

Parental Influence on Adolescents' Career Choices

SHUBHANGI BHAGAWATI* AND DEEPTI PURANIK**

Abstract

This paper explores parental influence on adolescents' career choices. Choosing a career is considered to be one of the crucial phases in a person's life and hence it is an important decision. The adolescent period is considered, since it has been explored, as a critical period, filled with a lot of developments and transitions that occur in one's life. Parents play a dynamic role in forming of an adolescent's career, and they are the ones with whom we have day-to-day correspondence since childhood and are involved in some or the other decisions in our life, it is crucial to look into the parent-child relationship. This paper tries to explore three main relationships: first is the relationship between perceived parental influence on adolescents' career choices and emotional independence from parents. Second it tries to explore the relationship between perceived parental influence and vocational commitment of adolescents. Thirdly, it explores the relationship between vocational commitment and emotional independence from parents.

INTRODUCTION

Choosing a career has always been considered a significant stage in a person's life. The decision to it will either open up the avenues of success or close the doors of opportunities. While for some, taking such an early

decision might be relatively easy, for others it might be quite stressful, and they may encounter a lot of struggle in it.

Difficulties in forming this early-stage decision may cause stress and tension, avoidance or

* Student, Amity University, Mumbai

** Assistant Professor, Amity Institute of Behavioural Sciences, Amity University, Mumbai

delayed decisions, lack of perceived ownership and even sometimes result into someone else taking the decision (Gati and Saki, 2001). However, the irony is that children are not always prepared for taking such a big decision at the time they require taking it. The period of adolescence is explored as one's constant struggle to establish their identity and independence in the community. This is the stage when self-identification, exploration of goals and establishment of autonomy from parents takes place (Newman and Newman, 1995). While choosing a career is often perceived to be an individual choice, it has been theorised (Creed and Patton, 2003) that people rarely consider themselves to be having an autonomous choice while making career decisions. A variety of influences such as family, school, society, economic and social factors are likely to influence one's career decision making. Among the various factors that are found to affect career decisions in adolescents, findings have shown the influence of parents to be of utmost importance, especially because they are the immediate sources of correspondence since childhood. If we look at the child's developmental stages, it can be observed how the child is surrounded by the direct family comprising of parents, siblings and the enlarged family consisting of grandparents, uncles and aunts, where each one is equally likely to have a compelling effect on the adolescent's career choices (Alphonse, 2016). While it

has been explored that many parents like to maintain a neutral scenario when exposed to their child's career decisions, the results of a number of studies have shown parents to have a much greater influence when compared to that of the teachers, faculty or career counsellors. These influences can take the form of either support or advice. Parents have played an important part in the development of the personality of the child by providing guidance about the levels of education and training, the details about the different kinds of work and occupations and helping them in the formulation of the work belief system and attitudes. These influences that help shape the personality of the child are learnt in an unconscious way throughout the process of growth and maturation (Alphonse, 2016). Research findings reveal that there are a number of important influences that parents use for shaping their child's career. These influences can range from the role models they set for their adolescent child to look up to, the behaviours and values that the parents like or dislike, agree or disagree upon, the level of parental expectations set for the adolescent child and the level of encouragement and support that the parents provide their children with.

PERCEIVED PARENTAL INFLUENCE AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Parents have been found to engage in various activities that aim at enhancing their children's career

development, that includes encouragement to hone their necessary attitudes and skills that are important for successful career attainment to enhancing their adolescent's ability to choose appropriate working choices (Young and Friesen, 1992). According to sources, parents start affecting the career decisions of their child; the moment they begin to develop the ability to utter their respective parent's job title. Adolescents who enjoy care and support from their dear ones, such as their parents, associate themselves with greater confidence level to learn and relearn and opt for a career that seems to be more appealing (Clutter, 2010). In a research conducted by Dietrich and Kracke (2009), no evidence was found that would indicate stoppage in searching for different career opportunities due to parental pressure. According to studies, the influence of parents on their adolescent's career choices are said to be generally regulated by the emotional bonds that exist between the parent-child relationship (Vondracek, Lerner and Schulenberg, 1986; Lucas, 1997; Middleton and Loughhead, 1993). Most of the information regarding the world of work is gathered from parents as adolescents are encouraged and guided towards their life roles (Vondracek et al., 1986). For instance, a parent who encourages a male child to enhance his technical skills may direct to the child's future success as an engineer while the female child possessing similar skills who is socialised by her

parents to be a nurturing caregiver may instead direct her career to be a nurse. Bratcher (1982) discussed that the roles that seem to be acceptable for the development of the adolescent child are mostly decided by the traditions and expectations that are being followed in the family, thereby influencing the adolescent's career choices and perceived occupational interests. Shellenbarger (2006) writes that even though parental advice and guidance are considered to be crucial and beneficial to the child, too much of interference or advice can often lead a teenager to disengage and thus separate ties from their career options altogether.

EMOTIONAL INDEPENDENCE AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Olaosebikan and Olusakin (2014) in their paper discussed how adolescents have been found to straddle the line of childhood obedience and adult independence. In a sense, they are usually trying to learn about how to make up their own minds, while ignoring what they are told. As adolescents start disengaging from their parents, autonomy starts to develop. According to several studies, parents foster this disengagement by inspiring their children to develop independence through decision making opportunities as the child matures. Following Chickering Reisser (1993), they noted that emotional independence conveys freedom from continual and pressing

needs for reassurance, affection, or approval. The research conducted by them stated that if the child is emotionally independent from the family, this may lead to forming stronger relationships with one's peers, which will further enhance vocational commitment in the child. Being emotionally independent from the parent demands that the child gradually disengages from his or her family and enhances autonomy, self-efficacy, and interdependence on others (Ladd, 2000). Reviewing several studies have demonstrated that adolescents' perceptions of parental separation and attachment are predictors for different phases of the development of the adolescent, that includes career development as well. Families like those that are dysfunctional in nature, that never allow the exercise of autonomy of thought and expression, demoralise the adolescent (either overtly or covertly) from exercising mental separateness (Blustein, Walbridge, Friedlander and Palladino, 1991). According to Li and Kerpelman (2007), they found that greater the parent-child attachment is, the more the child feels obliged to agree with their parental advice. This likely then leads to the child into taking a career that they would feel their parents would approve of. While on the other hand, if children feel emotionally separated and disengaged from their parents, they end up taking careers of their choices and disregard their parent's choice. This interprets

that the level of autonomy shown towards adolescents may provide significant means of predicting advancement towards commitment to career choices.

VOCATIONAL COMMITMENT

Vocational commitment is the extent to which a person is willing to state and defend the vocational and occupational goals (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). According to Porfeli and Lee (2012), deciding on a career and identifying with it are the two components of vocational commitment. It aids in forming decisions and further attaching oneself to those decisions. Vocational commitment is generally thought to be a process that is displayed at a young age when offered by the age-old question of what youngsters wants to do when they grow up. One's commitment to a career is demonstrated in the decisions one takes, the choices one formulates and the vocational identities that one establishes. According to research, children identify jobs that are being occupied by people of their same gender or social class and are found to be more inclined towards occupations that appear to be more sensational and glamorous (Porfeli and Lee, 2012). The evolution of vocational commitment takes place as individuals begin to take steps towards identifying their future career plans (Ladd, 2000). Chickering and Reisser (1993) further notes that the development of career plans

and one's desire and motivation to carry on despite barriers are critical components to assess when evaluating vocational commitment. According to Ladd (2000), family, career, and other commitments that are modelled by parents will aid to demonstrate to the adolescent about how they are expected to behave as a grown up. He further noted that individuals tend to be more satisfied and successful with their chosen careers, when they accomplish establishing a secure vocational identity.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As deciding on a career is a major turning point in one's life, it is of utmost importance that one should be guided in a proper direction so as to have a fulfilling career ahead. Parents have been found to portray a dynamic role in shaping their child's career. In a collectivistic country like India, individuals spend most of their time with their family, particularly their parents and usually take their guidance till a much older age. Parents provide financial, emotional, motivational support and facilitate the sources (books, newspapers, etc.) to ensure their children's better academic performance. Since in our life, our parents play the most important part, the ones we've had direct day-to-day correspondence since childhood and they almost are involved in some or the other decisions in our life, it is thus necessary to understand

their influence and expectations in deciding our careers and gain some insight into this relationship. The period of adolescence is crucial and it is considered to be a combination of defiance and independence and thus, it is equally important to understand if there exists any influence of parents in their children's emotional independence during this phase. Also, since commitment to one's vocation is crucial for a successful career life, it is of utmost importance to explore if it is modelled by parents. Exploring these areas will help career counsellors to carve out appropriate interventions for our younger generation. Thus, looking into this relationship between parents and their influence in their adolescent's career choices will help us to find answers and guide our children, thereby easing out their career decision making process.

OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The objective of this paper was to explore the relationship among "perceived parental influence on adolescents' career choices", "emotional independence from parents" and "vocational commitment". To meet this objective, the research questions mentioned below were addressed:

1. Does a significant correlation exist between adolescent's "perceptions of parental influence on career choices" and their "emotional independence from parents"?
2. Does a significant correlation exist between adolescent's "perceptions

of parental influence on career choices” and their “vocational commitment”?

3. Does a significant correlation exist between adolescent’s “vocational commitment” and “emotional independence from parents”?

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample of the current study comprised of two hundred adolescents aged between 15 to 18 years, studying in different schools and colleges in India. Snowball sampling was used in this study where respondents recruited other respondents. Online google forms were circulated for ease in collecting responses of the participants.

Tools

The career questionnaire, developed by M.W. Ladd (2000), consists of three parts and data has been collected using the different sub-scales present in the questionnaire. The first sub-scale, the Perceived Parental Influence (PPI) was designed

to assess the respondents’ perception of the influence of their parents on the career choices of the adolescents. The Emotional Independence sub-scale (IND) was designed in order to assess disengagement from parents. Questions are presented with equal number of positive and negative worded questions to control for the acquiescence response set. The third sub-scale, the Vocational Commitment (VOC) aims at the development of vocational or career goals and decisions and examines how committed a child is to his or her career or vocational choices. One-third of the items are negatively worded to control response bias. Each of the three scales consists of 15 statements/items and uses a five-point Likert Scale for scores on different items.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 represents Descriptive Statistics, which includes the mean, standard deviation (SD) and range of the sample data (Age, Years of Education). It also includes mean,

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics about Respondents and Related parameters

S.No.	Parameters	Mean Value	Standard Deviation	Range
1.	Age of Respondents	16.48	1.02	15–18
2.	Years of Education	11	2.83	9–13
3.	PPI	51.56	5.74	35–64
4.	IND	41.1	7.69	23–65
5.	VOC	54.57	7.69	37–73

Respondents: Girl Students: 100; Boy Students: 100; Total Number of respondents: 200

standard deviation (SD) and range of the variables (PPI, IND and VOC). For a total population of 200 adolescents, the age of the adolescents ranges from 15–18 years, having a mean of 16.48.

Pearson correlation was conducted through SPSS in order to evaluate the correlation found among the variables: “Perceived Parental Influence” and “Emotional Independence from Parents”, “Perceived Parental Influence” and “Vocational Commitment” and “Emotional Independence from Parents” and “Vocational Commitment”. The correlational data consisting of the Pearson correlation values (r), are presented in the form of correlation matrix in Table 2.

The purpose of the research was to explore if there exists any influence of parents on their adolescents' career choices. Out of the three research questions, the first one explored if there exists a significant relationship between “perceived parental influence” and “emotional independence from parents”. A negative correlation was obtained between the “PPI” and the “IND” scale. The overall correlation between IND and PPI was $-.248$, which was moderately significant at

the $p < .01$ level. This data suggests that there exists a significant relationship between PPI and IND. The moderate significant negative correlation between IND and PPI scale suggests that as adolescents perceive less influence of parents on their career choices, they become more emotionally independent from their parents. This was moderately aligned with other formerly conducted researches as that of Chickering and Reisser (1993), where it was observed that students strive to be distinct and independent from their parents (Ladd, 2000).

The second research question explored if there exists a significant relationship between “perceived parental influence on career choices” and “vocational commitment”. Between the “PPI” and “VOC” scale, a positive correlation was obtained suggesting that as adolescents perceive greater parental influence while choosing their career, the more they feel career or vocationally committed. Thus, with more parental guidance and influence, they feel more committed to a career. The overall correlation between PPI and VOC was $.065$, suggesting a correlation that is very weak and

Table 2
Correlation Matrix

	PPI	IND	VOC
PPI	1	$-.249^{**}$	0.065
IND	$-.249^{**}$	1	$-.145^*$
VOC	0.065	$-.145^*$	1
N = 200	$*p < .05$	$**p < .01$	

an almost negligible relationship. Thus, despite the correlation being positive, it showed a non-significant result and thus displayed a lack of correlation between the VOC and PPI scales. This might suggest that while parental influence is considered to play a crucial role in career decisions, it actually comprises a minimal part of the multitude of factors that influence vocational choices. Thus, this result fails to support earlier research (Ladd, 2000), which found a moderate significant relationship between vocational commitment and perceived parental influence.

The third research question explored if there exists a significant relationship between “vocational commitment” and “emotional independence from parents”. Between the VOC and IND scales, a negative correlation was obtained. This infers that as adolescents become more vocationally committed to their careers, the less they feel emotionally independent from their parents. An overall correlation of -0.145 was found between the VOC and IND scales, which was significantly a low correlation ($p < .05$). This puts forward that there exists a very minimal correlation between VOC and IND scales and further research should be carried out. This finding, however, very slightly differs from previous research (Ladd, 2000) which suggested a lack of correlation between the two scales, inferring that there exists no affiliation between emotional independence and commitment to career choices.

However, this result seems to be aligned with the other two results and can be inferred that as more the adolescent perceives parental influence on their career choices, the more vocationally committed one is and less independent one becomes emotionally from their parent. Although there wasn't any strong relationship or association shown between any of the two variables of the three different correlations, the mean score attained on the PPI scale ($M = 51.565$) indicates that almost majority of the sample reported perceiving parental influence on their career choices, while on the contrary the mean score reported on the IND scale ($M = 41.1$) does not indicate the same. Also, the mean score reported on the VOC scale ($M = 54.57$) indicates that majority of the adolescents in the sample report were committed to their career choices. While parents may not be shown to strongly influence their children's career choices, but in reality, they do have a significant role to play, whether it be moderately or weakly, and thus this influence should not be taken lightly. Counsellors working with students should bring parents as well in the counselling process to develop effective career plans, educate parents about their influence in the career guidance process for their children and thus help to ease the career-decision making process for children.

CONCLUSION

Deciding on a career is an important choice, particularly for the child,

since the process begins quite early on. Adolescence, particularly known as the period of defiance and the continual need to establish one's independence, can be a lot difficult, when the pressure of choosing a career at this point grows. The results of the study showed that a negative moderate correlation exists between "perceived parental influence" and "emotional independence from parents". This shows that although the correlation is not that strong, there exists some amount of relationship between the variables, and it is important to look more into this parent-child relationship. Secondly, a positive but almost a negligible correlation between "perceived parental influence" and "vocational commitment" may suggest further research to be carried out between the two variables. Also, a low and negative but significant correlation was found between "vocational commitment" and "emotional independence from parents". It is quite known that one's

nurturance can have a meaningful influence on the person one becomes and hence it is reasonable to assume that parents might have some level of influence on their adolescent's career choices and decisions. But among the multitude of other factors, their influence might seem to be quite low in today's generation. Even though this influence can be small, it does play a vital role in the child's decision-making process. There are several parents who want to help their adolescent child in deciding an appropriate career. Thus, based on the inferences from this study, career counsellors may consider including family influences and relations in carrying out career interventions. They may also help parents comprehend the role they play in their adolescent's career choices and assist them in helping their children to make such a crucial decision of their lives. This paper thus raises variety of opportunities for future analysis and research.

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