



Research Article

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Received: 27 December 2021 / Accepted: 31 March 2022 / Published: 5 May 2022

Factors Influencing Career Choice Among Social Work Graduates

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36941/jesr-2022-0066>

Abstract

In recent years, career decision-making has attracted research attention, especially choosing careers among graduates. Making informed and appropriate career choices are positively related to work performance and career success. The present study investigates the factors influencing career choice among social work graduates. A sample of 417 social work graduates was recruited to complete the survey. Descriptive analysis, Pearson correlation, and multiple linear regression were used to analyze the data. Our results show that there is a positive correlation between environmental, interpersonal, institutional, external, internal factors and career choice. Additionally, multiple regression analysis indicates that external and internal factors influence career choice among graduates. The present findings contribute to the general discussion about the influential factors in graduates' career choices. University administrators must develop career guidance and counseling programs more broadly in universities to support graduates in making appropriate career choices.

Keywords: career choice, environmental, institutional, social work, student

1. Introduction

Research on career choice has attracted recruiters and young graduates. Making a career choice is one of the most critical decisions for graduating students. Choosing the desired career can be stated as an individual's top priority, especially among graduate students. The appropriate career choice can

significantly impact a student's future. Choosing a career is a process of deciding for those who seek satisfaction from their work. People make career decisions based on balancing their interests, values, opportunities and competencies (Dibabe et al., 2015). Career choice is a process with many interacting factors.

Carpenter and Foster (1977) Carpenter and Foster (1977) demonstrated that career determinants can be intrinsic (personal interest and job satisfaction), extrinsic (compensation and job availability), or interpersonal in nature (family, teachers, and friends). Besides, Csikai and Rozensky (1997) reported that factors affecting career choice among social work students categorized as altruism, professional concerns and exploratory factors. Many previous works of literature have shown that students choose their career according to many factors such as social status, workload, prestige, personal and cultural values, career expectations, family background, promotion opportunities and financial rewards (Agarwala, 2008). Some prior findings showed that social support, information and finance (Najar & Yousuf, 2019), living environment, and education achievement (Igere, 2017; Shahzad et al., 2014) affect graduates' career choices. According to the model of job choice by Purohit et al. (2020), interpersonal, internal, external, institutional and socio-demographic factors affect career choices among graduates.

Furthermore, a study by Karaca et al. (2016) indicated that family influence, personal preference, personality structure, income potential, job security and career opportunities could influence the choice of a profession among social workers. A study by Hanson and McCullagh (1995) showed that social work students rate on the factors in choosing a social work career from the highest to lowest score including working with people, exciting and challenging, good job opportunities, good working conditions, job security, status and prestige and good salaries. Alyafei (2018) found that demographic, social change, family, and personal experiences influenced career choice among social work students. The findings of Couturier et al. (2021) reported that gender, psychological trauma experience, role model influence, values and personal motivations were factors influencing the choice of a social work career among universities.

Interpersonal factors involve the influence of parental, family, relatives, friends and professors (Gokuladas, 2010). The effect of acquaintance, friends and family on graduate job choice has been found in previous studies (Özbilgin et al., 2005; Sultana & Mahmud, 2020). Besides, studies have indicated that educators considerably influence learner decision-making. The effect of teachers has been found significant in graduates' job choices (Abbasi & Sarwat, 2014; Aycan & Fikret-Pasa, 2003). Teachers' beliefs impact their students' ability perceptions and career choices. According to Falaye and Adams (2008), some teachers encourage students to choose career decisions that are congruent with their abilities and aptitudes. Among 360 undergraduate students in the humanities (sociology, social works, psychology, business and political science) in Ghana showed a positive association between interpersonal factors and career choice (Woasey, 2015).

Internal factors focus on graduates' interests, work environment, growth opportunities and other personal characteristics (Purohit et al., 2020); values, personal interests and personality (Byrne, 2015). Among personal variables, personal interest linked to intrinsic motivation and enjoyment is considered the most significant psychological variable for career choice (Krapp & Prenzel, 2011). The findings of previous studies showed that personal interest factors correlated positively with and predicted career choice among undergraduate students (Afzal Humayon et al., 2018). Personal interests are the most influential factors in students' career choices (Anojan & Nimalathasan, 2013). Besides, students' perceptions of their skills, abilities and competencies have been identified as a significant determinant in selecting a proper profession (Agarwala, 2008).

External factors include graduating students' job opportunities, earnings and social status (Uyar et al., 2011), employee benefits, industry trends (Purohit et al., 2020). Numerous prior studies mentioned financial remuneration as the most affected factor for the graduate career choice (Agarwala, 2008; Gokuladas, 2010). According to Aycan and Fikret-Pasa (2003), pay is the most influential job selection among graduate students. Additionally, recent research indicates that graduates consider fringe benefits and starting salaries while making employment decisions (Abbasi & Sarwat, 2014; Thampoe, 2016).

Graduates identified their course and subject which they studied as the most critical element

affecting their job choice (Jordaan, 2009). Besides, the crucial role of career guidance has been reported in prior findings. Career guidance is related to enhancing the readiness of students to make career choices (Oigo & Kaluyu, 2016; Sun & Yuen, 2012).

Industrial Revolution 4.0 has given rise to rapid social and economic growth changes that led Vietnam to face new challenges. Social work has been considered potentially making a significant contribution to responding to social problems. Although many universities have taught social work programs, there remains a workforce shortage. Therefore, more studies investigating the associated factors that affect career choice of social work graduate students are needed in Vietnam. To our knowledge, however, there is a dearth of comprehensive scientific research examining the role of determinants on profession choice, particularly for social work graduates. Therefore, the objectives of our research are to investigate the relationship between environmental, interpersonal, institutional, external, internal factors and career choice and determine whether these variables influence career choice in social work graduates. A research methodology is shown in the second section. The present research results, discussion, and conclusion are introduced in the following sections.

2. Methods

2.1 Research Hypotheses

This study used a cross-sectional study to investigate predictors of career choice among social work graduates.

H₁: External factors would positively affect career choice among social work graduates.

H₂: Internal factors would positively affect career choice among social work graduates.

2.2 Participants

Informed consent was provided to all participants after receiving an explanation of the purpose of the research. Four hundred seventeen questionnaires were sent to the participants, all returned. The sample were recruited from ten universities in Vietnam, consisting of 82 males (19.5%) and 335 females (80.5%), as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: An overview of survey participants (N = 417)

Variable	Category	Frequency (%)
Gender	Male	82 (19.5)
	Female	335 (80.5)
Area	Dong Thap Province	27 (6.4)
	Ho Chi Minh City	120 (28.7)
	Lam Dong Province	48 (11.5)
	Da Nang City	65 (15.5)
	Thua Thien Hue Province	42 (10)
	Ha Noi Capital	115 (27.4)
School	Hanoi National University of Education	37 (8.8)
	University of Social Sciences and Humanities - Vietnam National University, Hanoi	44 (10.5)
	University of Labour and Social Affairs	34 (8.1)
	University of Danang - University of Science and Education	65 (15.5)
	Hue University - University of sciences	42 (10)
	Da Lat University	48 (11.5)
	University of Social Sciences and Humanities - Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City	46 (11)
	University of Labour and Social Affairs 2	39 (9.3)
	Ho Chi Minh City University of Education	35 (8.4)
	Dong Thap University	27 (6.4s)

Variable	Category	Frequency (%)
Marital Status	Single	225 (54)
	Married	192 (46)

2.3 Measurement

The author designed scale to investigate the factors influencing career choice among social work students. The factors influencing career choice scale includes six subscales: (i) environmental – 3 items with a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.802, (ii) interpersonal – 6 items with a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.757, (iii) institutional – 5 items with a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.751, (iv) external – 9 items with a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.824, (v) internal – 6 items with a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.753, (vi) career choice – 4 items with a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.753. Each item was responded to on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from one to five (1 = “strongly disagree”, 2 = “disagree”, 3 = “neutral”, 4 = “agree”, 5 = “strongly agree”).

3. Results

Table 2: Means and standard deviations of factors influencing career choice

Variables	Items	M	SD
Environmental factors	I chose this career because of its high growth in the industry	3.73	0.968
	I chose this career because the government has provided favorable conditions for the department.	3.97	0.991
	I chose this career because of the high demand for labor	3.89	1.011
Interpersonal factors	I chose this career because of the influence of my family and relatives	3.34	1.282
	I chose this career because of the influence of my friends	3.51	1.114
	I chose this career because of acquaintance	3.71	1.118
	I chose this career since everyone else in my circle already had a steady job	3.87	0.995
	I chose this career because of encouragement from my teachers	3.88	0.997
Institutional factors	I chose this career because of the institution's recommendation	3.67	1.199
	My career choice is influenced by what I learned in university.	3.76	1.040
	School reputation influences my career choice	3.85	0.998
	The outstanding major of the school influences my career choice	4.00	0.956
	School's Union and Association influence my career choice	4.02	0.952
External factors	Career guidance influenced my career choice	4.08	0.894
	I chose this career because of professional work environments	3.92	0.927
	I chose this career because it would allow me to develop my abilities further	3.88	1.001
	I chose this career because of good salaries	4.38	1.035
	I chose this career because of career advancement opportunities	4.02	0.888
	I chose this career because it is close to where I live.	4.12	0.824
	I chose this career because of good benefits	4.69	0.857
	I chose this career because of job stability	3.94	0.868
	I chose this career because of the low level of stress	4.12	0.885
Internal factors	I chose this career because of proper agency culture	3.93	0.938
	I chose this career because it corresponded to my present knowledge	3.81	1.124
	I chose this career because it corresponded to my present skills	3.76	1.013
	I chose this career because it is compatible with my personality	3.71	1.030
	I chose this career because it is compatible with my interests	3.92	0.937
	I chose this career because it corresponded to my major	3.77	0.969
Career choice	Workplace experiences influence my career choice	3.88	1.013
	I felt that I made the right decision for me	3.98	0.922
	I am going to continue my current career in the future	4.11	0.910
	I will put in more effort to grow and advance in my career.	4.14	0.898
	I am going to recommend this present job to my acquaintances	4.02	1.007

The means and standard deviations of factors influencing career choice among social work graduates are presented in Table 2. The table reveals the top two indicators with mean scores as below (i) environmental factors: I chose this career because the government has provided favorable conditions for the department (M = 3.97, SD = 0.991) and I chose this career because of the high demand for labor (M = 3.89, SD = 1.011); (ii) interpersonal factors: I chose this career because of encouragement from my teachers (M = 3.88, SD = 0.997) and I chose this career since everyone else in my circle already had a steady job (M = 3.87, SD = 0.995); (iii) institutional factors: Career guidance influenced my career choice (M = 4.08, SD = 0.894) and School's Union and Association influence my career choice (M = 4.02, SD = 0.952); (iv) external factors: I chose this career because of good benefits (M = 4.69, SD = 0.857) and I chose this career because of high salaries (M = 4.38, SD = 1.035); (v) Internal factors: I chose this career because it is compatible with my interests (M = 3.92, SD = 0.937) and Workplace experiences influence my career choice (M = 3.88, SD = 1.013); (vi) Career choice: I'm going to put in more effort to grow and advance in my career (M = 4.14, SD = 0.898) and I am going to continue my current career in the future (M = 4.11, SD = 0.910).

Table 3: Correlation for all study variables (N = 417)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Environmental					
2. Interpersonal	0.591 **				
3. Institutional	0.601 **	0.546 **			
4. External	0.549 **	0.529 **	0.685 **		
5. Internal	0.338 **	0.480 **	0.462 **	0.581 **	
6. Career choice	0.436 **	0.453 **	0.535 **	0.665 **	0.591 **

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 Tailed).

Table 3 shows the correlation between factors influencing on career choice among social work graduates. Pearson correlations revealed a statistically significant and modestly positive relationship between occupational choice and environmental factors (r = .436, p < .01), interpersonal factors (r = .453, p < .01); strongly positive correlation between career choice and institutional factors (r = .535, p < .01); external factors (r = .665, p < .01) and internal factors (r = .591, p < .01).

Table 4: The results of the multiple regression analysis of career choice

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p	F	R ²	Adjusted R ²
		B	Std. Error	Beta					
1	(Constant)	0.510	0.175		2.917	0.004	211.738	0.506	0.503
	External	0.585	0.051	0.486	11.450	<0.001			
	Internal	0.322	0.044	0.308	7.265	<0.001			

Regression analysis examined the factors influencing career choices among graduate social work students. Regression analysis was analyzed with the following independent variables (external and internal factors) and a dependent variable (career choice). The correlation coefficients were lower than 0.8, showing no multicollinearity between the independent variables (Allison, 1999). The tolerance values were higher than 0.2, and the VIF values were less than 2, showing no multicollinearity (Field, 2016). Additionally, the Durbin-Watson (DW) statistic was used to analyze the autocorrelation between independent variables, which was found to be 1.880, suggesting that there were no significant correlations between the residuals (Field, 2009).

Table 4 shows that the corrected coefficient, Adjusted R² was .503, revealing a change in the dependent variable, graduates' career choice, due to a one-unit change in the independent variable.

The regression model was statistically significant ($F(2, 414) = 211.738, p < .001, R^2 = .506$). The results showed that external factors ($\beta = .486, p < .001$) and internal factors ($\beta = .308, p < .001$) were significant predictors of career choice. Therefore, the results suggest that the first and second hypotheses (H_1, H_2) should be accepted.

4. Discussion

The main objectives of the present study were (i) to investigate the relationship between environmental, interpersonal, institutional, external and internal factors and career choice and (ii) to determine whether these variables influence career choice among social work graduates in Vietnam. Our study highlighted a few significant findings. First, there was a correlation between environmental, interpersonal, institutional, external and internal factors and career choice. Second, external and internal factors could significantly predict career choice in social work graduates.

Our data analysis reveals that environmental, interpersonal, institutional, external and internal factors are significantly and positively associated with career choice. This result reflects those students who scored higher on environmental, interpersonal, institutional, external and internal factors report higher levels of career choice. This finding is consistent with a previous study by Calaguas (2017) that showed a significantly positive relationship between interpersonal factors and career choice.

Another finding suggests that external factors significantly influence choosing a career among social work graduates. Specifically, graduates rated salaries and benefits as the crucial elements affecting selecting a career. The result is consistent with what has been found in previous findings showing that salary is the most influential factor in job selection among graduate students (Agarwala, 2008; Gokuladas, 2010; Aycan, 2003). Another finding indicates that internal factors predict career choice in graduates. Specifically, in the internal component, choosing a career that is compatible with an individual's interests is the most crucial factor. In line with previous studies, personal interests are the most influential factors in students' career choices (Afzal Humayon, 2018; Anojan, 2013).

There are several limitations to the study. First, participants did not distribute uniformly; in particular, female participants outnumbered male participants by a proportion of approximately four times which might lead to inaccurate results. We encourage future researchers to consider the findings of this study. Second, the current research has not investigated other factors that may predict career choice in social work graduates (e.g., societal factors and socio-demographic factors), future research endeavours might examine these factors.

Despite some limitations, the findings have significant theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the findings may provide a clearer understanding of how social work graduates' environmental, interpersonal, institutional, external, and internal factors influence career choice. It contributes to advancing current knowledge on the models developed to measure career choice. The findings have many practical implications. Career guidance influences choosing a career that social work graduates reported. Hence, university administrators need to design and develop career guidance programs more broadly. Career guidance assists individuals to recognize their abilities, competencies, and national requirements to sort out the personal relevance of the educational and career options available. Besides, training and equipping of career guidance counselors should be recommended in universities to enhance their competence in assisting the students in career self-awareness and decision making.

5. Conclusion

Career choice is one of the most crucial decisions for graduating students, especially social work graduates. It is essential to investigate career choice among social work graduates so that university administrators can provide career guidance programs properly. The results show associations between environmental, interpersonal, institutional, external, internal factors and career choice. The

present study has found that information about internal and external factors acting as predictors of career choice, in particular, external factors are more affected career choice than internal factors. The findings suggest that career guidance is critical in choosing a career among social work graduates. It is noted that university administrators need to develop career guidance and counseling programs in universities. This is the first research conducting the association between environmental, interpersonal, institutional, external, internal factors and career choice among social work graduates in Vietnam, contributing additional information to future similar studies based on our findings.

6. Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank the Social Worker student respondents from Vietnam who took the time to participate in this study.

7. Funding

This research is funded by the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training under grant number B2021-DNA-05.

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