



THE SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS OF CAREER INDECISION

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Abstract

This study aims at pointing out how some of the classical socio-demographic factors affect people's ability to make career decisions early in life. We have selected three relevant dimensions for this: gender, social environment, and ethnicity. As a tool for measuring the concept of career decision/indecision we used two well-known instruments designed for this purpose: CDDQ (Career Decision Difficulties Questionnaire) and CDMSE-SF (Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy - Short Form), both adapted and validated on the Romanian population.

Keywords: career decision; gender; social environment; ethnicity; CDDQ; CDMSE-SF

Introduction

Career indecision is one of the most important concepts of career psychology, with some authors concluding that it is the most important concept, along with vocational interests (Kelly & Lee, 2002). The sources of career indecision are varied, as Gati, Krausz, and Osipow (1996) show. They proposed a model for career choice difficulties, explained on three sources: lack of training, lack of information and inconsistent information. According to this

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model, a person which has to make a career decision has to observe the problem, to conceptualize it as a discrepancy between the present situation and the expected one, and, later, to explore possible alternatives. The best career decision is the one who allows the person to reach his/her goals. Thus, people facing difficulties in making a career decision can have diffuse goals, minimal knowledge concerning occupational alternatives, or low motivation.

Why so much attention for career indecision? The answer is simple: career decision is one of those major life decisions, its consequences reaching all levels of someone's existence. After all, "the art of success in life depends greatly in choosing the right profession" (Jurcău, 1980, p. 196). Most adolescents face career indecision and need support in order to succeed in this complex process. Here comes the role of school counselors, vocational counselors, parents, class masters and teachers. Although one can see a growing concern for this matter in Romania (one good example being the introduction of *Counseling and orientation* in the national curriculum for the 12th grade, instead of the traditional class mastering), there are not enough studies in the field, projects or services which could help teenagers with their career decision.

Objectives

Our research aims at finding out some of the aspects of the "psychological portrait" of the undecided teenager. We want to find out what his/her gender is, where does he/she come from, what is his/her ethnicity. This particular research is part of a larger study which includes more socio-demographic variables, but for the following pages we shall stick to detailing only the three we've mentioned above.

Method

Participants

We have collected data from 554 subjects as it follows: 141 pupils in the 8th grade of some schools in Oradea (the capital city of Bihor county), 269 pupils in the 12th grade of more high-schools in Oradea and Beiuș (a rather important city in Bihor county), and 144 students in the 3rd year of study within the Faculty of Social and Humanistic Sciences (University of Oradea). 167

participants were boys, while 387 were girls. 391 of them come from urban environments, while 163 come from rural ones. Their ages range from 13 to 25 years. All participants volunteered for this study and we also had the approval from the managers or administrators of the schools where they study.

Tools

The participants were tested with two instruments adapted and validated onto Romanian population: CDDQ (Career Decision Difficulties Questionnaire) and CDMSE-SF (Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy - Short Form). CDDQ consists of 24 items, grouped in 2 subscales: difficulties due to lack of information and difficulties due to inconsistent information. Participants respond to the 24 items on a Likert scale in 9 steps (from 1: not suitable at all, to 9: suites me very well). Its internal consistence coefficient, with the two-factor structure, is .940, which indicates a good internal consistence of the items (Perțe, 2013). The second scale we used - CDMSE-SF - meant to evaluate the degree in which respondents are able to make career decisions consists of 23 items grouped in two subscales: *self-efficacy in obtaining information* and *self-efficacy in the decision process*. Following the adaptation and validation studies, a good internal consistency of the items was revealed ($\alpha=.85$) (Perțe, 2013). Also, participants were asked to offer a series of socio-demographic data, regarding correlates of career indecision (on a separate questionnaire). The above mentioned data referred to: gender, social environment and ethnicity.

Procedure

The questionnaires were administered in classrooms, in a pencil-paper format. Participation was based on volunteering, in the conditions of informed consent. Also, we obtained approval from the management of the schools in question. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of the results and of the possibility to personally solicit their data from the researcher.

Results

Gender differences regarding career indecision and self-efficacy in making a career decision

Table 1. Descriptive indices for difficulties in career decision and for self-efficacy in career decision depending on the gender of the participants

Variable	Gender	N	m	SD
Decision difficulties due to lack of information	Male	167	67.101	29.980
	Female	387	65.258	32.085
Decision difficulties due to inconsistent information	Male	167	15.215	7.719
	Female	387	14.098	8.561
Decision difficulties (total)	Male	167	82.317	35.418
	Female	387	79.356	38.245
Self-efficacy in the decision process	Male	167	56.718	10.373
	Female	387	58.077	8.528
Self-efficacy in obtaining information	Male	167	28.904	5.326
	Female	387	29.870	5.044
Self-efficacy in career decision (total)	Male	167	85.622	14.532
	Female	387	87.948	12.373

The table above shows the average values obtained by the participants for the two instruments (and, also, for their subscales). High values in the case of the first instrument (CDDQ) show great career difficulties, while high values for the second instrument (CDMSE-SF) show good self-efficacy in making a career decision. If we compare the results to the benchmarks of the two scales, we observe that our data is of average level.

We can notice that the females generally obtain lower scores for career decision difficulties (79.356 vs. males=82.317). Subsequently, regarding self-efficacy regarding career decision, the females also obtained better scores (87.948 vs. 85.662). To establish if these differences are statistically significant, we used a U Mann-Whitney test (respectively a t test for self-efficacy regarding career decision, since here we have a symmetrical distribution of the data), which showed us that the differences are not actually significant. More precisely, although we got significant differences regarding decision difficulties due to inconsistent information ($U=28397$; $p < .05$), the associated size of the effect indicates a low effect, which lead us to the suspension of decision. The same situation appeared in the case of self-efficacy regarding career decision and its subscales (significant differences, but low effect). Thus, we can only assert that the girls *tend* to be more self-efficient regarding career decision than the boys.

Differences regarding career decision difficulties and self-efficacy in career decision depending on the social environment (urban vs. rural)

Table 2. Descriptive statistical indices regarding variables measured depending on the social environment of the participants

Variable	SE	N	m	SD
Decision difficulties due to lack of information	urban	391	57.063	26.679
	rural	163	86.803	32.168
Decision difficulties due to inconsistent information	urban	391	12.815	7.672
	rural	163	18.319	8.566
Decision difficulties (total)	urban	391	69.879	31.929
	rural	163	105.122	37.955
Self-efficacy in the decision process	urban	391	59.350	8.505
	rural	163	53.631	9.353
Self-efficacy in obtaining information	urban	391	30.222	4.949
	rural	163	28.036	5.292

Note: SE= Social environment

Analyzing the table above, we can notice great differences in average scores concerning career decision difficulties between subjects which come from an urban environment compared to those coming from a rural environment (the latter meet obvious greater career decision difficulties; 69.879 for urban subjects vs. 105.122 for rural subjects). Great differences can also be observed regarding career decision difficulties due to the lack of information (57.063 urban vs. 86.803 rural) and for difficulties due to inconsistent information (12.815 urban vs. 18.319 rural). Subjects from the rural environment seem to be less efficient in the decision process when compared to their colleagues from the urban environment (53.631 vs. 59.350), but also less efficient in obtaining occupational information (28.063 vs. 30.222). The nonparametric U Mann-Whitney test would show if these differences are statistically significant or not.

Table 3. The values of the U Mann-Whitney test for variables measured depending on the social environment of the participants

Variable	U Mann-Whitney	p	d Cohen
Decision difficulties due to lack of information	15201**	.000	.99

Table 3. The values of the U Mann-Whitney test for variables measured depending on the social environment of the participants - *continued*

Variable	U Mann-Whitney	p	d Cohen
Decision difficulties due to inconsistent information	19316.5**	.000	.79
Decision difficulties (total)	14908.5**	.000	1.05
Self-efficacy in the decision process	20062**	.000	.70
Self-efficacy in obtaining information	24191**	.000	.44

Note: **Significant differences for $p < .01$

The values of the U Mann-Whitney test indicate strongly significant differences for all variables. Let us take them one by one, in the order of the effect size associated with them. Subjects from urban and rural environments strongly differ regarding career decision difficulties ($U=14908.5$, having a significance level lower than .001). The size of the effect ($d_{\text{Cohen}}=1.05$) indicates a strong effect. Thus, we can assert that adolescents from rural environments are facing greater difficulties than those from urban environments. These strong differences also show for the subscales of career decision difficulties: rural environment teenagers show greater difficulties due to the lack of information [$U=15201$; $p < .001$, $d_{\text{Cohen}}=.99$], but also greater difficulties due to inconsistent information [$U=15201$; $p < .001$, $d_{\text{Cohen}}=.79$]. The sizes of the effects associated with these differences indicate strong effects, and this makes us highly trust our results.

The adolescents from urban environments have more trust in their own ability to make career decisions than those from rural environments; the value of U (20062), significant at a level lower than .01, and the associated effect size ($d_{\text{Cohen}}=.70$) indicate an average effect. Taking into account the strong statistical difference we got, it is unlikely that the effect showed up by accident (Sava, 2004), so we can trust our results. In the same way, we are going to interpret the results we got for self-efficacy regarding getting occupational information; adolescents from urban environments show a much higher level of this dimension than those from rural environments [$U=24191$; $p < .001$, $d_{\text{Cohen}}=.44$].

The values of the Levene test for the equality of variances are associated with significance levels higher than the critical values $p=0.05$, so we can assume the equality of the variances for the two samples and we will use the t test without additional corrections. The calculated value of the t test is 6.730, with a significance level lower than .001. This indicates there are

strongly significant differences between teenagers from urban and rural environments regarding self-efficacy in career decision, with those coming from urban environments having higher self-efficacy [$t_{(552)}=6.730$; $p<.001$, $d_{\text{Cohen}}=.63$]. The average effect associated with the statistically strong difference makes us trust the results we got (the risk of making a type I error being minimal).

Tabel 4. The t test for self-efficacy in career decision (a total made of participants from urban vs. rural environments)

Variable	Levene test		<i>t test</i>			d Cohen
	F	p	<i>t</i>	df	p	
Self-efficacy in career decision (total)	1,624	.203	6,730	552	.000	.63

Differences regarding career decision difficulties and self-efficacy in career decision depending on ethnicity

Our sample included 51 subjects of Hungarian ethnicity and 503 participants of Romanian ethnicity. After a quick look at their scores regarding career decision difficulties we could have presumed that Hungarian pupils have greater difficulties in making a career decision. Initially, we compared the two samples (even if they were disproportionate) and the statistical analyses have proved no significant differences in general or for the two subscales. Later, we decided to randomly extract a sample of 51 Romanian participants to see if in the case of equally sized samples we get the same differences. We analyzed again the data distribution for the two samples and we got symmetrical distributions (the values of Z Kolmogorov-Smirnov had associated levels higher than .05, both for CDDQ as for CDMSE-SF and for their subscales). The comparisons were made through the t test for independent samples.

Analyzing the table with results for the t test, we can notice that we got no results whose significance levels are smaller than .05. So, in the case of equally sized samples, we have no significant differences depending on the ethnicity, the results being the same as previous comparisons.

Table 5. The t test for self-efficacy in career decision - a total of Romanian ethnicity and Hungarian ethnicity samples (equal size samples)

Variable	Levene test		t test			d Cohen
	F	p	t	df	p	
Decision difficulties due to lack of information	.004	.95	-1,207	100	.23	.24
Decision difficulties due to inconsistent information	7.652	.007	1.391	89.807	.16	.29
Decision difficulties (total)	.565	.45	-.660	100	.51	.13
Self-efficacy in the decision process	1.749	.18	.124	100	.90	.02
Self-efficacy in obtaining information	.001	.97	.988	100	.32	.19
Self-efficacy in career decision (total)	2.005	.16	.455	100	.65	.09

Conclusions

Differences determined by gender

Gender differences were very much studied in relation with career decision difficulties, but mostly with self-efficacy in making career decisions (Lent & Hackett, 1987; Gati, Osipow, & Givon, 1995; Patton & Creed, 2001; Lent, Lopez, & Bieschke, 1991; Zeldin & Pajares, 2000, *apud* Gainor, 2006; Gati & Saka, 2001). In the case of the present study, we noticed that the female subjects have, generally, lower scores for career decision difficulties and higher scores for career decision self-efficacy, but these differences are not statistically significant. We cannot certainly state that females have fewer difficulties due to the fact that they get more consistent information or because they simply manage them better, but we can notice this tendency. We also can point out that, when it comes to difficulties due to contradictory information or due to internal or external conflicts, adolescent girls tend to be more capable to surpass these difficulties. The lack of significant results can be explained by the homogeneity of the samples.

The same situation appears in the case of self-efficacy regarding career decision (and its subscales). We got statistically significant results, but the effect was low. Thus, we can only indicate a tendency of higher self-efficacy for girls than for boys, regarding career decision.

As previously stated, gender differences were intensely studied. One good example is the study of Patton and Creed (2001) who reported differences created by age and gender for certainty in career decision. The females scored higher when it came to certainty regarding career decision [$F_{(1, 1769)}=8.36$, $p<.01$]. In the adaptation and validation study for Chinese population performed by Creed and Yin (2006), there were significant differences between females and males regarding the lack of information [$F(1, 429)=4.61$, $p<.05$] and inconsistent information [$F(1,429)=4.00$, $p<.05$], in the sense that females showed lower difficulties levels than the males. These results are similar with the results of our study.

Differences determined by the social environment

The difference between teenagers coming from rural environments and those coming from urban environments has a high practical importance. This fact becomes more important as the concept of “equality of educational opportunities” is getting more and more credit for today’s policies creators (unfortunately, as it is obvious at least in Romania, this concept has yet to get more solid ways to become reality). The equal access to education is a constitutional right which is not really transposed in the everyday reality; there are, still, large categories of people which are not favored in this aspect, and one of them is the category of children and teenagers coming from rural environments (especially from isolated villages). We got major differences of scores regarding career decision between subjects from rural environments and those from urban environments, in the sense that the first category faces greater difficulties in choosing a career. These differences are statistically significant, and the size of the effect indicates a strong effect. Thus, we can state with certainty that teenagers from rural environments are much more challenged when it comes to making a career decision, than those from urban environments. Strong differences were also noticed for decision difficulties due to the lack of information and for decision difficulties due to inconsistent information.

It is not surprising that people from rural environments meet greater difficulties in obtaining occupational information; the schools from rural environments do not always benefit from the presence of a school psychologist (or his/her duties do not allow for efficient career counseling activities with actual pupils). The access to information (via Internet or any other technical

mean) is more difficult in the rural environments, due to social and economic challenges present there. Also, managing difficulties due to contradictory information or due to internal or external conflicts is more difficult when the necessary skills are not developed or are poorly exercised. Regarding career decision self-efficacy, urban environment teenagers have more trust in their ability to make career decisions. We also got strongly significant differences on this dimension between rural and urban teenagers, with the urban ones showing higher levels. Similar results were obtained concerning self-efficacy for obtaining occupational information and self-efficacy concerning the decision process.

Ethnicity differences

In most theories, career decision was interpreted as an expression of personality, as an active manifestation of it in the professional world. Belonging to an ethnic group is one of those modelling factors of personality which significantly contribute to the developing of the inner self. Thus, career decision is strongly bound with ethnicity. Ethnic groups are characterized by a unitary vision of the world, a common cultural view regarding different existential questions (among which, of course, career decision). Along adolescence, ethnicity can mediate expectancies concerning self-efficacy, building and reaching occupational goals, and, finally, career decision. These are some of the arguments which made us study the differences caused by ethnicity concerning career decision difficulties and self-efficacy on career decision. After a preliminary view on the scores of the participants, we had an image according to which Hungarian subjects experience a higher level of career decision difficulties, when compared to their Romanian peers. But the statistical analysis did not show any statistically significant differences (for the entire scale or its subscales). Therefore, our conclusion must be that our subjects do not differ amongst themselves depending on their ethnicity. One possible explanation for the lack of differences is the fact that the two ethnicities (Romanian and Hungarian) have actually coexisted in Transylvania for a very long time (almost 1000 years), and the minority group of the Hungarians is actually very well integrated with the Romanian majority and has full access to any kind of form of education (including education performed in Hungarian). We must also note the fact that our Hungarian subjects, although pupils in Hungarian language classes, were enrolled in Romanian schools. It is possible that in the

case of pupils enrolled in exclusively Hungarian schools the ethnical identity would be more strong. This should be, of course, followed in a future study. In the case of self-efficacy regarding career decision, the tendencies continue in the same logic: Hungarian subjects show slightly lower scores than the Romanian ones, but the differences are not statistically significant.

Due to the strong influence that ethnicity has on the process of career decision, more studies from countries with high ethnical variety were focused in revealing those differences. Peterson (1993) and Chung (2002) proved that Afro-American students have higher scores for self-efficacy regarding career decision when compared to their Caucasian peers. These particular results are diametrically opposed to those shown in other studies, which suggested that Caucasian teenagers are more efficient than those belonging to other ethnic or racial groups (Gloria & Hird, 1999; Mau, 2000). Gushue (2006), while studying self-efficacy regarding career decision in Latin-American 9th graders, has shown that a strong ethnic identity is a good predictor for career decision self-efficacy. The association between ethnical identity and expectances concerning occupational results was mediated by career choice self-efficacy. In the same line of ideas, Flores and collaborators (2006) have shown that career decision self-efficacy is a good predictor for the educational purposes of high school students of Latin-American origin.

The studies focused on ethnical differences in career decision are few in number, but it is gratifying to see that concerns in this field tend to get more serious. Similar studies will have to be developed in Romania, too, since there are enough minority groups and it is important to find out how their ethnicity affects their career decision process. Only this way we will be able to create accurate activities and intervention programs to efficiently help adolescents with ethnical identities other than Romanian concerning their career decision.

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