

Original Research Article

Career choices, career related stress and need for career counselling and guidance among young secondary school students: a cross-sectional study

Syed Najmul Ain^{1*}, Mohamad Azhar Gilani², Kouser Sideeq Lone³

¹Department of Community Medicine, SKIMS, Soura, Srinagar, Kashmir, Jammu and Kashmir, India

²Department of Orthopaedics, SKIMS, Medical College and hospital, Srinagar, Kashmir, Jammu and Kashmir, India

³Department of Community Medicine, GMC Srinagar, Kashmir, Jammu and Kashmir, India

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*Correspondence:

Syed Najmul Ain,

E-mail: najmasyed123@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Background: Career is one of the factors that determine the future of an individual. Vocational dimension is an important one which may influence the health of a person. The objective of this study was to find out the career choices among secondary school students in district Baramulla of the Kashmir valley and to find out the career related self-reported stress among the students.

Methods: It was a cross-sectional study carried out in 2018 for a period of one month. A self-administered pre-designed questionnaire was distributed among students of class 9th and 10th availing tuitions from a private tuition centre. The information was collected regarding the socio-demographic characteristics, career choices, other information related to career, and self-reported career related stress. The data was entered in Microsoft excel 2010 and analysed using SPSS version 23.

Results: A total of 100 students participated. Mean age of the students was 15.19±0.84 years with 57% females. Ninety seven percent of the students had been thinking about their career for quite some time. Most of the students wanted to pursue MBBS (52%) followed by engineering (14%). Seventy-four percent of the students were of the opinion that career counselling was necessary. Nineteen percent of students were stressed about their career.

Conclusions: Most of the students had already decided on their career but many were stressed and unsure about what path to choose. About 74% of the students were of the opinion that there should be career counselling and guidance available for the students so that they are able to take the right decisions at the right time.

Keywords: Career, Counselling, Anxiety

INTRODUCTION

Career is one of the factors that determine the future of an individual. Vocational dimension is an important one which may influence the health of a person. It is the culmination of one's lifetime efforts.¹ It determines some of the most basic things about the individual like the level of income, type of work etc, and thus leaves a mark on one's personality and outlook. One wrong decision may have devastating consequences on a person's life and in

turn affect his family. This individual decision also affects the economic prosperity of a nation in the long run as the people who are misfits in their workplace are mostly less productive.² With the advancement of information technology and job competition, career choice has become complex. In olden days, a career or profession continued in generations.³ College students choose their job fields for many reasons. The factors that determine the career choice may be family, passion, salary, race, gender and past experiences. Another thing influencing the decision of

career choice is the people or role models for a person.⁴ Kerka says career choice may be influenced by various factors which may include personality, self-concept, interests, cultural identity, globalization, socialization, social support, role model, and available resources like information and financial.⁵ Bandura et al stated that the factors may include the context in which a person lives, his/her personal aptitudes, educational attainment and social contacts.⁶ Perrone et al believed that anticipated earnings are the most important influential factors for men whereas for females prestigious positions were the most important factor.⁷ Rodrigo et al were of the opinion that females were mostly influenced by desire to work for other people whereas males were influenced more by monetary gains in their career choice.⁸ According to Eremie et al career is the totality of experience through which a person learns about and prepares to get engaged in work as a part of his way of living.⁹ Some students make up their mind early and know exactly what they have to choose while others find themselves switching majors due to a number of courses available.¹⁰ A student in Kashmir has to choose a subject for his further studies in class 11th at a young age of 16 or 17 years. At this point many do not even take their career seriously and many may be confused as to what they should opt for. Since this is the deciding time for the students and there being almost no concept of career counselling or guidance in Kashmir, students may get stressed out at this stage. The aim of the study was to find out the career choices among students in Kashmir and career related stress among students.

Objectives

The objective of this study was (a) to find out the career choices among secondary school students in district Baramulla, Kashmir; and (b) to find out the career related self-reported stress among the students.

METHODS

Study design

The study design was a cross-sectional study.

Study period

The study was carried out in 2018 for a period of one month from 10th February 2018 to 10th March 2018.

Study area

The study was carried out at a private tuition centre at Baramulla.

Data collection

A self-administered pre-designed questionnaire was distributed among the students of class 9th and 10th who

were availing tuitions from a private tuition centre in Baramulla. Permission was asked from the head of the tuition centre and informed consent was also obtained from the participating students. The students were asked to return the filled questionnaire within a week. The information was collected regarding the socio-demographic characteristics, career choices and other information related to career, and self-reported career related stress. All those students who gave consent to participate were taken into the study while the rest were excluded.

Ethical approval was sought from the institutional ethical committee of GMC Baramulla.

Statistical analysis

The data was entered in Microsoft excel 2010 and analysed using SPSS version 23. The categorical data was summarised as frequencies and percentages while the continuous data was summarised as mean and standard deviation.

RESULTS

In our study a total of 100 students participated. The socio-demographic characteristics of study participants are summarised in Table 1. Table 1 shows that the mean age of the students was 15.19±0.84 years. Minimum age was 13 years and maximum was 17 years. Participation of females (57%) was more than that of males. Most of the students were studying in 10th standard.

Table 2 summarises the responses to career related questions that were asked in the questionnaire. Table 2 shows that 97% of the students had been thinking about their career for quite some time. Thirty-three percent of the students had thought about their career in 8th standard whereas 15% had started thinking about it in class 9th and same percentage in class 10th.

Most of the students wanted to pursue MBBS (52%) followed by engineering (14%). Ninety-two percent of the students said that the career that they wanted to pursue was their choice and 46% of the students had not thought of an alternative if they could not succeed in achieving their desired career. Seventy four percent of the students were of the opinion that there should be a career counselling that could help them decide in a better way. Nineteen percent of the students were stressed about their career. Seventy-four percent of the students were of the opinion that career counselling was necessary.

Table 3 shows the relationship of career related stress with age and gender of the students. Mean age of the students who were stressed was lower than those who were not stressed (p=0.003). There was no relationship of stress about career with gender (Table 3).

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of study participants.

Characteristics		Number	Percentage (%)
Age-group (years)	≤15	62	62.0
	≥16	38	38.0
Gender	Female	57	57.0
	Male	43	43.0
Class	9 th	9	9.0
	10 th	91	91.0
School	Government	1	1.0
	Private	99	99.0

Table 2: Responses to career related questions.

Responses		Number (%)
Ever thought of career you want to pursue	No	3 (3.0)
	Yes	97 (97)
When did you first start thinking about your career?	10 th	15 (15)
	≤7 th	34 (34)
	8 th	33 (33)
	9 th	15 (15)
Career that you want to pursue?	Arts	6 (6)
	Commerce	2 (2)
	Engineering	14 (14)
	Finance	5 (5)
	Law	3 (3)
	MBBS	52 (52)
	Other	7 (7)
	Research	4 (4)
	Sports	2 (2)
	Teaching	2 (2)
Is it your choice or compulsion?	Choice	92 (92)
	Compulsion	5 (5)
Have you thought of an alternative?	No	46 (46)
	Yes	51 (51)
Are you stressed about your career?	No	78 (78)
	Yes	19 (19)
Do you think there should be a career counselling?	No	23 (23)
	Yes	74 (74)

Table 3: Relationship of career related stress with age and gender.

Relationship	Stressed about career	N	Mean	Mean difference	95% CI of difference	P value
Age*	Yes	19	14.68 (0.946)	0.611	0.206 to 1.015	0.003
	No	78	15.29 (0.758)			
Gender	No (%)	Yes (%)				
	Female**	44 (80)	11 (20)	-	-	1.000
	Male	34 (81)	8 (19)			

*t-test was performed, **Chi-square test was performed.

DISCUSSION

It has been wisely said that no other choice (other than our spouse) that we make influences each one of us at every stage of our life, our families, children and status as much as our career choice does.¹¹ Our study is the first of its kind

to explore the aspect of career related stress in young students and the need for career counselling. In our study we reached to the students studying in class 9th and 10th because in these classes a student in Kashmir usually has to decide the subjects that he wants to choose for himself in the coming years. Based on the subjects that a student

chooses in 11th standard, the career of a student is usually decided.

In our study the, mean age of the students was 15.19±0.84 years which is the usual age in class 9th and 10th. At such a young age, the students are usually confused as to what they should choose and where a path leads to.¹⁰

Most of the students (97%) of the students had thought about their career which is quite appreciable. But what had they decided? would this career really be suitable for the student? Did he really know the pros and cons? Was it really his choice? These are some very important aspects that will determine the satisfaction of the student in his life ahead. A study conducted by Jonas Masdonati found that career counselling and therefore choosing the right career was associated with life satisfaction.¹² As we see about 52% of the students wanted to be a doctor and pursue MBBS followed by engineering (14%) which reflects that it might be a societal trend or peer pressure or professional prestige that is being followed because there must be a reason for most of students going in one direction. Professional prestige has been found as an important factor for young people that decides their career.¹³ What is important here is that can all the students who want to pursue such tough courses like MBBS and engineering get what they aspire for which depends on the working ability, intellect and mental strength of a person.

Not achieving the goal may cause stress in some students unless they have thought for some other options. In our study, 46% of the students had not thought of an alternative which means there is a pressure of achieving the goal. Mirvis et al say that following globalization, there is a growing need for career mobility and flexibility.¹⁴ Therefore, this issue needs to be addressed through career counselling in students at a very young age so that they see their future in a broader sense while still be goal oriented.

Our study shows that 19% of the students were stressed about their career which is a substantial percentage. Stress about the career was more in younger students. There was no relationship of gender with stress about the career. Kunnen et al reported that career choice guidance decreased significantly the self-reported psychological problems among students. The career guidance intervention was effective equally for all groups of participants regardless of their level of psychological problems before the intervention.¹⁵ Therefore here also career guidance is needed and essential for the young Kashmiri students. Seventy four percent of the students were of the opinion that there should be a career counselling that could help them decide in a better way. It has been suggested that career counselling may have direct and indirect effects on the well-being of the clients and it resolved personal or psychological difficulties.¹⁶ It has also been suggested by Feldman et al that making an adequate career choice and therefore following positive career pathways for an individual leads to personal satisfaction and also social integration.¹⁷ Besides career

counselling has positive effects on identity development and increases commitment strength in vocational and personal domains.¹⁸

Limitations

The sample size for study could have been large. But the study was conducted among young students who showed a high non-response rate of around 30%. Nevertheless, the study gives an initial idea of the problem and further studies are recommended. Reasons for a particular career choice were not explored as the option was kept initially but it was missed by most of the students because of the descriptive nature of the question. For this qualitative in-depth interviews are the best option to know the problems of the students. Also, the questionnaire that was used was not validated as it was intended to measure just the descriptive variables and self-perceived stress by the students.

CONCLUSION

In our study most of the students had planned about their career but many of them were confused and stressed about their career. About 74% of the students were of the opinion that there should be career counselling and guidance available for the students so that they can take right decisions at right time. Career counselling through professional career counsellors must be made available to students to decrease the career related stress among the students and for a better future of the students and the society as a whole.

Recommendations

As found in the study most of the students were of the opinion that career counselling is required for them to decide better for their career. Therefore, we recommend that there should be a career counselling centre where specialists in this field can guide the students to decide for their career choice. It should be made available widely to the students, and at a young age. Awareness should be generated among students to seek help through counselling for making the decision for their career.

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