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# Understanding and Facilitating Career Decisions among Adolescents – A Review

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**ABSTRACT**

Thinking actively about one's career, planning for the steps to be taken to achieve it consciously begins in the adolescent stage. Individuals often conceptualize career decisions as choosing what one will do to earn a living. However, career, occupation and vocation are different. The term Career is modern and includes much more than a vocation or occupation a person chooses. Career decisions are important and affect more than the earning of an individual. They affect the lifestyle, status, identity, place of residence, personality and many other factors in an individual's life. As a result, Career counselling is therapeutic and contributes to personal growth as well. It can contribute to developing career maturity – the readiness of an individual to take career decisions. This paper explores the factors influencing career decisions, career maturity and trends in career counselling across different parts of the world. It emphasizes on the importance of designing interventions that will facilitate career decision making among adolescents.

*Keywords:* *Career Decisions, Career Maturity, Career Counselling*

C areer occupies an important space in people's lives. Along with personal growth and happiness, career growth and well-being largely contribute to a person's overall success and satisfaction. It is important to understand the various factors involved in career decision making and planning for better understanding and facilitation of the process.

Crites (1981) distinguished between terms career, vocation and occupation. The American Psychological Association describes Vocation as 'an occupation or profession to which one is particularly suited, especially one involving a sense of mission or calling'. On the other hand, occupation refers to a group of jobs in organizations which are similar in nature (Herr, 2004). The term Career is modern and includes much more than a vocation or occupation a person chooses. The National Career Development Association defines career as 'process of assisting individuals in the development of a life-career with a focus on the definition of the worker role and how that role interacts with other life roles' (Retrieved from edumilestones.com).

Individuals often conceptualize career decisions as choosing what one will do to earn a living. However, career decisions affect more than the earning of an individual. It affects

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their education, stressors, social identity, lifestyle, place of residence as well changes in their personality (Herr, Cramer, & Niles, 2004). The contribution of career counselling to personal and relational growth and development is well documented (Krumboltz, 1994; Schultheiss, 2003). Therefore, career counselling may be a required intervention for individuals who face emotional problems later in life. Crites (1981) suggested that career counselling can be therapeutic as a lot of other variables are affected by one's professional life. For example, a person who is unable to perform well in his/her profession may experience anxiety, low self – esteem and other psychological issues. There might be instances where individuals might have unrealistic aspirations for themselves, risking their professional success in the absence of career counselling. Career decisions and guidance for the same therefore, form a crucial part of adolescence and young adulthood.

*Factors influencing career decisions*
Various career development theories enlist factors that affect an individual's career choices. One of the popular developmental theories was given by Super (1953). Similar to other developmental theories, he talked about certain developmental tasks at each stage which needs to be accomplished. In the growth stage, children begin to develop a mental picture of them in the world of work in relation to others. The exploration stage has 3 sub-stages – tentative, transition and trial. Children move through this stage between the age of 14 to 21yrs and come up with a specification of their career preference based on the exposure they receive. Career guidance interventions in adolescence should include evaluation of own strengths and weaknesses with regards to work opportunities available (Cole, 1982). The latter stages are establishment, maintenance and decline through which individuals go through in their adulthood.

According to Social – cognitive career theory, Career-related behavior is influenced by four aspects of the person: behavior, self - efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals in addition to genetically determined characteristics. The theory explains that in addition to career maturity, decision making skills or obtaining career related information, there are other factors which will affect career choices (Gladding, 2016, p.299).

Dani and Desai (2018) studied the factors affecting career decision making in secondary school students. Factors like - Personal, Social, Educational, work culture and family were studied. It was found that decision making was not limited to the influence of one single factor but combination of factors was involved. Pascual (2014) found that father's occupation and availability of jobs after college were important determinants of career decisions. Personality, job opportunities, available choices and interests were found to influence career decisions. (Dublin et al., 2020)

Career maturity refers to the readiness of an individual to take career decisions (Super, 1957). Crites (1971) stated that making career decisions, choosing a job, and using problem solving skills are part of career maturity. There are 6 dimensions to career maturity - orientation to vocational choice, information and planning, consistency of vocational preferences, crystallization of traits, vocational independence, wisdom of vocational preferences. Research on career maturity explores differences in career maturity across groups such as gender, socio – economic class, type of school among other variables.

In their research, Adekeye et.al (2017) studied determinants of career maturity among senior high school students and found socio – economic status as an important determinant. Another significant contributor found was academic need achievement. Singhai (2020)

conducted a study on tribal male and female adolescents to assess their career maturity. It was found that males scored much higher on career maturity – attitude component. But there were no differences found in the scores of males and females on career maturity – competence. Dhull (2018) studied career maturity in the context of type of school and gender. Results showed higher scores on career maturity for females as compared to males. Also, students from private schools were found to be more mature than those studying in Government schools.

Some of the research studies have explored how career maturity develops and how career decisions are made. Creed & Patton (2003) studied adolescents studying from 8 – 12 grades in Australia to understand the predictors of career maturity. Both components of career maturity – attitude and knowledge were studied. Results showed that 41% of variance in career maturity – knowledge was accounted for by age, gender, career decidedness, and work commitment. Whereas 52% of variance in career maturity – attitude was accounted for by age, self – efficacy, work commitment and career decidedness.

### *Trends in career counselling*
Career counselling has been a crucial part of the counselling profession. It was first practiced when Parsons (1909) initiated the vocational guidance movement (Gladding, 2016, p.289). Throughout the progression of the field of career counselling, it has been known by different terms like vocational guidance, occupational counselling etc. Over a period of time, the distinction between these terms became clearer.

The functions of a career counsellor are listed below- (Gladding, 2016, p.291).
1. Administration and interpretations of tests.
2. Personal counselling sessions.
3. Development of individualized career plans.
4. Facilitation of decision-making skills.
5. Provision of support for job-related difficulties or career transitions.
6. Integration of vocational and avocational roles.

Over the years, career guidance services have taken various forms such as Career fairs, Library assignments, Career shadowing, Didactic lectures, Role – playing, computer assisted information. Interventions have shifted from being conducted in classroom settings to external organizations such as the Government stepping in to provide these services. Several databases and directories are formed to disseminate information about careers. One of the developments in career guidance are Computer based career planning systems. One of the top programs is System of Interactive Guidance and Information, based on values – based theory of career decision making (Katz, 1975). The latest version SIGI3 contains five components with a focal point on 1. self-assessment (Values), 2. identification of occupational alternatives (Locate), 3. review of occupational information (Compare), 4. review of information on preparation programs (Planning), and 5. making tentative occupational choices (Strategy) (Gladding, 2016, p.292,293).

In their research article, Tabar and Saberi (2023) summarized the evolution of career counselling. Their findings throw light on the transition from traditional approaches, to more individual narratives, mentorship programmes, inclusion of career counselling into education. They highlight the use of psychotherapy into career counselling, use of motivational interviewing, multiculturalism, and technology in the modern practices.

Career guidance and counselling in India is becoming a well – established service. The Government has started online portals and guidance centres for providing information and application guidance to students for helping them choose colleges. The Government of Maharashtra has for example started an online portal for career guidance that helps in exploring careers, colleges, exams, vocational courses, and scholarships. National Career Service by the Ministry of Labour & Employment has been developed as a resource for career counselling as well as employment related information. Career Guidance and counselling centre (CGCC) has been established at Amravati under CSR, which provides the users with information of various careers and the process of application for those courses.

Another way in which career counselling services are being provided is through assessment of abilities, interests and personality factors in order to suggest suitable careers for clients. The Shaymchi AAI Foundation has launched an initiative called 'Career Mitra' in which all students appearing for SSC board exams are encouraged to complete the career assessment and are suggested careers based on their answers. The 'Future Vedh Career Inclination Test' is available for the same on MKCL website. Apart from this, many private Institutions, NGOs have been involved in career counselling.

### *Interventions to facilitate career decision making*
Thinking actively about one's career, planning for the steps to be taken to achieve it consciously begins in the adolescent stage. This stage is also characterised by the task of developing one's identity. According to Erikson (1968), adolescents are in the stage of identity v/s identity confusion. Along the same lines, James Marcia proposed a theory of identity development in adolescents. He focussed on 4 categories of adolescent identity – identity achievement, identity foreclosure, moratorium and identity diffusion. Through this theory, Marcia (1980) explained how career development is an important part of identity formation.

Several surveys indicate the lack of awareness of career options and confusion of Indian students. India Today (2019) conducted a survey with 10,000 students in the 14 – 21 age group. Results suggested that 93% of the students were aware of only seven career options – most common being engineering, accounts & finance and computer application. Mini, Christopher, Janetius (2020) found in their research that 82% college students chose their college due to parental or peer influence, advice from teachers or availability of job opportunities. They also identified that many students opt for any jobs because of attractive salaries, even if it does not align with their academic qualifications. Sivakumar and Sridhar (2016) measured the career maturity among 11th grade students in India. Their findings showed low levels of career maturity irrespective of gender, family type, caste, religion or type of school. Dani and Desai (2018) noted that secondary school students in Gandhinagar did not have sufficient information about various careers, making the decision making difficult.

Studies on Career interventions have established the extent to which they can improve career maturity. A Career Exploration Intervention designed by Archardi (2005) involved a 7 - week program with eighth grade students. Results showed that students have varied levels of career maturity, and that females demonstrated higher career maturity than males. Lau, Chung and Wong (2019) studied the effect of career exploration intervention on career maturity and self – concept among Malaysian high school students. A pre and post experimental design was used. The results showed enhanced career maturity and self – concept for the students immediately after the intervention as well as after 4 weeks. Tabar

and Saberi (2023) recommend a shift in career counselling practices to more holistic approaches that consider an individual's life contexts, the evolving job market, and technological advancements.

Initiatives undertaken in the field of career counselling are currently focussed on testing, assessment and guidance to students about careers suitable for them. Other activities such as career fairs focus more on giving information, guiding through job applications or providing employment opportunities. These initiatives do present a large number of options to students, however do not address the skills necessary for students to take career decisions. One of the functions of career counselling also is to enhance decision making skills of students at crucial points of their career. Presently, the need is felt at a larger level with the implementation of the National Educational Policy 2020. A Liberal studies approach is being encouraged. Students will be expected to make choices from diverse subject baskets, at multiple levels of their selected career path. Under such conditions, merely obtaining information will not help students make decisions. A Career Development Intervention that addresses exposure to occupations, factors influencing career choices and equipping students with decision making skills will be helpful in developing career maturity and overall performance of students in their career.

## CONCLUSION

- Various factors such as job opportunities, family's occupation and personality characteristics are considered while making career decisions.
- A person's career maturity i.e. readiness to take career decisions is determined by demographic factors like age, gender, socio economic status, available occupational information etc.
- Looking at the forms of guidance and counseling given to individuals currently, it can be seen that these services may not be sufficient to improve career maturity and decision making of the students. Especially with implementation of a more Liberal form of education today, the need for improving the readiness of adolescents is felt.
- This review highlights the need to introduce career interventions at an early age to enhance career maturity and decision making in adolescence which is a crucial point in shaping one's career.

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