



An Analysis of Parental Influence on Career Choice and Success

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Introduction

In our society, individuals spend most of their lives working, indicating that a career is one of the most important choices an individual has to make. Through interaction with the world and others, various facets of socialization influence one's career choice and subsequent lifestyles, rewards, and the success resulting from that choice. A central component of this learning process is parental socialization. Parental socialization may be defined as parents' influence on their children to learn and acquire behaviours that are socially desirable and demanded (Martinez-Escudero et al., 2020). This early and significant form of socialization is an area of interest when considering how an individual chooses a career and the success that ensues. Therefore, this paper explores the relationship between parental influence and individuals' career choices and success by analyzing macro-level and micro-level parental influences.

Macro-level Parental Influence: Socioeconomic Status and Education

When considering how parental influence may affect an individual's career choice and subsequent success, it is essential to consider the macro-level institutions that may function in this relationship, such as Socioeconomic Status (SES) and education. Research by Din et al. (2022) suggests that parents' SES and education influence the career choice of medical students and graduates. The results showed that 50% claimed a role of parent's SES in the career choice of medicine. Further, a study by Nunes et al. (2023) reveals a positive correlation between students' grades and parental post-secondary education. Stated otherwise, students appear to have significantly better grades when their parents have a post-secondary education.

Similarly, research by Schnabel et al. in 2002 explores the correlation between parents' education and SES and their children's educational outcomes. These outcomes serve as indicators of potential career success. In samples from Germany and the United States, parents' education and SES correlate significantly with Grade 7 students' achievement on tests, overall grades, and future academic plans and aspirations. The substantial influence of parental SES is further supported when researchers control for other factors and "socioeconomic background turned out

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to be an independent factor in all career-related decisions observed in the period under investigation in both countries” (p. 193). These results showcase the universality and generalizability of these macro-level parental influences on an individual’s potential career choices and success.

The connection between parental SES and occupational choice and success found in research suggests that access to financial support from parents based on SES influences opportunities and aspirations (Din et al., 2022; Nunes et al., 2023). Therefore, available financial support from parents may directly influence career choice and subsequent success. A potential explanation for the positive correlation between parents' education and the educational outcomes of children may be found in research by Schnabel et al. in 2002, explaining that access to financial resources and social status leads to increased flexibility and opportunity while selecting a career path. For example, financial support while taking a gap year to decide on a career path and help with the costs of university and housing while pursuing a career may drastically influence the potential career decisions and success an individual experiences.

Micro-level Parental Influence: Support and Interpersonal Relationships

Parental socialization impacts an individual’s career choice and success on a micro-level to a large extent through interpersonal relationships created and maintained that foster encouragement, support, and involvement. Research by Llyod et al. (2018) revealed that students interested in STEM, a potentially successful career choice, had parents who reported high expectations for their children. This study shows the importance of parental influences on students seeking a career in STEM, specifically on students' occupational aspirations. “Just over 90% of parents of students interested in STEM had university aspirations for their child, with parents of male students proportionally more likely to have university aspirations for their child (91.7%) compared to parents of female students (86.4%)” (p. 313). The quote reveals that parental aspirations are positively correlated with students' university aspirations, which may indicate parents' encouragement and involvement toward children pursuing a career in STEM. The parents in this study “spoke of creating a supportive environment” (p. 317), which focused on education, achievement, and a positive career choice.

Further, research by Nunes et al. supports these ideas by stating that “grades are significantly better for students whose parents...communicate higher expectations about their offspring’s school careers” (p. 1). An article by Ahmed et al. in 2022 reveals that parental wishes and pressures are amongst the most influential factors influencing Generation Z’s career choices. For example, “a total of 60.71% of respondents mentioned that parents’ pressure or wishes were the major influence for them” (p. 231). These results show a high degree of parental involvement, support, and encouragement in the cases of students pursuing a higher-level career path.

The interpersonal relationship built between parent and child and the subsequent messages communicated is explored in research by Bradford et al. in 2001. Astin’s sociopsychological model of career choice (1984, as cited in Bradford et al., 2001) focuses on the messages of significant adults, such as parents, given to children during childhood socialization that influence adult career perceptions and behaviour. Although fathers are reported to most frequently encourage achieve-

ment, subjects responded mothers when asked who had the most influence on their career success. These results are challenged by research by Hoffman et al. (1992), which indicates that “female and male students are influenced more by their fathers than their mothers when making career decisions” (p. 70). The following quote further supports how the closeness of interpersonal relationships with fathers influences career choices and success: “the closer a respondent rates his/her relationship with his/her father, the more the students agree that parents have a strong influence on career choice” (p. 71). A potential explanation for the increased influence of fathers found by the researchers may be found in the following statement by Bradford et al. (2001) regarding how mothers’ influence on an individual’s career choices and success may change in light of more working mothers. “One positive outcome may be that mothers can bring more career-specific information into their daughters’ lives. Alternatively, the mother’s opportunity to be actively involved in her daughter’s life may decrease” (Implications, para. 7).

Parenting Style

Related to parental support and encouragement is parenting styles, a force of socialization that influences psychosocial development, such as internalization of social values like self-esteem, responsibility and punctuality, and has long-term effects on an individual’s development. A study by Martinez-Escudero et al. (2020) examines how different parenting styles may influence the psychosocial development of an individual, a development which may be useful in the workforce and serve as a precursor to career success. The study finds that the indulgent style of parenting, characterized by “parental warmth without strictness” (Discussion, para. 1), yields the highest scores on the psychosocial development criteria tested. According to the data collected, an authoritative style appears to be the second-best parenting style because, although strict, it is still characterized by warmth. In contrast, “styles with a lack of parental warmth (authoritarian and neglectful) are related to low scores on the psychosocial development criteria examined” (Discussion, para. 1). Therefore, parental socialization style and degree of warmth may be linked to career choices and success of an individual in terms of their psychosocial development. Related to parenting style is the function a parent serves in an individual’s life. An article by Ahmed et al. (2022) states that “parents are not just authority figures but friends, guides, and role models” (p. 232) as they provide financial and emotional support to their children. Finally, this research highly recommends “that parents do scaffolding for their children while choosing a career by keeping their interest as a priority which will be a source of job satisfaction and motivation for their children in the future” (p. 233). The role of parents and the specific parenting style employed is integral to an individual’s socialization and future decisions, specifically career decisions.

Role Modelling

Another instance of micro-level parental influences that may serve a function in an individual’s career choice and success is the career situation a parent models throughout one’s life. Characteristics of work modelled by a parent to be desirable, such as career stability, consistency,

as well as intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, may influence what their child views as desirable in a job for themselves. An article by Din et al. (2022) explains how the most common parental influence on medical students' career choice was mutual agreement that a medical career would afford them a positive societal reputation and recognition. Similarly, it is found that role modelling of prestigious professions and higher salaries by parents influenced Generation Z's career choices significantly (Ahmed, 2022). Parents provide the context in which perceptions of career opportunities and occupational aspirations are formed through the process of socialization. Research by Holmes et al. (2017) suggests that "having a parent or carer who already works in a STEM career has been found to positively influence children's aspirations towards a STEM career" (as cited in Lloyd et al., 2018, p. 310). To expand, parents that model a successful career in STEM or other occupations contribute to the schemas and perceptions of potential career paths.

The potential influence a parent's career may have on an individual's career choice and success is displayed clearly in a study by Pablo-Lerchundi et al. (2015) as it explores how "exposure to role models is a determinant in the development of occupational choices, professional values, and entrepreneurial intentions and behaviour" (p. 1645). Among the 851 engineering and architecture students involved in the study, it was first found that when students' parents are business owners, they display higher entrepreneurial intentions than those whose parents are not self-employed. Findings also indicate that "civil servants' children score lower on EI [entrepreneurial intentions] than those whose parents do not work for the public sector" (p. 1647). Further, participants appeared to place more value on their parents' occupations. The increased value is displayed through results that "entrepreneurs' children find being a civil servant a less attractive option than civil servants' children do," while "children of civil servants consider their parents' occupation to be a more attractive professional option than business owners' children do" (p. 1648). Another finding that outlines the parental influence of role modelling on an individual's career choice and success is that "civil servants' children find financial reward less important than children of non-civil servants do" (p. 1648) while "entrepreneurs' children attribute more importance to this value than public workers' children do" (p. 1649). The value of extrinsic rewards and entrepreneurial intentions an individual possesses may influence their career choice and success through their motivation towards upward mobility or satisfaction with a lower-level job status.

Parents influence career development and decision-making through socialization by communicating values, offering opportunities to learn and develop, and inspiring and guiding individuals toward certain goals and occupations (Ahmed, 2022). More specifically, "through their life experience and job satisfaction, parents inspire adolescents to adopt the career path they had for themselves since childhood" (p. 232). It is stated that this phenomenon is generalizable worldwide. Finally, the work by Bradford et al. (2001) states that "the power of example should not be underestimated, particularly the modelling of successful career skills and strategies" (Implications, para. 9).

Referring back to Astin's sociopsychological model of career choice, it is argued that a significant amount of adult career behaviour may be attributed to childhood socialization (1984, as cited in Bradford et al., 2001). For instance, gender-role socialization communicates and forms ideas regarding the permissibility of different careers for different genders. Therefore, if a child is subject to a parental role model that displays career behaviour that varies from the dominant soci-

ety's gendered occupational norms, such as a mother in the trades, a traditionally male occupation, they may be more likely to make career choices that function as non-traditional for their gender in our society.

Conclusion

The high degree of parental influence on career choice and success is explored throughout this paper. Macro-level and micro-level factors that contribute to the parental socialization of individuals and have a subsequent influence on career decisions and success include parental SES, support, interpersonal relationships, parenting style, and role modelling. By reviewing what existing literature suggests regarding the degree to which parental socialization influences individual career choices and success, it may be suggested that parents provide practical assistance and scaffolding to their children regarding career decisions (Din et al., 2022). By providing sufficient support and aspiring towards a more successful future for their children, parents may influence the outcomes experienced by said child. Also crucial to psychosocial development and potential success is the parenting style employed and the degree of warmth and strictness used (Martinez-Escudero et al., 2020). The modelling of stable, attainable careers and desirable rewards by parents may influence what individuals view as desirable or permissible for themselves in a future career. Therefore, the relationship between parental influence through socialization on both macro and micro level factors is significant to an individual's career choices and success and is worthy of consideration when exploring the concept of work.

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