

Lifestyle Inclinations in Undergraduate Students' Choice of Psychology Degree

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ABSTRACT Traditionally, both men and women were known to choose careers that suit their family traditional obligations. Therefore, choosing a career is a crucial decision that needs to be made from an informed position. An ex-post facto research design was employed to examine gender differences in the altruistic motives of psychology students. Stratified random sampling method was used to select 368 participants. A questionnaire was used to collect data. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Mann Whitney U test. Overall, the participants' lifestyle motives for career choice were moderate. Only one construct (my career will suit my lifestyle) had a high mean score of 4.11. Gender differences in lifestyle inclinations of the students were not statistically significant. Future research needs to target a larger cross-geographic sample to increase the generalisability of the findings.

INTRODUCTION

Lifestyle values refer to the want for "good life" like status, power, independence, opportunity for professional development and remuneration associated with the occupation (Bossman 2014; Davey and Lalande 2004; Edgell 2015). It also includes constructs such as hours of employment and opportunity to travel. Shadbolt and Bunker (2009) argue that family factor is a powerful determinant of career choice that relates to the need to consider circumstances that surround it. Also, regard it as a significant reason why medical students reject rural practice even though intellectual challenge and job satisfaction potential may be high. Another study with medical students shows that those who seriously considered a career in psychiatry gave significantly higher ratings to the quality of life (Cutler et al. 2006). Surveys conducted by the American Bar Association in 1984 and 1990 show that lifestyle was a major factor in the choice of law as a career (Byers 1996).

The perception of controllable lifestyle which includes fewer work hours and fewer night calls, is the main reason why the relative attractiveness of radiology as a career choice of medical students has increased steadily in the past years (Horst and Gunderman 2006; Raphaeln and Lingard 2015; Shahzad et al. 2014). The new trend suggests that students put family and leisure at the top of their priority lists. Thus less time at work means more time for the family and leisure activities. Thus, medical students are getting more heavily committed to extracurricular activ-

ities such as raising a family, participating in sport, music and dance.

The potential lifestyle of a future career has been increasingly recognised as a major factor in specialty choice among medical students (Edgell 2015; Horn et al. 2008; Raphaeln and Lingard 2015; Salter 2007). The increased prominence of lifestyle and income indicates that medical students of today generally take a broader view and look at the future life as a whole when considering career options (Salter 2007). Medical students were looking for flexibility in their careers and opportunity to do things outside of the hospital and clinic (Horn et al. 2008).

Though traditionally women rated flexibility and compatibility with family and domestic responsibilities highly influential on career choice, recent evidence suggests that lifestyle factors are now equally important to both men and women (Shadbolt and Bunker 2009; Shahzad et al. 2014). Accounting students who participated in a study by Thibodeau and Usoff (2002), shows that both men and women value time flexibility and other work-life balance issues when choosing a career. Male more than female medical students who preferred a surgical career cited lifestyle as one of the major reasons for career choice (Wendel et al. 2003). In Scotland, a study with pupils shows that boys rated 'means you can work locally (Edinburgh and Lothians)', 'involves a lot of travel' more highly than girls (Bond et al. 2009).

A study conducted by Freed et al. (2008) with general paediatrics resident students reports that lifestyle was less commonly rated as

the most important factor. Small differences were seen between men and women. Although factors related to lifestyle are known to be important in career choice within the medical profession, research with Australian students has not shown that these factors are more important for women than men (Tolhurst and Stewart 2004).

Female college students more than their male counterparts were found to put more emphasis on working conditions when making career choice (Heckert et al. 2002). Another study by Drinkwater et al. (2008) shows that women were ready to compromise professional attainment within their personal work-life balances. The compromise hinges on gendered stereotypes of their social and professional roles, lack of female role models, their greater awareness of the tensions between career and family, other informal influences and lack of positive career advice to counterbalance these influences.

An emerging trend of hiring academic couples was observed at a US university faculty which seemed to be a new breed determined more than ever to strike a sustainable balance between working and private lives of the employees (Schiebinger et al. 2008). Couple hiring was viewed as a deeper institutional restructuring around quality-of-life issues. The employees want their personal lives like childcare to be taken care of.

Despite the fact that career choice is a critical decision that shapes the life of the individual, there is paucity of literature on career choice motives in general and those that are related to lifestyle inclinations in particular undergraduate psychology students. Southern Africa is a pluralistic society that is generally collectivistic in nature. It would therefore be very interesting to find whether the collectivistic values such as family obligations have an influence on career choice among psychology undergraduate students. The little available literature is dated and therefore cannot be used to influence policy changes. Furthermore, a good understanding of the influence of lifestyle career inclinations will help prospective employers make job placements that will increase employee motivation and retention.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

An ex post facto research design was used to conduct the study and to investigate the pos-

sible effects of gender (independent variable) on the altruistic career intentions of psychology students (dependant variable). The design allowed the students to search back in time for factors seemingly associated with their altruistic reasons for choosing psychology as a career field (Cohen and Manion 1994).

Participants

Stratified random sampling was employed to select 368 participants. Two-hundred participants (100 female, 100 male) were randomly selected from the University of Venda (South Africa) and 168 (82 female, 86 male) participants from the Great Zimbabwe University (Zimbabwe). Thus, the participants were drawn from the two sub-groups or strata as they existed in the population (Fraenkel and Wallen 2006). Stratified random sampling increased the likelihood of the sample representativeness. Randomisation in the selection of participants ensured that each psychology student had an equal and independent chance of being chosen. The sample translated to 33.7 percent of the study population which was large enough to reflect the views of psychology students at the two universities. The ages of the participants ranged from 17 years 41 years. The mean age of the whole study sample was 22.35 years. Therefore the participants were mature enough to express informed and well thought views. All the participants were of the Black African ethnicity.

Research Instrument

The study modified and adopted Myburgh's (2005) career motives questionnaire. The questionnaire was pilot tested and a Spearman rho alpha co-efficient of 0.89 was obtained. The instrument was pilot tested with ten psychology students who did not take part in the main study. The ten students in the pilot study validated the questionnaire by checking the appropriateness of the items. In addition, the questionnaire was validated by research experts.

Procedure

Assistance was sought from teaching members of staff who accompanied the researcher to the classes to select the participants and administer the questionnaire. Class registers were used to randomly select the participants in the quantitative approach and gender balance was main-

tained. The Likert type scale was explained clearly to the participants as the majority might not have been used to it. A Likert scale, consisting of various altruistic attitudes was administered to the selected psychology students to determine the career motives that male and female participants gravitated towards. The questionnaire was group administered to the selected students in class and collected by the researcher upon completion. All selected students who took part in the study returned the completed questionnaires. On average, the participants took 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics and Mann Whitney U test were used to analyse data. Means and standard deviations were computed. In addition, the Mann Whitney U test, a statistical programme in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was employed to analyse the effect of gender in the altruistic career intentions of

psychology students. Mann Whitney U test is a non-parametric (distribution-free) test that was used to compare two independent groups (female and male participants) of sampled data (Nachar 2008). It evaluates whether the medians on a test variable differ significantly between two groups (Green and Salkind 2008).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Higher Degrees Ethics Committees of the participating universities. Informed consent was obtained from each individual participant. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured and maintained throughout the study. Reporting was anonymous as the participants were not required to write their names on the questionnaire.

RESULTS

The participants' lifestyle motives for choosing psychology as a career related field are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Lifestyle inclinations of students

Item	Descriptive statistics		
	N		Mean
	Statistic	Statistic	Std. error
I enjoy office work	353	3.90	.062
Much of what I will do does not seem really like work	346	2.83	.071
My career will suit my lifestyle	358	4.11	.053
My career will allow me to live where I like	353	3.42	.058
My work schedule will be flexible	355	3.20	.059
My career will allow for enough outdoor work	353	3.59	.062

Table 2: Mann Whitney U test results of gender and lifestyle inclinations

Item	Gender	N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	Mann Whitney U	Z-score	Sig.
I enjoy office work	M	181	167.95	30399.00	13928.000	-1.799	.072
	F	172	186.52	32082.00			
	Total	353					
Much of what I will do seems not like work	M	182	174.27	31717.00	14784.000	-.154	.877
	F	164	172.65	28314.00			
	Total	346					
My career will suit my lifestyle	M	182	176.51	32124.00	15471.00	-.595	.552
	F	176	182.60	32137.00			
	Total	358					
My career will allow me to live where I like	M	180	168.77	30378.00	14088.000	-1.612	.107
	F	173	185.57	32103.00			
	Total	353					
My work the schedule will be flexible	M	181	172.22	31344.00	14691.000	-1.138	.255
	F	173	184.08	31846.00			
	Total	355					
My career will allow for enough outdoor work	M	180	173.61	31249.00	14959.000	-.660	.509
	F	173	180.53	31232.00			
	Total	353					

Table 1 shows that the most popular reason for choosing psychology degree programme was that a career in psychology would suit their lifestyle. Other popular reasons were that the work schedule will be flexible, enjoying office work and the career will allow for enough outdoor work.

Table 2 shows that gender differences in lifestyle inclinations of the students were not significant.

DISCUSSION

The finding that most participants chose psychology as a degree programme because it suits their lifestyle is consistent with several studies (Bossman 2014; Edgell 2015; Horn et al. 2008; Raphaeln and Lingard 2015; Salter 2007; Shadbolt and Bunker 2009; Shahzad et al. 2014) that indicated that potential lifestyle of a future career has been increasingly recognised as a major factor in career choice among students. It was however, surprising that the mean scores for the other five constructs were moderate. This finding suggests that lifestyle has less influence on the career decisions that students make. A plausible explanation to the moderate scores is that the career decisions were taken by university students whose majority were still single and had understandably little regard for family obligations. Thus, their career decisions were less influenced by their anticipated role as father or mother and perceived pressure to leave work and care for their children (Marks and Houston 2002; Shahzad et al. 2014). In addition, the finding could be a reflection of the Western individualistic values that Southern Africans, especially the young generations had embraced. However, the moderate scores seem to support Freed et al.'s (2008) finding that lifestyle was less commonly rated as a major factor in career choice.

The findings from responses show a variance to Drinkwater's (2008) and Heckert et al.'s (2002) conclusion those females more than males put emphasis on working conditions when making a career choice. Furthermore, the findings counter Bond et al. (2009) and Wendel et al. (2003) who indicated that males more than females choose a career that is flexible and controllable. Rather, the findings support Raphaeln and Lingard (2015), Shadbolt and Bunker (2009), and Thibodeau and Usoff (2002) who indicated that

lifestyle factors of flexibility and compatibility with family were equally important to both men and women. It appears that the scientific findings and proclamations have succeeded in eroding gender stereotyped beliefs, prejudices and uncertainties. The production of new knowledge has liberated human minds from anachronistic ideas and beliefs.

CONCLUSION

The lack of gender variation in the lifestyle career choice inclinations of the university students suggests a marked decrease in the gender gap. This scenario could be attributed to fact that both boys and girls in South Africa and Zimbabwe are socialised to fulfil family responsibilities. This augurs well for the participating countries that strive to develop pluralistic and non-segregatory societies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Schools and universities should continue to review their career guidance policies to include strategies that encourage students to take both family and community responsibilities. As citadels of learning and centres of excellence, universities should empower both male and female students to make independent career choices as the choice of degree programme has implications on their performance, satisfaction and retention. The non-significance of the influence of gender on lifestyle career intentions of students needs further scholarly attention. Future research with a representative cross-geographic Southern African population is needed to make findings that are generalisable.

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