

CAREER CONSTRUCTION IN ADOLESCENCE. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CAREER ADAPTABILITY, COPING STRATEGIES AND THE LEVEL OF VOCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: First career decisions that need to be made during adolescence imply completing various difficult vocational tasks and therefore are stress inducing experiences. Based on the theoretical model of coping strategies for career indecision that consists of three categories of coping, Productive coping strategies, Nonproductive coping strategies and Support-seeking (Lipshits-Brazilier et al., 2016) and on the concept of career adaptability, as main concept of Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2005), the present research explores the relationship between career adaptability, coping strategies for career indecision and the level of vocational development in adolescence. The results show that there are significant relations among the investigated variables. The relevance of the results for career counseling and guidance interventions is discussed.

Keywords: career construction, adolescence, career adaptability, coping strategies, vocational development

Marked by significant changes in all developmental areas (Garcia, 2010; Rew, 2005), adolescence is perceived as a stressful period, one of the reported stressors being future-related concern. Several studies investigated, among other stressors typical of this age, how adolescents experienced worries about their future from different perspectives. Taking into consideration cultural and societal factors, one study concluded that adolescents from eighteen countries, regardless of their origin, “experienced substantially higher levels of future-related stress than school-related stress” (Seiffge-Krenke et al., 2012, p. 266). Based on a developmental approach and using a longitudinal design, another study highlighted the fact that the levels of future-related stress noticeably increased during early adolescence and for girls future-related stress also increased during late adolescence (Seiffge-Krenke et al., 2012, p. 266). Specifically, adolescents are concerned about their future education and occupation (Nurmi et al., 1994, p.483). Trying to determine adolescents’ perception of career concern using a thematic organization of the participants’ responses, Code & Bernes (2006) identified several factors related to seven themes: training and education concerns, security, satisfaction, failing, commitment, wrong occupational choice and having to decide.

These findings can be related to the fact that adolescents face two important transitions, one in early adolescence, when they graduate secondary school and become junior high students and the second major transition when they graduate high school and prepare to enter either the world of work or continue their academic training. On passing from one level of education to another, adolescents are required to make important career decisions that “affect their educational and vocational opportunities” (Gati & Saka, 2001, p.331) and impact their future. For instance, in Romanian educational system 14-year-old adolescents (8th graders) must choose a high school and a specialization. Previous research showed that some adolescents make these first career decision “relatively easily” (Gati & Saka, 2001, p. 331), others feel unprepared and “appear confused and uncertain in making career choices” (Code & Bernes, 2006). Therefore, in order to face and surmount these

concerns and to successfully complete the vocational tasks, adolescents need adequate coping strategies and effective inner resources. Lipshits-Braziler et al. (2016) proposed a theoretical model of coping strategies comprising fourteen categories that represent three major coping clusters: Productive coping, Nonproductive coping and Support-Seeking. Identifying specific coping strategies that adolescents activate during transitions with the purpose of diminishing nonproductive coping strategies and enhancing productive coping can be an important and helpful career counseling objective. "If an adolescent's coping skills can be improved, it is feasible that she or he may perceive and react to stressors in a different manner yielding more positive health outcomes" (Garcia, 2010, p. 5).

At the same time, along with productive coping strategies, such as problem solving, flexibility, self-regulation, career adaptability which "denotes an individual psychosocial resources for coping with current and anticipated vocational development tasks, occupational transitions, and work traumas" (Savickas, 1997) represents an essential prerequisite for dealing with nowadays rapid changes and with the complexity of career decisions. Comprising four global dimensions, career adaptability model is structured on three levels: Concern, Control, Curiosity and Confidence represent general adaptability resources and the highest level, specific attitudes, beliefs and competencies "that shape the concrete adapting behaviors" are considered the intermediate level and coping behaviors are the third and the most concrete level of the model (Savickas, 2013, p.158-159).

Purpose of the Study

Taking into consideration that efficient and optimizing career interventions focused on adolescents' specific problems rely on research evidence, the goal of the present study is to examine the relations between coping strategies for career indecision, conceptualized according to the model developed by Lipshits-Braziler, Gati and Tatar (2016), the degree of adaptability in career decision making and readiness to make occupational choices, as defined by Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2005) and the level of vocational development of Romanian adolescents. First, we hypothesized that Productive coping Strategies would be positively related to the level of career adaptability (Hypothesis 1). Second, we hypothesized that Nonproductive coping strategies and Support-seeking strategies would be negatively related to the level of career adaptability in adolescents (Hypothesis 2). Finally, we anticipated that the higher the level of adaptability is, the higher the adolescents' level of vocational development will be (Hypothesis 3).

Method

Participants

The participants of this study were adolescent students enrolled in four state middle schools and in one high school. The sample comprised 244 adolescents (153 adolescent girls and 91 adolescent boys), aged 13-17 years old (M= 14,64, SD=.066).

Instruments

1. Career Maturity Inventory Form C (CMI - Adaptability Form, Porfeli & Savickas, 2011)

Designed and revised in order to measure career choice readiness for students up to and including Grade 12 (Savickas & Porfeli, 2011, p. 335) CMI Form C comprises four scales, Concern, Curiosity, Confidence and Consultation. The first three scales, summing eighteen items, indicate an individual's degree of adaptability in career decision making and readiness to make occupational choices. Therefore, a student will receive five scores, a total score for the above mentioned three scales representing career adaptability dimensions and four scores

for each scale. In the present study, we used the total score for the three scales (Concern, Curiosity and Confidence) in order to investigate adolescent students' level of adaptability as derived from these three scales. Cronbach alpha coefficient for the CMI Form C total score based on 18 items was .86 (Savickas & Porfeli, 2011, p. 361). In the present study Cronbach Alpha internal-consistency reliability for the total score of the three scales was .80.

2. *The Strategies for Coping with Career Indecision Questionnaire (SCCI, Lipshits-Braziler, Gati & Tatar, 2014)*

The coping strategies that adolescent students used to deal with career indecision were investigated with SCCI questionnaire. Comprising 45 items (one warm-up item, two validity items and 42 items representing 14 coping strategies), SCCI questionnaire provides information about three major coping styles: Productive coping, Nonproductive Coping and Support-Seeking. The students were asked to rate their answers on a 9-point Lickert-type scale (1 = does not describe me, 9 = describes me very well). Lipshits-Braziler et al. (2016) reported a median Cronbach alpha internal-consistency reliability estimate of .84 for the 14 coping subscales and α of .86, .92, and .88 for the three major scales (Productive Coping, Support-seeking, and Nonproductive Coping, respectively) for the Hebrew version of the SCCI (p.49). In the present study, the Cronbach α internal consistency reliability for the whole questionnaire was .84 and for Productive coping scale .81, for Nonproductive Coping .85 and .85 for Support-seeking.

3. *Student Career Construction Inventory (SCCI, Savickas & Porfeli, 2011)*

Student Career Construction Inventory (SCCI) was developed to measure students' level of vocational development. The authors established five subscales that represent the completion of five vocational development tasks: self-concept crystallization, occupational exploration, career decision making, skilling or instrumentation, transitioning from school to work. The questionnaire comprises 25 items each of them standing for different activities related to career construction. The students have to indicate how much they have thought about or how much they have planned each activity mentioned on a Lickert scale from 1 to 5 (1= I haven't thought too much about this thing, 5= I have already done this thing). As a result, the participants receive a total score that represents the general level of vocational development and scores for each of the five subscales. Previous studies reported Alpha Cronbach for the total score .93 (Babarovic & Sverko, 2016). In this research, the Cronbach α internal consistency reliability for the whole questionnaire is .87.

Procedure

After obtaining the informed consent of the school principals, the administration of the three questionnaires was organized during regular classes. Participation was voluntary. The students were explained the purpose of the research and were guaranteed the confidentiality of their responses. They indicated their names, age, gender and year of study. They completed paper-and-pencil versions of SCCI (Strategies of Coping for Career Indecision), CMI – Form C and SCCI (Student Career Construction Inventory) in the same order, during two classes. Upon their request, students were given the interpretation of their results and individual career guidance and counselling sessions, as well.

Results

In order to investigate the relations between Productive coping Strategies and the level of career adaptability, Spearman correlational coefficient was computed for non-parametrical data, as the values did not have a normal distribution. The values presented in Table 1 ($\rho = .344, p < 0,01$) indicate a significant correlation between the above mentioned variables.

Spearman's rho correlation coefficient	Productive coping	Degree of adaptability
Productive coping	1.00	
Degree of adaptability	.344*	1.00

*p < .001

Table 1

Examination of Table 2 shows significant negative correlations between Nonproductive coping and the level of career adaptability ($\rho = -0,543$, $p < 0.01$) and significant negative correlations between Support-seeking strategies and the level of career adaptability ($\rho = 0,238$, $p < 0.01$).

Spearman's rho correlation coefficient	Support-seeking	Nonproductive coping	Degree of adaptability
Support-seeking	1.00		
Nonproductive coping	.427*	1.00	
	* p< .001		
Degree of adaptability	-.238*	-.543	1.00
	* p< .001	* p< .001	

Table 2

The third hypothesis stated that the higher the adolescents' level of adaptability is, the higher their level of vocational development will be. The results indicate a significant correlation between these variables ($\rho = 0,547$, $p < 0,01$), confirming our assumption (see Tabele3).

Spearman's rho correlation coefficient	Degree of adaptability	Total degree of vocational development
Productive coping	1.00	
Total degree of vocational development	.547*	1.00
	*p < .001	

Table 3

Discussion

According to the results of this study, the level of career adaptability is associated positively to Productive coping strategies and to the level of vocational development and negatively to Nonproductive coping strategies and Support-seeking. These findings have important practical implications for career counseling and guidance interventions. One of the objectives of such interventions is helping students make good career decisions for their future by increasing the level of vocational development. As the results of this study indicate, exposing adolescents to career related activities that promote adaptability (Career Concern, Career Curiosity and Career Control) and productive coping strategies (such as instrumental and

emotional information seeking, problem solving, flexibility, accomodation, self-regulation) will positively impact the level of vocational development. At the same time, nonproductive coping strategies (such as escape, helplessness, isolation, submission, opposition) and support seeking being negatively related to the level of adaptability need to be addressed in a consistent manner in counseling activities in order to be reduced.

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