

Implications of Language on Career Choices of 16 Years Old Female Students: A Sociological Study Based on Trilingual Mixed School

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Sex-role attitudes are known to influence career choices. The objective of this study was to assess the factors affecting career choices in a group of Sri Lankan female students attending a senior secondary school.

The protocol of the study confirmed to the Declaration of Helsinki. The study was conducted in a trilingual mixed school from January to March 2016. A combined quantitative and qualitative approach was employed. In the quantitative study, Sri Lankan females in the Ordinary Level classes following studies in three different languages (Sinhala, English, and Tamil) were selected using the cluster sampling method. Students who were already occupied were excluded. A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect the socio-demographic data, their future career choice and the self-perceived factors associated with their choice. Face validation of the questionnaire was obtained before the study. Comparative qualitative study was based on the Grounded theory. The sample was selected using non-probability purposive sampling. In-depth interviews were conducted in their native language. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to elicit the accounts of the factors influencing their future career choices. Interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. Interviews were conducted until the saturation of the themes.

Sixty students (20-Sinhala language, 20-Tamil language, 20-English language) participated in the study. The subjects were 16 years old. Monthly family income was approximately similar in all three categories. (37000-Sinhala language, 39000-Tamil language, 40000-English language). Mode “major occupation category” of the fathers according to the International Standard Classification of Occupations-08 (ISCO-08) was “Elementary Occupations” in all three groups. All the subjects chose their future career as “Professional” major group according to the ISCO-08. 30% (n=18) of them chose sub-major group of “Health Professionals” followed by “Science and Engineering Professionals” (8.3%, n=5), “Business and Administrative Professionals” (8.3%, n=5), “Information and Communications Technology Professionals” (5%,n=3), “Legal, Social and Cultural Professionals” (6.7%,n=4) and “Teaching Professionals” (38.3%,n=23). The English medium students had a wide range of choices (n=10) compared to Sinhala (n=7) and Tamil (n=5) medium students. Among the factors determining their choice of future career, “External influences” were identified as most influential factors. Self-efficacy beliefs were found only among few subjects (n=9). Interviews for the in depth study were conducted with 25 subjects who were randomly selected from the main sample. We found that the parental influence played a major role in determining future careers. Unlike Sinhala and Tamil medium students, gender stereotypes, social acceptance and monetary outcomes were de-emphasized in the choice of the future career by English medium students. The study population had a limited range of interests in occupations. All wanted to be “Professionals” in the future. Career choices were largely determined by the external influences. English medium students were less restricted in their future career choice.

Keywords: *Occupation choice, Career development, Gender stereotyped jobs.*

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