

Understanding Career Decision-making Difficulties of Adolescents in Institutional Care

*¹Nagpal Gauri & ²Kaur Supreet (Dr.)

^{*1}Research Scholar, Department of Education, Panjab University, Chandigarh (India)

²Assistant Professor, USOL, Panjab University, Chandigarh (India)

ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History

Published Online: 10 October 2018

Keywords

Adolescents, Institutional Care, Career Decision making difficulties, Developmental indecision, Career indecisiveness

*Corresponding Author

Email: gaurinagpal_03[at]yahoo.co.in

ABSTRACT

Career decisions are daunting for everyone. But adolescents who live in institutional care are deprived of a conventional family set-up and therefore, face greater difficulty in taking such decisions. In the current education system, adolescents who decide to continue with general education have to select an academic stream after Grade X. This choice has a substantial and irreversible effect on the future career prospects of these adolescents. In the light of these facts, this paper presents a case study of one such adolescent who lives in institutional care. In order to understand the nature of his career decision-making difficulties, the Career Decision-making Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ) was administered. As he exhibited indecisiveness, a semi-structured interview was conducted with him to unearth the sources of his indecisiveness. In addition, in-depth interviews were also conducted with his peers and his caregivers along with personal observations to gain a deeper insight into the nature of his career problems. Finally, a personalized strategy to help him overcome his career decision-making difficulties has been suggested.

1. Introduction

Though the term 'adolescent' has been defined differently in different contexts, the most popular understanding is that it refers to a person between the age range of 10 to 19 years [1]. Numerous attributes like various physical changes, consciousness about looks, enhanced imagination, etc. are bracketed together with adolescents.

Among many developmental tasks that adolescents have to accomplish at this stage, the selection and preparation for an occupation of their choice is a crucial one [2]. Similar views have been shared by Erickson who purported that adolescents face the psychological crisis of 'Identity versus Role Confusion' and the successful resolution of this crisis results in a stable sense of personal identity [3]. Further, Erickson considered occupational identity as the key domain of identity formation [4]. In the present education system the earliest career decision that adolescents have to make, comes in the form of selection of academic streams after grade X. The choice is usually between Science, Commerce and Humanities stream. As change of academic stream in Grade X and XII is not allowed by the Central Board of Secondary Education [5] this decision has an irreversible effect on the future career development of adolescents. Ergo, the need to pay attention to the career decision-making process of adolescents is crucial to ensure that well-informed decisions are made at this stage that result in post-decision satisfaction in the long-run.

Though many factors like scores obtained in the previous year's examination, advice of parents, teachers, friends, relatives, etc. influence the choices made by adolescents [6],

the encouragement provided by parents plays a pivotal role in such choices [7]. Invariably, these decisions will become more daunting for those who do not have access to such encouragement and constant advice. This brings us to the need to address the career concerns of adolescents, who for various reasons, do not live with their families and instead live under the care of paid adults in residential institutions. Many career development theories have also pointed out the crucial role that family plays in career choices [8, 9]. In addition, the matter of provision of education and job quotas for orphan children being sub-judice [10] indicates that it is high time that the career related concerns of adolescents who live in institutional care be discussed.

2. Career decision-making difficulties

Career decision-making process refers to the process of making career-related decisions and educational choices akin to those. The problems that one encounters during this process which hamper a career decision are known as career decision-making difficulties or career indecision [11]. The taxonomy of difficulties in career decision-making put forth by Gati, Krausz and Osipow was used to understand the career difficulties faced by adolescents in institutional care. As depicted in figure 1, career decision making difficulties are a result of 10 types of difficulties, namely, lack of motivation, indecisiveness, dysfunctional myths, lack of information regarding decisional process, lack of information about occupations, lack of information about self, lack of information about the ways of obtaining information, unreliable information, internal conflicts and external conflicts.

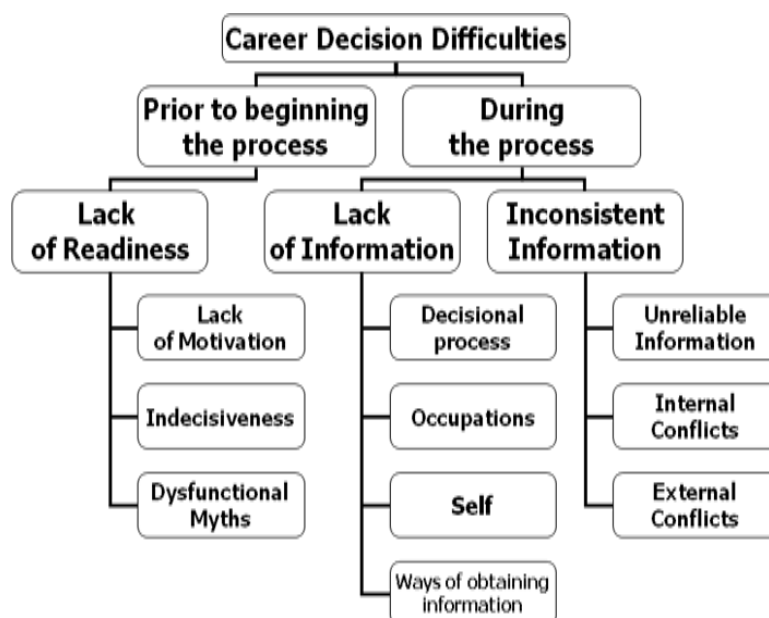


Figure 1. Taxonomy of career decision-making difficulties.

Source: "A taxonomy of difficulties in career decision making", by I. Gati, M. Krausz and S. H. Osipow, 1996, *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 43(4).

Except indecisiveness, all the difficulties are considered to be a temporary phase [12] and therefore, are collectively known as developmental indecision [13, 14]. On the other hand, the type of difficulty represented by the category of indecisiveness represents difficulties that are more permanent in nature. These difficulties, often labeled as career indecisiveness, are rooted in emotional and personality related sources and thus, are more severe [15].

As adolescents in institutional care experience various emotional and personality related issues including attachment problems [16], anxiety issues [17], lower self-esteem [18] and lower emotional intelligence [19] among many others, there is a need to distinguish developmental indecision from career indecisiveness while assessing career decision-making difficulties of such adolescents to formulate effective strategies for career guidance.

3. Methodology

The case study approach was used to delve into the career aspirations and the problems that adolescents in institutional care face in their career decision-making process. In order to compile data for the case studies, the Career Decision Making Difficulties Questionnaire [20] was administered. The CDDQ assesses the nature of career decision-making difficulties faced by adolescents. The scores on the CDDQ were used to assess the nature of career decision-making difficulties and the extent of developmental indecision and career indecisiveness faced by them. Further, in-depth interviews were conducted with the adolescents, their peers and their care-givers and personal observations were used to gain insight into the emotional and personality related aspects of the adolescents.

In this paper, one such case study has been presented in the following sections to highlight the various facets of career decision-making difficulties that adolescents in institutional care

face. The name of the adolescent has been changed to protect his identity.

4. Case study: Vimal

Vimal, a 15 year old boy, came to live in the faith-based institution located in Dwarka, New Delhi where he currently resides, in the year 2015. As the institution was responsible for providing him educational opportunities, they arranged for his admission into a nearby Government school. One of his caregivers, whom he fondly calls *didī*, informed the researcher that under the provisions of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 he was admitted to Grade VIII. However, at that time he did not even know the alphabets properly. Now he is in Grade IX and compared to his peers, his academic performance is much below the average. However, going by his own journey, his accomplishment is nothing less than remarkable. From, not knowing how to write, he manages to participate in all activities at school, does his homework on his own and is constantly trying to improve his academic performance. Besides, the institution has also arranged for tuition classes for all adolescents in their premises.

Two of his peers, whom Vimal reported to be closest to in the institution were also interviewed. When asked to describe Vimal, one of them said "*bahut sharmila hai madam ye to...bahut kam bolta hai*" meaning that he is quite shy and does not speak much. On being enquired about Vimal's career aspirations, one friend said that he did not have any idea about it, implying that Vimal did not discuss these matters with him and the other friend said "*pata nahin kya banna chahta hai..kabhi kuch bolta hai kabhi kuch*". This second friend also apprised the researcher about how Vimal's father usually comes to visit him at the institution.

When Vimal was asked about his favourite recreational activities he revealed his preference for indoor games and how he likes to idly roam around in his free time. Though his

favourite subject is 'Hindi'; regarding his career interests, he aspires to join the Air Force when he grows up. During his interactions with the researcher, he shared that the inspiration to join the air force came from watching some patriotic movies. When he was probed further he could remember just one, "Border", which he watched on television in the common area of the institution with his friends.

Vimal appeared to be very confident of his career choice *prima facie* and was judged to be facing only moderate developmental indecision as per the scores on CDDQ. The results of the CDDQ further revealed that though he did not face salient developmental indecision, he did have difficulty pertaining to career indecisiveness. In particular, he was facing difficulties relating to the following dimensions of the CDDQ:

- a) Indecisiveness: This means that Vimal might have a tendency to procrastinate or repeatedly change his decisions frequently and he may exhibit high fear of failure. Vimal's indecisive nature was also reflected in interactions with his peers.
- b) Lack of knowledge about the career decision-making process: This indicates that he is not familiar with the steps involved in the career decision-making process that is he does not know what all factors should he consider while taking a career decision or making an educational choice.
- c) Lack of information about self: This means that he lacks a clear understanding of his own caliber and preferences. It means that a clear sense of identity has not yet evolved.
- d) Lack of information about occupations: This shows that he did not have adequate information regarding various educational or career choices.
- e) Internal conflicts: This points towards internal confusion or a situation where a preferred career involves some less desirable attributes.
- f) External conflicts: This difficulty usually arises due to a difference of opinion with the significant others.

The overall difficulty faced by him was calculated to be 6 on a scale of 1 to 9, 1 being the least and 9 being the most severe difficulty; he reported an overall difficulty level of 5 on a scale of 1 to 9. This shows that he did have a fair idea of the extent of difficulties that he is encountering.

As his CDDQ scores indicated presence of the trait of indecisiveness, the researcher tried to unearth the sources of his career indecisiveness through the semi-structured interview. During the interactions, the researcher identified anxiety as the major reason behind his indecisiveness as he repeatedly mentioned that he was scared to make a wrong choice.

The fact that though he was quite clear about his career aspirations but did not have the slightest idea as to how he could achieve his career goals also came to the fore during the interview. When the researcher asked him whether he knows how to achieve his career goal, he said that all he knows right now is that he will have to select Science after Grade X. He expressed how he feels that he needs more information about how to get ahead in his chosen field. When informed about the

kind of training that a person joining the air force has to undergo, he was surprised to know that it involves physical fitness and that such training is quite rigorous as one has to follow a lot of rules and regulations there. He told the researcher that he can barely get up early in the morning and he never knew that physical training is involved in his profession of interest. When inquired about whom he approaches for advice, he said that he doesn't approach anyone around him for advice as he doesn't think that they know much about the sort of information that he needs. This shows a lack of trust that he has in others. The researcher has also observed that while other boys were quite vocal and open to interaction, Vimal seemed shy and kept to himself.

Further his caregiver disclosed that his academic performance is not up to the mark and it seems highly implausible that he will get good enough grades to opt for Science stream. This highlights a major drawback of our education system. Subjects are allotted on the basis of marks obtained in examinations, and not on the basis of interests of the students. Such selection may create a downward spiral for the child due to a lack of interest.

5. Strategies for career guidance

Vimal's scores on the CDDQ, researcher's observations and interviews with him and his peers and caregivers, indicate multiple types of career indecision that necessitates a comprehensive career guidance strategy. Therefore, some measures are suggested to facilitate adolescents like Vimal in their career choices in general and more imminently, the educational choice relating to selection of an academic stream after Grade X:

- First and foremost, possibilities for Vimal's reunion with his father shall be explored. Many a times, certain factors like poverty, abuse, etc. may require that the child be separated from the parent. With time, many of these factors may mitigate and the Government may also intervene to provide financial and social support to his father or extended family so that he may live with them. Globally, there is a move towards de-institutionalization keeping in mind the negative consequences of institutional care and therefore, such options shall be explored and reviewed by the institution and put forth to the concerned Child Welfare Committee (CWC).
- Career counseling shall be provided in schools so that the need for factual information regarding the various types of careers is made available to all adolescents. This will ensure that adolescents do not make hasty decisions like Vimal did by deciding to pursue a career that he saw in some movie without any regard to his own personality and calibre.
- At the level of the institution, more collaborations shall be formed with corporates and with higher education institutions so that adolescents like Vimal get a chance to discuss career and educational choices with people

from varied professional fields. This exercise will surely fill the information deficit regarding different occupations that adolescents in institutional care often face.

- Though Vimal's caregivers at the institution claimed that the adolescents get constant guidance from a psychological counselor, this claim was not validated with interactions with the adolescents who reported that such activities took place once in a while. In order to address the emotional and personality reasons behind indecisiveness, it is necessary that all adolescents in institutional care have round the clock access to mental health services. The counselors may suggest a host of psychological exercises to build up self-esteem, reduce anxiety, improve social adjustment and developing a stable sense of personal identity.
- All schools must offer bridge courses wherein after the Grade X examination, the school organizes temporary classes for all streams available at their school in Grade XI so that students may attend those classes and gauge their interest in particular academic streams.
- Students' decision-making skills shall be honed from the very beginning. The education system in general

shall place equal impetus on creativity and taking responsibility as on obedience.

- As the internet is a great source of knowledge regarding one's educational choices and consequent career choices, digital literacy and more importantly web-literacy is an indispensable career tool. Vimal did not have access to the internet. In today's e-world, it is essential that adolescents in institutional care be provided with this basic facility, either at school or at the institution where they reside.

6. Conclusion

Career indecision is multi-faceted and though some forms of career indecision are common to most adolescents, each adolescent faces some peculiar difficulties in their career decision-making process. Therefore, the policy of "one size fits all" regarding career guidance of adolescents in institutional care does not work well. There is a dire need to frame personalized career strategies for these adolescents apart from provision of some common measures for fulfilling information-based needs.

References

1. World Health Organization. (2018, May 10): 'Global accelerated action for the health of adolescents (AA-HA!): Guidance to support country implementation'. Retrieved June 13, 2018, from http://www.who.int/maternal_child_adolescent/topics/adolescence/framework-accelerated-action/en/
2. Havighurst, R. J. (1951): 'Developmental tasks and education'. Longmans, Green, New York.
3. Erikson, E. H. (Ed.). (1963): 'Youth: Change and challenge'. Basic books, New York.
4. Erikson, E. H. (1950): 'Childhood and society'. New York, W. W. Norton & Co, New York.
5. Mehta, K. (2015, May 22): 'Once in stream, can't row back'. The Times of India, pp.8.
6. Oke, A. S. (2012): 'Impact of personality, interests and perceived parenting on effective career decision making (Doctoral thesis)'. Shreemati Nathbai Damodar Thackersey Women's University, Mumbai. Retrieved on December 5, 2014 from <http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/handle/10603/9513>
7. Young, R. A. (1994): 'Helping adolescents with career development: The active role of parents'. The Career Development Quarterly, 42(3), 195-203. doi:10.1002/j.2161-0045.1994.tb00934.x
8. Roe, A. (1957): 'Early determinants of vocational choice'. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 4(3), 212-217. doi:10.1037/h0045950
9. Super, D. E. (1957): 'The psychology of careers'. Harper & Row, New York.
10. The Financial Express. (2018, July 07): 'Education and jobs quotas will not improve orphaned children's lot'. The Financial Express. Retrieved August 25, 2018, from <https://www.financialexpress.com/opinion/education-and-jobs-quotas-will-not-improve-orphaned-childrens-lot/1234563/>
11. Gati, I., Krausz, M., & Osipow, S. H. (1996): 'A taxonomy of difficulties in career decision making'. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 43(4), 510-526. doi:10.1037/0022-0167.43.4.510
12. Guay, F., Ratelle, C. F., Senecal, C., Larose, S., & Deschenes, A. (2006): 'Distinguishing developmental from chronic career indecision: Self-efficacy, autonomy, and social support'. Journal of Career Assessment, 14(2), 235-255. doi:10.1177/1069072705283975
13. Osipow, S. (1999): 'Assessing career indecision'. Journal of Vocational Behavior, 55(1), 147-154. doi:10.1006/jvbe.1999.1704
14. Tinsley, H. E. (1992): 'Career decision making and career indecision'. Journal of Vocational Behavior, 41(3), 209-211. doi:10.1016/0001-8791(92)90022-R
15. Amir, T., & Gati, I. (2006): 'Facets of career decision-making difficulties'. British Journal of Guidance and Counseling, 34(4), 483-503. doi:10.1080/03069880600942608
16. Lionetti, F., Pastoreb, M., & Baronea, L. (2015): 'Attachment in institutionalized children: A review and meta-analysis'. Child Abuse & Neglect, 42, 135-145. doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2015.02.013
17. Andersson, G. (2005): 'Family relations, adjustment and well-being in a longitudinal study of children in care'. Child & Family Social Work, 10(1), 43-56. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2206.2005.00337.x

18. Fisher, L., Ames, E., Chisholm, K., & Savoie, L. (1997): 'Problems reported by parents of Romanian orphans adopted to British Columbia'. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 20(1), 67-82. doi:10.1080/016502597385441
19. Radhakrishnan, R., & Rajasree, S. (2013): 'Comparing emotional intelligence and decision making ability of institutionalized and non-institutionalized children'. *Conflux Journal of Education* 1(2), 60-65. Retrieved on November 17, 2014 from <http://www.naspublishers.com>
20. Gati, I., & Saka, N. (2001): 'High school students' career-related decision-making difficulties'. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 79(3), 331-340. doi:10.1002/j.1556-6676.2001.tb01978.x