Predictors for career indecision in adolescence

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Abstract

The counseling of adolescents in order to make a vocational choice is a key step along the path of career development. According to a consistent body of research, this study was designed in order to explore the contribution of career decision self-efficacy, locus of control, academic self-esteem, personality traits and parental support to the prediction of career indecision among adolescents. The career locus of control, academic self-esteem and neuroticism were significant predictors of career indecision. The main results were discussed in the context of their relevance for the counseling of adolescents in career choice and development.

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1. Introduction

The development of technology, industrialization and the greater diversity on labour market make career choice a more difficult and complicated process. Therefore, career choice implies new challenges for school counselors and educational psychologists. In order to choose the most appropriate career, the individuals must to evaluate all options and opportunities. It is thought that limited career developmental tasks increase the difficulty of career-making choice (Luzzo, 1993).

Career choice influences the whole life of the individuals and also shapes their future (Argyropoulou, Sidiropoulou-Dimakakou, & Besevegis; 2007; Luzzo, 1993). There is studies supporting the finding that career decision is related to personal well-being (Rottinghaus, Jenkins, & Jantzer, 2009), as well as social

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adjustment (Savickas, Bridick, & Watkins, 2002). A high level of career indecision impedes career planning and development processes (Betz & Voyten, 1997; Luzzo, 1993).

Career indecision has been associated with a wide array of variables, such as: inadequate family support, problematic interaction patterns, and attachment (Downing & Nauta, 2010), career-related barrier and social support perceptions (Lopez & Ann-Yi, 2006), identity-related factors (Guerra & Braungart-Rieker, 1999), self-efficacy beliefs regarding one’s career planning, decision-making skills, coping strategies, and vocational interests (Betz & Voyten, 1997; Argyropoulou et al., 2007), trait anxiety, external locus of control, and perfectionism (Leong & Chervinko, 1996). Briefly, both some individual and contextual factors appear to contribute to career indecision.

The present study aimed to investigate some potential predictors of career indecision among high school students. Using hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis, six models were tested taking into account career decision self-efficacy, career locus of control, academic self-esteem, Big Five personality traits, and parental support as predictors. Career indecision was considered as criterion. Also, the mediating role of the academic self-esteem on the relationship between the neuroticism, career locus of control, perceived parental support, and career indecision was tested.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

Participants were 99 high school students (52 girls and 47 boys) aged between 18 and 19. All the participants were in twelfth grade. The students were included in a career counseling program conducted by the author of the present study. They have completed five self-reported scales and a personality inventory as a part of the counseling program.

2.2. Instruments

The participants were administered a set of measures, as follows: Career Decision Scale/CDS (S. H. Osipow, C. G. Carney, J. L. Winer, B. J. Yanico and M. Koschier; adapted from Argyropoulou, Sidiropoulou-Dimakakou, & Besevegis, 2007), Career Decision Self Efficacy-Short Form/CDSE-SF (K. M. Taylor and N. E. Betz; adapted from O’Brien, 2003), Career Locus of Control Scale/CLOC (Millar & Shevlin, 2007), Parent Career Behavior Checklist/PCBC (Keller & Whiston, 2008), Toulouse Self-Esteem Scale/ETES (Oubrayrie, Safont, & de Leonardis, 1994), and Big Five Inventory/BFI (Benet-Martinez & John, 1998). The CDS has included 16 items (in the present study, α = .91). The CDSE-SF comprises 25 items (α = .91). The CLOC is composed of 20 items (α = .82). The PCBC includes 24 items (α = .94). The academic self-esteem was measured with a subscale from ETES (12 items, α = .66). The BFI comprises five scale measuring the neuroticism (8 items, α = .76), extraversion (8 items, α = .71), agreeableness (9 items, α = .53), openness (10 items, α = .70), and conscientiousness (9 items, α = .74). All measures were set on Likert-type scales.

3. Results

3.1. Correlations among measured variables

The career indecision was negatively correlated with: career self-efficacy (r = -.47, p < .01), academic self-esteem (r = -.33, p < .01), perceived parental support (r = -.33, p < .01), extraversion (r = -.23, p < .05), openness (r = -.30, p < .01), and conscientiousness (r = -.45, p < .01). There were positive
associations with neuroticism ($r = .46, p < .01$), and career locus of control ($r = .58, p < .01$). No significant association between career indecision and agreeableness was revealed. Also, significant correlations between career self-efficacy, career locus of control, academic self-esteem, parental support, and personality traits were observed.

3.2. Potential predictors of career indecision

The career self-efficacy and the conscientiousness were removed from predictive models in order to avoid the strong multicollinearity with the rest of the predictors. The first model (see Table 1) included career locus of control as significant predictor ($\hat{\beta} = .58, p < .001$). The unique contribution of the locus of control to the explanation of career indecision variance was 33.6%. In the next five models, new independent variables were added one by one.

Table 1: Hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis on adolescents' career indecision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Added predictors</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>$R$</th>
<th>Adjusted $R^2$</th>
<th>$\Delta R^2$</th>
<th>$F_{\Delta R^2}$</th>
<th>$\hat{\beta}$</th>
<th>$r^2_{part}$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Career locus of control</td>
<td>48.50 ***</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.338</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>48.5 ***</td>
<td>.58 ***</td>
<td>.336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>31.97 ***</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.400</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>10.46 **</td>
<td>.28 ***</td>
<td>.067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Parental support</td>
<td>23.49 ***</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.421</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>4.24 *</td>
<td>-1.7 *</td>
<td>.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Academic self-esteem</td>
<td>19.32 ***</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.441</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>4.25 *</td>
<td>-1.7 *</td>
<td>.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>15.33 ***</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.435</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>.0009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>12.69 ***</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.430</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** $p < .001$

Across the all models, the career locus of control and the neuroticism has constantly a significant contribution to the variance of career indecision. In the fourth and fifth models, the academic self-esteem was a negative predictor of career indecision. Along with constant, the six independent variables of model 6 explained 43% of the career indecision variance ($R = .68; F = 12.69, p < .001$). Only the career locus of control ($\hat{\beta} = .41, p < .001$) and the neuroticism ($\hat{\beta} = .23, p < .01$) were significant predictors. The openness and the extraversion did not contributed significantly to the models 5 and 6. The introduction of these variables did not produced significant increases in contribution of predictors to the explanation of criterion variance.

3.3. The mediation models

In the second regression model, the perceived parental support was a negative predictor of career indecision ($\hat{\beta} = -.17, p < .05$). When the academic self-esteem was introduced as potential predictor (starting with the fourth model), the parental support still did not predict the career indecision. Therefore, academic self-esteem was hypothesized to be a mediator of the relationship between career locus of control, neuroticism, perceived parental support, and career indecision. The hypotheses were tested using Baron and Kenny’s (1986) recommendatons.

The mediation hypotheses were partially supported (see Table 2). Thus, the career locus of control has predicted significantly the career indecision ($\hat{\beta} = .58, p < .001$), and academic self-esteem ($\hat{\beta} = -.28, p < .01$). The academic self-esteem was a significant predictor for career indecision ($\hat{\beta} = -.33, p < .01$). When academic self-esteem was introduced as predictor along with the career locus of control, the later variable
has continued to be a significant predictor of career indecision ($\beta = .52, p < .001$). Further, the strength of the association between the career locus of control and indecision was reduced with the entry of the mediator in the regression equation ($\Delta \beta = .06$).

On the other hand, the parental support has predicted both the career indecision ($\beta = -.33, p < .01$), and academic self-esteem ($\beta = .34, p < .01$). As noted, the academic self-esteem predicted the career indecision. When the two independent variables were introduced together in the regression model, the parental support still has predicted the career indecision ($\beta = -.25, p < .05$). Moreover, $\beta$ for parental support was lower than $\beta$ when parental support has been introduced as an unique predictor ($\Delta \beta = .08$). However, the effect size for both mediation models was small.

Table 2. Academic self-esteem as mediator

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>Mediation effect size</th>
<th>z-Sobel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>Academic self-esteem</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>Career indecision</td>
<td>25.95 ***</td>
<td>.46 ***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>Career indecision</td>
<td></td>
<td>.41 ***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic self-esteem</td>
<td>Career indecision</td>
<td>20.38 ***</td>
<td>-.30 ***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career locus of control</td>
<td>Academic self-esteem</td>
<td>8.43 **</td>
<td>-.28 **</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career locus of control</td>
<td>Career indecision</td>
<td>49.34 ***</td>
<td>.58 ***</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>1.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career locus of control</td>
<td>Career indecision</td>
<td>29.07 ***</td>
<td>.52 ***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic self-esteem</td>
<td>Career indecision</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.20 **</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental support</td>
<td>Academic self-esteem</td>
<td>12.83 **</td>
<td>.34 **</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental support</td>
<td>Career indecision</td>
<td>12.35 **</td>
<td>-.33 **</td>
<td>-.038</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental support</td>
<td>Career indecision</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.25 *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic self-esteem</td>
<td>Career indecision</td>
<td>9.59 ***</td>
<td>-.24 *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

The neuroticism was not a significant predictor of academic self-esteem, thus leaving without support the condition 1 recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986). The mediation hypothesis of the relationship between neuroticism and career indecision was not supported.

4. Discussion and conclusion

Career choice is one of the most important steps an individual makes throughout life. The present study has shown that when career self-efficacy, academic self-esteem, perceived parental support, conscientiousness of high school students are low, the career indecision tend to increase. Also, the career indecision among students tend to associate with a high level of neuroticism and externalism. The findings were convergent with those reported in other studies (Betz & Voyten, 1997; Loubsny, Hutchens, Loveland, 2005; Nota, Ferrari, Solberg, & Soresi, 2007).

Self-concept refers to the perceptions of individuals, both positive and negative, of their characteristics and competencies. Components of self-concept include self-esteem (i.e., one’s feeling of self-worth), self-efficacy, and the level of one’s beliefs stability (Luhr, 2005). Self-concept is important in various domains of the individual’s functioning: education, profession, social relationships, family etc. The increased academic self-esteem fosters greater confidence of an individual in his or her own skills and
abilities, thus making more easier the process of career choice. Coopersmith (1967) showed that children and adolescents having high levels of academic self-esteem tend to be more exploratory, persevering, and active participants in their academic environment.

The findings of mediation models showed that the involvement of parents in the adolescents’ career choice is a significant predictor of academic self-esteem, which in turn could lead to the decrease of the career indecision. Consequently, by involving parents in career choice-related activities the adolescents’ academic self-esteem will be strengthened and adolescents will be more likely to make a successful vocational choice. Vocational intervention should be structured to increase adolescent’s ability to cope with difficulties they encounter in career decision-making process.

References


