

# **FAMILY INTERACTION PATTERNS: RELATION TO AND CAREER BELIEFS AND CAREER MATURITY OF COLLEGE STUDENTS**

**Melati binti Sumari, Ph.D**

Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling  
Faculty of Education  
University of Malaya

**Gerard J. Louis**

HELP University College

**Megan Ng Swee Sin**

Taylors University College

A considerable amount of research has been done especially in the United States, on the influence of family interactions patterns in career development of college students. Bratcher (1982) was the first to suggest the application of family systems theory in the area of career development. Bratcher suggested that family rules, homeostasis, and boundaries were the most influential systemic issues that would likely affect career choice. The author believes that family rules and myths play an important role in predicting family members' behaviors. Children who become the object of family rules and myths appear to have a lower level of differentiation of self, resulting in an impaired life. Individuals raised in a healthy and functional family will be well individuated, more resilient, and develop personal autonomy. This certainly will affect their career development because members of a healthy family will have more flexibility in choosing a career and knowing what they want from a career in contrast to those who live in a family with rigid boundaries, rules, and myths (Bratcher, 1982).

Zingaro (1983) proposed that a lack of differentiation from parents or enmeshment contributes to career decision-making problems. People with low levels of differentiation from the family may not be able to differentiate their own expectations from their family's expectations. This idea was extended by Lopez and Andrew (1987) who theorized that the quality of family relationship dynamics and the level of family functioning influenced vocational decisions. Thus, it is impossible to understand individuals without taking into account their social system, which is usually the family. Again, the interrelationship between psychological separation, personal identity achievement, and career decision were emphasized for young adults and their families.

## **Objectives**

Using family system perspective as a foundation, the present study was conducted to investigate the relationship among college students' family interaction patterns, and their career maturity. The study is also aimed at identifying the differences in career maturity of students in a private college and students in a public university.

## **Research Questions**

Consistent with the objectives of the study, the study is aimed at answering the following research questions:

1. Are there relationships between family interaction patterns and career maturity of college students?
2. Are there differences in the total score of family interaction patterns and career maturity between students in public and private higher education institutions?



## Methodology

### *Research Design*

This study used a quantitative approach. The instruments used are a demographic information sheet, the Family Environment Scale (FIS; Moos & Moose, 1990) and Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale-Short Form (CDSE-SF; Betz & Taylor, 2000). These instruments were originally developed by U.S. researchers in English. However, both instruments have been used with non-English populations after being translated into several languages.

### *Measures*

*The Family Environment Scale-Form R (FES-Form R; Moos & Moose, 1990).* The FES is a 90-item, self-report questionnaire to assess an individual's perception of the social climate in the family of origin along three dimensions: (1) Relationship; (2) Personal growth; and (3) System maintenance. The relationship dimension assesses the degree to which the family members are perceived to be involved with each other and how openly positive and negative feelings are expressed. The personal growth dimension reflects the family-of-origin's goal orientation or ways the family-of-origin encourage or inhibit personal growth. The system maintenance dimensions reflect the degree to which the family emphasizes clear organization, control, structure, rules, and procedures.

*The Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale (CDSE-SF).* The CDSE-SF is a 25-item instrument used to assess an individual's degree of confidence in being able to complete career decision making tasks. The subscales of the CDSE-SF include: Self-Appraisal, Gathering Occupational Information, Goal Selection, Making Plans, and Problem Solving. Responses are made on a 5-point scale from 1 (*No confidence at all*) to 5 (*Complete confidence*).

*Demographic information sheet.* Students completed a 7-item demographic questionnaire that assessed their gender, race, academic major, who influences their career choices, type of institutions, fathers' and mothers' educational backgrounds, and type of residential settings.

### *Subjects and Setting of the Study*

A number of 274 volunteer undergraduate students were drawn from one public university and two private universities located in Klang Valley, Malaysia. Of that number, 128 (46.7%) were students from a public higher education institution and 146 (53.3%) were from two private higher education institutions.

Of the 274 participants, 22.3% ( $n = 61$ ) were males and 77.7% ( $n = 213$ ) were females. Regarding ethnicity, 32.1% ( $n = 88$ ) were Malays, 48.5% ( $n = 133$ ) were Chinese, 14.2% ( $n = 39$ ) were Indians, while the remaining 5.1% ( $n = 14$ ) were from other races. Regarding participants' field of study, the majority of participants are in social science based major (54.4%,  $n = 147$ ) and only 33.9% ( $n = 93$ ) were in science major. A small percentage (2.6%,  $n = 7$ ) were students pursuing the A-Level program.

### *Data Analysis*

Relationships among variables were measured using the Pearson product moment correlations and simultaneous regression analyses, while the differences among variables were measured using the analysis of variance. Independent *t*-test was used to examine differences between groups. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the sample.



## Findings

This study shows there are relationships, whether positive or negative, between family environment and confidence in making career decisions. Even though the relationships are small, they may play significant roles in students' career self-efficacy. We also found that all family environment subscales made a very small contribution to career decision-making self-efficacy subscales (each contributed less than 10% of the variance in CDSE subscale). Overall, the findings suggest that perceived quality of family environment especially in terms of control, participation in social activities, and emphasis on moral and religious values could predict students' confidence level in career decision-making.

The study found no significant differences between students in public and private higher education institutions in their family environment scores and career decision self-efficacy score ( $p < .05$ ). This indicates that students in both types of institutions share the same perspectives regarding their family interaction patterns and they also have the same confidence level in career decision-making.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Overall, the findings suggest that perceived quality of family environment especially in terms of control, participation in social activities, and emphasis on moral and religious values could predict students' confidence level in career decision-making. The small relationships between the two variables also suggest that factors other than family environment variables may also contribute to individual differences in career decision-making self-efficacy. The analysis also indicates that the contribution of family environment dimensions on career decision-making self-efficacy is small.

Several questions remain open: Does each item measure family environment from a Malaysian perspective? One possibility is that the particular instrument (FES) may not be suitable for Malaysian culture. As revealed in the present study, the reliability coefficient of the FES is only .43 in comparison to the reliability of the CDSE, which is .88. In other words, the FES may not be a good measure of family environment for Malaysians. Obviously, an examination of the psychometric properties of the FES in the Malaysian context is an important step to determine the cultural validity of the FES. Once valid measures are established, the attempt to incorporate cultural context into career development can continue. Finally, although the findings suggest that family interaction patterns contribute to career decision-making self-efficacy, other important family variables that may also play an important role are not addressed by the FES. Examples of family variables that might be considered in future studies are parental marital status, standard of living, and attachment and relationships with siblings and extended family members, family composition, and birth order. These variables are considered important to Malaysian families because they can affect the way a family functions.

## References

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