

# An Analysis of how Parents Influence their Children's Career Decisions

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**Abstract:-** The study sought to find out how parents influence their children's career decisions. Ninety (90) participants were randomly selected from 4 most common careers in Zimbabwe (Health profession, education profession, Industry and office profession). A quantitative approach was followed and the participants responded to a closed form questionnaire on a 5-point-Likert scale. The results indicated that parents (family at large) exert a very strong influence on their children's career decisions despite the modern trends such as the attachment individuation theory that states that most communities have become more individual centred than social in the way they live and make personal decision, particularly career decision. The researcher recommends that parents be exposed to and equipped with the relevant career information to assist in career guidance. Schools are also encouraged to extend a welcoming hand to parents so they may work collaboratively with parents in providing career guidance.

**Keywords:-** Career Guidance, Parents, Career Decision.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Parents (and family members) exert a strong influence on how their children choose careers. They may influence them directly and indirectly, intentionally and inadvertently, consciously and unconsciously. Since parents generally live with the child during the formative years they tend to exert a relatively strong influence on how their children make career decisions. Parents may influence their children's career decisions directly in giving the most needed career advice especially at early stages as role models as well as indirectly in their norms and values. Parents influence on their children's career decisions may either inspire children to follow their parents' footprints, or steer them away from certain careers (Jungen, 2008).

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Parental influence in their children's career decision is well supported by several theories, specifically, Social Cognitive Career Theory, (Lent 1997); Bandura's Social Cognitive Learning theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory. All these theories place strong emphasis on the influence of the contextual environment (social) on learning and development, this includes career development. Among the social contexts the family plays a pivotal role, of which parents are key influential forces

Generally the church and the peer influences are overridden by the home and school influences. Although the church and peers may influence a growing child, these two are mainly determined by the home and the school standards and values. This is also strongly supported by Epstein's model (1987) that emphasizes that career development is strongly shaped by the home and the school.

The home environment has its strongest influence during pre-school and then in primary school years. During the early childhood years the individual acquires mainly non-formal career guidance from his/her immediate environment. He/she may begin to develop "when I grow up thoughts..." about careers as he/she observes and interacts with those people in different careers. According to Jungen, (2008) studies show that children of about five years old have indicated that they identify with their mothers or father's occupations.

From a developmental point of view career development begins at infancy and continues during their formative years so that they may make informed career decisions without regretting later. Although the child may seem to desire autonomy in career decision by the age of adolescence (adolescent's quest for self-identity, Belkin, 1988) they still seek parental approval since the parents are the sole sponsors for training for most undergraduate students- "he who pays the piper chooses the tune". Of course parental influence of career decisions of their children gradually tapers off as the children undertake graduate and post graduate studies as they become mature enough to make informed decisions and are also more able to finance their own education.

Parents and family may influence their children's career decisions through the socialization process. When parents acknowledge that their child is male or female, thus deciding on the type of toys (cars, blocks or dollies) to give their infant child. Hence, parental perspectives about gender roles indirectly influence the growing child's career pathway. Hence, it is very imperative for parents to be equipped with the relevant career guidance information. This findings from Bloomberg's (1984) in South Africa; which indicated that parents (father and mother) were the most influential in relation to subject choices and in career decisions among the South African secondary school students. This also concurs with Singh (2005)'s observation that career guidance begins in the home and ends in the home. The parents are with the child before formal

schooling and may remain with the child after school. Parents love and know their child better than most other people and can therefore go out of their way to guide and help them. Considering their experience with their child, it can be concluded that they understand him/her best and desire the best for him/her. In brief, parental career guidance is well-meant (Lindhard, 1974).

However, other scholars contend that it may not be necessary for parental involvement in career guidance because some of the parents may be deficient in career counselling and other educational skills (Fowkes, 2007). However, Ipaye (1996, p. 129) observes that “although some parents are illiterate they are enthusiastic in getting their children to make up for what they lamentably missed...in addition it is the parents’ desire that their children do not slave as they did.” In a way it makes the parents proud to have a child succeed in their career. In addition, some counsellors contend that too much parental involvement in career decision may lead to over dependency, foreclosure or moratorium (career indecision), according to Marcia’s decision making theory. Other modern theories such as the Attachment Individuation theory suggest that since societies are losing their social fabric, individuals are desiring to make personal decisions as individuals rather than collectively or consultatively.

According to Singh (2005), it is very necessary to provide career information from home because parents usually remain with the child after school so they can provide sustained support. Hoto, (2018) also contends that despite the popular belief that career decisions are individualistic; the family (parents) are the most influential force when it comes to career decisions. The other contributing reasons for the increased interest in parents about their children’s education are cited in Davidson (2009) as follows;

- there is a general increase in the parental awareness of considering children as young learners;
- of late there are relatively more mothers with a college education or who are professionals;
- there has been a noticeable change in the family structure, whereby the child has become the centre of focus;
- Some governments are encourage parental involvement in their children’s education. A typical example is the Nziramasanga Commission (1999) of Zimbabwe, which also emphasizes parental involvement in the student career guidance process;

With such trends it is imperative for the school to work collaboratively with parents in providing career guidance to their children in secondary school.

There are several ways in which family may influence their children’s career decisions. Some of these may be intentional and others are non-intentional (Sink, 2005). These may include;

- Parenting style (nurturing and developing career awareness especially during early childhood years);

- providing financial support for schooling and career training;
- providing social support during school years and career training years;
- development of values and
- personality development.
- through heredity (physical makeup, personality, abilities, aptitudes, dexterity),
- through nurturing (parenting style, early childhood experiences, attitudes, values, drive to succeed, fear of success, financial sponsoring, socio-economic status) and
- Parents as role models.

Parental influence is proactive. It may be both intentional and unintentional. Young (1997) cited in Davidson 2009 observed that parental influence is most helpful when it is intentional, planned and a goal-directed action. Early childhood experiences plant a seed for the future career. For example, a child who had to be hospitalized for two months may develop a passion for a career in health and medicine; or may never such as anything to do with doctors or nurses depending on how his experience at the hospital was. Parents may positively influence their child’s career decisions depending on their attitudes to life experiences. For instance, if parents exaggerate the dreadfulness of visiting the Dentist, the child may not desire to become a dentist. On the other hand, if parents appreciate the kindness of the nurses, or glamorize the helpfulness of the Lawyer or Policeman, it is likely that the child may aspire to enter either of these careers.

Melgosa (2001, p. 53) argues that “Parents’ lifestyle (values, attitudes and practices) may also influence in their children’s career decisions. A family that upholds self-denial and selfless service will most likely have children with the same inclination.” It is a well known saying that ‘values are caught, not taught’. Thus it is very likely for an individual to catch the family values than those of other institutions because the family has the strongest influence and the child is under the influence of the family a greater part of his formative years (Child, 1985; Melgosa’s 2001).

#### ➤ *Socializing*

Parents are the key in the primary socialization of the child and continue to exert great influence on their children throughout life (Zvobgo, 2009; Mudhovozi and Chireshe, 2012). Right from birth, the parents begin influencing their children through socializing. Gender stereotyping of careers can begin as early as during infancy, when parents buy toys for their little ones. A message is communicated by the type of toys we buy for our babies; this might lay a foundation for the choice of a career. For example, building blocks are usually bought for boys and dollies for girls. As more parents stereotype Mathematics, Computer studies and engineering as naturally male domain, more and more girls develop fear for such subjects, they underestimate their abilities in mathematics and science related subjects and overestimate the difficulty of the. This way parents discourage their children from STEM related courses and mathematically oriented careers.

For fear of being considered weird or ‘Tom-boys’ some young females shun careers of their aspirations and train for those that may not match their interests, personalities or abilities. They eventually find themselves as square pegs in round holes with no career self efficacy, low job satisfaction, no career satisfaction and no carer realisation for their performance will not be at their best.

Attitudes and perceptions of parents also contribute significantly in influencing their children into or away from certain careers. According to Desai (2012), research (in Asian countries) indicates that parents’ attitudes and perceptions greatly influence their children’s career decisions. This may include gender biased attitudes and gender stereotypes about careers.

#### ➤ *Parenting Styles*

Parenting styles are patterns of bringing children up. Parenting styles greatly affect personality and consequently career development for different parenting styles result in different outcomes in the values, behaviour and personality of the child. Shaffer (1999) classifies parenting styles into four distinct categories. Each of these is unique and bears weight on how the adolescent makes decisions, his/her academic achievement and the development of social skills. Each of these parenting styles is a reflection of the parent’s attitudes to the development of the child. Sharf (1992) also concurs with Shaffer’s (1999) view except that he focuses on the attitudes of parents. In brief, different parenting styles also contribute in influencing the children’s career decisions. Dictatorial or authoritarian parents tend to dominate the decision making process and suppress the will of the child. In this case the child is usually caught in a dilemma, wanting to make his own decision and at the same time desiring to comply with the decision of parents so as to prove to be obedient. In addition, children raised under authoritarian parenting style may become poor in decision making and timid or adopt the same authoritarian leadership at their work place.

On the other hand, permissive parents allow the children too much freedom without guidance as a result children sometimes make the right choice on their own or at other times, as what frequently happens, they feel frustrated after having made poor, pre-mature decisions due to lack of guidance. They may have poor social skills, so they usually may not get along well at the work-place because they tend to be self-centred and non-conforming; this also adds to their frustrations. (Shaffer, 1999; Melgosa, 2001) The uninvolved parenting style is the most dangerous. It frustrates the child having to make crucial decisions such as choice of career without guidance or affirmation from loving parents. This usually leaves the child with a low self esteem. By being uninvolved the parent still exerts a negative influence by being negligent of their parental responsibility.

The traditional parenting style is fine, especially for the male child. For in this parenting style the father dominates in the major decisions. One of the results of the traditional parenting style is to produce youths who may

lack career self efficacy or who, in most cases, may lack self confidence and may experience career indecision. Generally, the male child has a role model but for the female child, it is rather less fortunate. Such female students may have poor career decision making skills. The female or male child from a traditional parenting style has high chances of succumbing to gender stereotyping of careers, choosing only the traditionally ‘male’ or ‘female’ careers. (Shaffer, 1999)

The ideal parenting style that, to a large extent, guarantees effective decision making is the authoritative. This style fosters independence and allows or permits discussion or dialogue between parent and child before the ultimate decision is made. It promotes authority, high esteem, excellent social skills and high academic achievement. Such a child may be able to adjust and accept whatever the outcome from their decisions because they have developed a high self-esteem. Such adolescents feel ownership of their decision. Such individuals can accept success or failure with less stress. They can easily work with others because they have learnt to dialogue and reason with others. They can take other people’s opinions without feeling threatened. They can handle positions of responsibility. (Melgosa, 2001)

#### ➤ *Parents as Role Models*

Most children spend a greater fraction of their lives with their parents. As a result the parents become the best role models for the growing adolescent (Sink, 2005). Ginzberg’s (1951) career development theory shows a strong inclination on the influence of parents. Looking at the adolescent stage, although the child desires some degree of autonomy, most of his/her major decisions are made in consultation with parents. More so if both parents are professionals, the children will such as to take after their parents, ‘a chip off the old block’. During transitional sub-stage which is marked by the child’s completion of the school and getting ready for college or university, non-formal career guidance has a significant impact on most adolescents. Because the school no longer has a strong grip on these adolescents, they look at facts once presented by teachers and peers objectively and move on, trying to be realistic. Because the adolescent spends the next period with the parents as the immediate consultants, parental influence has a strong impact at this stage.

Chauhan (1979, p. 92) observed that the parent’s occupation may have a significant influence in the decisions for a career by adolescents. In adolescence, boys tend to identify themselves with the career of their fathers, in the same vein. sons of farmers or social workers or medical scientists tended to choose the careers related to that of their fathers. In the same vein girls tend to aspire to become career women if their mothers have been career women compared to girls from non-working mothers. Similar studies in West Africa by Okeke (cited by Ipaye, 1996) revealed similar findings. This is strongly supported by Bloomberg’s (1984) studies in South Africa. Bloomberg (1984) made similar observations about factors that determine subject selection by seventh graders in South

African schools. Fathers were rated as the most influential in relation to subject choices. Fathers' influence was rated at 52% followed by mothers, rated at 40%. However, with the changing trends of more women joining the workforce, more girls have been influenced to attempt not only the traditional careers such as teaching or nursing but other professions such as engineering, law, aviation, etc. Researches (in Southern Africa) by Mutekwe and Modiba (2012) indicated that parents and older siblings may influence the adolescent in career decisions. Usually these are more than simple mentors because they also promise connections; as portrayed by the observation by Mutekwe and Modiba (2012) that a father who is employed with ZESA may influence his children and relatives to get careers in the same line; with ZESA; (whether they have the interest and abilities or not this may not be considered).

However, Zunker (1981) noted that this monotony of the family stereotyping (of homemaking mothers and the bread-winning father) is broken by some adolescent who determines to become anything else other than their parent's profession because they have developed a negative attitude towards their parent's profession. Such unexpected outcomes are usually a result of parents' negative attitude about their work environment. In general the attitude of both parents will determine the attitude of the child towards any career. If parents are disgruntled and grumble about their own work, adolescents will perceive their parents' jobs unfavourably and develop a negative influence about them. Several researches cited by Bandura and Bussey (2012) have observed that if both parents and teachers would strive to portray non-stereotypic modelling, then children's career aspirations will not be influenced by gender bias. As role models, most parents and heroic family members or relatives, assume that their children will take after their occupation.

Therefore, the influence of parents on their children's career decisions may either be positive or negative depending on parents' attitudes. Whether it is negative or positive, the impact is strong. Parents may also influence their children's career decision either positively or negatively by the frequent remarks they make about certain professions.

#### ➤ *Developing Personal Values*

Melgosa (2001, p. 53) observed that "Parents' lifestyle (values, attitudes and practices) has a determining role in their children's vocational choices, e.g. a family that upholds self-denial and selfless service may most likely have children with the same inclination." It is a well known saying that "values are caught, not taught". Thus it is very likely for an individual to catch the family values than those of other institutions because the family has the strongest influence and the child is under the influence of the family the greater part of his/her developmental years. Parents may also exert an influence on the work ethics of their children.

#### ➤ *Providing Social and Financial Support*

Actually, parents' financial and socio-emotional support for a particular career path may boost the child's self-esteem and career self-efficacy. In certain cultures there are specific professions ear-marked for a specific sex. Such cultures have the gender roles well defined such that it is considered taboo for a female to assume to have the potential to perform masculine jobs. Similarly boys who aspire to do feminine professions such as nursing face the challenge of being less acceptable by the general society and consequently they end up with lowered self-esteem.

At a time when more women are joining the workforce, this makes the competition for employment stiff. One needs to be on the cutting edge and avoid the risks of training for a career that might become obsolete in a few years time. In western countries in the 1900s, only about 18% of the working population were women; today more than 40% of the working population are women (Your Career, 1983, p. 11). Hurlock (1973, 215) observed that, "For the average girl, a job was merely a stop gap between school and marriage". By then, formal career guidance was not deemed necessary for there were few stereo-typed professions based on some gender bias. While this was observed in western countries, in Zimbabwe or some African countries the figures for women employees were much less then. However, of late there has been a paradigm shift, with more women joining the workforce. People now advocate for equal opportunities for all. With the introduction of formal career guidance in secondary schools the percentages may have changed.

#### ➤ *Socio-Economic Status and Financial Support*

Socio-economic status (SES) factors include the social class. This is closely linked to familial factors. It is also a major determinant in career decision making as those of low socio-economic background may not afford expensive training programmes, thus restricting certain individuals from making certain career options. In a way some careers are out of reach for some particular class of individuals unless there is some scholarship funding available. Numerous studies have presented evidence of close links between career development and socio-economic background. (Fowkes, 2007; Davidson, 2009)

Research by Fowkes (2007, p. 88) indicated that students from high socio-economic status seem to have higher career self-efficacy skills and conversely, students from lower SES reported to have more career decision making difficulties. She found that boys from high income families tended to assume they would go to college even at quite an early age. In contrast, boys from lower-income families tended to think in terms of skilled jobs which would offer them quick income and a higher rate of remuneration than their fathers received. This way, they quickly relieve their parents of the financial burdens or make up for the parental financial deficiencies. They generally tend to have modest aspirations as compared to those children from high income families. This is truly so because most parents from the high socio-economic status usually do not such as to associate themselves with blue-



collar jobs or professions that are technical or involve manual labour. Gothard (1985) also concurs with Hurlock's (1973) observation that students from middle class or average socioeconomic status are relatively highly represented at tertiary level of education. Most parents of higher socio-economic status have an inclination to influence the choice of career for their child generally towards glamour and prestige. Possibly it is because one's career, to some extent, determines one's social status. In the American culture, socio-economic status depends more upon the occupation than on any other factors (Belkin, 1988, p. 507). On the other hand, one's socio-economic status determines attitudes towards certain careers. Some parents, because of their socio-economic status, hold certain prejudices about some careers. Hurlock (1973, p. 215) observed that adolescents from the higher socio-economic groups are generally subject to greater family influence than those from the lower socio-economic class.

It has been observed that adolescents from affluent homes feel the pressure from parents who would usually expect their children to take up white collar jobs and shun the blue collar ones. This is contrary to research findings by Ali et al. cited by Fowkes (2007, p. 88) which indicated that socio-economic status seems not to contribute much to career self efficacy. Actually it is more of the parents' attitude than the child's attitude. Hurlock (1973) argues that adolescents judge the prestige of a job from a different perspective. With the adolescent the order is: authority, followed by autonomy, then the salary, lastly the "title". As a result some young adolescents are easily lured by occupational attractiveness associated with advertising stereotypes on media. Others are attracted by novels in hospitals with great ideas about doctors and nurses. Melgosa (2001, p. 53) suggests that it is important for parents to de-mythicise these fictional attitudes in the minds of the adolescents as they develop their career.

Socio-economic status also determines how much exposure to career opportunities a person has. An individual from a family of highly educated parents or parents who are professionals will most likely be more exposed to the career opportunities available as compared to the rural school child with parents who are subsistent farmers. Generally, the individual from the rural background is exposed to a relatively narrower variety of careers than the adolescent from the urban environment. Sharf (1992) observed that children know best those occupations that are in their communities. For example, rural children tend to be exposed to fewer occupations than children in the urban areas where there are greater influences of the media. The general educational level and attitude of the parent (regardless of whether the parent is from developed countries or from developing countries) also influences career decisions. Parents who are more

educated seem more proactive to help their children in career decisions (Fowkes, 2007, p. 88). According to Alenoma (2012), research in western countries has indicated that highly educated parents of high socio-economic status have high expectations for their male children than for female children to achieve high social status. Career guidance by such parents tends to promote male children to excel academically. Contrary to this observation, studies in Nigeria by Ipaye (1996) indicated that even the parents with low educational qualifications have high aspirations for their children, not desiring that these children face similar struggles such as their uneducated parents. From this background, even formal career counsellors need to understand the attitudes and values of their students and their economic background. Because attitudes and opinions can be modified, both the school career guidance providers and the parents can provide information that can motivate those adolescents from the solid working class family and from the under-privileged families to develop higher aspirations.

#### ➤ *Personality Development and Self-Awareness*

Sperling (1982, p. 185) defines personality as "the arrangement of internal forces that mould the way an individual goes about being the person that he is". Personality is a result of interaction between the individual's genetic traits and the social and general environmental factors. The personality of an individual is a result of the interaction between nature and nurture. Both heredity and the environment contribute in shaping the individual's personality. Looking at career development theories such as Holland's (1942) person- environment fit theory, if an adolescent chooses a career that fits his personality he stands a greater chance of experiencing career satisfaction and ultimately career realisation. On the other hand, if he selects a career which is not suited to his/her personality, he/she may have to work with people of different personality, be frustrated and unhappy in his job, dissatisfied with his achievements and anxious to change to an occupation that will meet his needs better.

A person with a low self image has feelings of inadequacy may not pursue careers that involve interpersonal skills, responsibility over personnel or major policy decisions. Secure and emotionally stable individuals tend to make stable and well satisfying career choices. Personality tests can be accessed on the internet. These can assist the individual understand their personality. Holland's (1942) person-environment-fit theory is based on personality differences and how this can contribute to choosing the appropriate career best suited to one's personality. Personality development is greatly influenced by heredity and the interests by the immediate environment, especially the home.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The study followed a quantitative approach analysing the degree of parental on their children's career decisions.

A sample of 90 respondents was randomly selected from 4 different careers ( Education/teaching, Business office, health professionals and industry employees).

Employing org	Frequency	%
Health	20	22.2
Education/teaching	28	31.1
Industry	23	25.6
Business office	19	21.1
Total	90	100

Table 1:- *Frequencies of Respondents According to Employing Organisation (N= 90)*

The reason for selecting these 4 key careers is to ensure representation of the most common careers in Zimbabwe.

Source of Influence	Frequency	%
Parents	40	44.4
Both (parents & school)	32	35.6
School	18	20
Total	90	100

Table 2:- *Comparing Sources of influence in career decision (N= 90)*

- About 20.0% of the participants indicated that they were influenced mainly by formal (school) career guidance, mainly through career guidance lessons (41.8% reported that career guidance lessons influenced them the most).
- More than one third (35.6%) of the participants reported to have been influenced by both the formal (formal) and parents (non-formal) career guidance.
- Forty four (44.4 %) were influenced by Parents (non-formal) sources of career guidance.

However, the research findings indicate that both formal and non-formal career guidance influence students in their process of choosing careers. Since 35.2% of the respondents reported to have been influenced by both School (formal) and Parents, for effective career guidance the two need each other. Parents and schools need to work collaboratively to ensure effective and informed career decisions.

### IV. CONCLUSION

The study indicates that parental influence seems to be very strong in career decision making. However, parental influence alone may not be very effective as some researches have indicated that most parents may not be very well informed about the career market trends, career entry requirements. Hence the researcher recommends that deliberate collaboration be established between parents and schools in providing career guidance to children. The study also recommends that a similar study be carried out on a larger population in other cities.

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