Review Article

The Parental Influence on the Educational and Vocational Decisions of Adolescents: A Retrospection of International Research

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Abstract: This paper deals with the analysis of family factors that influence the educational and therefore professional decisions of adolescents. The educational-professional decisions of adolescents are products of complex and parallel processes and the influence of parents on them is internationally diachronic and important. Initially, a presentation and analysis of the conceptual approaches of decision-making is attempted and then a historical presentation of research data concerning the parental connection and influence on the educational-vocational decisions of adolescents is made. The influencial factors that are being considered are those of the parents' professions, the grammatical knowledge and the educational background of the family, the family's economic situation, the gender of adolescents and the expectations and unfulfilled wishes of the parents. It is also required to mention the crucial role of functional-authoritative parenting and the negative influence of parental over-involvement.

Keywords: developmental psychology, decision psychology, career psychology, vocational decisions, parental influence, adolescents.

INTRODUCTION

People on a daily basis, endlessly, are confronted with situations, events and circumstances that require their decisions, whose correctness and success determine their lives to a greater or lesser extent. Therefore, the ways that persons make their decisions are key-factors in achieving their goals. The theoretical discussions about the value and usefulness of the ability to make sound and realistic decisions are rooted in the economic science. But over time, decision-making theories have been a distinct subject of research into a wide range of disciplines, resulting in the development of relevant theories. In addition, the central pillar of these theories was the theoretical example of the larger philosophical core of the researchers, around which they are developing their research work [1].

There is a number of definitions that attempt to describe the decision-making process. According to Baron [2], this process is related to the way persons think, when they want to choose between at least two alternatives. Also, Thoresen and Mehrens [3], according to the same reasoning, argue that the decision is the process of choosing a direction of activity among a number of alternatives. Decision-making is a process through which people choose between two or more alternatives, for providing solutions to a direct or long-term issue or to take advantage of an immediate opportunity [3]. According to the latter definition, there are three basic conditions:

1) the existence of at least two alternatives or consequences, from which the individual will choose one;
2) the person evaluates as important something about the consequences, because if nothing is considered as important, then there is no real choice;
3) an abundance in the effectiveness of the consequences and whether the person desires them, since if everything is evaluated as equally effective and desirable, then there is no real reason for evaluation and selection. In more details, the alternative scenarios or consequences concern both the course and the method (among many options) chosen by a person to reach the decision-making solution, as well as the time aspect of decision-making.

The decision-making is not only related to the process but also to its outcome, since it is a complete choice. Based on the above considerations, "decision" and "choice" are conceptually synonymous terms. However, Edward Russo and Paul Schoemaker detect a significant differentiation: "the more the alternatives, the more likely a correct decision is made. Many persons make the mistake of believing that many

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alternatives will confuse and disorient them. In fact, the various choices are those that give a person the possibility of finding the best solution. Like many roads leading to the same place, one can reach his/her goal through different choices" [4].

An important element of decision-making is the "decision situation". According to Jepsen and Dilley [4], it includes:

- a person who decides;
- the need for (a conscious) decision-making;
- a certain framework within which a person must make the decision.

A person is in a decision situation when [3]:

- he/she feels the need, the obligation or the duty to make decisions;
- this need is conscious;
- there is a specific framework within which the decision must be made, while the conditions prevailing within this framework are variables that affect the final decision;
- there are information existing about the decision;
- more than one solution exists.

This framework includes information that come not only from the person him/herself but also from the context. During the mental processing of alternatives, the persons calculate the possible results based on [4]:

- the chances that are gathered to reach the desired result;
- the usefulness or value of the results that they will have for themselves.

The decision situation has several elements in common with the "problem situation", since in the latter case the state of affairs differs from the desired situation or the desired goal, so in this case the person is also necessary to act in order to achieve the goals [3]. The problem situation is undesirable and unpleasant, because it disturbs the balance of human life. This eventually creates the incentives for a person to seek a solution of the problem. Thus, by making a decision or by executing a series of actions aimed at solving the problem, a person seeks to remove the mental confrontation or conflict [5].

Decision-making is not only about a single person and his/her actions but also about others, while the decisions can be either individual or collective. Individual decisions are made by a person and should not be confused with whether or not this person is affected by others. Individual decisions are based on personal beliefs, attitudes and values. Personal beliefs (the view of how the world works), attitudes

(predisposing persons to assess situations or certain people within the dimension of "desirable-undesirable") and values (they are the "hidden criteria" that persons judge others and interpret the environment, while having a close connection with the general self-image) are shaped by both the messages that a person receives and the behaviors manifested in his/her family and the wider social environment.

Every decision made is based on previous decisions of a person and will also be the starting point of his/her future decisions [6]. Decisions are not static but dynamic. Persons, as they pass from one age-stage to another and with the emergence of constantly new perspectives, can change the outcome of their decisions by making new ones [7]. Collective decisions involve more than one person, they are a daily reality for any social group and a basic concern of any society. Regardless of whether the decisions are individual or collective, they sometimes concern the present and sometimes the future [8]. Finally, Beach [9] argues that a decision (even individual) usually involves other people, as it is considered a social activity.

Linking information and quality of decision is direct, since decision-making depends to a large extent on both the knowledge and the way information is used by a person. Thus, a person's effectiveness in making a decision depends on how well he/she knows him/herself and the environment. The lack of proper information poses the risk of confusion, while the lack of sufficient information may lead to either an immature choice or a limited number of alternatives [10]. More specifically on this issue: "the quality of decisions is influenced by the information we use to make them. The lack of correct information can be confusing. On the other hand, if we cannot gather all the available information into consideration, we may limit the number of alternatives or make an immature choice" [6].

From the above theoretical approach it is concluded that decision-making gives persons the ability to respond to changes or to make them by making use of their potential. People in decision-making set long-term and short-term goals, while ensuring their personal development in every aspect of their lives. By closing this presentation, it would be an omission not to refer to the consequences of making wrong decisions. Making wrong decisions has a negative impact, not only on the individual but also on the social development of a person. Indeed, if these decisions concern the choice of educational path and career, they are in some cases at least binding [3].

THE PARENTAL INFLUENCE

The family environment has a decisive contribution to decision-making, professional selection and development of adolescents, since the family is the

primary nucleus of socialization [11, 12]. Parents are the main persons influencing the development of adolescents. Either directly through the provision of standards, aspirations and guidelines [13, 14] or indirectly through their financial situation, their cultural and educational background [15].

There are many research findings that show the importance of the family's functional characteristics (e.g., supportive family environment, family members' relationship, parenting, family cohabitation, parenting behavior) in professional aspirations and expectations of adolescents. In fact, the functional characteristics are significant in comparison with the structural characteristics. Structural features such as parents' occupation, family residence and parenting educational level are both the socio-economic and cultural background of the family [16].

The influencial factors that will be considered herein are those of the parents' occupations, the grammatical knowledge and the educational background of the family, the family's economic situation, the expectations and unfulfilled wishes of the parents.

Parental Occupations
For children, the parental experiences create a learning framework. In this, children become familiar with the world of professions, while they are being taught methods of combining family life with work [17]. Children who listen to their parents about their work, when they return home or when they visit them in their workplace and ask questions about it, formulate their personal opinions (positive or negative) about the working conditions of their parents [18]. The majority of parents are unaware of their influence on this issue, namely that parents' professions are largely associated with their children's professions [19]. The relationship between family and work affects parental behavior towards children. When parents experience intense negative feelings from their work, they transfer them to their parental role. This has the effect of creating a confrontational environment between children and them [20]. Also, the children of fathers with complex and autonomous work have more warm and honest relationships with them. These fathers are more receptive to their children's questions about professions [21]. Parents exercise this influence by exposing children to their work environment, encouraging them to participate in educational activities, mentoring their academic and professional decisions and discussing their professional goals [22].

Researchers suggest that the profession of the father, in particular, affects both the school success of children and their professional decisions [23, 24]. The study of Jenson & Kirchner [25], in a sample of 8,000 families in the United States, showed that half of the children followed the profession of their father, while in the cases where they did not follow it (mainly in low-prestige professions), the children sought an upgrading professional movement. In addition, adolescents want professions similar to those of their fathers or their professional preferences are higher than their father's professional level [26, 27]. In 1968, Werts [28], in a survey involving 76,000 young Americans, investigating the professional choice of sons in relation to the profession of fathers, concluded that in certain professional categories (such as medicine, natural and social sciences) the sons followed their fathers' career. Findings from other surveys show that the profession of father affects the professional choice more of the son rather than the daughter. As a rule, boys are encouraged to choose professions that excel or are equal in prestige to that of their fathers [27]. A survey carried out at high-school students in Attica (Greece) showed that 76% of them choose different professions from those of their fathers' when these professions are manual labour [29].

Kintis [30], examining the distribution of university students into branches according to the profession of their father, found that children of upper and middle social classes choose the so-called "privileged" sectors (medical and polytechnic schools), while children of non-privileged social classes (such as farmers, workers or self-employed) are directed more towards "less privileged" sectors, such as pedagogical academies or schools of economics (of course, this categorization of privileged/less-privileged sectors depends on the particular examined society). The same researcher also concluded that the profession of father plays an important role in the success of admitting young people into tertiary education institutes and in particular they are related to the choice of study's direction. He also reports that the chances of admission of a child having a father of tertiary education graduate are almost twice as high as those of a child having a father of secondary education graduate, 3.8 times more than a father of primary school graduate and 42.5 times more than an father who is illiterate. In addition, there are other surveys showing that children with parents who practice manual work rarely proceed to tertiary education [31, 32].

A survey concerning first-year students at the Polytechnic (Technical) University of Crete showed that children with a tertiary education graduate father are over-represented in the students' population [33]. Another research carried out at high-school students of Athens (Greece) showed that 76% of the sample aspired to be admitted into a university. However, one year after their graduation, only 32% of them had been admitted into tertiary education. From the above survey, it was found that the children of senior managers and

executives, both in the public and private sector, showed this ambition to a greater extent compared to the children of craftsmen, while also having a quadruple success rate in the departments of universities, compared to the children of workers and craftsmen. It was also found that the children of workers were mainly admitted to technical education institutes faculties, while about 10% turned to post-secondary vocational education. Those children who chose to study abroad came mainly from families of businessmen or managers [23]. Trice [34] showed in a survey that the aspirations and desires that persons had when they were children matched the profession practiced by their father by 40%, whereas only 23% of the aspirations they had as adolescents matched the profession practiced by their father. Indeed, 55% of those persons whose first aspirations matched their father's professions continued their career in the same professional category, while only 38% among those whose first ambitions were different than their father's profession followed the same career.

The mother's employment affects more the teen girls' professional aspirations than teenage boys [35]. Etaugh [36] found that girls with working mothers have higher professional ambitions and choose less traditional "female" professions, compared to girls with unemployed mothers. O'Brian [37], in her study of 17-18 year-old girls, found that girls with professionally successful mothers were targeting high-profile professions, corresponding to their abilities and expecting their future success.

In addition to shaping the professional preferences and aspirations of young people, other factors related to the profession of parents, especially of father, play an important role, such as their attitude towards their profession. If parents express negative views about their profession, or they aim only at money or education, they may cause similar reactions to their children [38, 39]. In conclusion, there is a link-effect of the parents' profession in the educational-professional decisions and choices of adolescents, who are influenced by their parents, since their parents are behavioral patterns for them. As far as the link-effect of the parents' profession on their educational-professional decisions is concerned, the father's profession plays the main role. Finally, it should be noted that if the profession of parents is of a low socio-economic level, the children are encouraged to seek more prestigious professions, which will help them in their social evolution.

Parental Educational Background

The educational level of the parents is a factor affecting the adolescent's decision to select vocational studies and professions, as it determines the extent of the choice, the selection criteria and the intensity of their ambitions. For example, regarding the extent of professional choice, adolescents with parents-scientists rarely choose a different profession. On the other hand, workers' children, with a view of ensuring higher social status, are oriented towards different professions than those of their parents. In addition, in terms of the intensity of ambitions and aspirations, the educational level of parents plays an essential role in the encouragement that the child will receive in order to become a professional and excel his/her parents [40].

The educational level of the parents influences both the development of the adolescents' career and the formation of the parents' attitude towards their educational path [33]. Interestingly, a survey of 1,000 high-school students in Greece showed that those with parents having a university level of education had similar success scores in tertiary education. This research also ascertained the inequality of access to tertiary education for people of different social backgrounds, since children of low social strata, whose parents do not have university education, have fewer opportunities for long-term education than children of privileged social, educational and financial families [41]. In addition, according to OECD data for Greece (http://www.oecd.org/greece), the success rate in the universities of children with fathers-scientists was 78.3%, while those with fathers-farmers was 34%. Children with parents who hold a university or college degree, are self-employed, managers and teachers, have a stable job, work in the public sector or at least the father has a stable job and the mother is either educated or engaged in households are more likely to follow tertiary education [32].

Human [42] argued that children with educated parents choose higher social status professions, while Super [43] observed that children from low socio-economic families choose professions that perpetuate their parents' status. Another research [44] showed that the educational level of parents affects both the family function and the professional orientation of children. Parents holding postgraduate and university titles appreciated the value of education and communicated that concept to their children. These then redefined and targeted their talents. In a relevant study [45], it was found that the children of teachers chose teaching and socializing professions, while low-educated parents had a negative role in their childrens' educational and professional career, as they blocked the expression of inclinations and talents of their children and prevented their admission into tertiary education [46]. Small & McClean [47], as far as the educational level of parents is concerned, refer to their exemplary role in the educational and professional decisions of their children, while Wall [48] in his study finds that the older son usually follows the profession of father.

Creed & Patton [49] argue that girls versus boys in their career tend to mature faster, while Wilgosh [50], through his research into gender stereotypes, concludes that stereotypes affect parents with a low educational level. Miller *et al*. [51], in their research on the influence of the educational level of parents on the decisions and choices of their children, showed that girls of low educational level families rarely engage in sciences. Through similar surveys [47], the highest trend for boys' entrepreneurship and girls' preference for artistic professions was ascertained.

There are many researchers that try to explore the different role played by each parent's educational level. Human [42] argued that the mother's educational level plays a more important role, while on the contrary Moser [52] argued in favour of the father. Krippner [53] found that the educational and professional preferences of girls are influenced by both the mother's educational level and profession, while those mothers with an inadequate level of education have less ambitions for their daughters. Instead, Mousourou [54] in her research argued that mothers were more ambitious for their boys (37% of them wanted their sons to become scientists), while this ambition became more intense as their level of education diminished. A research of Burlin in Washington [55] concluded that the mother's education had a greater influence on girls than boys, when choosing a profession, and that those girls having a father of lower educational level mostly chose professions either of less prestige or more "feminine".

In conclusion, the influence of the grammatical knowledge and the educational background of the family compared to the educational-professional decisions and choices of adolescents is quite important.

Parental Financial Situation

It is important to point out that social and financial inequality results in educational inequality. Mincer [56] argued that income inequality is influenced by the level of education. Park [57] noted the compensatory effect of the level of workforce's training on income distribution. The parents of adolescents, who are forced to work for many hours because of their poor financial situation, are negatively affected in their educational and professional aspirations [58]. In addition, a research by the National Reading Research Center (USA) has shown that children of middle-income families become more familiar with reading skills through specific strategies and practices [59].

Mortimore *et al*. [60], as reported in large-scale UK surveys, have reached useful conclusions about the financial level of the family in relation to the school performance of their children. According to these, when a child met the criteria for free meal provision it was more likely to have school failure. In more details, the children included in the above case showed lower reading and math performance, while at the same time they had more school absences. A research in Greek compulsory education found that the children of higher socio-economic backgrounds perform better and at the same time they have a positive relation between: school performance, the profession of their father and the level of studies of their parents [61].

According to research data, parents who do not enjoy a good financial situation choose to guide their children in their educational and professional choices to studies and professions that the parents believe they can provide professional rehabilitation and financial security [62]. In conclusion, the previous surveys show that the impact of family's financial situation to the educational-professional decisions and choices of adolescents is important.

Parental Expectations

Initially, it is important to highlight the important role played by parents in forming both the educational and professional choices of their children, regarding values, standards, expectations, pressure for school success and their support. Parental expectations are an important factor in the educational and professional future of adolescents, as they have been shown to play a decisive role, not only in shaping their aspirations but also in making their children's final decisions [63].

Most researchers on this issue compare children of different school performance, with the aim of highlighting common elements with parents of successful children in their academic life. Accordingly, parents of high-performance children adopt specific strategies to help them (e.g., monitoring of school work, organization of reading, praising), while taking initiatives to have regular contact with the school and try to maintain good relations with the teaching staff and its administration [64]. They also give their children the opportunity to take initiatives, offer them alternative choices, talk to them regularly, engage in the educational process, support them emotionally and have high expectations of them [65]. On the other hand, parents of low-performance children rarely visit the school on their own initiative [64], while criticizing their children and questioning their potential, threatening, punishing and restricting their choices [65].

According to Bourdieu [66], how parents and children face education, in fact, implies their attitude towards their future. This is not just a simple psychological process, but it is a psychosocial process of internalizing a family ethos. In this process, the objective probabilities are transformed into either subjective expectations or discouraging. Through several surveys, it is noted that Greek families, for a

variety of reasons (historico-economic, social and political), reject manual labor and choose mainly service occupations for their children [67-70]. Family socialization in Greece is almost necessarily identified with the model of social rising, while the pursuit of social status and success is attempted for children through the educational success. The anxiety about achieving social rising also explains the great interest of Greek parents (regardless of their social background) for their children's school performance, their grades, the success in examinations and the acquisition of qualifications. All these are sadly not pursued for the educational and cultural improvement of their children, but for the satisfaction of their unfulfilled desires. This fact leads families and children to high educational and professional expectations [71].

As far as expectations are concerned, the research interest is focused on the role of parents as transformers of differences in the socio-economic level and other characteristics of the family, which the students come from, into differences in educational and professional achievements. It is also worth noting that many of these expectations are in line with the effects that adolescents get by individual family members [72]. Research findings [73] show that the family's incitement to further study and career, which is an expression of parental expectations, plays a key role in youth decisions, choices and achievements.

In recent years, research efforts have turned (internationally) into studying the effect of gender on children. Research results emphasize that gender is one of the key and important factors in shaping parents' expectations for the future of their children [31, 74]. Many studies on this issue lead to the conclusion that today's parents wish for their daughters to study more than their sons and encourage them to do so. The massive admission of girls into the tertiary levels of education suggests the existence of a cultural framework and a socialization process that does not reproduce discrimination, prevailing in older times [75]. However, this does not in any way mean that the parents of modern age have overcome their anachronistic perceptions of the role and position of the two sexes. Parents may encourage young girls to succeed but they intervene when their choices are not considered appropriate for their sex, since they continue to regard marriage and family setting as the future destination of girls rather than work progress [76].

Furthermore, according to the relevant bibliography [77-79], the functional families are balanced and adaptable; there is a coherent and authoritative rather than authoritarian parenting and open family communication. The functional parents also: express appreciation, encourage risk-taking, accept mistakes, are emotionally independent, are guided by facts rather than emotions, live balanced and satisfied lives, possess strong communication skills, demonstrate flexibility and they believe in the importance of a good working alliance. On the contrary, wherever there are higher levels of parental withdrawal or over-involvement, there is more child anxiety observed [78]. The over-involved parents [77]: believe that they need to be involved in every decision, make decisions based on their own personal needs, exhibit anger and frustration, they are rarely satisfied, exhibit poor communication skills and they are inconsistent and demanding.

While the researchers attempt to describe the ways in which parenting expectations and unfulfilled wishes play a role in the decisions and choices of adolescents for their future, they remain to indirectly study these attitudes and expectations through the interpretations given by teenagers themselves, avoiding to address their own exponents. Thus, our understanding of the role of parental expectations in shaping the educational and professional decisions and choices of adolescents remains largely incomplete. It is worth noting that the relationship of parental involvement with the success of their children in school is not clear and direct. Without neglecting the importance of parents in raising and educating their children, it must be made clear that school, as an institution, only apparently offers equal opportunities. In fact, it maintains and reproduces social inequality, since school performance depends on the social origin of the adolescent [80].

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, adolescents' educational and vocational decisions are the product of complex processes, where parenting is crucial. Factors such as the parents' level of education, their financial situation, their profession and possible unfulfilled desires or their expectations from their children, influence the educational and vocational decision-making of teenagers, in parallel with family's functional characteristics (e.g., a supportive family environment) and the adolscent's sex. At a time when the model of social and economic organization is in a deep and prolonged crisis and there is parental over-involvement in many countries, both parents and teachers should ask themselves what kind of young people and tomorrow's citizens do they want to prepare for society and what do they expect from their children and their students, respectively. Of course, this question is difficult and inconvenient for both parents and teachers, because as Jean-Paul Sartre points out: "Every human is made of all humans."

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