The effectiveness of sources of support in career decision-making: A two-year follow-up☆

Dana Vertsberger [1], Itamar Gati *

Department of Psychology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem 91905, Israel

ABSTRACT

Making career decisions is often difficult and challenging, and one way to advance in the process is to seek help. The present research focused on the various sources of support young adults tend to look for when making their career decision and the factors that affect their actual use of these sources. Study 1 elicited the *self-reported help-seeking behavior* and the *Career Decision-Making Profile* (*CDMP*) from 1071 young adults (ages 18–35) who had already chosen their major(s) at a university. The young adults used sources that were easily accessible, even when they were perceived as being less effective. Additionally, those with less career decision-making adaptability, as derived from the *CDMP*, tended to seek help more often. Study 2, a two-year follow-up of 296 young adults who participated in Study 1, revealed that getting help reduced the likelihood of changing one's major.

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Choosing one's future career path can be a difficult and stressful process, due to the very large number of possibilities that are open to young adults and the many considerations that need to be taken into account (Gati, 1986; Multon, Heppner, Gysbers, Zook, & Ellis-Kalton, 2001; Sauermann, 2005). It is important to invest effort in making a career decision since one's career plays a vital role in one's economic, social and emotional well-being (Blustein, 2006, 2008; Fouad & Bynner, 2008; Hartung, 2011; Kelly & Hall, 1992; Rochlen, 2001; Uthayakumar, Schimmack, Hartung, & Rogers, 2010). Therefore, it is not surprising that young adults are concerned about their future careers and that many encounter difficulties in making this decision (Gati, Krausz, & Osipow, 1996; Nurmi, 1991). In Israel, another aspect that adds difficulties to an already challenging process is the mandatory military service after high school, which leads many adolescents to put off any consideration of their future career. This military service is often followed by temporary work and then a backpack trip abroad lasting for several months. Thus, many Israeli young adults begin thinking about their future career only around age 22–24 (depending on their gender and the length of their stay abroad), when they are not in an educational or vocational setting that might help them in their career decision-making.

According to social-cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994), self-efficacy (beliefs about one's ability to organize and execute courses of action) leads to developing favorable outcome expectations, and both self-efficacy and outcome expectation reinforce and foster career interests and career goals. In turn, these interests and goals lead to career planning and career exploration, which are necessary for making progress towards one's goals. Super (1990) described exploration as seeking data that has been identified as important in advancing in career decision-making, evaluating old and new data, locating alternative lines of action and considering their various possible outcomes and probabilities. While some individuals are capable of doing this by themselves

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* Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem 91905, Israel. Fax: +972 2 5882084.
E-mail addresses: danaverts@gmail.com (D. Vertsberger), itamar.gati@huji.ac.il (I. Gati).
[1] Tel.: +972 54 5480358; fax: +972 2 5882084.

without any apparent problem, many others face difficulties during in making a career decision (Amir & Gati, 2006). In this paper we focused on an important behavioral aspect of career planning and exploration – seeking the help and support of others when needed, especially when encountering difficulties in making a career decision (Lipshits-Braziler, Gati, & Tatar, 2015; Vertsberger & Gati, in press).

1. Help-seeking

Help-seeking is a way to cope with one's difficulties by using some source(s) of support, depending on one's needs and type of difficulties. One can seek emotional support, such as encouragement or a sympathetic ear, or look for relevant information (Offer & Schonert-Reichl, 1992; Tatar, 2009). What motivates individuals to seek help is the realization that they are facing a challenge they cannot cope with on their own, and therefore need to find external support (Gross & McMullen, 1983; Nadler, 1991). To actually get help, they have to know what types of support are available, and how each one can help them.

When making a career decision, young adults can approach professional sources of support, such as vocational or career counseling psychologists, career or guidance counselors, and career counseling centers. These professional sources often diagnose the basis of the client's career problems (e.g., cognitive, involving difficulties in collecting and processing information; or emotional, stemming from personality-related factors) and provide appropriate help (Gati, Amir, & Landman, 2010a). Additionally, young adults can seek help from a variety of informal sources of support, such as parents and friends or people working in the occupation they are considering. Nowadays they can also search for information using a variety of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) based sources, such as websites, on-line forums, and on-line questionnaires. Previous research has found that individual career counseling is the most effective and efficient type of support for facilitating career decisions, and computer interventions are the most cost-effective (Whiston, Sexton, & Lasoff, 1998).

The majority of research into help-seeking has focused on emotional problems such as stress and distress, and has consistently found a gap between individuals' need for help and their intention to seek professional help (Cheng, McDermott, & Lopez, 2015; Grinstein-Weiss, Fishman, & Eisikovits, 2005; Raviv, Raviv, Vago-Gefen, & Fink, 2009; Raviv, Sills, Raviv, & Wilansky, 2000). It appears that young adults facing emotional problems or difficulties prefer to seek help from family and friends rather than from professionals (Tishby et al., 2001). This may be partly due to their discomfort with self-disclosure (Vogel & Wester, 2003), the stigma associated with seeking professional help (Cheng et al., 2015; Komiya, Good, & Sherrod, 2000; Tatar, 2009; Timlin-Scalera, Ponterotto, Blumberg, & Jackson, 2003), and their fear of lack of confidentiality (West, Kayser, Overton, & Saltmarsh, 1991). Research concerning the use (or underuse) of professional support for difficulties during the career decision-making process found that negative attitudes towards career counseling, such as stigmas about career counseling, could lead to devaluation of the utility of career services and deter young adults from seeking help from professionals (Ludwikowski, Vogel, & Armstrong, 2009). Julien (1999) showed that young adults do not always know where to get help in making a career decision. However, little is known about whether or how young adults actually use the variety of sources of support available nowadays, in the era of the Internet, which sources of support they use, and what considerations affect their help-seeking. A better understanding of these issues may help in understanding how to encourage young adults to use professional counseling when needed.

2. STUDY 1: Help-seeking and career decision-making profiles

Among those who do seek assistance, some young adults approach professional career counselors for guidance and advice, while others look for self-help tools to assist them in making their career decisions (Gati, Saka, & Krausz, 2001; Sagiv, 1999). An important matter to take into account in the counseling process is the way the young adult approaches career decision-making, namely one's career decision-making *style* (Harren, 1979; Kelly & Gunn, 2006; Phillips & Pazienza, 1988) or *profile* (Gati, Gadassi, & Mashiah-Cohen, 2012; Gati, Landman, Davidovitch, Asulin-Peretz, & Gadassi, 2010b; Gati et al., 2010a).

On the assumption that every individual has a unique career decision-making pattern that comprises personality-related and situational characteristics, Gati et al. (2010a, 2010b) proposed a multidimensional model, describing the way individuals make career decisions in terms of their career decision-making profile (*CDMP*). The model has 12 dimensions, which were derived from earlier conceptualizations of decision-making styles. Each dimension represents a continuum on a bipolar scale: *Information processing* (analytic vs. holistic), *Information gathering* (comprehensive vs. minimal), *Locus of control* (internal vs. external), *Effort invested in the process* (much vs. little), *Procrastination* (high vs. low), *Speed of making the final decision* (fast vs. slow), *Consulting with others* (frequent vs. rare), *Dependence on others* (high vs. low), *Desire to please others* (high vs. low), *Aspiration for an ideal occupation* (high vs. low), *Willingness to compromise* (high vs. low) and *Using intuition* (high vs. low). Another characteristic that can be derived from the *CDMP* is the individuals' *career-decision adaptability (CDA,* Gati & Levin, 2012*)*. *CDA* is one's ability to make career decisions after effectively processing the relevant information, and without unnecessary delays in beginning or ending the process (Gadassi, Gati, & Dayan, 2012). Indeed, Gati et al. (2010a, 2010b) suggested that one pole of some dimensions is often more adaptive for decision making than the other. Based on findings that for six of the 12 *CDMP* dimensions one of the poles is indeed more adaptive (Gadassi et al., 2012), Gati and Levin (2012) derived an indicator of *CDA* comprised of these six dimensions: comprehensive *information gathering*, internal *locus of control*, low *procrastination*, fast *speed of making the final decision*, low *dependence on others*, and low *desire to please others*.

It is likely that individuals with a certain career decision-making profile are more inclined than others to seek help when making such decisions. For example, a positive association was found between dependence on others and help-seeking (Bornstein, 1992; Bornstein, Krukonis, Manning, Mastrosimone, & Rossner, 1993; Shilkret & Masling, 1981). Highly dependent individuals seek more