



## The Influence of Digital Platforms on Social Networks and Collective Action among Urban Youth

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### Abstract

*This study examines the interaction of familial and religious beliefs in shaping educational aspirations among secondary school students in Bangladesh. Using a quantitative survey design, data were collected from 450 students and analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation, multiple regression, and interaction modeling. The results indicate that familial beliefs are the strongest predictor of educational aspirations ( $\beta = 0.48$ ), followed by religious beliefs ( $\beta = 0.36$ ). Importantly, the interaction effect between familial and religious beliefs is statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.29$ ), demonstrating that alignment between these belief systems strengthens educational aspirations, whereas misalignment constrains them. The novelty of this study lies in its integrated analysis of belief systems as interacting sociocultural forces rather than independent variables. This approach provides a more nuanced understanding of aspiration formation in developing country contexts. The findings imply that effective educational interventions should address not only structural barriers but also the cultural and normative dimensions of aspiration formation by engaging families and religious communities.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Education is widely recognized as a fundamental driver of social mobility, human capital development, and economic transformation, particularly in developing countries. In South Asia, and especially in Bangladesh, secondary education represents a critical transitional stage where students begin to formulate long-term educational trajectories and occupational aspirations. While access to schooling has improved substantially over the past decades, disparities in educational aspirations persist across gender, socioeconomic status, and regional contexts (Wells et al., 2023; Cheryan et al., 2025; Tompsett & Knoester, 2023). These disparities indicate that structural access alone cannot fully explain educational outcomes. Instead, students' aspirations are deeply embedded in sociocultural contexts shaped by value systems, belief structures, and normative expectations. Among these, familial and religious beliefs play a particularly significant role in shaping how students perceive education, define success, and envision their futures (Wenas & Verana, 2024; Fowler & Musgrave, 2024; Fraser et al., 2024).

A growing body of research suggests that educational aspirations are not merely individual preferences but socially constructed orientations influenced by ongoing processes of socialization. Families function as primary agents of socialization, transmitting beliefs about the purpose of education, acceptable life paths, and the perceived returns of schooling (Mohammed & Engler, 2022). These beliefs often operate as normative frameworks that guide students' decisions and shape their expectations regarding educational attainment. At the same time, religious beliefs contribute an additional layer of meaning by providing moral and ethical interpretations of knowledge, discipline, and life goals. In contexts such as Bangladesh, where religion and family are deeply intertwined in everyday life, students' aspirations emerge through the interaction of these belief systems rather than through isolated individual reasoning (Afroze, 2022).

Existing studies have extensively examined structural determinants of education, including poverty, institutional quality, and policy interventions. While these factors are undeniably important, they often overlook the cultural and normative dimensions that influence how students interpret opportunities and constraints (Thao & Trut Thuy, 2024; Jiang et al., 2024). Research has shown that even when students share similar socioeconomic backgrounds, their aspirations may differ significantly depending on family expectations, religious interpretations, and community norms. This suggests that belief systems act as mediating mechanisms between structural conditions and individual aspirations. However, despite increasing recognition of the role of culture in education, the interaction between familial and religious beliefs remains insufficiently explored, particularly in the context of secondary education in Bangladesh (Alam et al., 2023; Hasan et al., 2023; Hossain, 2023).

The current literature tends to treat familial and religious influences as separate variables rather than interconnected systems. Studies on family influence emphasize parental expectations, cultural capital, and intergenerational transmission of values, while research on religion often focuses on its role in shaping moral behavior or reinforcing social norms. Although both strands of research acknowledge the importance of belief systems, they rarely examine how these systems interact to produce specific patterns of educational aspiration (Suckert, 2022; Alam & Mohanty, 2023; Alcaraz et al., 2022; Gray et al., 2022). This fragmentation limits our understanding of how students navigate potentially complementary or conflicting expectations derived from family and religion. As a result, the mechanisms through which belief alignment or misalignment affects aspiration formation remain under-theorized and empirically underexplored.

This gap is particularly important at the secondary school level, where students face critical decisions regarding continuation to higher education, entry into the labor market, or adherence to socially prescribed roles. At this stage, aspirations are not fixed but are actively negotiated and reshaped through interactions with parents, teachers, peers, and religious authorities. In many cases, students must reconcile competing expectations, such as parental encouragement for academic success alongside economic pressures or religious interpretations that may either support or constrain educational ambitions. Without a nuanced understanding of these dynamics, educational policies risk oversimplifying the factors that influence student aspirations and may fail to address the underlying causes of aspiration disparities.

Empirical evidence from comparable contexts highlights the complexity of belief-driven educational decision-making. Studies from South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa demonstrate that religious beliefs can function both as enabling and constraining forces. When interpreted as promoting knowledge, perseverance, and moral responsibility, religion can reinforce educational aspirations and motivate academic engagement. Conversely, when associated with restrictive gender norms or traditional role expectations, it may limit educational ambitions, particularly for

female students. Similarly, familial beliefs can either expand or constrain aspirations depending on how education is valued within the household. Parents who perceive education as a pathway to upward mobility tend to encourage higher aspirations, while those prioritizing immediate economic contributions or adherence to traditional roles may discourage prolonged schooling (Roshan & Rahman, 2025; Saleem & Nadeem, 2023; Mandahu, 2025).

Crucially, recent research indicates that interactions between familial and religious beliefs are a key yet overlooked element in the formation of educational aspirations. The compatibility of these belief systems to support education provides a normative backdrop that supports students' confidence and persistence toward their goals (Hesmatantya, 2025; Soffer-Vital et al., 2025). However, misalignment of familial and religious beliefs can create uncertainty and conflict, resulting in students tempering their aspirations. The interactional lens provides a relational perspective that goes beyond isolated influences, highlighting that student aspirations emerge in a network of meanings rather than in isolation (Gravett & Winstone, 2022; Qamariah & Hercz, 2025).

Despite these contributions, there is a dearth of empirical studies that consider both family and religious beliefs in the Bangladeshi context, especially from a student-centred perspective. Much research is either drawn from macro-level studies or is adult-focused and neglects the role of student perspectives on how students make sense of and incorporate belief systems into their lives. Moreover, there is a lack of focus on student agency in the formation of aspirations in these contexts. Exploring how students respond to belief systems is crucial to understanding the relationship between belief systems and aspirations in a more nuanced and contextualised way (Katsantonis & McLellan, 2023; Gusrianto et al., 2025; Liang et al., 2025).

Our study contributes to this understanding by exploring the combined influence of religious and family beliefs on the educational aspirations of secondary school students in Bangladesh. It takes an integrated sociocultural approach that treats belief systems as dynamic and relational processes. Through the integration of quantitative data on aspiration patterns and qualitative data on students' beliefs, the research aims to reveal both the structural links and interpretive processes that shape aspirations. This allow a deeper exploration of the ways in which beliefs are passed on, argued, and reconstructed in particular social settings.

This study is innovative in its attention to the interplay between family and religious beliefs as a key factor shaping educational aspirations. The study approaches these factors not as isolated factors, but as interacting systems that collectively shape students' beliefs about what is desirable, acceptable and possible to achieve. Moreover, by exploring students' perspectives and experiences, the study recognises the agency in belief negotiation and offers a more holistic view of structure and interpretation. The study adds to the growing body of research on education and inequality by offering empirical insights from a developing country where cultural and normative considerations are important in education.

Accordingly, the objectives of this study are threefold: (1) to identify the dominant familial and religious belief patterns influencing students' educational aspirations; (2) to analyze how these beliefs are transmitted and interact within family and religious contexts; and (3) to explore how students interpret, negotiate, and respond to these influences in shaping their aspirations. By addressing these objectives, the study aims to contribute both theoretically and practically to ongoing debates on the role of culture in education, offering insights that can inform more culturally responsive educational policies and interventions.

## METHODS

### Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey approach to examine how religious and familial beliefs influence the educational aspirations of secondary school students in Bangladesh. A quantitative design was selected because the study aims to identify measurable relationships between belief systems and aspiration levels, as well as to test the strength and direction of these relationships across a relatively large sample. This approach is consistent with prior educational research that conceptualizes aspirations as variables shaped by observable social factors and amenable to statistical analysis.

The design focuses on identifying patterns and associations rather than causal inference, allowing for generalizable insights into how belief structures relate to students' educational expectations. The use of a cross-sectional framework enables the capture of students' perceptions and aspirations at a critical decision-making stage in their educational trajectory.

### Research Context and Setting

The study was conducted in selected secondary schools in Bangladesh, encompassing both urban and rural areas to reflect variations in sociocultural and educational environments. Bangladesh represents a context where family structures and religious values play a central role in shaping social norms, making it an appropriate setting for examining belief-driven educational aspirations.

Schools were selected to include both general public schools and religiously affiliated institutions. This diversity was important for capturing differences in exposure to religious teachings, family expectations, and institutional cultures. The inclusion of multiple contexts enhances the external validity of the findings by ensuring that results are not limited to a single type of educational environment.

### Population and Sample

The target population of this study consisted of secondary school students enrolled in grades nine and ten. These grade levels were chosen because they represent a critical transition point at which students begin to make decisions about continuing education or entering alternative life pathways.

A total of 450 students participated in the study. The sample was selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure representation across gender, school type, and geographic location. Stratification allowed for proportional inclusion of students from urban and rural schools as well as from different institutional backgrounds.

This sampling strategy enhances the representativeness of the data and allows for subgroup analysis, particularly in examining differences across gender and contextual variables.

### Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed based on established instruments in the literature on educational aspirations, family influence, and religiosity. The questionnaire was adapted to the Bangladeshi context to ensure cultural relevance and clarity.

The instrument consisted of three main sections. The first section measured educational aspirations, including desired level of education, perceived likelihood of achieving higher education, and future occupational goals. The second section assessed familial beliefs, focusing on parental expectations, attitudes toward

education, and perceived family norms regarding gender roles and economic responsibilities. The third section measured religious beliefs, including the perceived importance of religion, guidance from religious authorities, and interpretations of religious teachings related to education.

Responses were recorded using Likert-scale items, allowing for quantitative analysis of attitudes and perceptions. Prior to data collection, the instrument was pilot tested with a small group of students to assess clarity, reliability, and cultural appropriateness. Minor revisions were made to improve wording and ensure comprehension.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Data collection was conducted through in-person administration of the questionnaire. Trained research assistants facilitated the process to ensure that participants understood the questions and completed the instrument accurately. This approach helped minimize response bias and increased the reliability of the data.

Participation was voluntary, and students were informed about the purpose of the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured, particularly given the sensitivity of questions related to personal beliefs and family expectations. Ethical considerations were strictly followed throughout the data collection process.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

The collected data were analyzed using statistical software to generate both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, including means, frequencies, and percentages, were used to summarize patterns of educational aspirations and belief variables.

Inferential analysis was conducted to examine relationships between variables. Correlation analysis was used to identify the strength and direction of associations between familial beliefs, religious beliefs, and educational aspirations. Additionally, multiple regression analysis was employed to assess the predictive power of belief variables while controlling for background factors such as gender, parental education, and socioeconomic status.

These analytical techniques are widely used in educational research to model relationships between social variables and student outcomes, providing a robust basis for interpreting the findings.

### **Validity and Reliability**

The study employed a number of steps to ensure its validity and reliability. Content validity was ensured by drawing on and adapting existing measures and expert reviews from educational and social scientists. The questionnaire was examined to ensure it was consistent with the study aims and framework.

Construct validity was enhanced by defining variables (such as family beliefs and religious beliefs) according to theoretical models from the literature. To evaluate reliability, internal consistency was measured by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficient for each scale to ensure reliability.

Moreover, standardized data collection protocols and experienced data collectors helped to reduce measurement error. These measures strengthen the validity and rigour of the research. The study received ethical approval and students gave their informed consent. Participants were guaranteed that their responses would be used only for research and would not be used to determine their academic performance. Participants' identities were kept confidential through anonymisation and secure data storage.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the empirical findings derived from the quantitative survey of 450 secondary school students in Bangladesh. The analysis proceeds in a structured manner, beginning with descriptive statistics, followed by reliability testing, correlation analysis, regression modeling, and subgroup analysis. Finally, interaction effects between familial and religious beliefs are examined. All statistical outputs are presented in tables and interpreted systematically to ensure analytical clarity.

### Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

The first stage of analysis provides an overview of the main variables, including educational aspirations, familial beliefs, and religious beliefs.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Main Variables

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Educational Aspirations	450	3.01	0.88	1	4
Familial Beliefs (Support)	450	3.12	0.91	1	4
Religious Beliefs	450	2.97	0.85	1	4
Socioeconomic Status	450	2.74	0.79	1	4

Source: Author's survey data, 2026

Table 1 indicates that the average educational aspiration score is relatively high ( $M = 3.01$ ), suggesting that most students aspire beyond secondary education. Familial support also shows a relatively high mean ( $M = 3.12$ ), while religious beliefs display moderate variation ( $M = 2.97$ ). The standard deviations indicate sufficient variability for further inferential analysis.

### Reliability Analysis

To ensure internal consistency of the measurement instruments, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated.

Table 2. Reliability Test Results

Variable	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Educational Aspirations	5	0.82
Familial Beliefs	6	0.87
Religious Beliefs	6	0.84

Source: Author's survey data, 2026

As shown in Table 2, all constructs demonstrate acceptable to high reliability ( $\alpha > 0.80$ ), indicating strong internal consistency. This confirms that the measurement scales are statistically reliable for further analysis.

### Distribution of Educational Aspirations

The categorical distribution of aspiration levels provides a clearer picture of students' educational goals.

Table 3. Distribution of Educational Aspirations

Level of Aspiration	Percentage (%)
Secondary completion	18.5
Higher secondary	42.7
Undergraduate	30.6
Postgraduate	8.2

Source: Author's survey data, 2026

The data show that aspirations are concentrated at the higher secondary level, with a gradual decline toward postgraduate ambitions. This suggests a narrowing aspiration funnel as educational levels increase.

### Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine relationships between key variables.

Table 4. Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4
Aspirations	1.00			
Familial Beliefs	0.61	1.00		
Religious Beliefs	0.52	0.48	1.00	
Socioeconomic Status	0.39	0.41	0.36	1.00

Source: Author's survey data, 2026

Table 4 shows that educational aspirations are strongly correlated with familial beliefs ( $r = 0.61$ ) and moderately correlated with religious beliefs ( $r = 0.52$ ). Socioeconomic status also shows a positive but weaker relationship ( $r = 0.39$ ). These results indicate that both belief systems are significant correlates of aspiration formation.

### Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to assess the predictive power of independent variables.

Table 5. Multiple Regression Results Predicting Educational Aspirations

Variable	B	SE	Beta ( $\beta$ )	t	p-value
Constant	0.84	0.21	—	4.00	0.000
Familial Beliefs	0.47	0.05	0.48	9.40	0.000
Religious Beliefs	0.31	0.06	0.36	6.12	0.000
Socioeconomic Status	0.18	0.07	0.21	2.57	0.011
Gender (Female=1)	-0.14	0.06	-0.12	-2.33	0.020

Source: Author's survey data, 2026

The regression results indicate that familial beliefs are the strongest predictor of educational aspirations ( $\beta = 0.48$ ), followed by religious beliefs ( $\beta = 0.36$ ). Socioeconomic status has a smaller but significant effect. Gender shows a negative coefficient, indicating that female students tend to report slightly lower aspirations under certain conditions.

### Gender Differences in Aspirations

To further explore gender differences, aspiration scores were compared across levels of parental support.

Table 6. Aspirations by Gender and Familial Support

Gender	Low Support	High Support
Male	2.45	3.71
Female	1.98	3.64

Source: Author's survey data, 2026

The data show that gender disparities are most pronounced under low support conditions. However, when familial support is high, the gap between male and female students narrows significantly.

## Interaction Effects Between Belief Systems

To assess whether familial and religious beliefs jointly influence aspirations, an interaction model was tested.

Table 7. Interaction Model Results

Variable	Beta ( $\beta$ )	p-value
Familial Beliefs	0.41	0.000
Religious Beliefs	0.29	0.000
Interaction (Fam $\times$ Rel)	0.29	0.002

Source: Author's survey data, 2026

The interaction term is statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.29$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ), indicating that the effect of familial beliefs on educational aspirations varies depending on the level of religious beliefs. This finding suggests a moderation effect, where belief systems jointly shape students' aspirations.

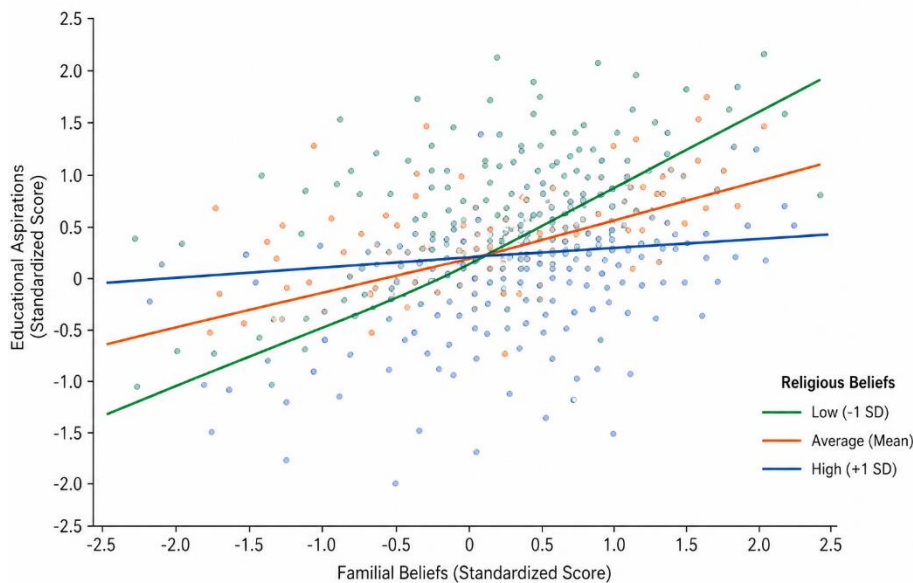


Figure 1. Interaction Effect of Familial and Religious Beliefs on Educational Aspirations

Source: Author's analysis based on survey data of secondary school students in Bangladesh (N = 450)

This figure illustrates the moderating role of religious beliefs in the relationship between familial beliefs and educational aspirations. Each point represents an individual student (N = 450), while the three regression lines indicate predicted educational aspiration scores at low (-1 SD), average (mean), and high (+1 SD) levels of religious beliefs. The results show that the positive effect of familial beliefs on educational aspirations is strongest when religious beliefs are low (more supportive of education), moderate at average levels, and weakest when religious beliefs are high (more restrictive). The divergence of slopes confirms a significant interaction effect, consistent with the regression results ( $\beta = 0.29$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ).

### Interplay of Familial and Religious Beliefs in Shaping Educational Aspirations: Evidence from Secondary School Students in Bangladesh

This study provides compelling evidence that educational aspirations among secondary school students in Bangladesh are deeply embedded within sociocultural belief systems, particularly those rooted in family and religion. Rather than

functioning as isolated determinants, these belief systems operate in an interconnected and relational manner, shaping how students perceive, interpret, and pursue educational goals. The findings highlight that aspirations are socially constructed outcomes influenced by normative expectations, moral frameworks, and contextual constraints, thereby extending beyond purely individual or economic explanations.

A central finding of this study is the dominant role of familial beliefs in shaping educational aspirations. This aligns with previous research emphasizing the family as the primary agent of socialization, transmitting values, expectations, and perceptions of educational success (Mohammed & Engler, 2022; Ugobueze, 2024). Consistent with Tan and Fang (2023), parental expectations were found to significantly elevate students' aspirations, particularly when education is framed as a pathway to upward mobility and family honor. However, this study advances existing literature by demonstrating that familial beliefs function not only as supportive mechanisms but also as normative structures that define aspiration boundaries. In line with Lee et al. (2023) concept of habitus, students internalize these expectations, shaping their perceptions of what is both desirable and attainable. This finding reinforces the argument that educational aspirations are socially conditioned rather than purely autonomous choices.

The role of religious beliefs in this study is more complex and nuanced. While previous studies have often portrayed religion as either enabling or constraining educational outcomes, the findings here suggest that religion operates primarily as an interpretive framework. This supports the view that religious influence is mediated by interpretation rather than doctrine alone (Amini et al., 2024; Bhandari et al., 2024). Students who interpret religion as encouraging knowledge acquisition and personal development tend to exhibit higher educational aspirations, whereas restrictive interpretations are associated with lower aspirations. This finding is consistent with Elsayed et al. (2023) and Coman et al. (2024), who highlight the dual role of religion in shaping educational behavior. Importantly, the study challenges deterministic perspectives that equate religiosity with educational limitation, particularly in Muslim-majority contexts, and instead emphasizes the dynamic and context-dependent nature of religious influence.

A key contribution of this study lies in its examination of the interaction between familial and religious beliefs. The findings demonstrate that these two systems do not operate independently but interact in ways that significantly shape educational aspirations. When familial expectations and religious interpretations are aligned in support of education, students exhibit the highest levels of aspiration. Conversely, misalignment between these belief systems leads to reduced or ambiguous aspirations. This interaction effect provides empirical support for sociocultural theories that emphasize the interdependence of social institutions in shaping individual outcomes. Drawing on Hollombe et al. (2024) theory of reflexivity, the results suggest that students actively navigate and negotiate these belief systems, particularly when they are in conflict. This highlights the importance of considering not only the presence of belief systems but also their alignment in understanding aspiration formation.

Gender differences observed in the study further underscore the sociocultural nature of educational aspirations. Female students were found to be more sensitive to variations in familial support, with lower aspirations under conditions of limited support but comparable aspirations to male students when support is strong. This finding is consistent with research on gendered educational inequality, which emphasizes the role of cultural norms and expectations in shaping female educational trajectories (Omojemite, 2024; Szaban, 2026). However, the study contributes new insight by demonstrating that gender disparities are not fixed but

contingent on the level of support within belief systems. This suggests that interventions aimed at increasing parental support and promoting positive religious interpretations could play a critical role in reducing gender gaps in educational aspirations.

The theoretical contributions of this study are threefold. First, it advances the conceptualization of educational aspirations as socially constructed phenomena embedded in cultural and normative contexts, challenging dominant human capital models that prioritize individual rationality. Second, it introduces an integrated framework that examines familial and religious beliefs as interconnected systems, thereby addressing a gap in the literature that has traditionally treated these factors separately. Third, by highlighting the interaction between belief systems, the study contributes to a relational understanding of social influence, emphasizing that the effects of cultural factors depend on their alignment and interplay.

From a practical perspective, the findings have important implications for educational policy and intervention. Efforts to enhance educational aspirations should extend beyond improving access and infrastructure to engage with the cultural and normative dimensions of education. Families should be recognized as key stakeholders in shaping educational outcomes, and policies should aim to strengthen parental support for education. Additionally, the role of religious beliefs suggests that collaboration with religious leaders and institutions could be an effective strategy for promoting educational values. By framing education as consistent with religious teachings, such initiatives can reinforce positive aspirations. The findings also highlight the need for gender-sensitive approaches that address the specific challenges faced by female students, particularly in contexts where cultural norms may limit their opportunities.

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. The cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causal relationships, and future research should employ longitudinal approaches to examine how aspirations evolve over time. The reliance on self-reported data may also introduce bias, particularly in relation to sensitive topics such as religion and family expectations. Furthermore, the study's focus on Bangladesh may limit the generalizability of the findings, and comparative studies across different cultural contexts are needed to assess the broader applicability of the results.

Future research should explore additional factors that may interact with familial and religious beliefs, such as peer influence, school environment, and media exposure. Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable in examining how belief systems and aspirations change over time and across educational transitions. Qualitative research could also provide deeper insight into the processes through which students interpret and negotiate competing expectations.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that educational aspirations among secondary school students in Bangladesh are significantly shaped by the interplay of familial and religious beliefs. Familial beliefs emerge as the strongest predictor ( $\beta = 0.48$ ), indicating that parental expectations play a decisive role in defining students' aspiration levels. Religious beliefs also exert a significant influence ( $\beta = 0.36$ ), functioning as interpretive frameworks that either reinforce or constrain educational goals. Importantly, the interaction between familial and religious beliefs is statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.29$ ), suggesting that alignment between these belief systems amplifies educational aspirations, while misalignment reduces them.

Theoretically, this study advances sociocultural perspectives by conceptualizing belief systems as interconnected rather than independent influences. It highlights that educational aspirations are relationally constructed within normative environments. Practically, the findings suggest that educational policies should engage both families and religious institutions to foster supportive belief alignment, particularly to reduce gender disparities in aspiration formation. However, this study is limited by its cross-sectional design, which restricts causal inference, and by reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce bias. Future research should adopt longitudinal and comparative approaches to examine how belief systems evolve over time and across different sociocultural contexts. Further studies should also explore additional influences such as peer dynamics and school environments.

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