

## Career Aspirations and Career Development Barriers of Adolescents in Kisumu Municipality, Kenya

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### Abstract

*The purpose of this study is to explore gender differences in adolescents' career aspirations and career development barriers among secondary school students in Kisumu municipality, Kenya. The study was conducted on 348 form four secondary school students. The major findings of this study show that there are certain careers that are preferred by both males and females i.e. investigative and enterprising career types however the realistic career type was mostly chosen by males while the social career type was mostly chosen by females. Academic qualifications and lack of financial resources were found to be the major barriers that prevent the students from aspiring for their dream careers. Males expressed lack of financial resources as the major barrier while females considered academic qualifications as their main barrier to their career development.*

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**Keywords:** career aspirations, career development barriers, secondary schools, students, gender

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### INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a time when teenagers develop certain aspirations regarding their educational and future careers. Aspirations represent a person's orientation towards particular goals and as Domenico and Jones (2007) reports, can be influenced by gender, socio economic status and family support. During adolescence, aspirations are especially important because they allow teen agers to evaluate the degree to which various choices help or hinder their chances of attaining desired goals.

Career preparation in adolescence is an important precursor for successful career development across the life span and is closely related to adolescence adjustment and well-being (Skorikov, 2007). During adolescence, developing a vocational identity is a central developmental task. According to Silvia (2001), aspirations refer to an individual's expressed career related goals or intentions and also include motivational components which are not present in mere interests. The career aspirations of adolescents have been viewed as significant determinants of both short term educational and long term career choices (Mau & Bikos, 2000; Schoon & parsons, 2002; Patton & creed 2007). They have also been regarded as important career motivational variables which are predictive of latter career attainment levels.

Traditional theories of career development propose that career aspirations develop in specific stages from childhood to adult hood. According to Ginsberg (1952), young adolescence from 11 to 14 years of age has tentative choices based on interests but with little attention to realistic constraints. By the age of 14-24,

adolescence are in the exploration stage with progressive narrowing of career options from identifying tentative options to making final decisions regarding career choice. Gottfredson's (2002) theory asserts that at the age of 14, students begin to adjust their career aspirations to factors of personal self and compromise their options to more realistic factors (Hirschi, 2010).

According to Gotfredson (2005), by the age of 13 and 14, adolescence have developed two cognitive competencies related to career development i.e. self-concept and perception about occupations. During adolescence, students have achieved an adult level understanding of the sex type and prestige level of common occupations. Gotfredson argues that adolescents start to eliminate occupational choices based on sex types and prestige levels. For example, female students might avoid choosing occupations that are perceived as too masculine such as mining and also might consider eliminating choices that are received as having low social prestige status such as a career as a house maid. Research shows that girls tend to aspire to a narrower range of occupations than boys because they believe many jobs are unsuitable for them whereas boys have a greater occupational understanding, focus and see more occupational opportunities than girls (Creed, Conlon & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007).

Current research on occupational aspirations have been conceptualised within theories that more readily recognize the influence of contextual factors. The Social cognitive Career Theory by Lent, Brown & Hackett (2002) for example holds that occupational

aspirations are influenced by different socialization practices that adolescents are exposed to as well as adolescents' internalization of these different experiences. It focuses on the interaction between adolescents cognitive personal variables and the contexts that may limit or encourage personal urgency in career development (Patton & Creed 2007).

Studies have shown consistently that adolescents perceive a substantial number of barriers to career development including ethnic and gender discrimination, lack of finances, family attributes and lack of educational opportunities (Creed, Conlon & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007). This evidence suggest that perceptions of career barriers both compromise carrier aspirations of adolescents and impact their capacity to make optimum career related decisions (Lent et al 2002). The relationship between career barriers and adaptive career functioning is a complex one, for while career barriers might restrict career options for some, they might also motivate others to achieve more highly (Lent et al., 2002; Creed et al., 2007).

The purpose of this study therefore is to explore gender differences in adolescents' career aspirations and career development barriers among secondary school students in Kisumu municipality, Kenya.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

This study involved 348 secondary school students from randomly selected private and public schools in Kisumu municipality. A total of 341 students successfully completed and returned the questionnaires of which were 183 female students and 158 male students. The participants voluntarily participated in the study.

**Instrument**

The questionnaire consisted of 3 sections. The first section inquired about participants age, gender and type of school attended.

The second section required the participants to state their career aspirations. These aspirations were then grouped based on Holland's code career models often referred to as the RIASEC model. It consists of six career codes. The social career type was coded as 1, realistic career was coded as 2, investigative career as 3, artistic career as 4, enterprising career as 5 and conventional career as 6.

The third section consisted of a list of 7 barriers which were synthesised from previous research. The participants were required to give their perceptions on the extent to which they felt the given barriers hindered or affected their career development on a five point likert scale. Based on the likert scale used strongly agree =1, agree=2, neutral=3, disagree=4 and strongly disagree=5.

**Procedure**

Form four students of the selected schools were informed of the study by their school principal who had been contacted by the researcher. The researcher then briefed the students on the purpose of the study and the importance of confidentiality. The students who agreed to participate were given a cover letter, a consent form and instructions for completing the instruments. The completed forms were then collected by the researcher for data analysis.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

To answer the first research question "are there any gender differences in students career aspirations?" the students career aspirations were coded based on Holland's code career model after which descriptive statistics was employed to summarize the data.

To answer the second question "are there any significant differences on students' perception of barriers to career development by gender?" a One-Way ANOVA test was performed to determine whether there were any significant differences.

**RESULTS**

Out of the 348 participants in the study, 185 of the respondents were male while 163 of the respondents were females. 2 female and 5 male participants did not indicate their career choice. A mean of 7.3 of the respondents did not respond to the items provided as barriers to career choice.

The first objective of the study was to determine gender differences in students' career choices. From the results, the social career type was chosen by more females than males 86.8 percent. Other career types that recorded more females than males include the conventional and artistic career types with 70.3% and 68% respectively. The realistic career type was mostly chosed by males (81.8%). Other career types that were mostly chosen by males include the investigative type (52.6) and the enterprising career type (52.9%). Results showing the total number of students within each career type are presented on table 1pe.

Table 1: frequencies and percentages of respondents in each career type

Career type	Females		Males		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Social	33	18	5	3.2	38	11.1
Realistic	4	2.2	18	11.4	22	6.5
Investigative	62	33.9	70	44.3	132	38.7
Artistic	26	14.2	11	7	37	10.9
Enterprising	41	22.4	46	29.1	87	25.5
Conventional	17	9.3	8	5.1	25	7.3
Total	183	100	158	100	341	100

The second objective was to determine whether there are any significant differences in students'

perceptions on barriers to career choice. From the results, none of the listed barriers reported a p value less than 0.05. The results are presented on table 2.

Table 2: means and standard deviations for barriers to career aspirations

Challenges	Group		Males		Females		Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Lack of financial resources	1.90	1.683	1.87	1.306	1.93	1.960	.742
Inadequate career guidance	2.30	1.306	2.31	1.401	2.29	1.220	.880
Parental pressure	2.53	1.451	2.60	1.456	2.47	1.448	.424
Inadequate career information	2.44	1.340	2.45	1.366	2.42	1.320	.878
Lack of employment opportunities	2.39	1.353	2.54	1.422	2.25	1.278	.058
Academic qualification	1.90	1.248	1.90	1.289	1.91	1.214	.963
Lack of role models	2.59	1.546	2.89	1.552	2.29	1.545	.876

**DISCUSSION**

The above results indicate that the investigative career type is the most preferred career type by both males and females. This means that most students aspire for careers that deal with abstract ideas and solving intellectual problems such as engineering, and medicine. This was followed by enterprising careers which involves leading, managing and organizing. The least preferred career type was the realistic career which involves the manipulation of tools and manual tasks. The findings of this study differ from those of Rosenbloom, Ash, Dupont & Coder (2007) which indicated that men and women are geared towards different careers because they value different aspects of work. The results from the current study show that most males and females in this study aspire for similar careers. For decades traditional gender roles have played a major role in the career aspirations and choices of individuals however this is no longer a barrier among students as these results show that both male and females students tend to aspire for similar careers. However certain career types are preferred by males such as the realistic careers which reported up to five times more males than females while others such as the social careers are preferred by females and this reported almost six times more females than males. This difference in career choices could be as a result of the socialization in different cultures where certain careers are not suited for particular gender.

Investigation within each career pattern indicate that investigative, enterprising and realistic careers had more male respondents while conventional, social and artistic careers shows more female respondents. The findings of this study correspond to those of Almisky, Bakar & Mohamed (2009), Wais, Firker &

Henning (2007) and Kniveton (2004) which indicated that males preferred investigative and realistic career types while females preferred social, artistic and conventional careers. These findings may be due to the existing gender stereotyping which is still at large all over the world. Females still choose careers that correspond with their traditional gender roles and males also choose careers that match those of their traditional gender roles. This may also be due to the differences in self-concept and self-efficacy between males and females.

The results in the current study show that various barriers prevent most students from pursuing their careers of interest. In the current study all the listed barriers except for lack of role models reported more than 50% of the respondents responding in the affirmative.

Based on the scoring of the likert scale, the barrier indicating the lowest mean score is considered as the most influential while that will the highest mean score is considered as the least influential. From the results, academic qualifications and lack of financial resources were considered the major barriers experienced by the respondents in their career aspirations. This means that as much as students would love to pursue certain careers of interest their grades and the financial resources available cannot allow them to compete in their fields of interest. Either they have low grades or lack tuition fees to enable them join their careers of interest. These results are similar to those of Natalie (2006) whose respondents voiced lack of financial resources as the major barrier in their career choice.

Lack of financial resources can be explained to be as a result of the high levels of poverty in Kisumu municipality whereby most students are not able to attend school regularly due to lack of school fees. This was also observed when collecting data in that, after making appointments, on visiting the schools in some of the schools most of the students were away to collect school fees. Education in Kenya has also become very expensive especially for the bright students who come from low economic backgrounds hence preventing students from pursuing their careers of interest.

Lack of role models compared to the other barriers to career aspirations received the least number of respondents agreeing that it was a barrier in their career aspirations. This shows that most students do not consider role models as an important aspect when deciding on their careers of choice as much as it may pose as a barrier to a few of the students.

When the means of responses for males and females were computed differently, for the list of barriers provided in the study, the means of the responses for

each of the barriers varied between the two groups. The males felt that lack of financial resources was the greatest barrier to achieving their dreams in terms of career attainment however females felt that their academic performance was the main hindrance in achieving their goals. As compared to males, females lack role models in a number of professions hence prevent them from choosing careers that are in line with these professions. The above results differ from those of Perrone, Sedlacek & Alexander (2001) in which men mostly cited time management as the main challenge while females cited the lack of financial resources as the main challenge. This difference may be as a result of the difference in the list of barriers to career attainment provided in the two studies for example time management did not form part of this study.

Despite males and females ranking the different barriers differently in terms of their influence on career development, no significant differences were found for each barrier by gender implying that these barriers influence the career development of males and females in a similar manner.

#### **CONCLUSION**

From the results, the researcher came to the conclusion that there are certain careers that are preferred by both males and females i.e. investigative and enterprising careers however the realistic career type was mostly chosen by males while the social career type was mostly chosen by females.

Academic qualifications and lack of financial resources were found to be the major barriers that prevent the students from aspiring for their dream careers. Males expressed lack of financial resources as the major barrier while females considered academic qualifications as their main barrier to their career aspirations.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The career counselors and all other persons who guide students in their career choice should help students determine the most suitable careers based on their ability, capability and interests. Stake holders should ensure that schools are well equipped with adequate career resources and qualified personnel in order to provide students with the necessary services in terms of career guidance that will help them in making informed career decisions. The school administration should have career days where individuals who have experiences in various careers are invited to provide students with information on various careers and share their real life experiences so that students are aware of what to expect from their careers of choice. The government should also provide bursaries for students who have qualified for higher learning but lack financial resources in order for the students to pursue their careers of choice. The

government of Kenya should also put up more colleges in order to absorb all the candidates who have qualified for higher education but fail to meet requirements for joining public universities.

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