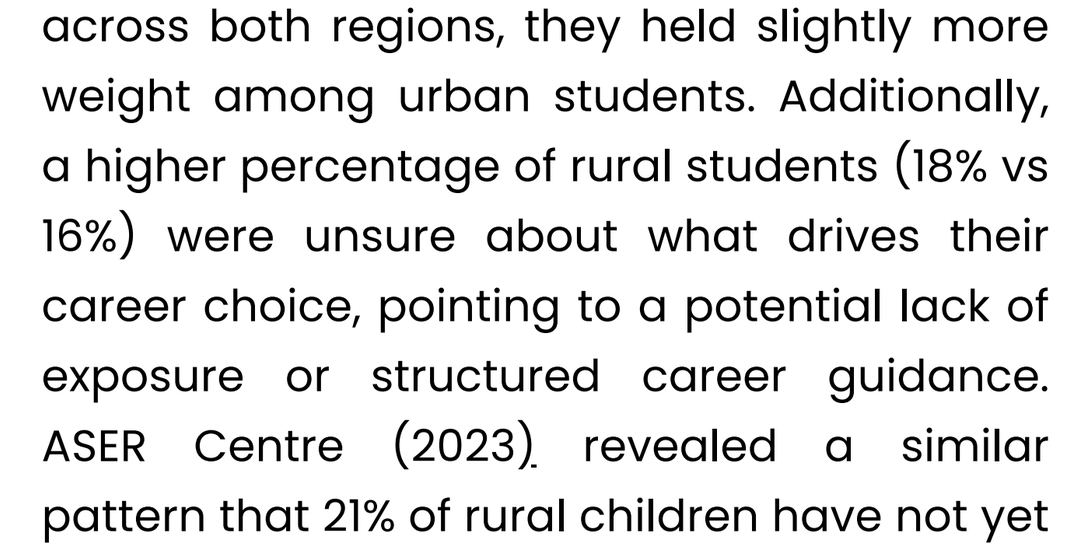
Sample Size - Gujarat: 3,533; Karnataka: 2,980; Madhya Pradesh: 3,096; Odisha: 3,387; Punjab: 1,979; Rajasthan: 3,050; Uttar Pradesh: 3,214

Salary potential influenced career choices more in Karnataka (24%) and Odisha (21%). Additionally, a significant portion of students in Gujarat (29%), Karnataka (19%), and Odisha (19%) were “not sure” of what influenced their decisions, highlighting a lack of clarity and direction. These patterns again suggest that career choices are shaped by a complex interplay of social expectations, personal interest, and economic awareness, varying significantly by region.

8.2.3 Factors influencing Career Aspirations across Urban and Rural Districts

The data revealed notable differences in the factors influencing career choices between rural and urban students. **In rural districts, family expectations had a stronger impact (29%) compared to urban areas (20%). Conversely, urban students were more influenced by passion for the field (26%) than those in rural areas (21%).** While job stability and salary potential were important across both regions, they held slightly more weight among urban students. Additionally, a higher percentage of rural students (18% vs 16%) were unsure about what drives their career choice, pointing to a potential lack of exposure or structured career guidance. ASER Centre (2023) revealed a similar pattern that 21% of rural children have not yet considered their future careers, underscoring the need for support in shaping children's career aspirations.

Fig. 8.2.3.1: Factors influencing Career Aspirations across Urban and Rural Districts

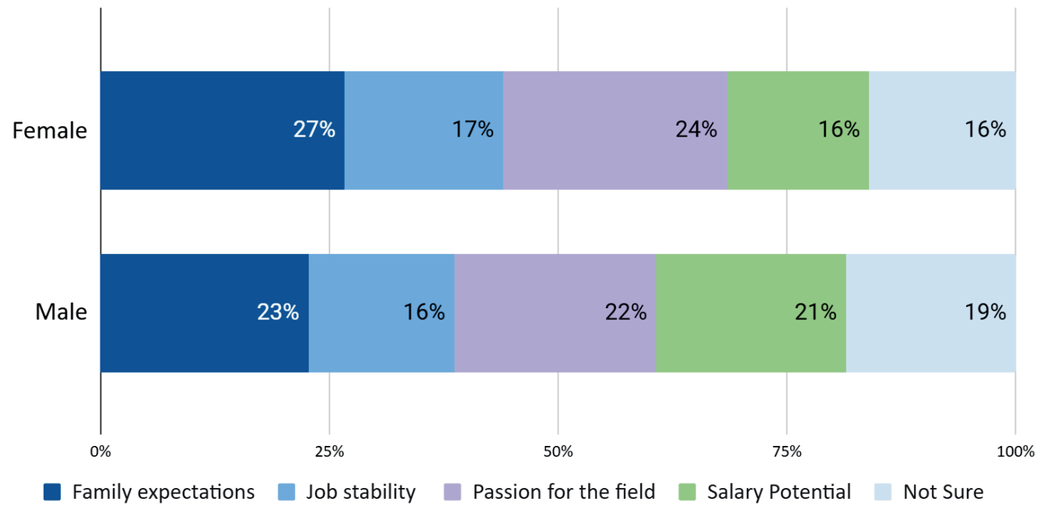


Sample Size - Urban: 10,180; Rural: 11,059

8.2.4 Factors influencing Career Aspirations across Genders

Factors influencing aspirations also varied by gender. Among male students, 23% attributed their career choices to family expectations, closely followed by 22% who prioritised passion and interest and 21% who consider salary potential as the most important factor.

Fig.8.2.4.1: Factors influencing Career Aspirations across Genders



Sample Size - Females: 10,749; Males: 10,490

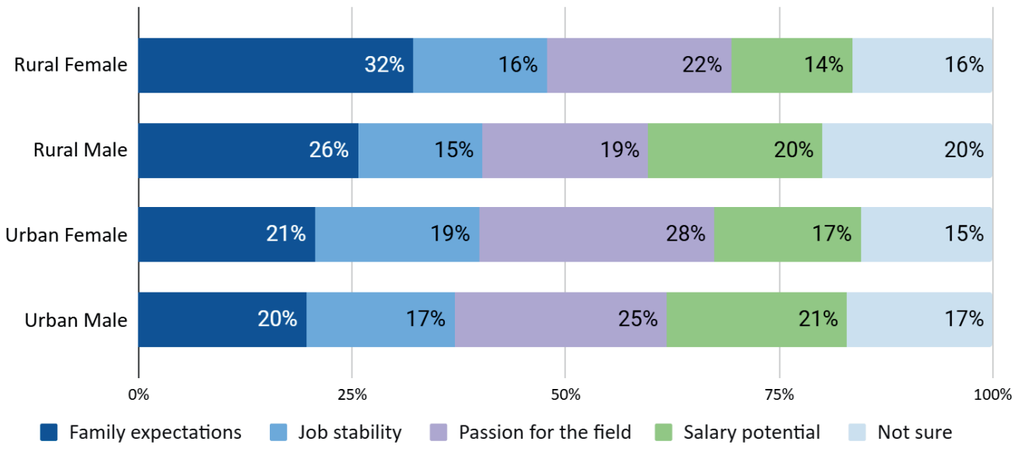
In comparison, **female students showed a slightly stronger inclination toward family influence, with 27% identifying it as the primary factor in their career decision-making.** Additionally, 24% of female students were driven by passion and personal interest, while 17% emphasised job stability as their main consideration. These findings suggest that while both male and female students were influenced by a combination of personal and external factors, female students may experience slightly greater familial influence and place more importance on long-term job security.

A. Factors influencing Career Aspirations by Gender and Type of District

Analysis of factors influencing career aspirations by gender and type of district revealed that family expectations were more prominent among rural females (32%) and males (26%), compared to urban counterparts. Passion for the field was the leading factor for urban males (25%) and females (28%).

Job stability was relatively consistent across all groups, ranging from 15% to 19%. Uncertainty was highest among rural males (20%), indicating a possible gap in career awareness or guidance.

Fig. 8.2.4.2: Factors influencing Career Aspirations by Gender and Type of District

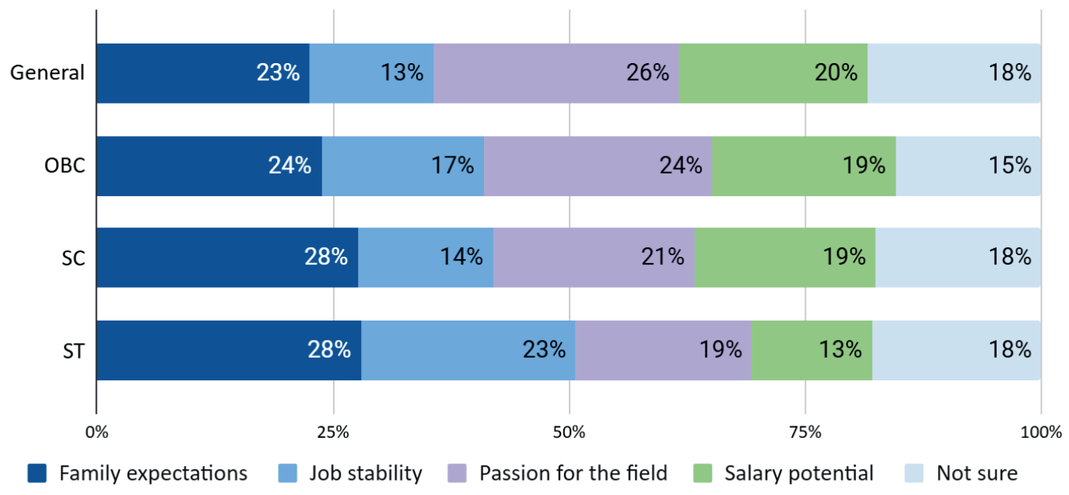


Sample Size - Rural Females: 5,651; Rural Males: 5,408; Urban Females: 5,098; Urban Males: 5,082

8.2.5 Factors influencing Career Aspirations across Social Categories

Overall, the data highlighted that the social background significantly affects career aspirations. Family expectations were the most cited factor by SC and ST category students, both at 28%, indicating strong cultural influence in these groups. 26% of students from the General category were driven by passion for the field. Family expectations and passion for the field were each cited by 24% of OBC category students. Salary potential was the highest among the General category students (20%) and the lowest among the ST category students (13%).

Fig. 8.2.5.1: Factors influencing Career Aspirations by Social Category



Sample Size - General: 7,135; OBC: 6,782; SC: 2,827; ST: 4,495

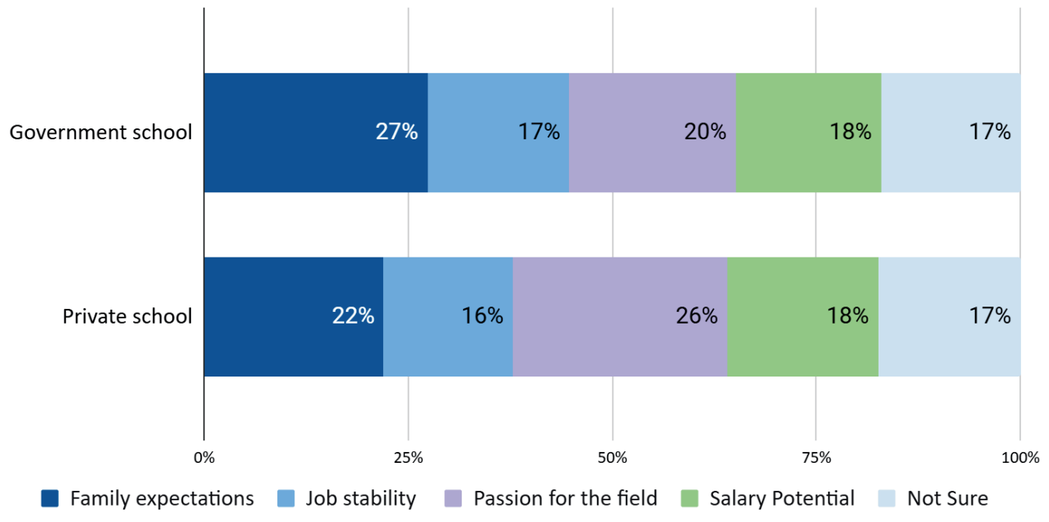
A similar percentage of students across all groups, ranging from 15% to 18%, reported being unsure about what influenced their aspirations.

8.2.6 Factors influencing Career Aspirations across Schools and Grades

A. Factors influencing Career Aspirations across Schools

Factors shaping career aspirations are significantly affected by the type of school that students attend. **Among students from government schools, family expectations (27%) was the leading factor in career choice, followed by passion for the field (20%) and then salary potential (18%).** This indicates a strong influence of traditional societal values, along with external drivers influencing career aspirations of government school students. **In contrast, private school students tend to prioritise personal interest more highly, with 26% citing passion as the most important factor in choosing a career**. This is followed by 22% who considered family expectations, 18% who valued salary potential, and 16% who wanted job stability. Khatri and Ashutosh (2022) also highlight that students from government schools are more influenced by external factors, including family expectations and societal pressures, compared to students in private schools. Interestingly, 17% of both private and government school students reported uncertainty about their career-driving factors.

Fig.8.2.6.1: Factors influencing Career Aspirations by Type of School



Sample Size - Private: 10,388; Government: 10,851

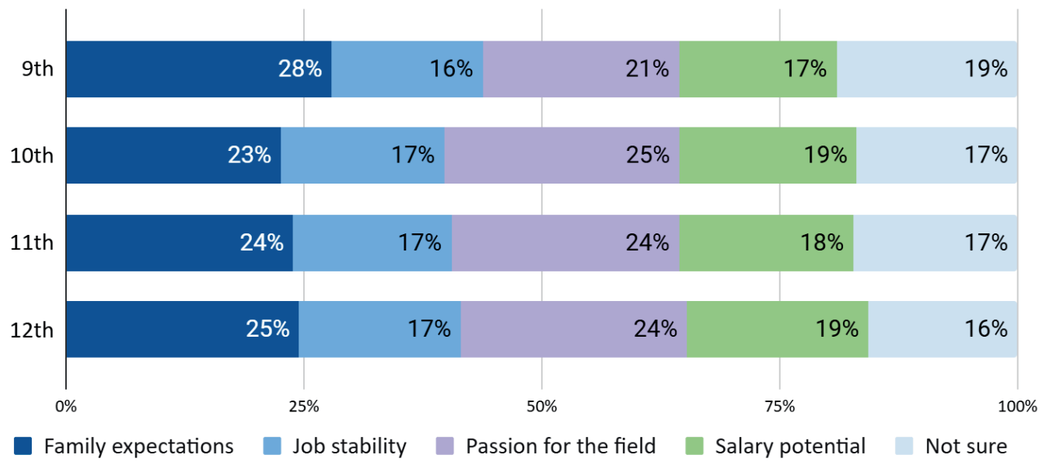
Factors influencing Career Aspirations by School Type and Gender

Analysis by school type and gender (Annexure 2, Fig. A.2.12) highlighted that 29% of female students in government schools were the most influenced by family expectations, and 25% of males in government schools were influenced by family expectations. Interestingly, female students in private schools were most influenced by passion for the field (28%) when making a career choice followed by males in private schools and government school students.

B. Factors influencing Career Aspirations across Grades

Across the grades, the factors influencing students' career choices depicted a broadly similar pattern. In Grade 9th, family expectations (27.92%) had the strongest influence as compared to other grades. In contrast, for students in Grades 10th, 11th, and 12th, passion for the field consistently appears as the most significant factor guiding career aspirations, indicating a shift from external influence to personal interest as students progress in their academic journey.

Fig. 8.2.6.2: Factors influencing Career Aspirations across Grades



Sample Size - 9th: 5,386; 10th: 5,393; 11th: 5,815; 12th: 4,645

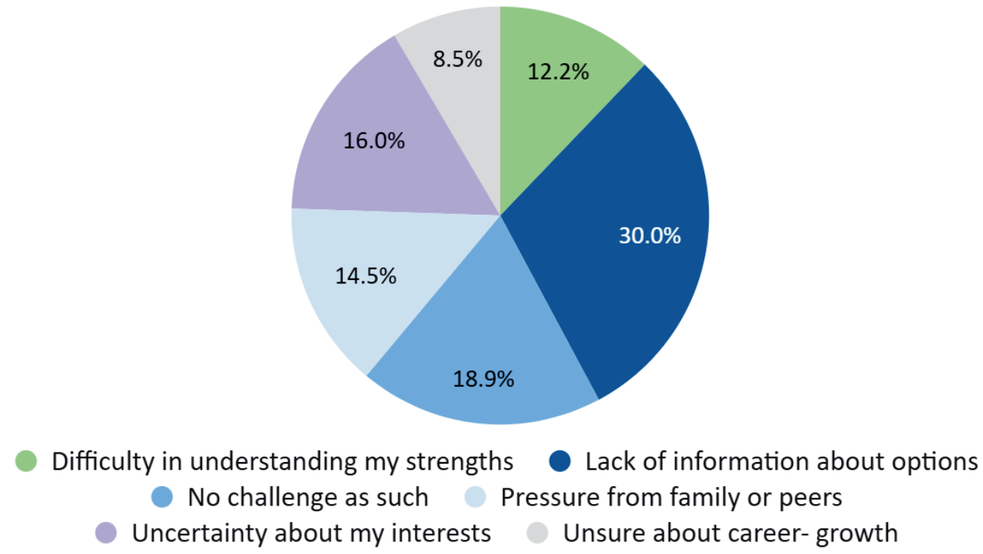
8.3 Challenges in Making Career Choices

Students often face significant challenges when making career decisions. Common struggles include uncertainty about their abilities, confusion over the vast number of career options, and anxiety about making the wrong choice, among others. Additionally, pressure from family, society, and peers can further complicate the decision-making process, leading to stress and self-doubt. Concerns related to job security, financial stability, and future success also contribute to the emotional burden students carry during this period. This section will explore the challenges that students face when making career choices and how these differ across different socio-economic contexts.

8.3.1 Challenges in Making Career Choices (Overall)

30% of students reported a lack of information about career options as the biggest challenge in making career-related decisions. This indicates a significant gap in students' awareness of available academic and professional pathways. Uncertainty about personal interests and lack of awareness of one's strengths was reported by 16% and 12% of participants, respectively, underlining the need to help students recognise their abilities.

Fig. 8.3.1.1: Challenges in Making Career Choices (Overall)



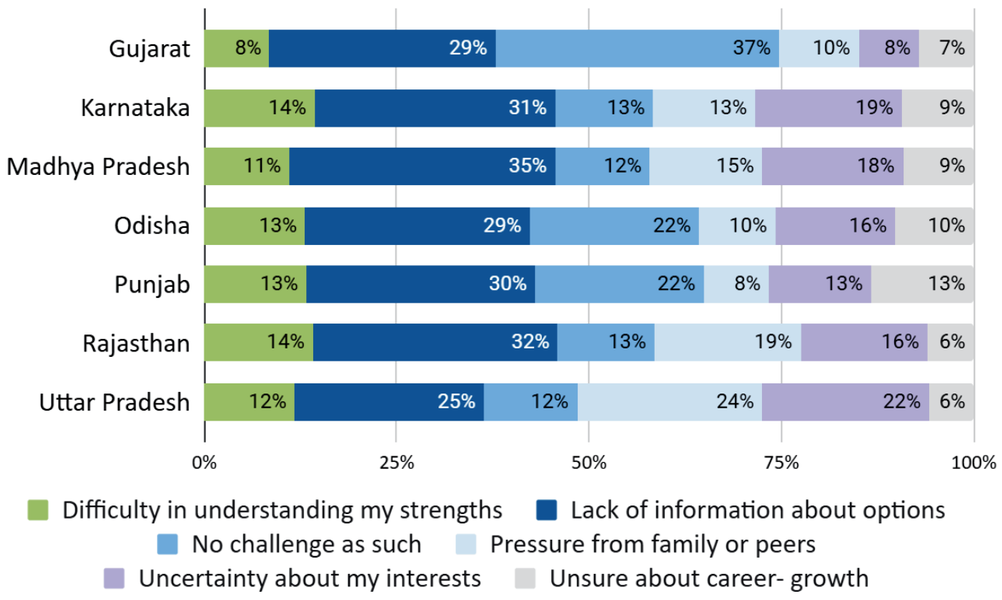
Sample Size: 21,239

Another challenge reported by students (14.5%) was pressure from family or peers, pointing to the role of external expectations in career decisions. Additionally, **8.5% of students expressed uncertainty about career growth**, indicating concerns about the long-term viability and opportunities in their chosen fields. The remaining 19% of students reported facing no specific challenge as such, which could suggest they have clarity about their career plans or have not yet actively engaged in the decision-making process. Overall, the data underscores the importance of structured career guidance to address these varied challenges.

8.3.2 Challenges faced across States

A key insight from the state- wise analysis is that the lack of information about options consistently emerged as a biggest challenge across most states.

Fig: 8.3.2.1: Challenges faced in Making Career Choices across States



Sample Size - Gujarat: 3,533; Karnataka: 2,980; Madhya Pradesh: 3,096; Odisha: 3,387; Punjab: 1,979; Rajasthan: 3,050; Uttar Pradesh: 3,214

For instance, Madhya Pradesh (35%), Rajasthan (32%), Karnataka (31%), and Punjab (30%) showed notably high percentages of students struggling with this issue, indicating a widespread gap in career guidance resources and awareness. Interestingly, Gujarat was the only state where a majority of respondents (37%) reported no challenge as such.

In contrast, states like Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh have the lowest percentages of students reporting "no challenge" (12%). Another notable observation was that the pressure from family or peers was faced by 19% of students in Rajasthan, 24% in Uttar Pradesh, and 15% in Madhya Pradesh.

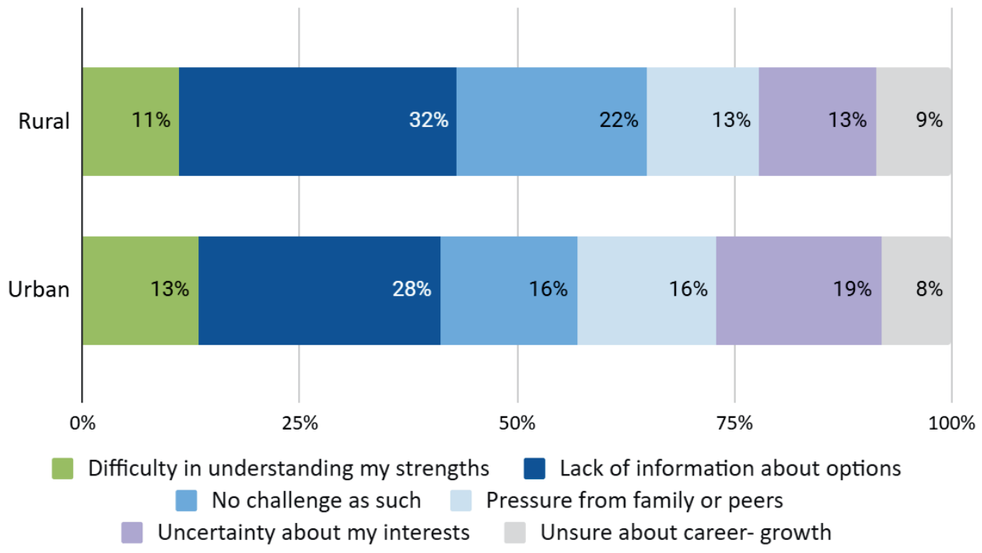
This reflects the influence of sociocultural expectations in career decision-making in some of the northern states. Additionally, uncertainty about career growth was relatively low across all states, indicating that while students may lack proper information, many have some clarity about their career goals.

8.3.3 Challenges faced across Rural and Urban Districts

32% of the participants in rural districts identified lack of information about career choices as the biggest challenge in pursuing a career. 22% did not find any such challenge in making career-related decisions. 13% found pressure from family and peers as the biggest challenge in choosing a career path. In urban districts, 28% of participants identified the lack of information about available options as their biggest challenge. Uncertainty about one's interests and lack of understanding of one's strengths was reported by a total of 32% of the students. Peer and family pressure emerged as the next major concern for 16% of students, followed by students (8%) who were unsure about career growth in their aspired career.

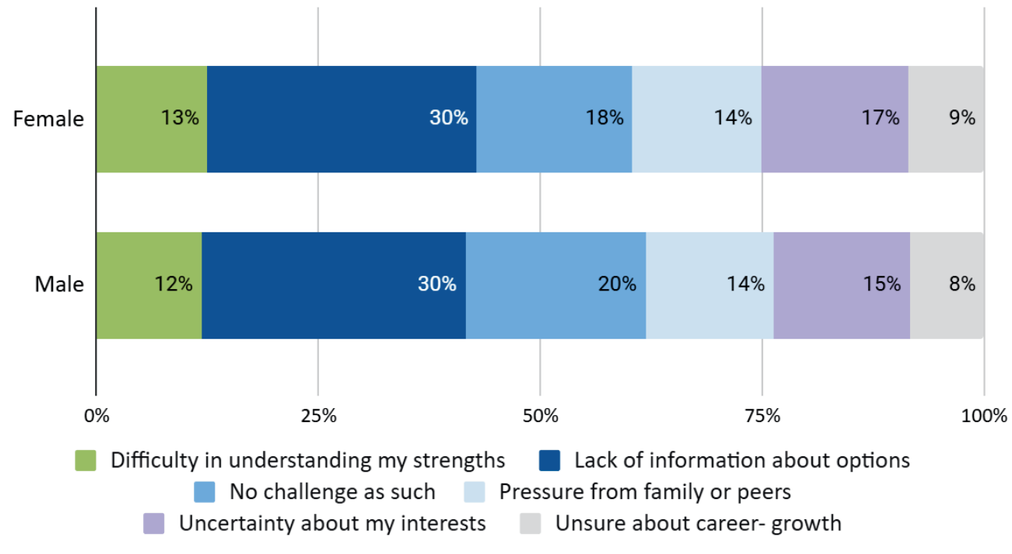
Students engaged in filling the Bharat Career Aspirations Study form

Fig 8.3.3.1 Challenges faced across Rural and Urban Districts



Sample Size - Urban: 10,180; Rural: 11,059

Fig.8.3.4.1 Gender wise challenges in choosing a career path



Sample Size - Females: 10,749; Males: 10,490

I**n conclusion, lack of information is the most critical barrier to career decision-making, especially in rural areas**. Singh (2018) also underscores that the sources of career-related information in India are largely compromised, and various available sources are not inadequately prepared to help students, particularly affecting those in rural areas. Additionally, urban students, while better informed, face more social and psychological pressures due to family expectations and uncertainty about their interests and strengths (13% vs 16% and 25% vs 32%).

8.3.4 Challenges faced across Genders

Among male students, most found lack of information on options as the biggest challenge (30%), followed by 15% who reported pressure from family and peers as the biggest challenge. Another 15% of male students identified uncertainty about interests as the biggest hurdle in choosing a career path, while 12% found difficulty in understanding their strengths as the biggest challenge.

Among female students, 30% lacked information on options and cited it as a challenge, and 15% each found family pressure and uncertainty in one's interest as the biggest hindrance to choosing a career option. 13% of female students reported difficulty in understanding strengths as their biggest challenge.

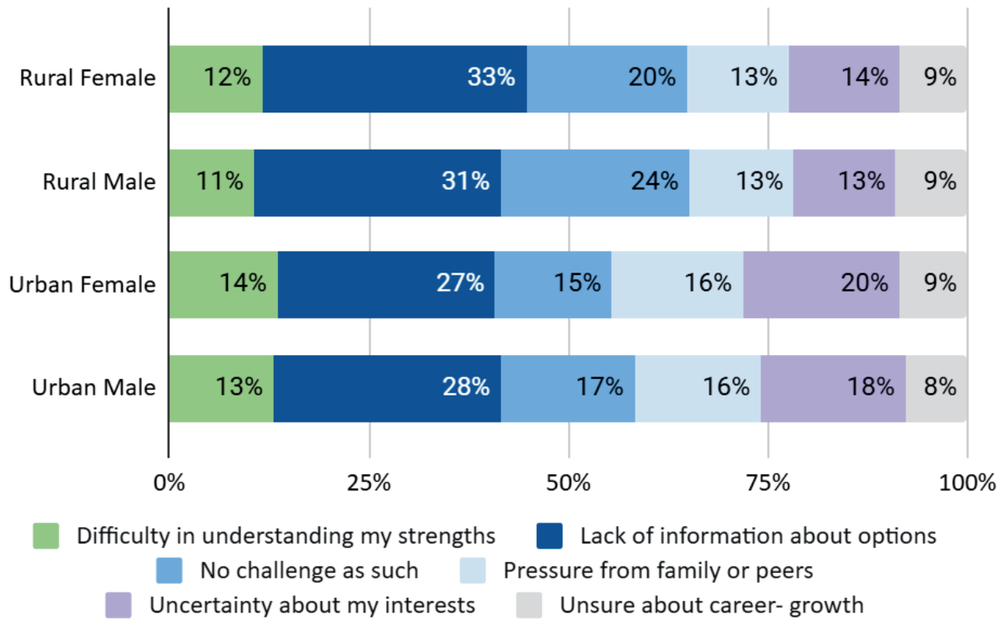
While both male and female students face similar kinds of barriers like pressure from family or peers, challenges among females such as uncertainty about interests, and lack of awareness of strengths and information are higher as compared to males, highlighting the need for gender-responsive career guidance strategies.

A. Challenges faced by Gender and Type of District

Lack of information about options was the most prominent challenge, particularly for rural females (33%) and rural males (31%). Urban participants also reported this as a major issue, though at slightly lower levels (urban females 27%, urban males 28%).

Orientation session in Gujarat, highlighting the purpose of the Bharat Career Aspirations Study

Fig. 8.3.4.2: Challenges faced by Gender and Type of District



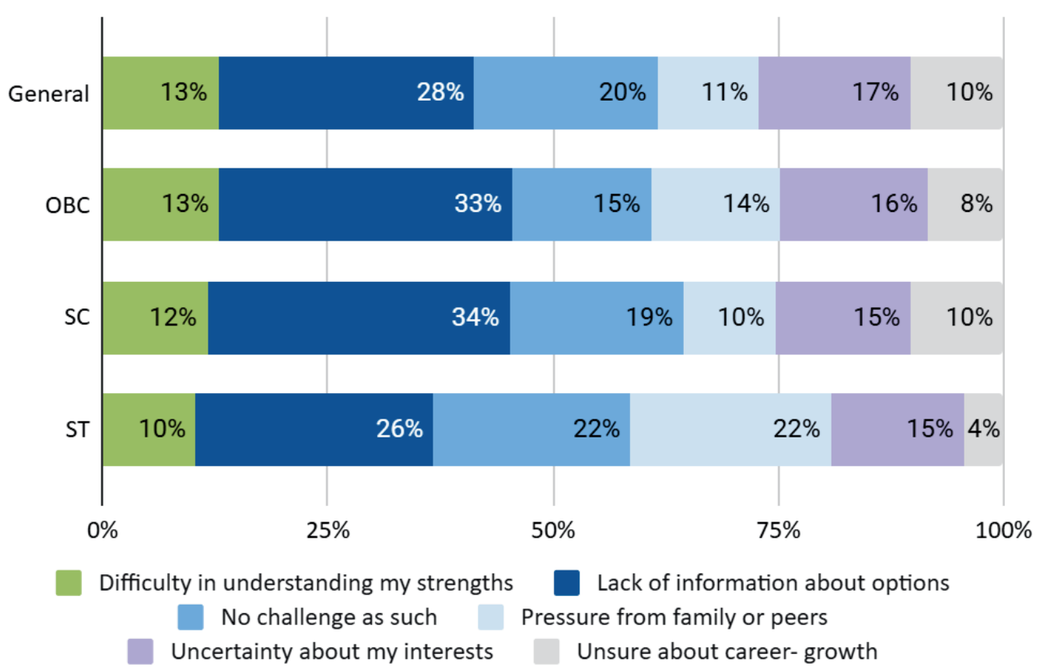
Sample Size - Rural Females: 5,651; Rural Males: 5,408; Urban Females: 5,098; Urban Males: 5,082

Challenges like pressure from family or peers and uncertainty about interests are relatively consistent across groups, with urban females and males facing slightly more pressure (16%) than rural counterparts (13%).

8.3.5 Challenges faced across Social Categories

Among students from the General category, the most commonly cited challenge in career decision-making is the lack of information on career options (29%), followed by uncertainty about their interests (17%) and difficulty in understanding their strengths (13%).

Fig.8.3.5.1 Challenges faced across Social Categories



Sample Size - General: 7,135; OBC: 6,782; SC: 2,827; ST: 4,495

Similarly, a significant proportion of OBC students (33%) also identified lack of information as the primary barrier. 16% reported uncertainty about their interests, 14% cited family pressure, and 13% struggled with recognising their strengths as their biggest challenges.

Among SC category students, 34% highlighted lack of information as the biggest obstacle, followed by 15% who were unsure about their interests and 12% who faced difficulty identifying their strengths.

Among students from the ST category, 26% found lack of information about their career options as the biggest challenge, followed by 22% who found family pressure as the biggest challenge. 15% reported uncertainty about their interests as a hurdle and 10% identified difficulty in understanding their strengths as the biggest challenge.

While all groups struggle with a lack of information, SC and OBC category students reported it most acutely. Additionally, a significant number of ST category students face external pressure from family members and peers.

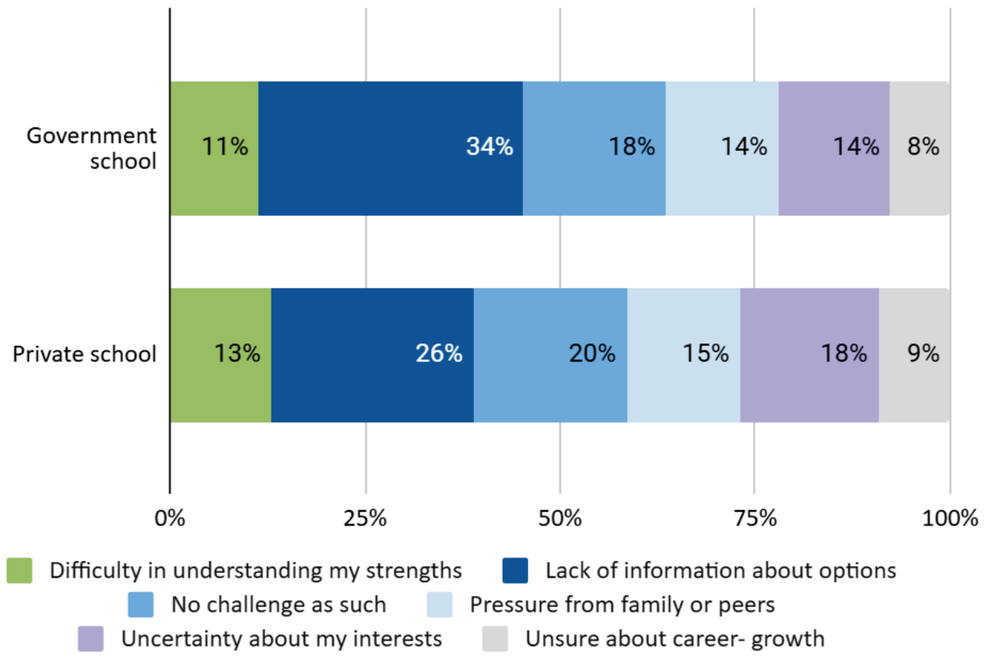
Career guidance and awareness session with students in Gujarat

8.3.6 Challenges faced across School Categories and Grades

A. Challenges faced across School Categories

Among different categories of schools, **34% of government school students and 26% of private school students found lack of information about options as the biggest challenge in choosing a career of their choice.** 14% of government school students as well as private

Fig. 8.3.6.1: Challenges faced across School Categories



Sample Size - Private: 10,388; Government: 10,851

school students reported pressure from families and peers as the next biggest challenge. 14% of government school students and 18% of private school students identified uncertainty about interests as the primary barrier. 13% of students in private schools and 11% in government schools highlighted difficulty in finding their strengths as the biggest challenge in choosing a career path.

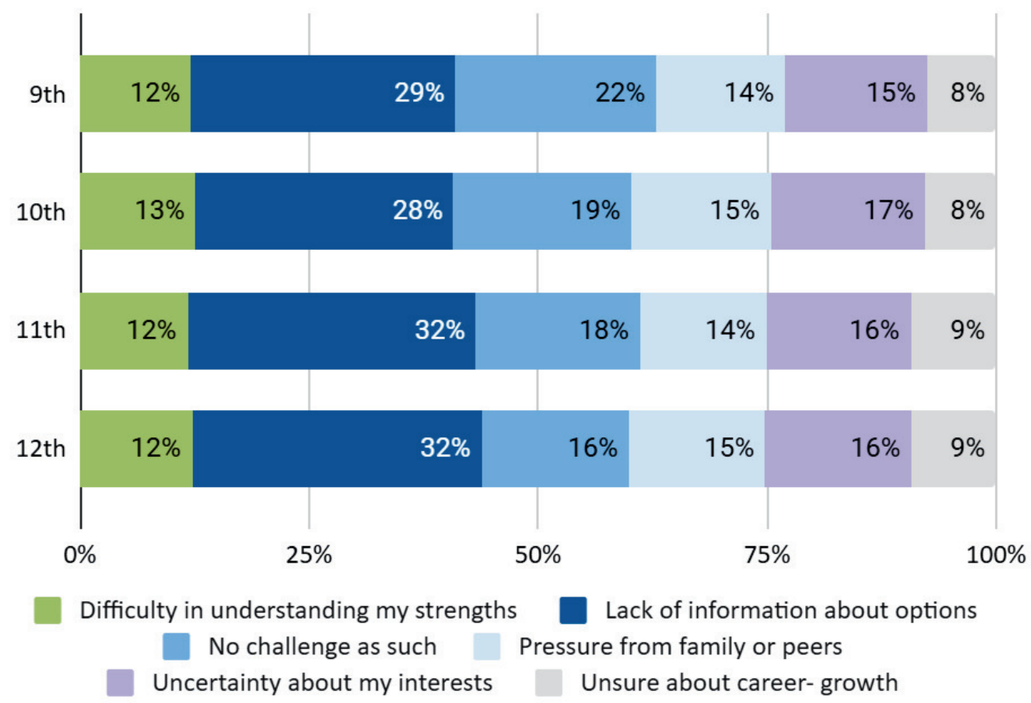
Challenges faced by School Type and Gender

A similar pattern is evident when challenges across school types and genders were analysed (Annexure 2, Fig, A.2.13).

B. Challenges faced across Grades

The overall data suggests that students across all grades faced similar obstacles in their career-related decision-making process. In Grade 9th and Grade 10th, 29% and 28% of the students, respectively, found that they lacked information on different career options. In Grades 11th and 12th, this percentage increased to 31.5% and 31.6% respectively. For Grade 9th students, 16% of students reported uncertainty about their interests as the biggest challenge. This was also cited as a challenge by 17% of students in Grade 10th, 16% in Grade 11th, and 16% in Grade 12th. The proportion of students who reported not facing any challenges gradually decreased from Grade 9th to Grade 12th.

Fig.8.3.6.2: Challenges faced across Grades



Sample Size - 9th: 5,386; 10th: 5,393; 11th: 5,815; 12th: 4,645

Students in Odisha being oriented about the process of the BCAR Study.

Students attending the orientation session on Bharat Career Aspirations Study in Banda

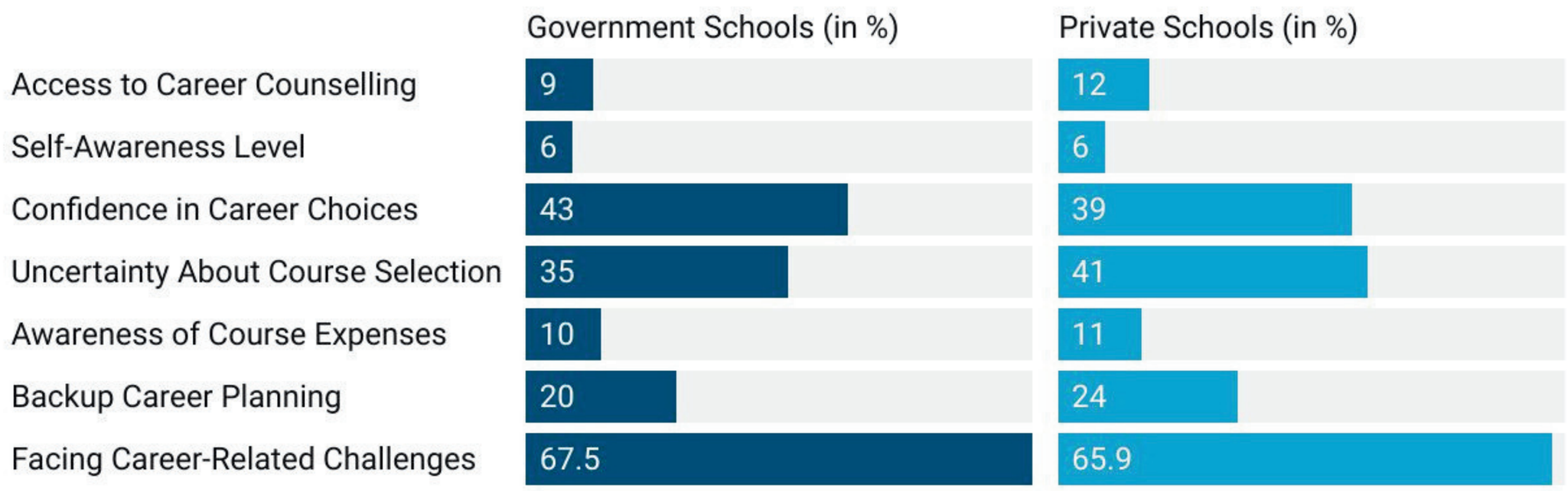
9

Comparative Analysis: Private and Government Schools

In BCAR 2025, roughly 51% of the participants were from government schools and 49% were from private schools. In private schools, the percentage of male participants (52%) was higher than female participants (46%), whereas in government schools, the percentage of female participants (54%) was higher than that of males (48%).

Parameter Comparison: Government vs Private School

Fig. 9: Parameters across Government and Private Schools



- A large proportion of students across both school types face career-related challenges (67.5% government, 65.9% private), indicating the need for systemic support across the board.

- Access to Career Counselling remains limited in government schools (9%) compared to private schools (12%), indicating a gap in guided career support that could impact informed decision-making.

- Uncertainty about course selection is notably higher among private school students (41% vs 35%), despite better counselling access—highlighting a possible mismatch between exposure and clarity.

- Backup career planning is more prevalent among private school students (24% vs 20%), suggesting slightly better preparedness for alternate pathways.

- Private school students show a stronger preference for professional careers such as Business Management (12% vs 9%), Engineering & Technology (11% vs 8%), and Finance & Banking (6% vs 4%), likely due to better exposure and access to resources. In contrast, government school students lean more towards careers like Education & Teaching (12% vs 6%).

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Annexures

Annexure 1

Consent Form

To,

The Principal,

Seeking Permission to conduct Career Awareness Baseline Assessment in your School

Respected Ma'am/Sir,

Greetings from iDreamCareer!

iDreamCareer (iDC) and YuWaah, UNICEF India are conducting a Bharat Career Aspirations Study to understand the career aspirations, awareness, and access to career counseling among high school students in India. With your consent, we want to invite students from grades 9th to Grade 12th of your school to participate in the study and become part of iDC's career counseling program.

The findings from the study will be used in Bharat Career Aspirations Report (BCAR) 2025. BCAR 2025 is in continuation with BCAR 2024 which was launched in June 2024 and captured career aspirations and awareness levels of 5000 students from grades 9th to 12th in 25 Indian states. The report was jointly launched by iDC and YuWaah, UNICEF India in the presence of Sh. Umesh Pratap Singh, Director at the Ministry of Education, Government of India. The report was also shared with state government officials, NGOs, and CSR partners, highlighting the critical need for career counselling at the school level.

BCAR 2025 plans to capture aspirations of 20,000+ students across 7 states and include a comparative study based on factors such as district type, school type and economic background of the students. BCAR 2025 will help us identify the blockers that hinder students from pursuing their desired careers, that will lead us to propose actionable solutions that empower and enable the youth to seamlessly transition into their aspired professional paths. Through this report, we envision a future where every young individual in Bharat has the opportunity, guidance, and resources to achieve their career dreams.

The students' responses to the survey will also yield findings that can enhance career counseling programs, such as those offered by iDC, and can also guide policy-making to improve career counselling services for students across India. The schools participating in the study will also receive a special mention in the Bharat Career Aspiration Report 2025.

Students participating in the study will be required to complete a 15-minute offline survey focused on their career aspirations and awareness of various career options. Additionally, they will receive the following complimentary services at free of cost:

1. The chance to attend a one-hour offline Career Planning Workshop led by experienced counselors.
2. Access to an online career dashboard, offering valuable information on various career pathways, colleges, admissions, and scholarships.
3. An opportunity to take an online Psychometric assessment and get access to a detailed career report that provides career-related insights based on one's interests, aptitude and personality.

There are no anticipated physical risks associated with participation in this study. To mitigate any potential risk of emotional discomfort when discussing career aspirations and potential obstacles, participants can reach out to a helpline operated by iDC at +91-8882213831.

All information collected about the students for this study will be kept confidential. The data will be stored securely and only researchers associated with the project will have access to the data. We will not cite the students by name and will remove any other identifying information when we share our results.

Your school's participation is completely voluntary. Students are free to withdraw their participation in the study at any time without repercussions.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Please fill the below details to confirm your school's participation in the study-

I _____ of _____ I have read (or had read to me) the contents of this consent form in a language that I understand and have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received satisfactory answers to my questions. I hereby permit students in classes 9th/10th/11th/12th of the school to participate in this research study.

Date: _____ Signature: _____

Contact Person:

Sanjay Singh
Phone: +91-9953626928
Email: sanjay.singh@idreamcareer.com

Additional statistical tables

Table A1.1: Gender-wise Distribution of Student Respondents Across Seven States

Gender			
State	**Female**	**Male**	**Grand Total**
Gujarat	1914	1619	3533
Karnataka	1453	1527	2980
Madhya Pradesh	1725	1371	3096
Odisha	1722	1665	3387
Punjab	850	1129	1979
Rajasthan	1466	1584	3050
Uttar Pradesh	1619	1595	3214
Grand Total	**10749**	**10490**	**21239**

Table A1.2: Gender-wise Distribution of Student Respondents Across Urban and Rural Districts

Gender			
Urban/Rural District	**Female**	**Male**	**Grand Total**
Rural	5651	5408	11059
Urban	5098	5082	10180
Grand Total	**10749**	**10490**	**21239**

Table A1.3: Gender-wise Distribution of Student Respondents by School Type (Government vs Private)

Gender			
Type of School	**Female**	**Male**	**Grand Total**
Government School	5775	5076	10851
Private School	4974	5414	10388
Grand Total	**10749**	**10490**	**21239**

Table A1.4: Gender-wise Distribution of Student Respondents by Grade (9th to 12th)

Gender			
Grade	**Female**	**Male**	**Grand Total**
10th	2622	2771	5393
11th	3063	2752	5815
12th	2444	2201	4645
9th	2620	2766	5386
Grand Total	**10749**	**10490**	**21239**

Table A1.5: Gender-wise Distribution of Student Respondents by Social Category (General, OBC, SC, ST)

Gender			
Social Category	**Female**	**Male**	**Grand Total**
General	3509	3626	7135
OBC	3454	3328	6782
SC	1381	1446	2827
ST	2405	2090	4495
Grand Total	**10749**	**10490**	**21239**

Table A1.6: Gender-wise Distribution of Student Respondents by State, Gender and Urban/Rural District

Gender				
State	***Urban/Rural District***	**Female**	**Male**	**Grand Total**
Gujarat	Rural	994	698	1692
	Urban	920	921	1841
	Total	1914	1619	3533
Karnataka	Rural	792	811	603
	Urban	661	716	1377
	Total	1453	1527	2980
Madhya Pradesh	Rural	978	833	1811
	Urban	747	538	1285
	Total	1725	1371	3096
Odisha	Rural	645	510	1155
	Urban	1077	1155	2232
	Total	1722	1665	3387
Punjab	Rural	783	1042	1825
	Urban	67	87	154
	Total	850	1129	1979
Rajasthan	Rural	628	689	1317
	Urban	838	895	1733
	Total	1466	1584	3050
Uttar Pradesh	Rural	831	825	1656
	Urban	788	770	1558
	Total	1619	1595	3214
Grand Total		**10749**	**10490**	**21239**

Table A1.7: Gender-wise Distribution of Student Respondents by State, Gender and School Type

Gender				
State	***Type of School***	**Female**	**Male**	**Grand Total**
Gujarat	Government School	920	560	1480
	Private School	994	1059	2053
	Grand Total	1914	1619	3533
Karnataka	Government School	789	827	1616
	Private School	664	700	1364
	Grand Total	1453	1527	2980
Madhya Pradesh	Government School	1003	741	1744
	Private School	722	630	1352
	Grand Total	1725	1371	3096
Odisha	Government School	1022	990	2012
	Private School	700	675	1375
	Grand Total	1722	1665	3387
Punjab	Government School	427	596	1023
	Private School	423	533	956
	Grand Total	850	1129	1979
Rajasthan	Government School	793	617	1410
	Private School	673	967	1640
	Grand Total	1466	1584	3050
Uttar Pradesh	Government School	821	745	1566
	Private School	798	850	1648
	Grand Total	1619	1595	3214
Grand Total		**10749**	**10490**	**21239**

Table A1.8: Gender-wise Distribution of Student Respondents by State, Gender and Social Category

Gender				
State	***Social Category***	**Female**	**Male**	**Grand Total**
Gujarat	General	461	439	900
	OBC	282	307	589
	SC	263	248	511
	ST	908	625	1533
	Total	1914	1619	3533
Karnataka	General	488	502	990
	OBC	718	747	1465
	SC	139	156	295
	ST	108	122	230
	Total	1453	1527	2980
Madhya Pradesh	General	366	341	707
	OBC	718	482	1200
	SC	246	240	486
	ST	395	308	703
	Total	1725	1371	3096
Odisha	General	1088	967	2055
	OBC	321	276	597
	SC	205	188	393
	ST	108	234	342
	Total	1722	1665	3387
Punjab	General	384	533	917
	OBC	254	311	565
	SC	195	264	459
	ST	17	21	38
	Total	850	1129	1979

Table A1.8: Gender-wise Distribution of Student Respondents by State, Gender and Social Category

Gender				
State	***Social Category***	**Female**	**Male**	**Grand Total**
Rajasthan	General	339	459	798
	OBC	486	551	1037
	SC	174	166	340
	ST	467	408	875
	Total	1466	1584	3050
Uttar Pradesh	General	383	385	768
	OBC	675	654	1329
	SC	159	184	343
	ST	402	372	774
	Total	1619	1595	3214
Grand Total		**10749**	**10490**	**21239**

Table A1.9: Gender-wise Distribution of Student Respondents by State, Gender and Grade

Gender				
State	***Grade***	**Female**	**Male**	**Grand Total**
Gujarat	10th	478	45	23
	11th	511	409	920
	12th	437	359	796
	9th	488	406	894
	Total	1914	1619	3533
Karnataka	10th	374	404	778
	11th	398	386	784
	12th	294	331	625
	9th	387	406	793
	Total	1453	1527	2980
Madhya Pradesh	10th	451	323	774
	11th	432	381	813
	12th	430	311	741
	9th	412	356	768
	Total	1725	1371	3096
Odisha	10th	347	432	779
	11th	672	528	1200
	12th	288	252	540
	9th	415	453	868
	Total	1722	1665	3387
Punjab	10th	213	278	491
	11th	210	279	489
	12th	236	240	476
	9th	191	332	523
	Total	850	1129	1979

Table A1.7: Gender-wise Distribution of Student Respondents by State, Gender and Grade

Gender				
State	***Grade***	**Female**	**Male**	**Grand Total**
Rajasthan	10th	395	469	864
	11th	384	442	826
	12th	352	351	703
	9th	335	322	657
	Total	1466	1584	3050
Uttar Pradesh	10th	364	420	784
	11th	456	327	783
	12th	407	357	764
	9th	392	491	883
	Total	1619	1595	3214
Grand Total		**10749**	**10490**	**21239**

Table A1.10: School Categories and their Characteristics

Features	**Government school**	**Private school**
Ownership	Government-run and owned	Owned and run by private individuals, trusts, or organisations
Funding	Government funded	Tuition fees and private sources
Fee Structure	Very low/Subsidised	Higher than government schools
Faculty Employment	Government employees (state or center)	Private management
Regulation	Strict government rules	Autonomous but overall abiding by government circulars
Admission Process	No/nominal admission fee, usually as an enrolment fair	Significant admission fee with a multi-level selection procedure

Fig. A.2.1: Career Aspirations among Females by State

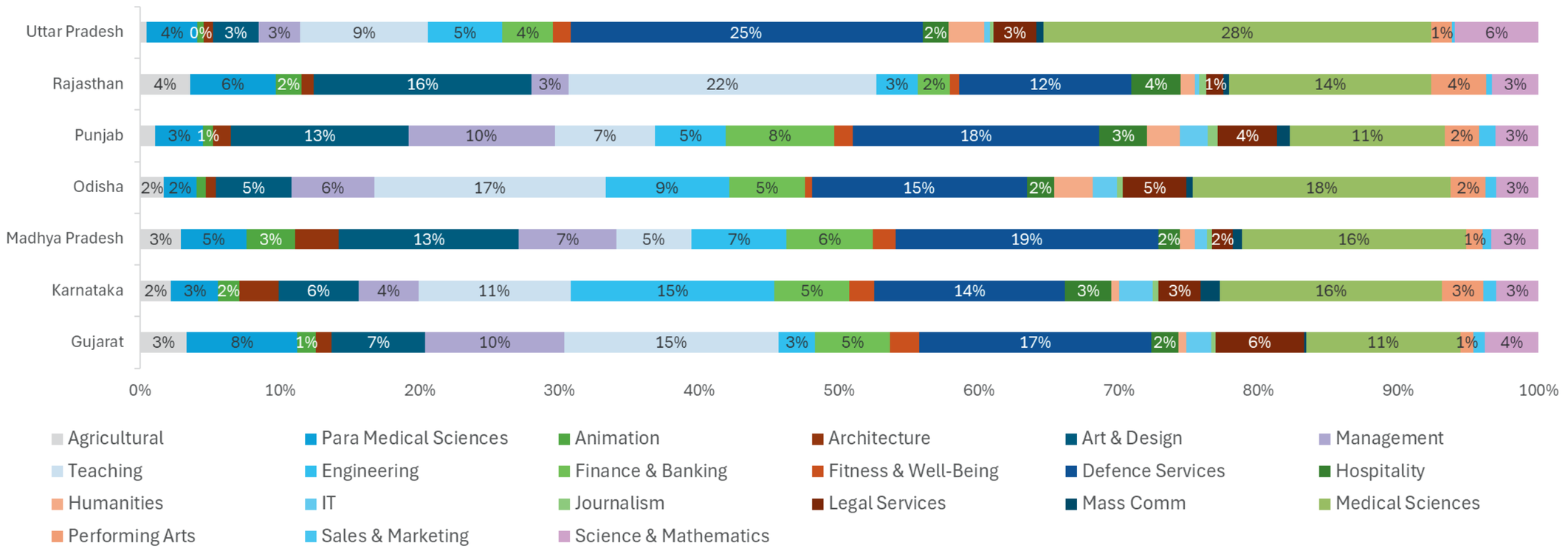


Fig. A.2.2: Career Aspirations among Males by State

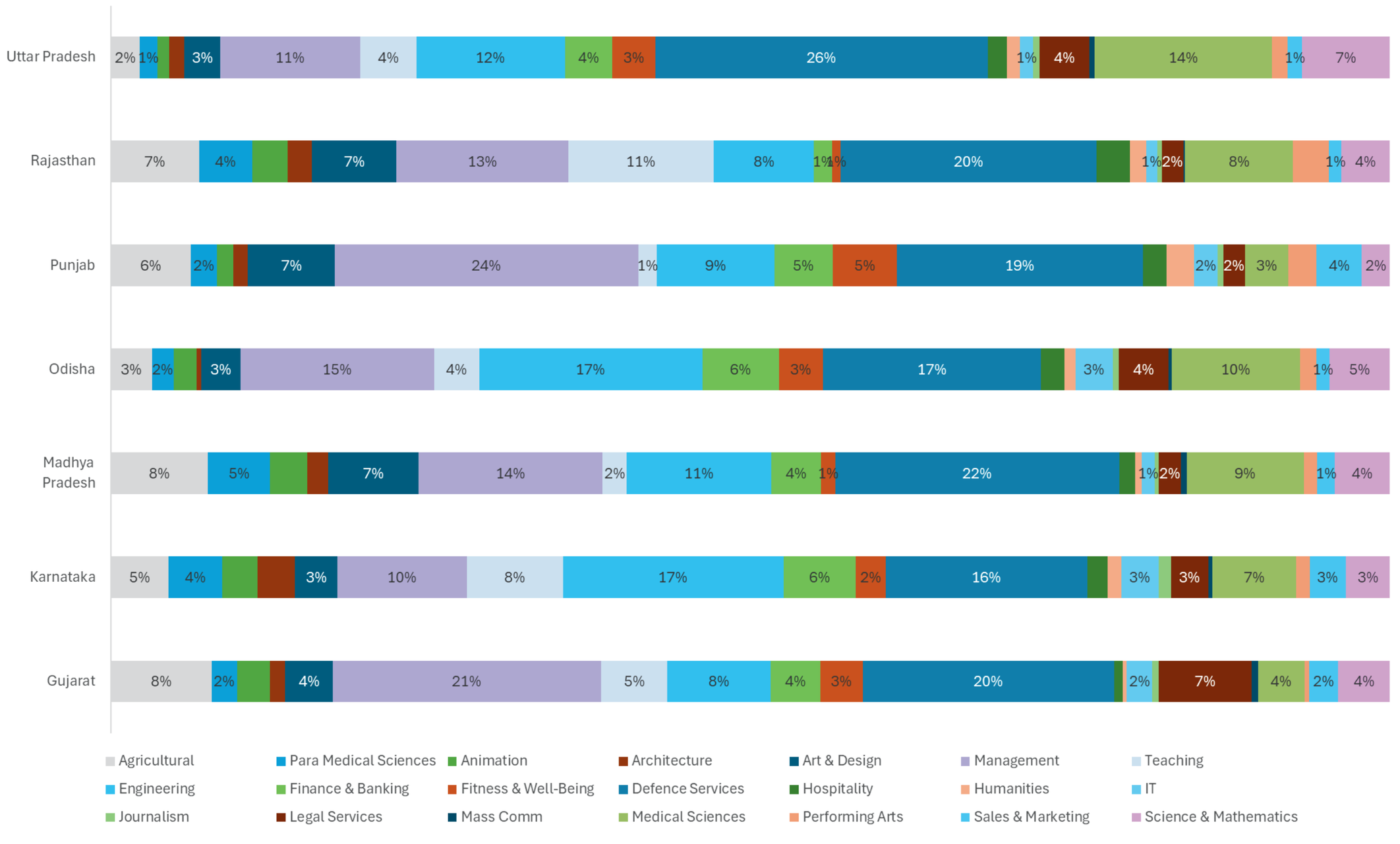


Fig. A.2.3: Career Aspirations by School Type and Gender

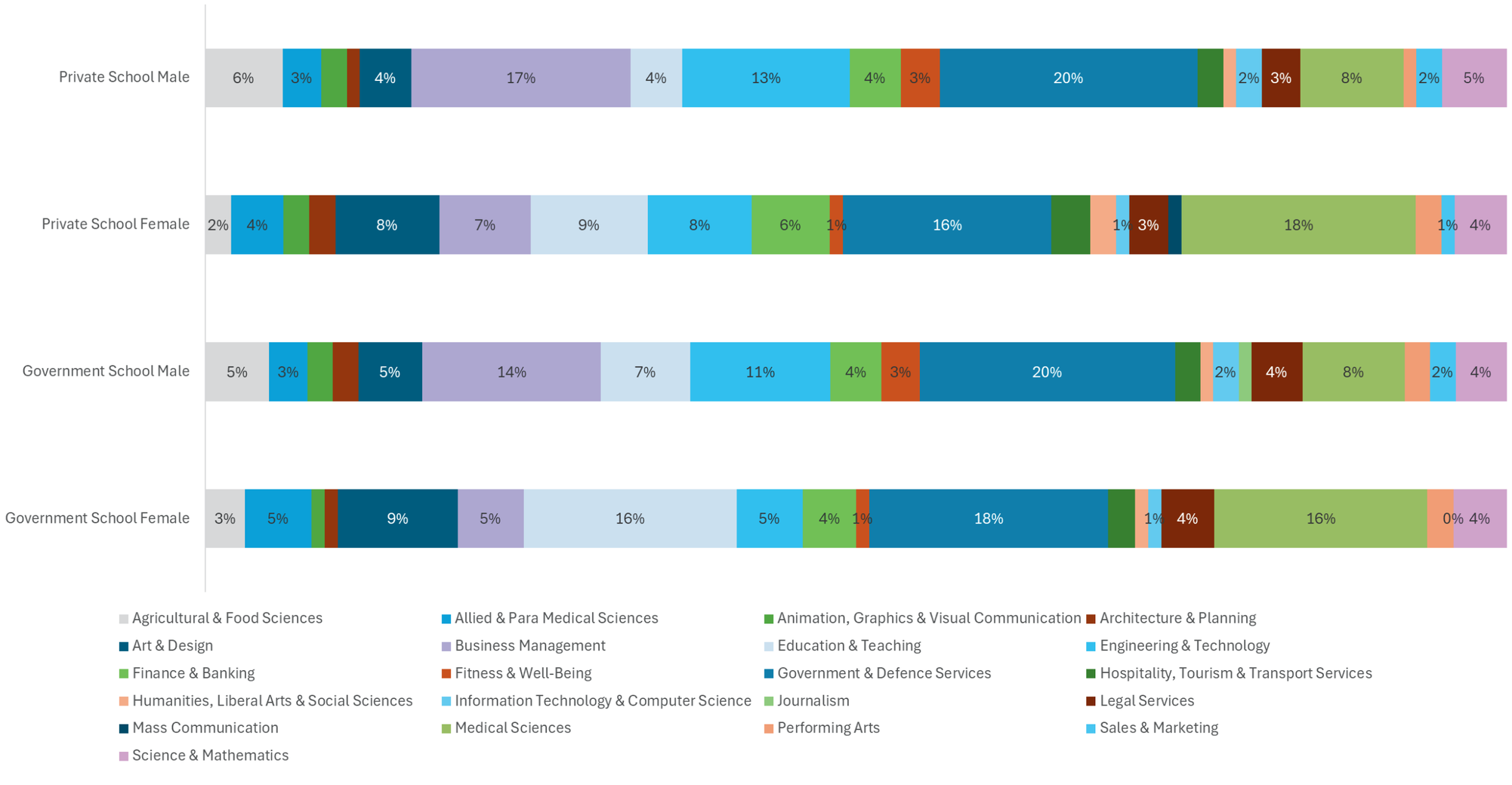


Fig. A.2.4: Self-assessment practices by state and type of district

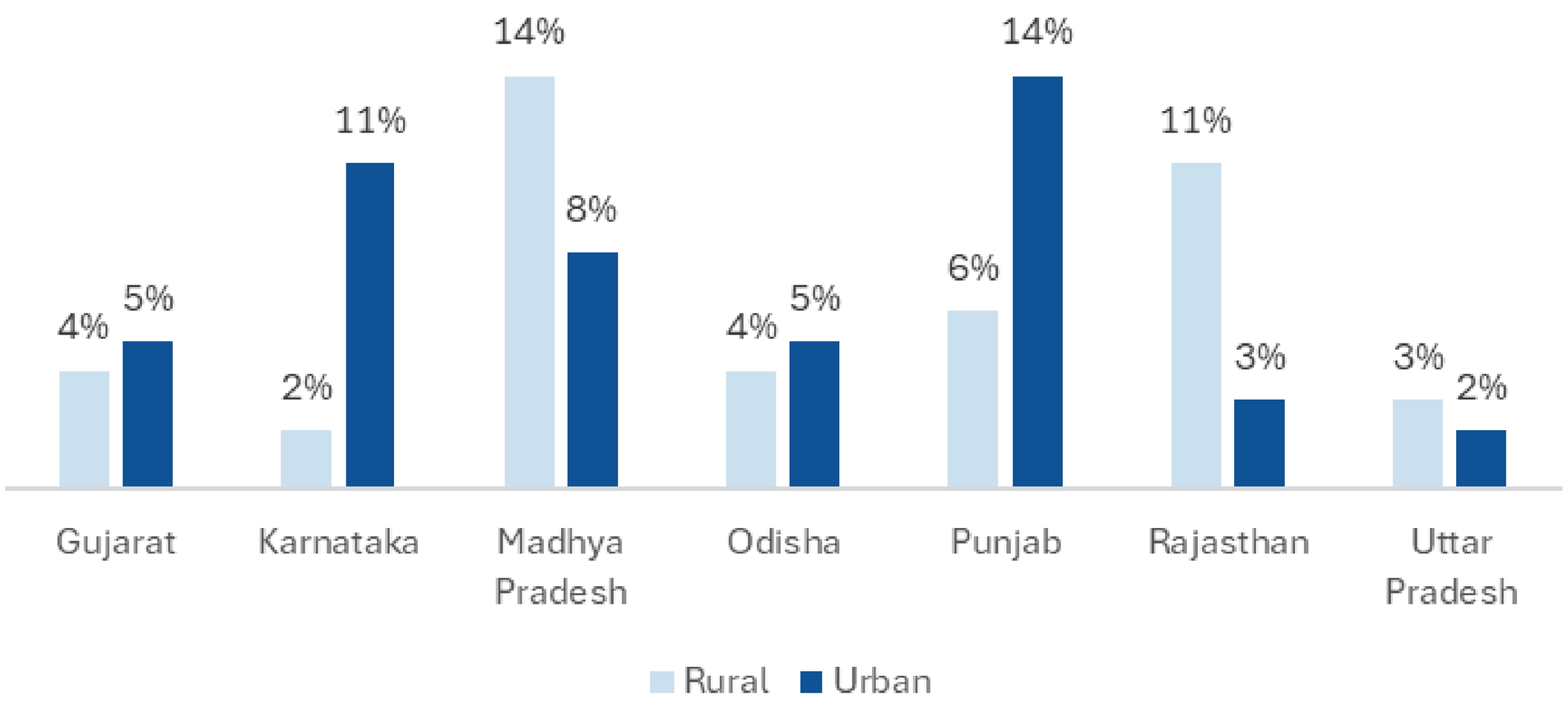


Fig. A.2.4: Self-awareness levels by type of school and gender

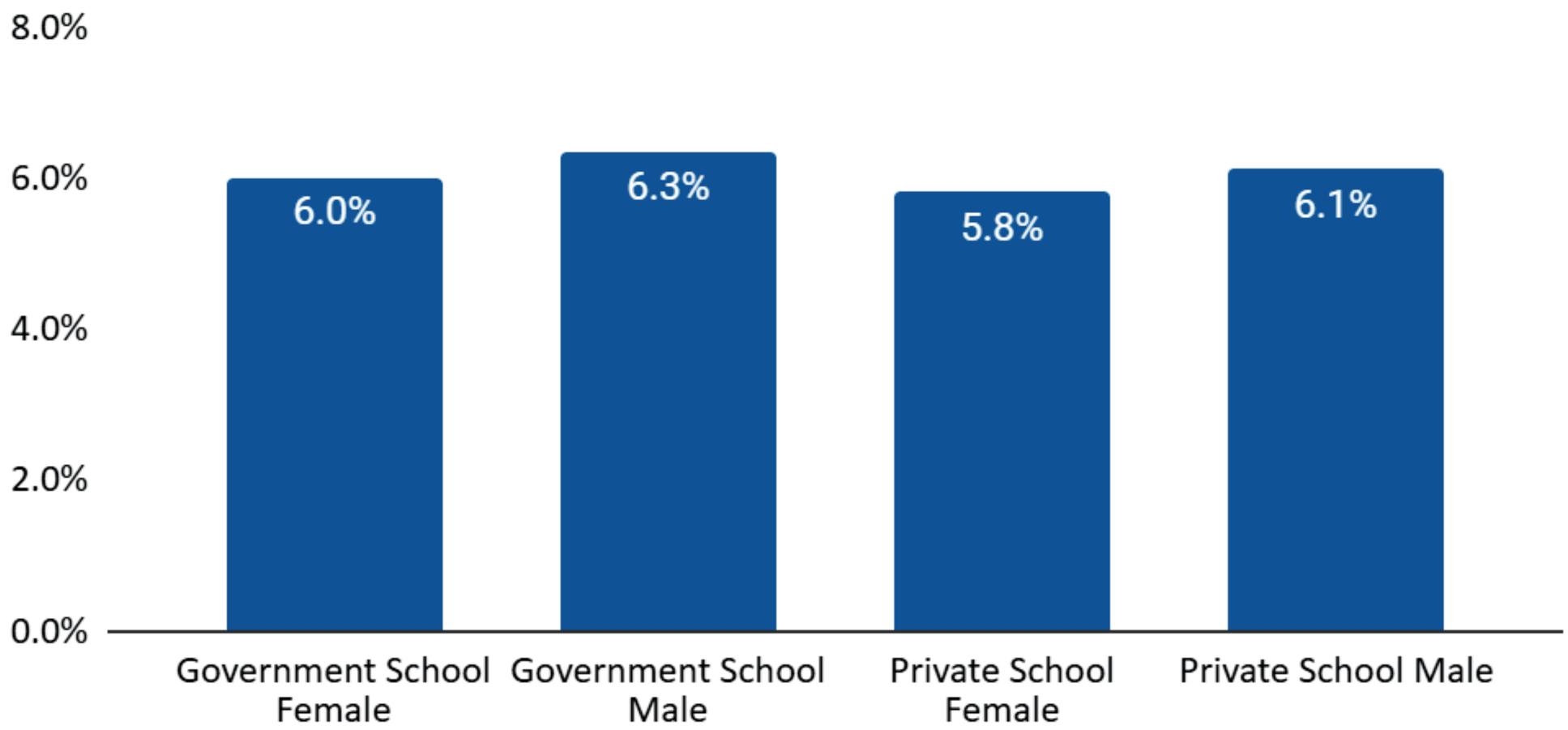


Fig. A.2.5: Awareness and Aspirations for Educational Qualification by School Type and Gender

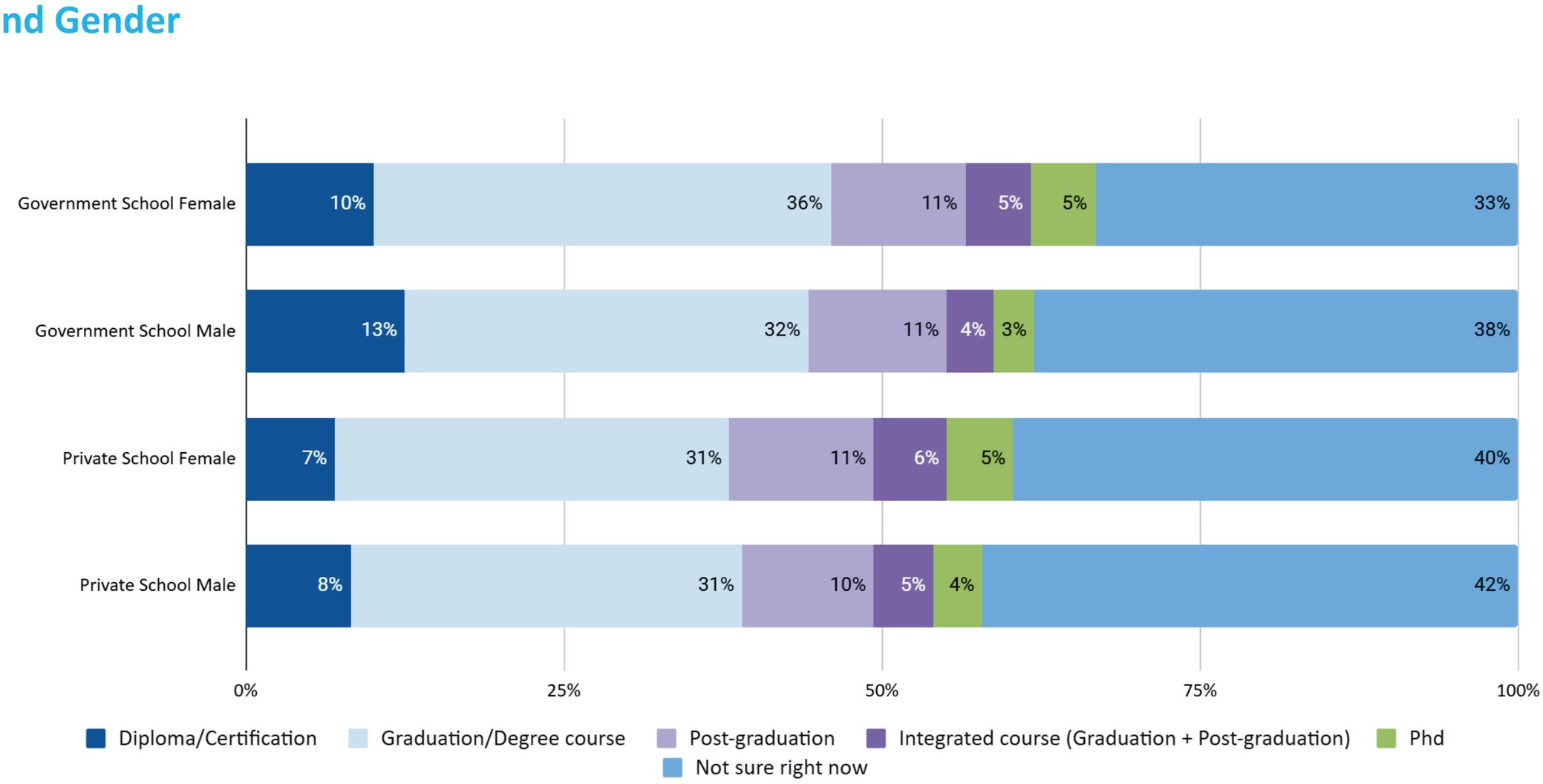


Fig. A.2.6: College Preferences by School Type and Gender

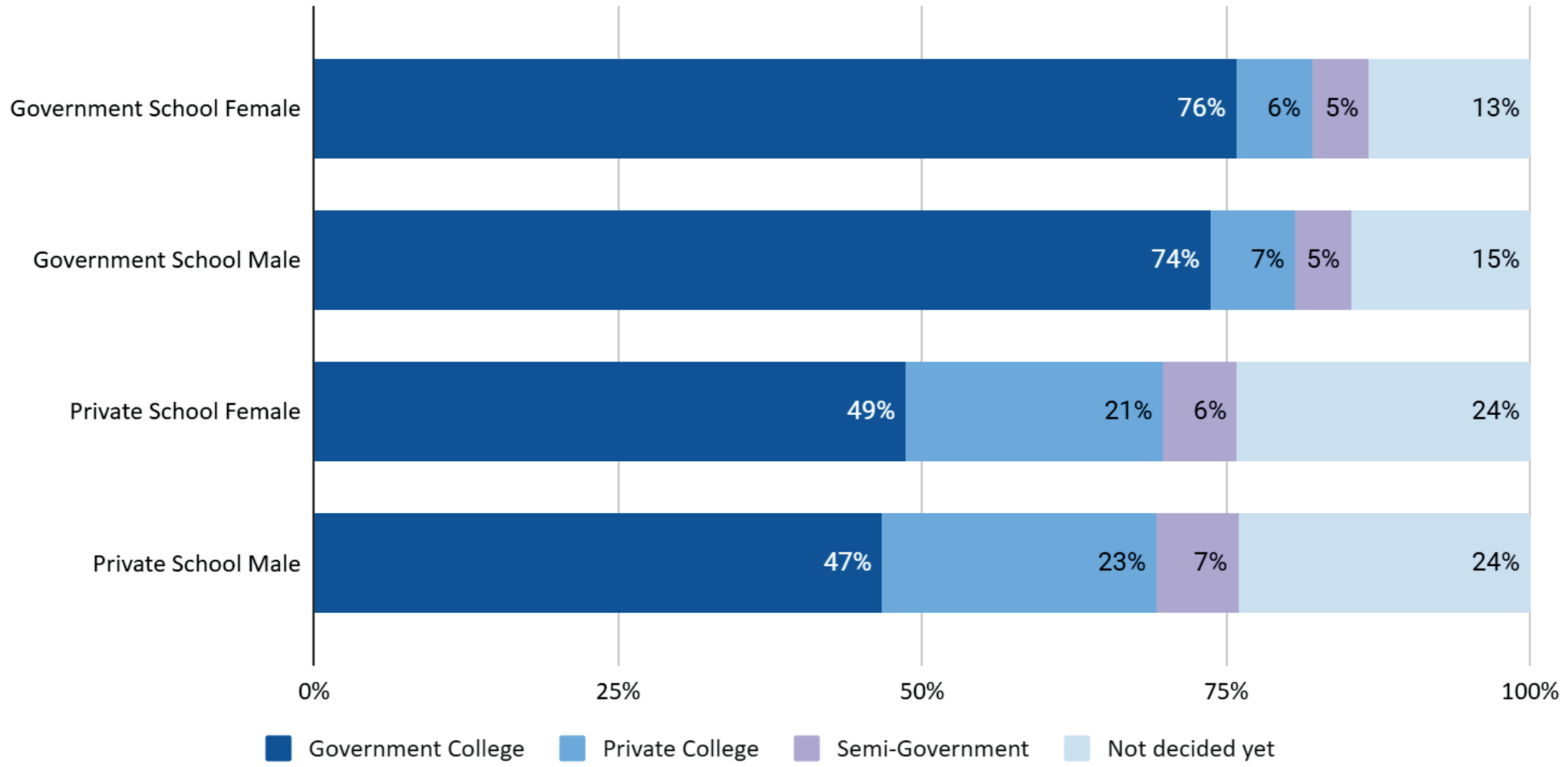


Fig. A.2.7: Awareness of Minimum Expenditure by School Type and Gender

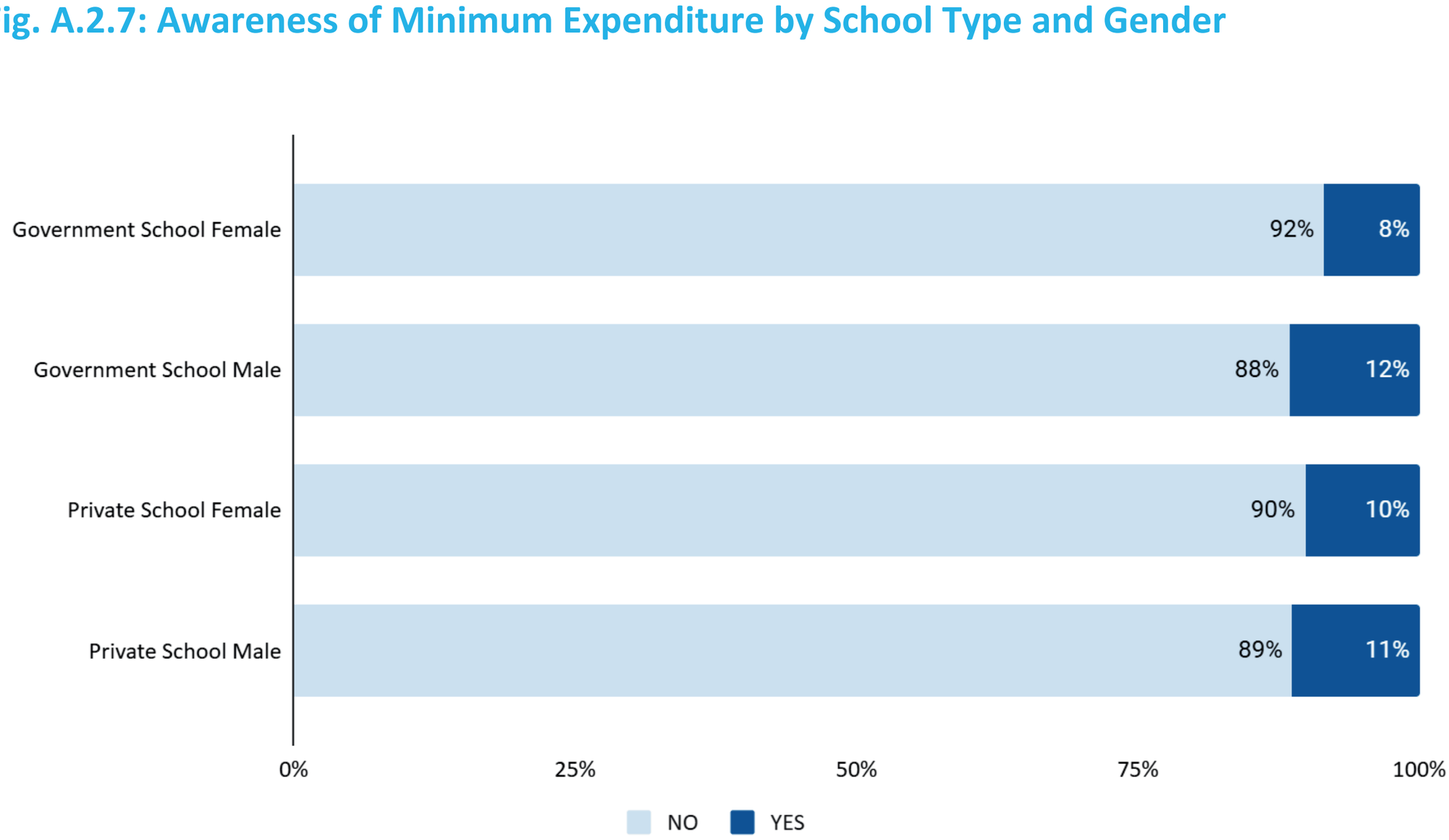


Fig. A.2.7: Awareness of Minimum Expenditure by School Type and Gender

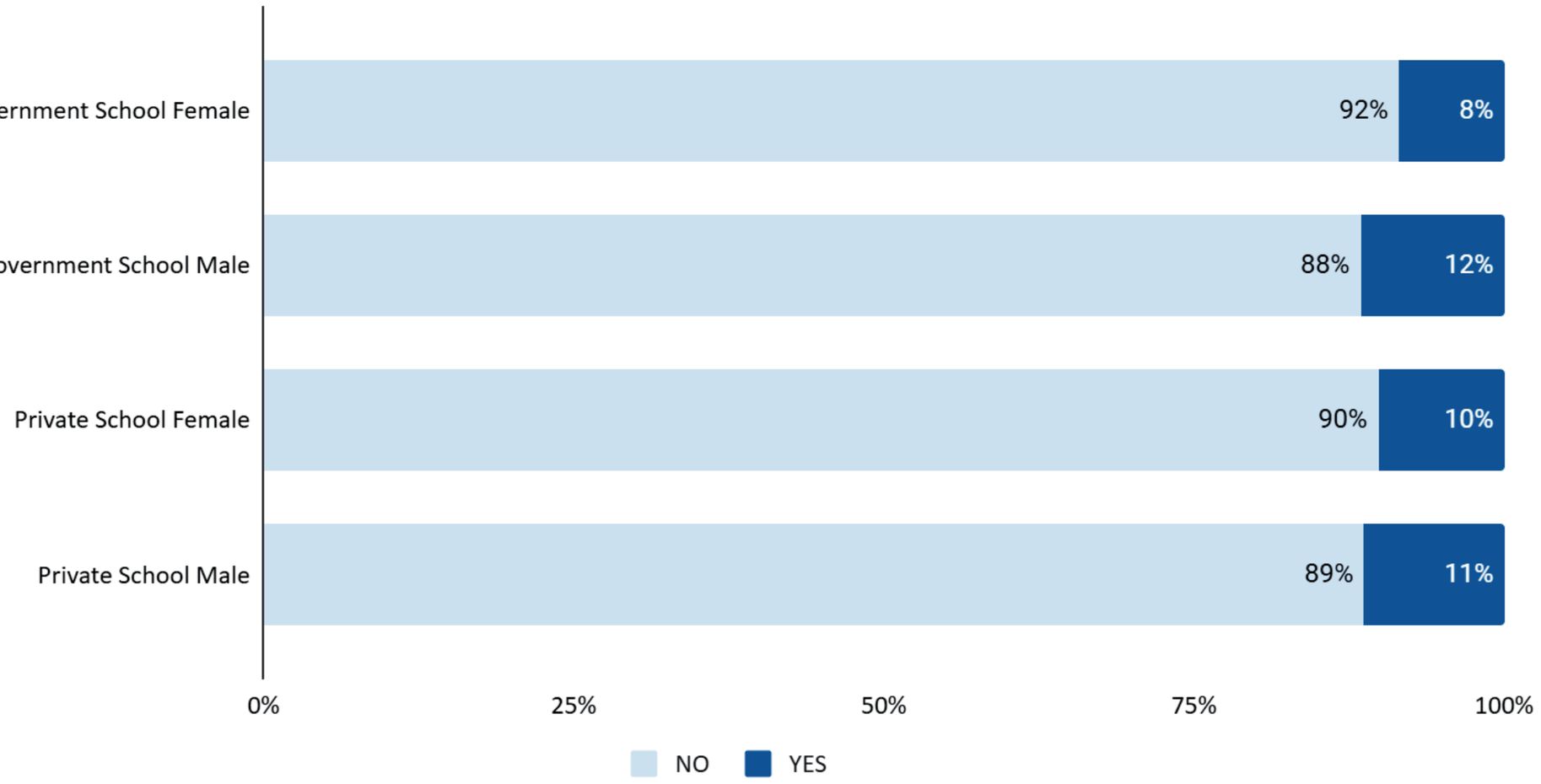


Fig. A.2.8: Backup Career Plan by School Type and Gender

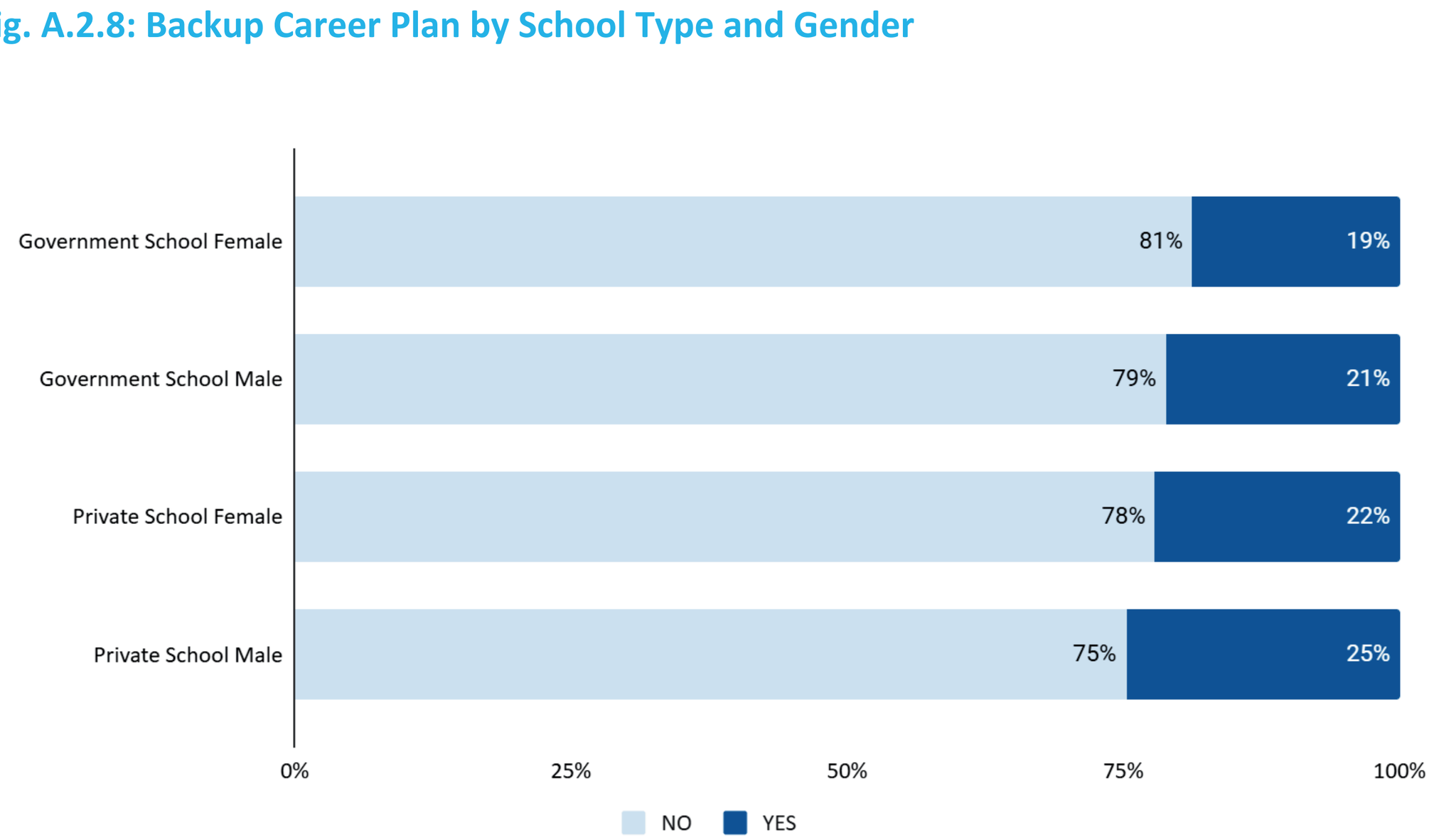


Fig. A.2.9: Stakeholders influencing Career Planning by School Type and Gender

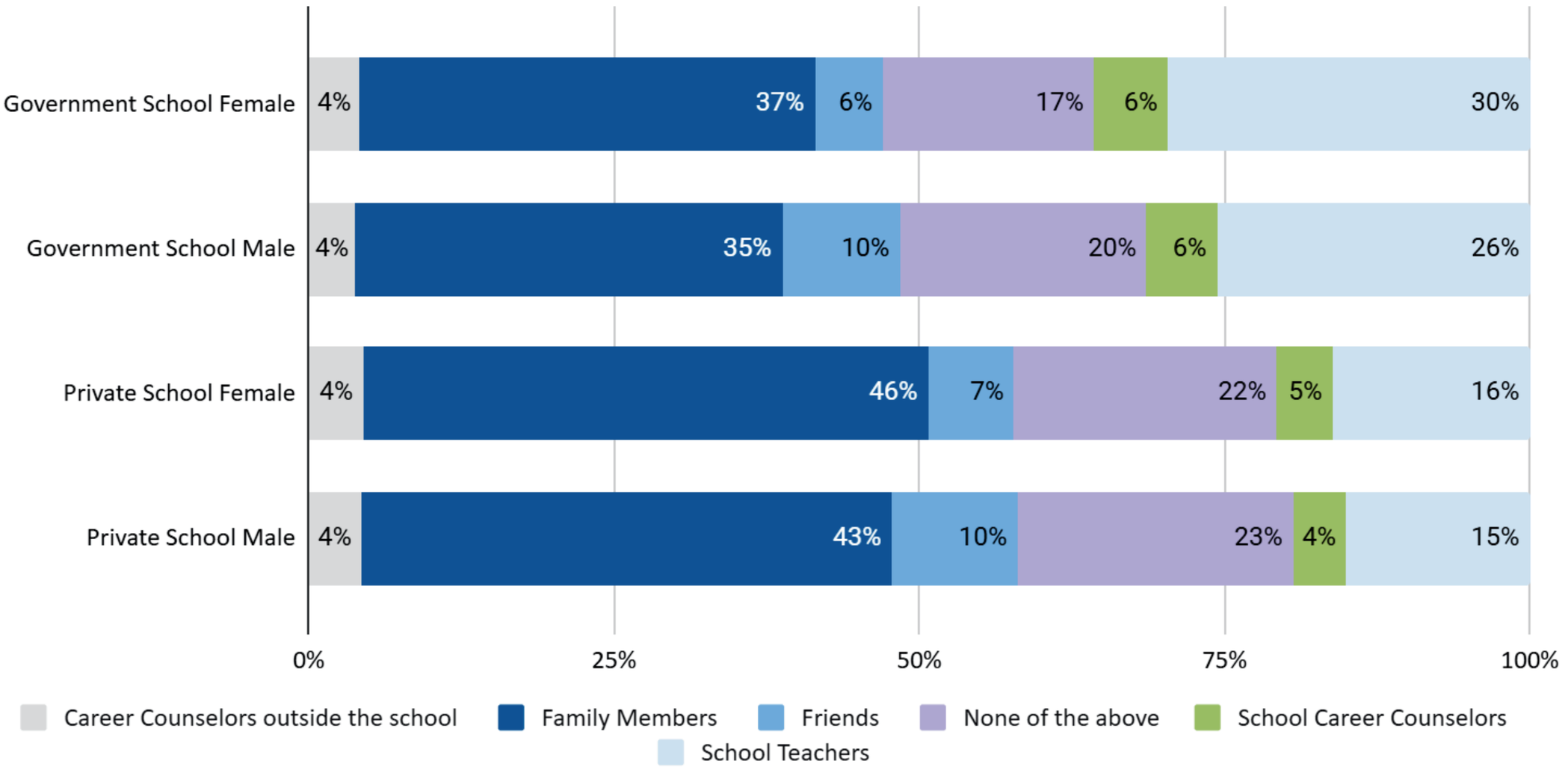


Fig. A.2.10: Access to Professional Counselling by School Type and Gender

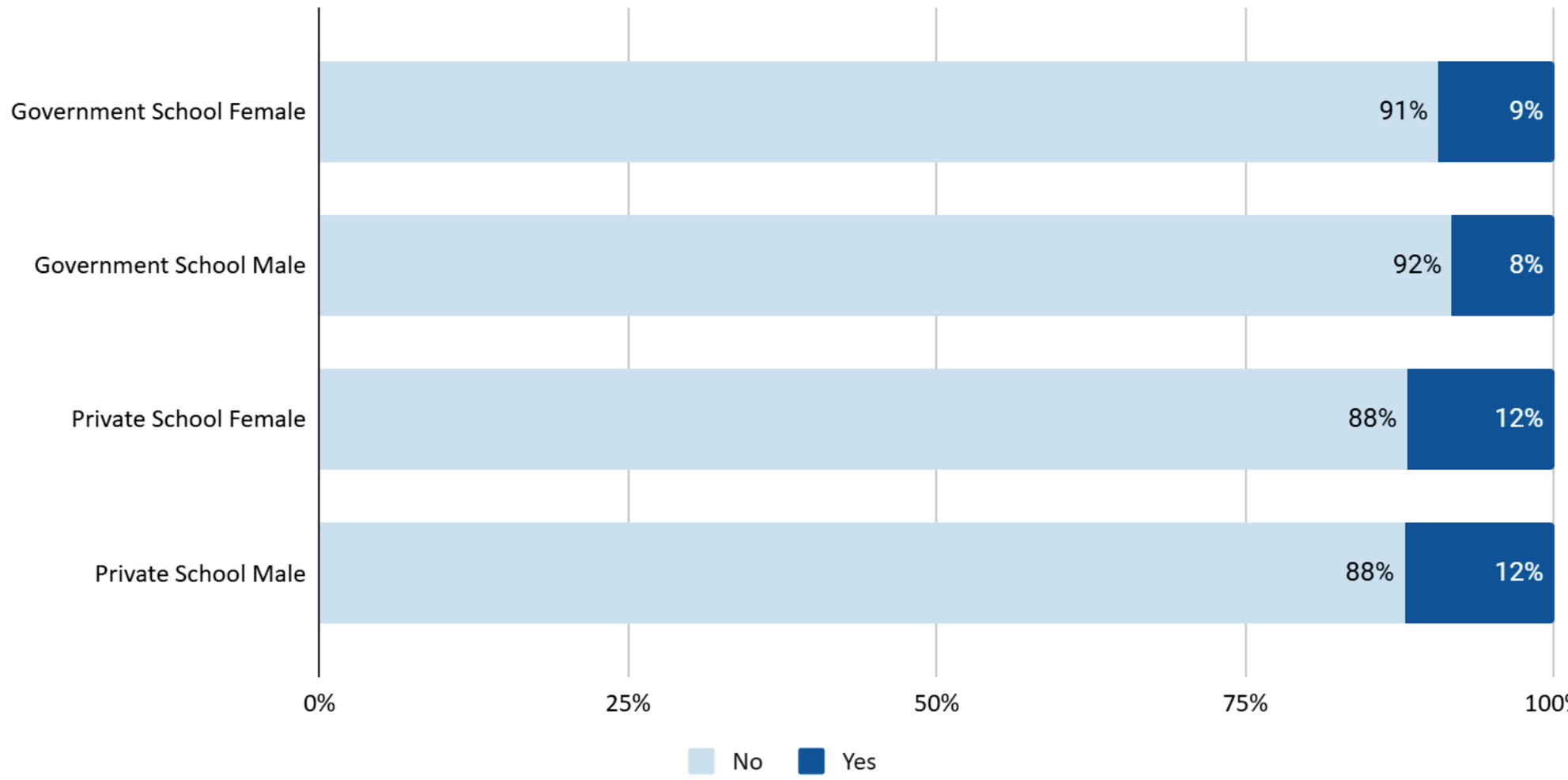


Fig. A.2.11: Confidence levels by School Type and Gender

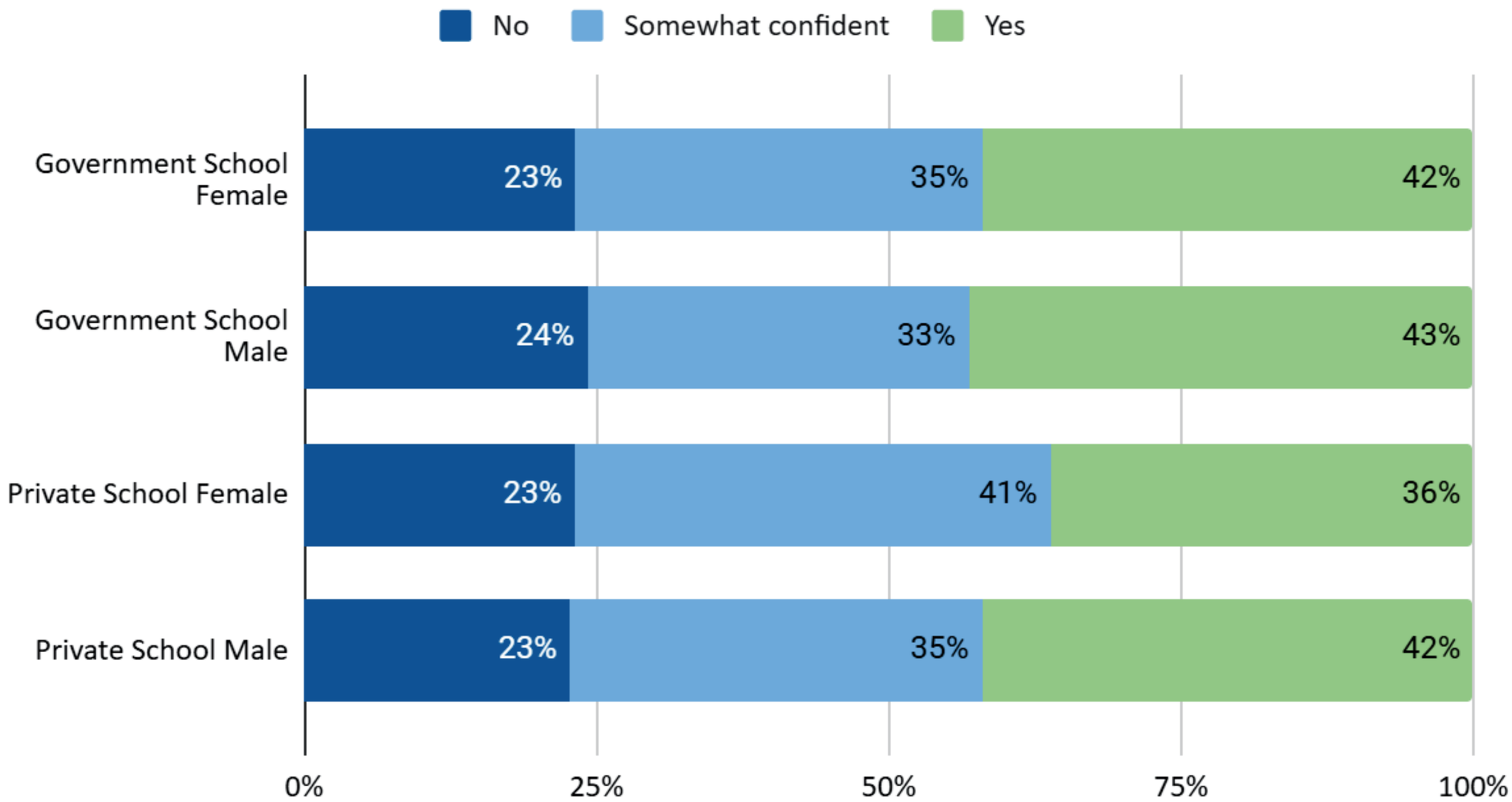


Fig. A.2.12: Factors influencing Career Choices by School Type and Gender

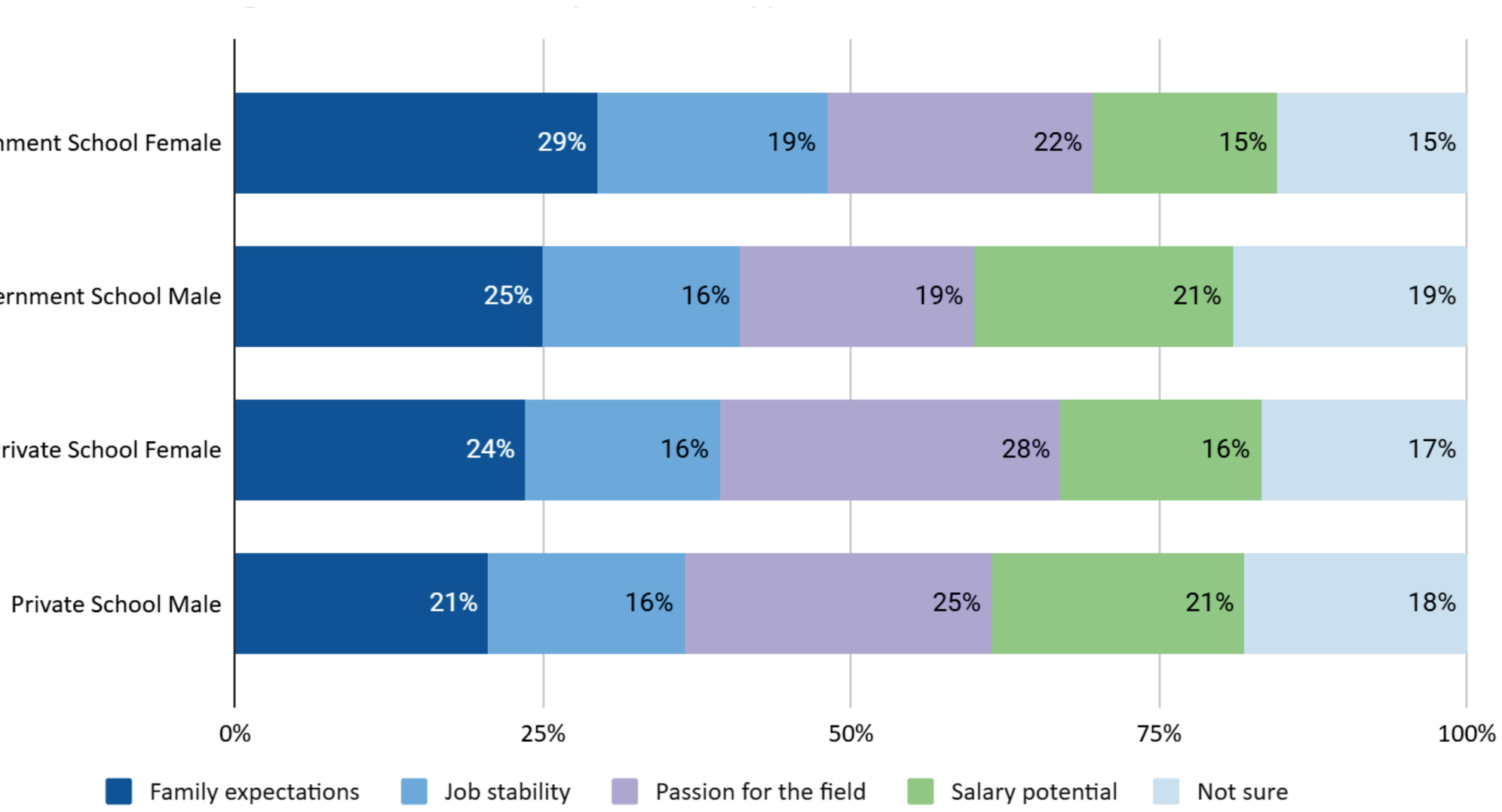
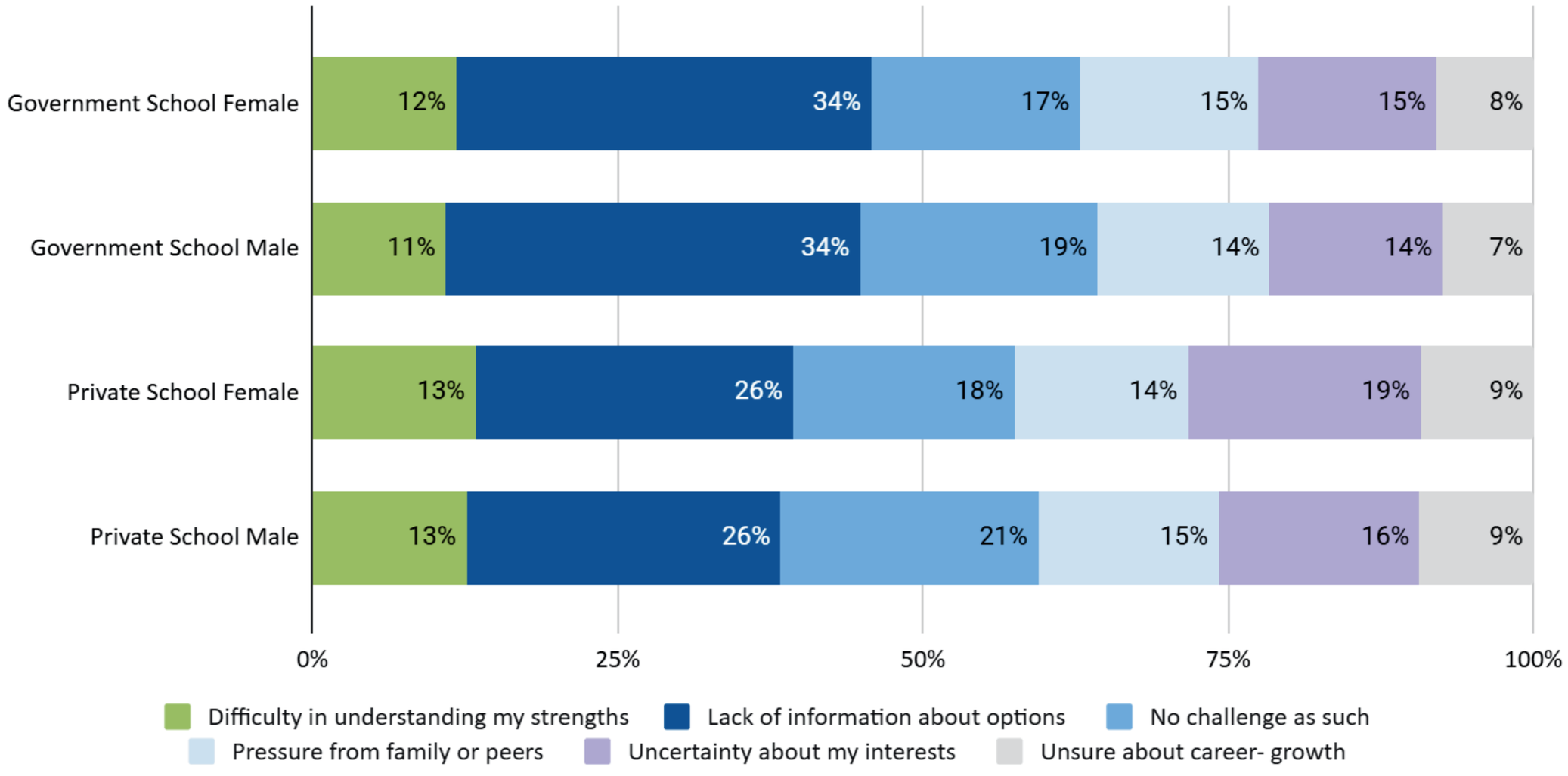


Fig. A.2.13: Challenges in Choosing a Career Path by School Type and Gender



Career Counselling and Awareness Workshop being held in Lucknow

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