



FATHER INVOLVEMENT AND CAREER DECISION-MAKING AMONG FIRST-YEAR FEMALE HEALTH STUDENTS IN A TRANSITIONAL CONTEXT

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the relationship between father involvement and career decision-making self-efficacy among first-year female undergraduate students who migrated and did not live with their fathers. This study employed a quantitative correlational design. The participants were 138 first-year female undergraduate students (M age = 18.14 years; SD age = 0.51), recruited through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using the Nurturant Fathering Scale and the Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy (CDMSE) Scale, and analyzed using Spearman's Rho. The results indicated a significant positive relationship between father involvement and career decision-making self-efficacy. Additional analysis revealed that age was not significantly related to father involvement but was positively associated with career decision-making self-efficacy. These findings highlight the important role of paternal emotional support in fostering female undergraduate students' confidence in making career decision, even when separated geographically.

Keywords: *Father Involvement; Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy; Female Undergraduate Students; Early Adulthood; Migration*

1. Introduction

The transition from high school to higher education marks a critical phase in early adulthood. During this period, students are expected to make decisions (Oweini, 2024). For first-year female students, this process often triggers anxiety and uncertainty, particularly among those who migrate to pursue their education and no longer live with their parents (Hawa, 2025; Super, 1990). The combination of novel academic challenges and geographical separation from family demands high adaptability and strong self-efficacy.

In the career decision-making process, family support, particularly from parents, serves as a crucial early foundation (Aban et al., 2025). Previous studies have demonstrated that general parental involvement positively correlates with children's career maturity and adaptability (Aban et al., 2025; Fouad et al., 2016). However, a review of the literature reveals that most existing research primarily focuses on co-residing families or

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examines parental support as a single construct, without differentiating between the roles of the father and the mother. Particularly in the psychological development of daughters, the father figure frequently acts as a secure base, uniquely shaping their confidence to navigate the outside world and make strategic decisions (Hasuti et al., 2020).

The focus on first-year migrant undergraduate students is based on the premise that they are at the onset of the transition from dependence to full autonomy. By migrating, these female undergraduate students lose immediate access to daily physical support from their families, a condition that can theoretically induce higher levels of anxiety regarding future planning compared to their peers who reside with their parents. While previous research by Hawa (2025) indicates that parental involvement remains a significant predictor of career self-efficacy, few studies have explored how this psychological impact endures despite considerable geographical separation.

This study focused on female undergraduate students at Politeknik Kesehatan (Poltekkes) Semarang, given the nature of vocational education, which requires undergraduate students to commit to a specific career trajectory from the very beginning of their studies. As a healthcare institution, we recognize that future professional demands necessitate strong career decision-making self-efficacy among undergraduate students. Its rigorous curriculum and future professional demands must equip students with strong career decision-making self-efficacy to help them persist through a challenging educational process. Furthermore, since Poltekkes Semarang attracts prospective students from various regions, the phenomenon of migrating and living geographically apart from the father figure presents a highly relevant context for examining family emotional support.

Previous research consistently indicates that first-year migrant undergraduate students represent a highly vulnerable group susceptible to psychological distress during this transitional phase. Relocating to a new environment often triggers homesickness and emotional maturity challenges during the first year of university. Furthermore, students who migrate and live away from their families are demonstrably more prone to experiencing loneliness. In addressing these challenges, Kapur (2022) demonstrated that parenting styles and parental support are crucial in fostering resilience among first-year migrant students. However, prior literature has predominantly focused on social adaptation issues (Pires & Chapin, 2022; Ziaian et al., 2023) or examined parental support as a broad, generalized construct (Stead et al., 2022). Recent meta-analyses highlight this as a critical gap, emphasizing the need to disaggregate parental variables to understand their unique contributions to career self-efficacy (To et al., 2022). Furthermore, addressing the psychosocial barriers of physical separation from a father figure remains an underexplored area (Duru & Söner, 2024). There remains a paucity of studies specifically investigating how the support of a father figure distinct from the mother serves as a foundation that influences the stability of a daughter's career decision-making self-efficacy from a geographical distance (Lent et al., 2002).

This study analyzes the relationship between father involvement and efficacy beliefs in making career decision among first-year female undergraduate students who do not reside with their fathers. The novelty of this research lies in its specific demographic focus on female migrant undergraduate students, alongside the isolation of variables to specifically examine the quality of the emotional bond with the father figure. This approach is anticipated to provide novel insights and empirical evidence demonstrating that physical separation due to migration does not necessarily sever the psychological impact of paternal involvement on a daughter's confidence in planning her future.

2. Method

This study conducted a quantitative correlational design to examine the relationship between father involvement and career decision-making self-efficacy. The research population comprised all first-year female students at the main campus of Politeknik Kesehatan Semarang. The participants consisted of 138 first-year female undergraduate students (M age = 18.14, SD = 0.51) recruited through stratified random sampling. The inclusion criteria aligned with the research objectives, specifically targeting first-year female undergraduate students at the Poltekkes Semarang campus who lived geographically apart from their fathers.

Data collection was conducted offline using psychological scale questionnaires. The father involvement variable was measured using the Father Involvement Scale, developed by the researchers based on Lamb (2010) theory. This scale encompasses three primary aspects: engagement, accessibility,

and responsibility. The instrument was developed through three rounds of pilot testing involving 45 subjects whose characteristics matched the target population. This process yielded 21 valid items with a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.910$, indicating excellent internal consistency and confirming the instrument's feasibility for use in this study.

Career decision-making self-efficacy was measured using the Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy (CDMSE) scale. This scale was initially developed by Taylor and Betz (1983) and subsequently revised into a shorter form by Betz et al. (1996). In this study, the researchers used the Indonesian-adapted version of the CDMSE developed by Purnama and Ernawati (2021). The adapted instrument originally comprised 25 items; however, through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), 10 items were retained as the final version after meeting the model fit criteria (Purnama & Ernawati, 2021). Before the main data collection, a pilot test was administered to 45 subjects. The reliability analysis was conducted in two stages, eliminating one item during the initial stage. Consequently, the final scale used in this research comprised 9 items. This process yielded a final reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.907$, demonstrating excellent internal consistency and confirming the study.

The acquired data were subsequently analyzed through several stages. A normality test was initially conducted to assess data distribution, followed by hypothesis testing to examine the relationship between father involvement and career decision-making self-efficacy.

3. Result and Discussion

The collected data were initially subjected to prerequisite testing, specifically the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test and a linearity test. The normality test results revealed a p -value < 0.001 for the father involvement and $p = 0.018$ for the career decision-making self-efficacy. Since both values were below the 0.05 threshold ($p < 0.05$), the data for both variables were deemed non-normal. Consequently, a nonparametric approach was employed for the data analysis, utilizing Spearman's Rho correlation test.

The hypothesis test using Spearman's Rho correlation yielded a coefficient of $\rho = 0.287$ with a significance level of $p = 0.001$ ($p < 0.05$). These results demonstrate a significant positive relationship between father involvement and career decision-making. Consequently, this implies that higher levels of perceived father involvement are associated with a greater efficacy belief for making career decisions. This finding is consistent with recent empirical evidence, which confirms that the direction of the relationship between paternal support and career planning capacity remains consistently positive across different student populations (Offando & Sukma, 2024). This suggests that when fathers are perceived as active participants in their daughters' lives, the daughters develop a more robust framework for evaluating their future professional paths.

These findings align with Lamb, (2010) positing that fathers play a crucial role in shaping a child's career orientation and decision-making competence through both direct and indirect daily interactions. Father involvement in the context of adolescent career development can be understood through the lens of attachment theory, in which a consistently present and responsive attachment figure provides a secure base for the child to explore their environment and make independent decisions (Allen & Daly, 2025). Recent studies emphasize that this independent paternal attachment uniquely contributes to a child's overall life satisfaction and, more importantly, their self-confidence in making strategic life choices (Hidayat et al., 2024). Among female students, the father's role as a secondary or primary attachment figure often translates into higher self-efficacy during high-stakes decision-making periods. Through a systematic review, Sarkadi et al., (2008) emphasized that positive father involvement is consistently associated with better child development outcomes, including problem-solving and decision-making skills. Within the framework of career theory, social support from significant figures, such as parents, directly contributes to adolescent career adaptability and decision-making (Kim & Lee, 2022). In a similar vein, Xu and Allan (2025) found that actively involved fathers tend to encourage adolescents to be more proactive in exploring career options.

Subsequently, the data were categorized according to the research variables. The categorization results for the father involvement variable indicated that most participants fell into the high category. As illustrated in Table 1, the largest proportion of participants was classified within this high level compared to the other categories.

Table 1. Categorization of Father Involvement

Very Low (< 1.75)	Low (1.75 – 2.93)	High (2.93 – 4.10)	Very High (> 4.10)
16	40	70	12

The high level of father involvement observed among most participants can be understood in the context of a collectivistic culture, which highly values the family as the primary social unit. According to Johnson and Young (2016), father involvement is influenced by contextual factors such as family characteristics, culture, and economic conditions. Within cultures that emphasize family cohesion, fathers tend to be more actively involved in their children's lives.

Regarding the career decision-making variable, the categorization results revealed that the majority of the participants also fell into the high category. As shown in Table 2, the largest proportion of participants was classified at this level compared with the other groups.

Table 2. Categorization of Career Decision-Making

Very Low (< 30.81)	Low (30.81 – 35.93)	High (35.93 – 41.06)	Very High (> 41.06)
22	40	58	18

The high career decision-making self-efficacy scores observed among the majority of the participants align with Kenny et al.' (2024) argument, that individuals in the exploration stage of career development begin to demonstrate enhanced capabilities in planning and making career choices with greater maturity. The high career decision-making self-efficacy scores among migrant students in this study highlight their psychological readiness. This resilience is likely bolstered by sustained emotional bonds that transcend physical boundaries. Research indicates that for individuals living away from home, the quality of familial emotional support serves as a critical buffer against the anxieties typically associated with vocational exploration in a new environment (Xing & Rojewski, 2018).

As an additional analysis, the researchers examined the relationship between age and both father involvement and career decision-making using *Spearman's rho* correlation. The results from the 138 participants yielded two findings. First, the correlation between age and father involvement produced a coefficient of $\rho = -0.022$ with a significance level of $p = 0.802$ ($p > 0.05$), indicating no significant relationship between the two variables. Although the correlation showed a negative direction and very weak strength, this relationship cannot be generalized because it failed to meet the threshold for statistical significance. This finding aligns with Munajat (2022) view that the quality of father involvement is primarily determined by the father's personal characteristics and the dynamics of the father-child relationship, rather than by the child's age alone.

Second, the relationship between age and career decision-making showed a correlation coefficient of $\rho = 0.195$ with a significance level of $p = 0.022$ ($p < 0.05$), indicating a significant relationship between these variables. The positive direction of the correlation suggests that greater efficacy beliefs in making career decision, although the strength of the relationship is considered weak. This finding supports Super's perspective that career maturity increases with age, driven by broader exploratory experiences and enhanced psychological readiness (Kulakow et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the weak correlation suggests that age is only one of many contributing factors; other factors, such as social support, self-efficacy, and career exploration, also need to be considered (Lent et al., 2002).

Beyond the psychological dimension, the findings of this study also carry meaningful implications for the health and well-being of female health students. Haq and Wicaksono (2023) in their literature review, found that limited access to parental figures, in this case due to divorce, has been demonstrated to negatively affect adolescents' quality of life across both physical and psychological domains. This condition may be analogous to the situation of migrant female undergraduate students who are geographically separated from their fathers. When paternal emotional support is perceived as limited, female migrant students face an elevated risk of anxiety, a condition that, in adolescents and young adults, is known to be further exacerbated by a range of psychosocial stressors in their surrounding environment (Deng et al., 2025; Tulodo et al., 2025). This is further reinforced by (2018), who

demonstrated that anxiety in this age group is not merely a psychological concern but a concrete health issue that warrants structured clinical attention, as evidenced by the effectiveness of psychoeducational interventions in reducing anxiety levels among adolescents. When left unaddressed, such anxiety may extend its impact beyond the psychological domain, disrupting sleep quality and compromising the overall physical well-being of female students (Alwhaibi & Al Aoolo, 2023; Anyango et al., 2024). In light of this, high father involvement, as demonstrated in this study, may serve not only as a psychological foundation for career confidence but also as an indirect protective factor for the mental and physical health of female undergraduate students navigating the demands of a rigorous health education curriculum.

4. Conclusion and Suggestion

This study concludes that there is a significant positive relationship between father involvement and efficacy beliefs in career decision-making among first-year female students who live geographically apart from their fathers. Emotional support from the father continues to play a crucial role in building a student's confidence, despite the physical distance necessitated by migration. Based on these findings, it is recommended that female migrant students maintain consistent communication and emotional closeness with their fathers. For future researchers, it is highly suggested to explore other environmental and social variables that may mediate this relationship, as broader social ecosystems are proven self-efficacy to influence career decision-making self-efficacy deeply (Jemini-Gashi et al., 2024). Investigating variables such as autonomy or peer support, alongside expanding the sample size across multiple universities, will provide a more comprehensive understanding of this dynamic.

5. Acknowledgments

The author would like to express her sincere gratitude to the supervisor, the relevant institution, and all participants for their guidance and direction throughout the writing of this article, as well as for their willingness to devote their time to this study.

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