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Factors Affecting Females' Occupational Aspirations: A Synthesis of the Literature

Abstract

The concept of occupational aspiration appears within career developmental theories as an important milestone in adolescents' career developmental; required for seeking careers that are compatible with their self-concepts. Many researches consider occupational aspiration as significant career motivational variable that is capable of predicting levels of future career attainment. Many studies suggest that gender is a significant factor in predicting students' levels of occupational aspiration. Gender is clearly one of the most powerful of all influences on vocational behavior (Osipow& Fitzgerald, 1996). This paper is an attempt to synthesize career literature that shows females' occupational aspirations are lower than their male counterparts. Withthe synthesis of literature, this study attempts to find out those factors that are responsible for lower occupational aspirations of females. The lower occupational aspirations of females may be explained in terms of understanding factors that influence occupational aspirations - factors such as gender, race, socio-economic status, parents' occupation, their educational level, and parental expectations. The study further suggests what measure could be taken to enhance females' occupational aspirations.

Keywords: Occupational Aspiration, Females' Occupational Aspirations, Factors affecting Females' Occupational Aspirations

Understanding Occupational Aspiration

Occupational aspirations are thefeelings, thoughts, fantasies, and goals that people have about their work. These feelings and goals affect people's decision-makingprocess and motivation with respect to their occupational choices. Alucid and comprehensive definition of occupational aspiration has not yet been givenin spite of significant theoretical and field work in the area. Rojewski (2005) regards occupational aspirations as careerchoices and goals that a person has expressed. Johnson (1995) thinks that an individual's occupational aspirations are the communication of his/her present occupational goals. In many studies occupational aspiration is regarded as an important career variable which can predict students' career achievement in future(Chung, Loeb, & Gonzo, 1996). The significance of occupational aspiration in adolescents' career development can be understood from its essential reflection in most career theories and in the extensive research carried out in second half of the twentieth century (Rojewski, 2005). Within career developmental theories, occupational aspiration seems to be a significant state in adolescents'adolescentlifewhere they can choose careers according to their self-concepts. Therefore, adolescents should take into account their abilities, interests and values in making their occupational aspirations (Super et.al. 1996). They should also transform their occupational aspirations from previous fantasy aspirations to tentative, and then final expectations.

Level of Aspiration

The Level of Aspiration can be defined as "orientation towards a goal". Likewise, level of occupational aspiration can be said as orientation towards an occupational goal. Level of occupational aspiration is a "function of the individual's range of aspirations for various goals" (Haller and Miller 1967). He reports that idealistic occupational aspiration is the one which an individual would choose, whereas idealistic occupational aspiration is one which an individual is sure about of getting it. (this sentence seems to be contradicting, could you please check this?)

Females' Occupational Aspirations

Many researchersreport gender as predicting variable for students' occupational aspiration.Osipow& Fitzgerald (1996) considers gender as a factor that has significant influence on career variables. Kalita (2014) also reporteddifferences between male and female's occupational aspiration. Many studies demonstrated that boys had higher levels of occupational aspiration than girls (Uplaonkar, 1981; Hudgins, 1987; Brooks & Redlin 2009; and Hoover, 1998). Hudgins (1987) concluded that girl schose those careers hichwhich were in the traditional middle groups (e.g. social services, education, music) of the occupational prestige hierarchy whereas boysopted for the careers that were on the higher side of the occupational prestige index. Creed & Hood (2009); Patton & Creed (2007) found in their study that boys are more likely to aspire for professional jobs like a doctor, accountant, archaeologist, teacher, bank manager, psychologist, engineer, architect, lawyer etc.whereas female students are likely to aspire for semi-professional jobs like a singer, musician, dress designer, social worker, receptionist, cashier, child care worker etc. In a study conducted by Khor & Peter (1994), it has also been reported thatboys generally preferred male-dominated jobs(like pilot, soldier, police, postman, sales manager, technician, taxi driver) and sex-neutral jobs which were not regarded being associated with any particular gender in the society,whereas females preferred sex-neutral occupations (like photographer, singer, teacher, journalist, social worker, translator, librarian)when given the freedom to choose. Males are reported to show increased awareness of jobs and industry (McMahon and Patton, 1997). Boys were more interested in work tasks and work conditions whereas girls were more concernedabout work environment.

Factors affecting Females' Occupational Aspiration

In spite of growing educational changes, cultural beliefs, and societal expectations, young females are still being prevented from achieving their goals (Alfred-Liro, Frome, & Eccles, 1996). The lower occupational aspirations of females may be explained in terms of factors such as gender, parents' occupational and educational level, socio-economic status, and parental expectations (Khallad, 2000; Watson et al., 1997). Many studies suggest that family, personality, parental level of education, schooland peers, socio-economic status, are few of the factors hicwhich affect girls' occupational aspirations (Crockett &Binghham 2000; Wilson & Wilson 1992). These factors alongwith other significant factors responsible for low occupational aspirations of girls are presented ahead that draw support from various studies in the field of literature.

Parents' Occupational & Educational Level

It has been reported in many of the studies that parents had a significant influence on their teens' career choices (Knowles 1998; Mau &Bikos 2000; Wilson & Wilson 1992). Several studies showthat the role of thefamily has been important in their children'scareer decision making(Guerra &Braungart-Rieker, 1999). These studies have demonstrated that parents have immensely influenced their

children in getting exposure to the world of work and in gaining career opportunities. Researches show that every adolescent is influenced by his/her parents' educational qualifications, aptitude, expectations and social system while making career decisions (Bandura &Barbaranelli, Carpara&Pastorel, 2001). Bhattacharya, 2013 feels that parents'role in the career choice of an individual cannot be denied.

While appraising the career counselling research in their Developmental Approach theory, Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad, & Herma (1951) have appraised researches in the arena of career counselling in their Developmental Approach theory. In this theory, they have reported that career decision-making is a chain of various steps taken over a period of time. As illustrated in the theory, children get exposure to different occupations from their family and start role-playing of these occupations early in the life. Females' educational level and their occupational status is greatly influenced by their parents' occupational aspirations and career choices. Adolescent females' occupational aspirations and career choices are particularly influenced by their mother's occupations(Burlin, 1976).Wahl & Blackhurst (2000) has also found similarity in parents and their children's occupational aspirations.

Parenting Styles And Guidance

The personality formation of girls largely depends on the parenting styles of parents (Bhatia, S. & Babu, N., 2019). Parents' mindset restricts them to consider girls as potential earners (Nair 2010). Subsequently they socialize their girls in the same way. Parents who are supportive and provide career guidance, their children are highly motivated and explore various careers themselves (Phillips, Blustein, Jobin-Davis & White, 2002). Kumar (2016) views that when parents impose their wishes on their children, they become passive towards career preparation.

Gender Role Socialization

The process of socialization and the shaping of personality are two major functions of the family. Gottfredson (1997) concluded that adolescents make or discard occupational choices on the basis of sex type and prestige level of the occupation. For instance, females might not select occupations usually considered to be too masculine e.g., a career as a miner. Various factors that play a vital role in restricting females into stereotyped role occupations include social and familial influences, less awareness of non-traditional alternatives, unacceptable environment in many men-dominated fields, and discrimination in many career fields (Domenico & Jones, 2007). Due to factors like gender role socialization and gender discrimination, females aspire for different types of occupations than males.

Cultural Beliefs

The occupational choices and aspirations of girls are largely affected by their cultural beliefs. A research carried out by Oxford University's Career Service (2015) reveals that boys are significantly more confident about their career possibilities in comparison to girls. Correll, S. J. (2001) in her study provides that cultural beliefs about gender channel boys' and girls' career choices into significantly different directions to the extent that they start acting on different gendered perceptions when making career decisions. Also, girls do not want to break thegood-girl image set by the society. This is the reason that they adhere tocultural beliefs and hardly aspire or decide to get into male-dominated careers. The formation of occupational aspirations has become more complicated and uncertain for adolescent females becauseof their preference to family over work (Hakim, 2002).

Socio-economic status

Various researches show that family's socio-economic status influences individual's occupational aspiration. Herr & Cramer (1996) reported that socio-economic status

influences information about work, work experience, and occupational stereotypes, which affects occupational aspirations. Students' aspirations and their family's socio-economic and educational status were found positively correlated (Mau &Bikos, 2000; Signer & Saldana, 2001).Children's career choices are based on parents' occupation, socio-economic and educational status (Burlin, 1976, Wahl &Blackhurst, 2003 and Alika&Egbochuku, 2009). Trusty (2002) reported that low socio-economic status leads to decreased and unrealized parental expectations. Sellers (1999) et al. concluded in their study that children from high socio-economic status showed greater knowledgeand interest in choosing professional occupations. On the other hand, Brown & Barbosa (2001) discussed in their study that the career choices of girls from low socio-economic status were greatly influenced by the career choices of their family and friends.

Peers

Various studies show that peers also have a vital role to play in career choice of students. Stuart (2000) found that peers' attitudes toward gender may increase or decrease a person's confidence in choice of a career. Adolescents get influenced by their peers easily because they trust their friends to provide validation of the career choices they make. A girl may easily be swayed with the thoughts and feelings of her peers. If her peers think that mechanical engineering is not suitable for girls, she also tends to think the same way.

Women choose more flexible careers for the sake of family

Another factor behind low occupational aspiration of girls may be that women weigh the cost and benefit of a career to their family lifewhile choosing occupations (Corder& Stephen, 1984). It is reported that females tend to choose stereotyped female professions because they provide females enough flexibility to combine work and family roles more easily (Sales & Frieze, 1984; Ware

and Lee, 1988). Society's expectations from women, i.e. to be the primary caretaker of the home and children, have led women to choose more flexible careers for the sake of family. Nair (2010) states girls' education is affected by gender segregation, gender stereotyping and their economic dependence onto males. Consequently, they aspire for careers which can be suitable for their work-home life balance. Nair (2010) further states focus of women has largely been on domestic roles rather than on roles that can prove productive for them and for the society as well. While looking for jobs, women tend to search for a job which requires a fixed and lesser number of hours so that they can manage their familial responsibilities also (Etzkowitz, Carol, Michael, Brian and Joseph, 1994). Girls generally do not aspire for careers which require high risk or high responsibilities or require them to work full time. That's why they generally choose semi-professional jobs in comparison to men.

Women's low Self Concept

In addition, women's self-concept of their abilities is inclined towards more stereotyped feminine occupationsor people-oriented occupations, such as helping people; whether or not these are actual representations of their abilities (Eccles & Hoffman, 1984; Eccles, 1987; Lips, 1992; Marini, 1978). If women feel that they don't have skills in male-typed occupations, they will not consider those occupations for themselves and will not select them for their future career. Behavioural Psychology suggests that girls have low self-efficacy. Due to low efficacy they give up on subjects which they feel require tough competition with boys or in which obtaining high marks is bit difficult (Van de Werfhorst&Mijs, 2003; Wilder & Powell, 1989). Researches undertaken regarding academic gender segregation or distinct academic field choices of girls and boys suggest that girls generally avoid competition and are risk-aversive, that's why they tend to choose ~~less~~fewermoney-making subjects (Booth & Nolen, 2011).

Discrimination & sexism

Few decades back, females had even lesser occupational choices due to factors such as discrimination, sexism, and little education. Many researches revealed that females had limited occupational aspirations and they generally opted a narrow range of occupations (Looft, 1971; Mendez & Crawford, 2002; Wahl & Blackhurst, 2000). Sex differences in occupational aspirations develop early in childhood (Looft, 1971) because parents usually encourage their boys' educational and occupational aspirations but not of their girls' (Heins et al. 1982). Studies conducted in last two decades reveal that females have expanded the horizon of their occupational choices, yet their occupational aspirations are comparatively low, particularly for male dominated and high status jobs (Wahl & Blackhurst, 2000). As we see, nowadays more and more girls are studying Science and technology courses; still their willingness to work in real job world is very low. Even if they are willing, their absorption in the job market is also quite low. As Epiphane (2002) states regarding French School System– 'Gender is generally considered to be an important factor for explaining disparities in the school-to-work-transition. Indeed, gender-based difference in labour market entry may be observed at all training levels, and almost always in the favour of the young men.'

Career Guidance Measures for Enhancing Girls' Occupational Aspirations

As the studies reveal that female students have low occupational aspirations, girls particularly need to enhance their occupational aspiration. For this, not only girls but in many of the cases their parents would also need counselling for letting their girls make their own career decisions, particularly in the cases where girls are not allowed to study courses or take up occupations that are considered male-dominated in the society. They should be given adequate occupational information and awareness.Research can be conducted on vocational guidance-based strategies to increase occupational aspiration of female students. From class 6th onwards female students should be exposed to the career related information, career magazines, and career newspapers so that they may be able to enhance their level of occupational aspiration. School programmers should also ensure maximum utilization of school counsellors to enhance occupational aspiration of female students.

Intervention programmes to provide career guidance in terms of career choice, career development, occupational information, career attitudes etc. can be conducted to help female students to make appropriate occupational aspirations. Hughes & Karp (2004), in their study show that students who were enrolled in a career course,showed increased outcomes on most career-related variables. The results of another study conducted by Sirohi (2013) pointed out that children studying in schools with vocational guidance and counselling provisions exhibited higher self-awareness and occupational information in comparison of not having these provisions. Self-awareness and occupational information are the prerequisites for making suitable occupational aspirations. In a meta-analysis of various career interventional studies, Oliver & Spokane (1988) reported a positive influence on participants' career decision-making, understanding of careers and career-related adjustment. Various studies report that college students who completed intensive career courses showed enhanced occupational aspiration and career decision-making as compared to students in the control group. O'Hara (2000) also reported that career exploration intervention increased students' career planning and career exploration competence. On the basis of these studies we can conclude that Career Intervention Programmes based on occupational information, occupational awareness, career choices, career maturity and career decision making etc. play a

significant role in increasing students' occupational aspirations. Therefore, special career programmes may be designed for increasing girls' occupational aspirations.

Other than career guidance, one long term suggestion for enhancing girls' occupational aspiration could be to achieve equality for men and women in all spheres of life where men and women both can share home and outside responsibilities, where women are also encouraged to know their self-worth and to utilise their education and skills.

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