

WCPCG-2010

Manifestation of parental perfectionism on career indecision

Mahdi Khasmohammadi*, Sidek Mohd Noah, Rusnani Abdul Kadir, Maznah Baba,
kiomars farah bakhsh, Hossein Keshavarz

Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, 43400, Malaysia
Allameh Tabatabaei University, Tehran, 14896, Iran

Received January 10, 2010; revised February 1, 2010; accepted March 4, 2010

Abstract

The roles of family and parental perfectionism in career development are not yet understood and it has not been examined exclusively, particularly when assessing family influences in areas of career decision making and career indecision. The purpose of this study was to investigate the contribution and role of parental perfectionism to the prediction of career indecision. A sample of 102 students (32 men, 70 women) responded to Career Decision Scale and The Almost Perfect Scale-Family. Data analysis using Pearson correlation coefficient revealed that parental perfectionism did relate to the career indecision of university students. The results from the current study further expand on the results from other studies in this area by providing insight into the effects of specific family dynamics and highlight the importance of integrating parental perfectionism into the conceptualization of career development in research and practice.

© 2010 Elsevier Ltd. Open access under [CC BY-NC-ND license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Keywords: Parental perfectionism, career indecision.

1. Introduction

Over 50 years ago, Super (1957) claimed that family variables such as interpersonal relations influence individual's career choice and adjustment. Also, Roe (1956, 1957) has hypothesized that family interaction patterns conduce significantly to vocational outcomes, and research has provided support for Roe's proposed link between parental attitudes and children's career choices (Osipow, 1983; Roe & Lunneborg, 1990). Some researchers have focused primarily on the influence of parents in career development. Brown (2003) pointed to that "parents exercise more influence than any other adults on the educational and vocational choice of children" (p. 332). The sway parents have in the career decision making of their children (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005). Steinberg (2004) posited parents have a weighty influence on the emotional, social, and intellectual components of their children's lives. Their guidance is a powerful component in the decision making process, and they expose their children to a particular variety of career choices (Chope, 2005).

While a number of studies regarding family attitudes, relations, and structure helped to elucidate the ways in which the family may influence career development, most of the family constructs studied have been broad (e.g.,

* Mahdi Khasmohammadi. Tel.: +60-172754872.

E-mail address: mahdikhas@gmail.com.

support) or fixed (e.g., parents' occupations) variables that are difficult to change. Therefore, most studies are limited in their ability to aid career counselors in identifying ways to enhance the nature of family influences. Recent theoretical works pointed to a potential link between parenting behaviors and children career development (Blustein, 2001). Hence, additional researches clarify the impact of parenting variables seems essential to recent efforts aimed at spanning the gap between knowledge and practice (Heppner et al., 2002; Stoltenberg, 2005). In addition, research in this area may help ease the anxiety of parents (Usinger, 2005) by providing them with specific steps they can take to positively influence their children career development (Keller & Whiston, 2008).

2. Career Indecision

Career indecision is generally viewed as a serious problem characterized by the experience of high levels of uncertainty and anxiety regarding one's career choices and by motivational difficulties with career goal-directed activity (Lopez & Ann-Yi, 2006). As a fact, a high level of career indecision interferes with educational and career planning and impedes normative career development processes. However, despite its status as a significant career-related problem, career indecision has not been a central construct in career development theories (Kelly & Lee, 2002).

Career indecision has been associated with a wide array of variables in different studies, such as inadequate family support, problematic interaction patterns, and attachment (Hargrove et al., 2002; Nota et al., 2007; Downing & Nauta, 2010), career-related barrier and social support perceptions (Lopez & Ann-Yi, 2006), identity-related factors (Guerra & Braungart-Rieker, 1999; Tokar et al., 2003), self-efficacy beliefs regarding one's career planning, decision-making skills, coping strategies, and vocational interests (Betz & Klein, 1996; Betz, Klein, & Taylor, 1996; Betz & Luzzo, 1996; Betz & Voyten, 1997; Guay et al., 2003; Argyropoulou et al., 2007) and trait anxiety, external locus of control, and perfectionism (Fuqua, Blum, & Hartman, 1988; Leong & Chervinko, 1996). Briefly, perceptions of both undesirable personal and contextual factors appear to contribute to career indecision.

3. Parental Maladaptive Perfectionism

One facet of family interactions that has received any attention in relation to career outcomes is parental perfectionism. Perfectionist parents defined by self-imposed standards and the pursuit of personally demanding rigid, adhere to these standards, and high levels of critical self-evaluations (Blatt, 1995; Frost et al., 1990). Recent studies pointed out that perfectionism is a multidimensional construct, containing both adaptive and maladaptive components (Bieling, Israeli, & Antony, 2004; Frost et al., 1993). Setting high personal standards may be adaptive because approving high personal standards is unrelated to negative adjustment outcomes (Bieling et al., 2004). In contrast, negative self-evaluations that arise from a inflexible adherence to these personal standards are more maladaptive because they strongly predict both depression and anxiety (Blatt, 1995).

Recent study recommended that, maladaptive perfectionist parents lack the empathic ability to be attuned to their children's needs and aspirations as they have a tendency to pursue their own personal goals strictly. Instead, these perfectionist parents may critically evaluate their children's behavior and extend the norms that they feel unable to achieve themselves to their children, and employ psychologically controlling parenting techniques. Consistent with this, the other study demonstrated that parental maladaptive perfectionism significantly predicted parent-rated and adolescent-perceived psychological control (Soenens et al., 2006).

Although parental perfectionism has been ignored in the career literature, its impact on the ability for independent exploration and decision making and perceptions of efficacy should not be underestimated. Parental perfectionism may directly affect children's decision-making skills because demanding styles are characterized by parental control and decision making that permit little independent practice of decision making. Trusty (1998) posited that extreme levels of parental control over children's career-related decisions did not encourage further educational achievement, but that moderately high levels of parental effort and guidance around career decisions were positively related to educational attainment. In short, it remains unclear whether parental perfectionism function as predictor of career indecision. In addressing this gap, it would seem especially important to examine the association of career indecision and parental perfectionism.

4. Purpose of the Present Study

This study examined whether parental perfectionism was related to career indecision and whether this relation differed by gender of student. The study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, although research has identified some relations between family variables and career indecision, parental perfectionism has not been extensively studied and has not been included in previous career developmental studies. Second, little is known about how parental perfectionism may contribute to career indecision. Third, this study examined how the family variables and career indecision differed for males and females.

5. Method

5.1 Participants

Participants in this study were 102 students from university putra Malaysia. Participants were recruited from undergraduate courses in various faculties on campus including modern language and communication, agriculture, computer science, forestry, animal science, economics and management, food science and technology, human ecology, management and marketing, microbiology, gerontology, biotechnology, veterinary medicine, mathematics, and education. An investigator collected data from all students who chose to participate. All volunteers completed a short demographic questionnaire and the instruments described in this article. Male ($n = 28$) and female ($n = 74$) participants with a mean age of 22.18 years (range 18-27) responded to two questionnaires, one assessing parental perfectionism and the other assessing career indecision.

5.2 Measures

- 5.2.1 *Demographic questionnaire.* This brief form solicited information on participants' gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, and so on.
- 5.2.2 *Career Decision Scale (CDS; Osipow, Carney, Winer, Yanico, & Koschier, 1987).* The 16-item Indecision scale of the CDS is one of the most widely used and well-regarded measures of career indecision that is currently available to measure the extent of respondents' current level of career indecision. Items were rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = not like me and 4 = like me), and item ratings were summed to produce a total score, with higher scores indicating greater career indecision. Osipow et al. (1987) reported a Cronbach alpha of .86 for total CDS scores. More recently, Kang (2009) cited study that established Cronbach's alpha of .88 for the Indecision subscale. #
- 5.2.3 *The Almost Perfect Scale-Family (APS-F; Methikalam, Slaney, & Wang, 2005).* APS-F was used to measure an individual's perceptions of how he or she is affected by the perfectionism in the family of origin. The APS-F was developed by revising the items of the APS-R to measure the perceived High Standards, Order, and Discrepancy attributed to one's family. It consists of the same three subscales of the APS-R: High Standards, Order, and Discrepancy. The APS-F uses a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree through 7 = strongly agree. The High Standards subscale measures the perceived degree of high standards for achievement and performance expected by one's family. The Order subscale measures the tendency for neatness and orderliness expected by one's family. The Discrepancy subscale measures the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as not meeting their family's standards for achievement and performance. Methikalam et al (2005) reported Cronbach alphas for the High Standards, Order, and Discrepancy subscales were .85, .82, and .95, respectively in a sample of 184 college students. #

6. Results

Scale means and standard deviations on two measures were computed separately for both female and male. To test for gender differences, t tests of independent means were conducted for each measure used in the present study. Descriptive statistics appear in Table 1. t-test results indicated significant gender differences in mean scores on the Career Indecision total scale ($M = 36.43$ for Females; $M = 40.9$ for Males) and no significant differences on the Parental Perfectionism scale ($M = 155.10$ for women; $M = 156.4$ for men).

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Females and Males on Measures, With t Values for Sex Differences

Measure	Females		Males		T value
	M	SD	M	SD	
Career Indecision	36.43	7.74	40.9	4.9	3.06**
Parental Perfectionism	155.10	26.40	156.4	20.5	.275

Notes. $N = 102$. Females, $n = 68$; Males, $n = 34$; ** $p < .01$.

A Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to examine the hypothesis that significant relationship would exist between parental perfectionism and career indecision. These correlation coefficient for the study variables for all, females and males, are presented in Table 2, respectively. The correlation coefficient show statistically significant positive correlation among the independent and dependent variables ($r = .44$, $p < .01$).

For both females and males, significant correlations were found between the total APS-F score and the CDS Indecision subscale score ($r = .43$, $p < .01$; $r = .56$, $p < .01$). These data show that for males also, correlations are higher than females.

Table 2. Pearson Correlations for Measures

Measures		1	2
All	CDS	-	.44**
	APS-F	.44**	-
Females	CDS	-	.43**
	APS-F	.43**	-
Males	CDS	-	.56**
	APS-F	.56**	-

Notes. $N = 102$. Females, $n = 68$; Males, $n = 34$; CDS = Career Decision Scale; APS-F = The Almost Perfect Scale-Family; ** $p < .01$.

7. Discussion

The present investigation examined whether Parental Perfectionism, could be used to empirically demonstrate purported links between family dynamics and vocational behavior. Results indicated that the perceived High Standards, Order, and Discrepancy attributed to one's family, indeed, have a direct relationship to the experience of high levels of uncertainty regarding one's educational and career choices. Findings suggest that individuals who perceive their families of origin as more discrepant and dominant with high standards and orders, show high levels of career indecision.

An initially surprising finding from this study was the significant different between the levels of career indecision among males and females that show higher level of career indecision for males compared with females. Also, results indicated the higher correlation coefficient between parental perfectionism and career indecision for males compared to females. In general, present study revealed that parental perfectionism was related and contributed to career indecision.

References

- Bieling, P. J., Israeli, A. L., & Antony, M. M. (2004). Is perfectionism good, bad, or both? Examining models of the perfectionism construct. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 36, 1373–1385.
- Blatt, S. J. (1995). The destructiveness of perfectionism. *American Psychologist*, 50, 1003–1020.
- Blustein, D. L. (2001). Extending the reach of vocational psychology: Toward an inclusive and integrative psychology of working. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 59, 171–182.
- Brown, D. (2003). *Career information, career counseling, and career development*. (8th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Chope, R. C. (2005). Qualitatively Assessing Family Influence in Career Decision Making. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 13(4), 395–414.
- Downing, M. H. Nauta, M.M. (2010). Separation-Individuation, Exploration, and Identity Diffusion as Mediators of the Relationship Between Attachment and Career Indecision. *Journal of Career Development*, 36(3), 207–227.
- Frost, R. O., Marten, P., Lahart, C. M., & Rosenblate, R. (1990). The dimensions of perfectionism. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 14, 449–468.
- Frost, R. O., Heimberg, R. G., Holt, C. S., Mattia, J. L., & Neubauer, A. L. (1993). A comparison of two measures of perfectionism. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 14, 119–126.
- Heppner, P. P., Casas, J. M., Carter, J., & Stone, G. L. (2002). The maturation of counseling psychology: Multifaceted perspectives, 1978–1998. In S. D. Brown & R. W. Lent (Eds.), *Handbook of counseling psychology* (3rd ed., pp. 3–49). New York: John Wiley.
- Keller, B. K., Whiston, S. C. (2008). The Role of Parental Influences on Young Adolescents' Career Development. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 16, 198–217.
- Kelly, K. R. & Lee, W. (2002). Mapping the domain of career decision problems. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 61, 302–326.
- Lopez, F. G., Ann-Yi, S. (2006). Predictors of Career Indecision in Three Racial/Ethnic Groups of College Women. *Journal of Career Development*, 33, 29–46.
- Niles, S. G., & Harris-Bowlsbey, J. (2005). *Career development interventions in the 21st century* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.
- Osipow, S. H. (1983). *Theories of career development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Roe, A. (1956). *The psychology of occupations*. New York: Wiley.
- Roe, A. (1957). Early determinants of vocational choice. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 4, 212–217.
- Roe, A., & Lunneborg, P. W. (1990). Personality development and career choice. In D. Brown, L. Brooks, and Associates (Eds.), *Career choice and development* (2nd ed., pp. 68–101). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Steinberg, L. (2004). *The ten basic principles of good parenting*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Stoltenberg, C. D. (2005). Reflections on reflections: Training in counseling psychology. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 33, 683–691.
- Super, D. E. (1957). *The psychology of careers*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Trusty, J. (1998). Family influences on educational expectations of late adolescents. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 91, 260–270.