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Career preferences and determinants of career choices among undergraduate and postgraduate students of Indira Gandhi Krishi Vishwavidyalaya, Raipur, Chhattisgarh

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Abstract

Agricultural education in India has diversified career pathways for graduates well beyond conventional government employment, yet empirical evidence on how undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) students of State Agricultural Universities perceive and prioritise these pathways remains limited, particularly in Chhattisgarh. The present study examined the career preferences of UG and PG students of Indira Gandhi Krishi Vishwavidyalaya (IGKV), Raipur, and identified the factors and persons influencing their career decisions. A descriptive research design was adopted, and 300 respondents (150 UG and 150 PG students) were selected from four constituent colleges of IGKV through a two-stage stratified random sampling procedure during the 2025-26 academic session. Primary data were collected using a pre-tested structured questionnaire and analysed using frequency, percentage and Chi-square tests. Results revealed that Government Job was the most preferred career option overall (35.67%), particularly among UG students (54.67%), whereas Higher Education (M.Sc./Ph.D.) was the leading preference among PG students (46.67%). The Chi-square test confirmed a statistically significant association between the level of study and career preference ($\chi^2 = 50.755$, $df = 6$, $p < 0.001$). Personal Interest (69.33%), Faculty Guidance (67.00%) and Job Security (57.00%) emerged as the three most influential factors shaping career decisions, while Teachers (36.33%) were the most prominent source of influence, followed by Self (29.33%) and Parents (23.00%). The findings underscore the need for structured career counselling, faculty mentorship and curriculum-integrated entrepreneurship exposure to help agricultural students align their career decisions with emerging employment opportunities in agriculture and allied sectors.

Keywords: Career preference, agricultural students, determinants of career choice, chi-square analysis, Indira Gandhi Krishi Vishwavidyalaya

1. Introduction

Agriculture remains fundamental to global food security, rural livelihoods and economic development, supporting nearly 2.5 billion people worldwide (Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 2023) ^[5]. Rapid advancements in biotechnology, precision farming, digital agriculture and climate-smart technologies have transformed agriculture into a knowledge-intensive sector, creating diverse career opportunities for graduates in government service, research, higher education, agribusiness, banking, food processing, consultancy, agri-tech and entrepreneurship (Naik *et al.*, 2024) ^[13].

Career preference refers to an individual's inclination toward a particular occupation based on personal interests, abilities, aspirations and external opportunities. Career decisions are influenced by academic aspirations, educational experiences, family background, socio-economic status, academic performance, job security, expected income and institutional support (Rojewski, 1996; Quaglia and Cobb, 1996; Surve, 2005) ^[18, 15, 22].

Among agricultural graduates, government employment continues to be the most preferred career because of its job security, stable income and social prestige. Studies have reported that while entrepreneurship and private-sector opportunities are gaining attention, concerns related to financial risk, limited practical exposure and market uncertainty still limit their adoption (Agbo *et al.*, 2015; Ansari and Ansari, 2019; Modak *et al.*, 2018) ^[1, 2, 12].

In India, agriculture and allied sectors contribute about 18 per cent to the Gross Value Added (GVA) and employ a significant share of the workforce (Government of India, 2024) ^[6]. The expansion of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) system and State Agricultural Universities (SAUs) has broadened educational and career opportunities for agricultural graduates. Previous studies have shown that government employment remains the most preferred career, while parental occupation, family income and academic performance significantly influence career aspirations (Lakshmi *et al.*, 2013; Niranjana *et al.*, 2018) ^[9, 14].

Chhattisgarh, known as the “Rice Bowl of Central India,” offers expanding opportunities in agriculture through diversification, value addition and agripreneurship. Indira Gandhi Krishi Vishwavidyalaya (IGKV), Raipur, equips students with technical and entrepreneurial skills through experiential learning, Rural Agricultural Work Experience (RAWE), internships and research programmes to meet the evolving demands of the agricultural sector.

Although several studies have examined the career preferences of agricultural students in different states of India (Ansari and Ansari, 2019; Arunachalam *et al.*, 2020; Bora and Barman, 2022; Kumar and Chauhan, 2020; Raju and Devarani, 2023; Rout *et al.*, 2021; Sambrani and Sidram, 2022; Sengathir and Dhayanand, 2022; Vinodkumar and Seema, 2021) ^[2, 3, 4, 8, 16, 19, 20, 21, 23], evidence from IGKV, Raipur remains limited. Therefore, the present study was undertaken to assess the career preferences of undergraduate and postgraduate students of IGKV, Raipur, and identify the factors influencing their career decisions.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Research Design and Study Area

The study adopted a descriptive research design to systematically examine the career preferences of undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) students and the factors shaping their career decisions. It was conducted in Indira Gandhi Krishi Vishwavidyalaya (IGKV), Raipur, the State Agricultural University of Chhattisgarh, established on 20 January 1987 was purposively selected as the study area. IGKV operates a network of 28 constituent colleges, 11 affiliated colleges, 8 research centres and 27 Krishi Vigyan Kendras, offering three undergraduate, twenty postgraduate and nineteen doctoral programmes.

2.2 Sampling Procedure

A two-stage stratified random sampling technique was followed. Four constituent colleges of IGKV offering both UG and PG programmes were selected purposively. From a total student population of 3,100 (2,045 UG and 1,055 PG), a sample of 300 students comprising 150 UG and 150 PG students was selected using disproportionate stratified random sampling to facilitate comparison between the two groups.

2.3 Data Collection

Primary data were collected during the 2025–26 academic session through personal interviews using a pre-tested structured questionnaire. Secondary data were obtained from journals, thesis, government reports, ICAR and IGKV publications, and official university records.

2.4 Statistical Tools of Analysis

Data were edited, coded, tabulated and analysed using frequency and percentage analysis to summarise the socio-demographic profile of respondents and their career preferences, the factors

influencing these preferences, and the persons who most influenced their decisions. To test the association between the level of study (UG/PG) and career preference, the Chi-square (χ^2) test of independence was applied using the formula:

$$\chi^2 = \sum [(O - E)^2 / E]$$

where O denotes the observed frequency and E the expected frequency. The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the analysis:

H₀ (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant association between the level of study and the career preference of the students.

H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis): There is a significant association between the level of study and the career preference of the students.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents

The socio-demographic profile of the 300 respondents showed that the majority (83.33%) belonged to the 20-25 years age group, with UG students concentrated below 20 years and PG students more represented in the older age groups. Female respondents (55.33%) slightly outnumbered males (44.67%). Most respondents belonged to farming families (40.00%), followed by service, other occupations, and business. Nearly half (48.67%) reported an annual family income below ₹3 lakh, indicating that most students came from low- to middle-income agrarian households. These findings are in line with Lakshmi *et al.* (2013) ^[9] and Sengathir and Dhayanand (2022) ^[21], who reported that family background and income influence students' career orientation.

3.2 Career Preferences of Undergraduate and Postgraduate Students

The distribution of career preferences among UG and PG respondents is presented in Table 1. Of the 300 respondents, Government Job was the single most preferred career option overall, chosen by 107 respondents (35.67%), followed by Higher Education (M.Sc./Ph.D.) with 100 respondents (33.33%), Private Sector Job (11.33%), Farming/Agribusiness (7.67%), Entrepreneurship/Start-up (5.33%), Research and Development (5.00%) and Others (1.67%). A clear divergence emerged between the two academic levels: Government Job was the leading preference among UG students (54.67%), whereas Higher Education (M.Sc./Ph.D.) was the leading preference among PG students (46.67%). Preferences for Private Sector Job, Research and Development, and Entrepreneurship/Start-up were comparatively higher among PG students, while Farming/Agribusiness attracted a modest, broadly similar share of respondents at both levels.

A Chi-square test of independence was conducted to examine the association between the level of study and career preference. The test yielded a statistically significant result ($\chi^2 = 50.755$, $df = 6$, $p < 0.001$), leading to rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0) and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (H_1). This confirms that career preferences differ significantly between undergraduate and postgraduate students of IGKV, Raipur, and that the level of academic attainment is an important correlate of career orientation among agricultural students.

The dominance of Government Job, particularly among UG students, corroborates Lakshmi *et al.* (2013) ^[9], Arunachalam *et al.*

al. (2020) ^[3], Kumar and Chauhan (2020) ^[8], Rout *et al.* (2021) ^[19], Vinodkumar and Seema (2021) ^[23], Bora and Barman (2022) ^[4], Sambrani and Sidram (2022) ^[20], Sengathir and Dhayanand (2022) ^[21] and Reddy *et al.* (2025) ^[17], all of whom reported government employment as the most preferred career option among agricultural and allied-discipline students because of its job security, social status and stable income. The stronger orientation of PG students toward Higher Education is consistent with Niranjana *et al.* (2018) ^[14], who observed that students frequently preferred further education before entering the job market, and partly diverges from Ansari and Ansari (2019) ^[2] and Raju and Devarani (2023) ^[16], who found higher education dominant even among undergraduates a difference plausibly attributable to institutional environment and regional opportunity structures. Maloth *et al.* (2026) ^[10] similarly reported a stronger PG inclination toward research and academic careers, mirroring the present findings.

3.3 Factors Influencing Career Preferences (Multiple Response)

The factors reported by respondents as influencing their career choice are summarised in Table 2 (multiple responses were permitted). Personal Interest was the most frequently cited factor (69.33%), followed by Faculty Guidance (67.00%), Job Security (57.00%) and Institutional Training Programmes (53.00%). Family Influence was reported considerably more often by UG students (58.00%) than PG students (34.67%), whereas Creativity and Innovation was cited more frequently by PG students (41.33%) than UG students (27.33%).

Table 1: Career preferences of undergraduate and postgraduate students

Career Preference	UG (f)	UG (%)	PG (f)	PG (%)	Total (f)	Total (%)
Government Job	82	54.67	25	16.67	107	35.67
Higher Education (M.Sc./Ph.D.)	30	20.00	70	46.67	100	33.33
Private Sector Job	13	8.67	21	14.00	34	11.33
Farming/Agribusiness	10	6.67	13	8.67	23	7.67
Entrepreneurship/Start-up	7	4.67	9	6.00	16	5.33
Research and Development	5	3.33	10	6.67	15	5.00
Others	3	2.00	2	1.33	5	1.67
Total	150	100.00	150	100.00	300	100.00

$\chi^2 = 50.755$, $df = 6$, $p < 0.001$ (Source: Field survey data, 2025-26)

Table 2: Factors influencing career preferences of undergraduate and postgraduate students (Multiple Response)

Factors	UG (f)	UG (%)	PG (f)	PG (%)	Total (f)	Total (%)
Personal Interest	101	67.33	107	71.33	208	69.33
Faculty Guidance	98	65.33	103	68.67	201	67.00
Job Security	83	55.33	88	58.67	171	57.00
Institutional Training Programmes	77	51.33	82	54.67	159	53.00
Family Influence	87	58.00	52	34.67	139	46.33
Salary/Income	62	41.33	66	44.00	128	42.67
Academic Performance	60	40.00	51	34.00	111	37.00
Creativity and Innovation	41	27.33	62	41.33	103	34.33
Opportunities	32	21.33	45	30.00	77	25.67
Peer Influence	32	21.33	28	18.67	60	20.00
Social Status	25	16.67	29	19.33	54	18.00
Risk Perception	17	11.33	24	16.00	41	13.67

(Source: Field survey data, 2025-26; percentages exceed 100 due to multiple responses)

suggesting that as students' progress academically, the locus of influence shifts from family-oriented considerations toward self-

directed, innovation-based motivations. Peer Influence, Social Status and Risk Perception were the least frequently reported factors at both levels.

These findings align with Lakshmi *et al.* (2013) ^[9], who identified academic achievement, parental occupation and socio-economic background as significant determinants of career choice, and with Niranjana *et al.* (2018) ^[14], who identified personal interest and parental influence as major determinants of career preference among agricultural graduates. Kumar and Chauhan (2020) ^[8] similarly reported that achievement motivation significantly influenced postgraduate scholars' career preferences, while Sambrani and Sidram (2022) ^[20] found knowledge, skills and personal interest to be primary determinants of career choice at UAS Raichur. The prominence of Faculty Guidance further supports Meena and Parimalarani (2023) ^[11] and Reddy *et al.* (2025) ^[17], who identified teacher guidance and job security as key motivating factors among agricultural students.

3.4 Persons/Sources Influencing Career Decisions

Table 3 presents the distribution of respondents according to the persons or sources that most influenced their career decisions. Teachers were reported as the most influential source (36.33%), followed by Self (29.33%), Parents (23.00%), Friends (7.00%), Role Models (3.33%) and Others (1.00%). This pattern was broadly consistent across UG (34.67% Teachers) and PG (38.00% Teachers) respondents, indicating that faculty members and mentors play the most prominent role in shaping career decisions at both academic levels, ahead of self-directed decision-making and parental influence.

This finding is consistent with Meena and Parimalarani (2023) ^[11], who reported that teachers significantly influenced students' career preferences through guidance and mentoring, and with Lakshmi *et al.* (2013) ^[9], who highlighted the importance of parents and the educational environment in shaping occupational aspirations. It also supports Sambrani and Sidram (2022) ^[20], who observed that family members, teachers and peers collectively influenced career choices, and Jayasudha *et al.* (2024) ^[7], who emphasised that institutional support and reliable information sources significantly influenced students' career-related aspirations.

Table 3: Persons/sources influencing the career decisions of undergraduate and postgraduate students

Influencing Persons/Sources	UG (f)	UG (%)	PG (f)	PG (%)	Total (f)	Total (%)
Teachers	52	34.67	57	38.00	109	36.33
Self	43	28.67	45	30.00	88	29.33
Parents	38	25.33	31	20.67	69	23.00
Friends	10	6.67	11	7.33	21	7.00
Role Models	5	3.33	5	3.33	10	3.33
Others	2	1.33	1	0.67	3	1.00
Total	150	100.00	150	100.00	300	100.00

(Source: Field survey data, 2025-26)

4. Conclusion

The present study examined the career preferences of undergraduate and postgraduate students of Indira Gandhi Krishi Vishwavidyalaya, Raipur, and the factors influencing their career decisions. The findings revealed that, the undergraduates show a marked preference for Government Jobs driven by Personal Interest, Faculty Guidance, Job Security and Family Influence, whereas postgraduates display stronger orientation toward Higher Education (M.Sc./Ph.D.) and, to a lesser extent,

Research & Development, private-sector employment and entrepreneurship, influenced by Faculty Guidance, Creativity/Innovation and institutional training exposure. The difference by academic level is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 50.755$, $p < 0.001$), indicating these patterns reflect substantive variation rather than chance. Teachers were identified as the single most prominent source of influence across both cohorts, surpassing self-directed decision-making and parental input. Despite the continuing dominance of government employment and higher studies, comparatively few students currently prefer entrepreneurship, agribusiness or R&D—career pathways that are critical for sectoral diversification and modernization. These findings underscore the strategic value of strengthening structured career counselling, enhancing faculty-led mentorship and industry linkages, and embedding entrepreneurship, agribusiness modules and applied research exposure within undergraduate and postgraduate curricula at IGKV to broaden students' career repertoires and better align higher education outcomes with evolving agricultural sector needs. Future multi-university and longitudinal research should examine how institutional support, practical entrepreneurial exposure and evolving labour-market signals jointly shape career decision-making over time to inform targeted policy and curriculum reforms.

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