



Vocational Preferences and Career Awareness Among Psychology Students in Kerala

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ABSTRACT

In India, the choice of course of study at the Higher Education level, and thereby even a career, is not a student's exclusive prerogative. The Society being largely patriarchal, aptitude or choice of an individual often take a backseat and factors like parental pressure, societal trends, peer influence, etc become more important in such decisions. Despite contrary advice from experts, the trend usually perpetuates, especially among the middle-class. The present paper is an exploration of career choices and awareness among students undertaking graduate study in Psychology in Kerala. Results show that being a psychologist is the primary aim for majority. There is a lack of awareness regarding other fields of practice. Students' perceptions regarding various facets of practice of psychology are also assessed. Implications are discussed.

KEYWORDS : Vocational Preferences, Career Awareness, College, Students

Studies have been conducted among research scholars in the field of Psychology in India to assess professional choices and attitudes (Singh & Dalal, 1988). But the students in the early stages of studies in psychology have not been covered systematically. The present work is a part of an inquiry that is aimed at finding the attitude of students of Psychology, mainly undergraduate students, towards the profession, and thus predicting the prospects

of those students in becoming successful and dedicated professionals. It also probes the career preferences of psychology students and covers such aspects as their insight about prospective beneficiaries of psychological services, the reason for choosing psychology as a potential career, etc.

The key research questions raised in this work are the following:

- Which career option is the most sought-about for Psychology Students?
- Which practice field of psychology is of interest to the students?
- What is the students' perception regarding the principal beneficiaries of psychological services?
- How did the students choose psychology as a study/career option?
- Is there any gender difference in the students' choices?

Method

Population and sample

Kerala has one of the highest number of students of psychology at various levels,

in almost all states. All the affiliating universities in the state offer undergraduate, post graduate and research courses in psychology through affiliated colleges and teaching and research departments. Majority of the students pursuing these courses are girls. The study concentrated in the Malabar region. The sample of the present study consisted of 290 students of psychology from seven different institutions affiliated with Calicut University and Kannur University. There were 24 male students and 266 female students. A majority of 283 students were studying the BSc (UG) programme and 7 were studying the MSc programme.

Tool and Technique

Data was collected through survey method, with the help of a questionnaire prepared for the specific purpose of this work. The responses were tabulated and analysed with the help of statistical software. Since the collected data was nominal in nature, no assumptions have been made regarding the normality of the collected data. Percentage analysis was

conducted to delineate the. Chi-squared (χ^2) test of Independence was carried out to find the association between gender and the various responses and choices of the students. Since the number of male students was small, there were a number of cells in each test with ex-

pected frequencies less than 5. Such a situation renders the obtained chi-squared values to be inflated. Because of this, Fisher's Exact test (Fisher, 1922) was employed to estimate the association of the variables. To assess the strength of the associations, Cramer's V test was also employed for the selected cross tabulations. **Research Design**

The present study is descriptive in nature. Exploration of the vocational preferences of students of psychology was the primary aim. Research questions were formulated to suit the design of the study. Quantitative method was used for data collection and analysis.

Results and Discussion

The demographic profile of the respondents is given in table 1.

Table 1
Demographic profile of the students

	Gender		Course	
	Male	Female	B Sc	M Sc
Frequency	24	266	283	7
Percentage	8.3	91.7	97.6	2.4

Female students are the majority in the sample. This is true with the general trend in Kerala where girls are found to be the majority of those studying the various courses in psychology.

Table 2
Career Choice

Career Choice	Frequency	Percent
Teacher	33	11.4
Psychologist	214	73.8
Researcher	21	7.2
Other	22	7.6
Total	290	100

Some noteworthy observations can be made from these. Being a psychologist is the primary career goal for the vast majority of students - 73.8 percent. 11.4 percent want to be a teacher and the proportion of those aspiring to be researchers is even less than those who have

opted for other careers.

Associations between the measures and the two discriminatory factors – gender and course of study were examined with the help of Chi-square test of independence. The strength of associations, wherever present, were studied with Cramer's V test. Since the categories of Male and M Sc contained relatively smaller number of observations, Pearson's chi-square could give inflated values and therefore could not be considered useful. Fisher's Exact test (Fisher, 1922) was used instead.

Table 3
Chi square test for independence: Career Goal

Gender	Counts	Career Goal				Fisher's Exact	Cramer's V
		Teacher	Psychologist	Researcher	Other		
Male	Observed	3	13	5	3	8.124*	.175*
	Expected	2.7	17.7	1.7	1.8		
Female	Observed	30	201	16	19		
	Expected	30.3	196.3	19.3	20.2		

*- Significant at .05 level. NS - Not Significant

The Standardised Residual for the *male x researcher* cell was 2.5, indicating that there is a significant gender difference in whether one would opt to be a researcher or not. Boys are more likely to say that their career goal is to become a researcher. Cramer's V test indicated a strong association as well. No other significant associations were noted here.

Table 4
Chi square test for independence: Favourite Field

Gender	Counts	Favourite Field				Fisher's Exact	Cramer's V
		Clinical Psychology	Counselling	OB/HRD	Others		
Male	Observed	4	7	8	5	21.817*	.308*
	Expected	11.9	7.3	2.0	2.8		
Female	Observed	140	81	16	29		
	Expected	132.1	80.7	22.0	31.2		

*- Significant at .05 level. NS - Not Significant

It can be noted from table 4 that both Fisher's Exact test and Cramer's V have given significant results. An examination of standardised residuals gave a positive value of 4.3 to the *Male x OB/HRD* cell and a negative value of 2.3 to the *Male x Clinical Psychology* cell, both significant. Thus it can be inferred that boys tend to select OB/HRD as a favourite field more than girls whereas they are not likely to select Clinical Psychology as favourite.

Table 5
Chi square test for independence: Interesting Area

Gender	Counts	Interesting Area					Fisher's Exact	Cramer's V
		Hypnotic therapy	Counseling	Psychotherapies	School Counselling	Others		

Male	Observed	9	6	6	3	0	1.961 ^{NS}	.081 ^{NS}
	Expected	6.4	6.4	6.9	4.2	0.2		
Female	Observed	68	71	77	48	2		
	Expected	70.6	70.6	76.1	46.8	1.8		

*- Significant at .05 level. NS - Not Significant

No significant associations were seen in the interesting area item. The choices are evenly spread out along areas and across gender.

Table 6
Chi square test for independence: Who is in Need of Psychological Help

Gender	Counts	Who is in Need of Psychological Help					Fisher's Exact	Cramer's V
		Children	Adolescents	Employees	Elders	Others		
Male	Observed	4	15	3	1	1	7.107 ^{NS}	.177 ^{NS}
	Expected	6.8	13.9	0.7	1.7	0.9		
Female	Observed	78	153	6	19	10		
	Expected	75.2	154.1	8.3	18.3	10.1		

*- Significant at .05 level. NS - Not Significant

No gender differences were noted in the perception of potential beneficiaries of psychological services. No visible trend was visible, possibly because the respondents were mainly undergraduate students of psychology, who have not had much exposure to the actual field situation.

Table 7
Chi square test for independence: How did you choose psychology

Gender	Counts	How did you choose psychology				Fisher's Exact	Cramer's V
		Friends	Relatives	Own Interest	Teachers		
Male	Observed	2	1	21	0	2.533 ^{NS}	.103 ^{NS}
	Expected	0.7	1.6	21.2	0.5		
Female	Observed	7	18	235	6		
	Expected	8.3	17.4	234.8	5.5		

*- Significant at .05 level. NS - Not Significant

The majority of both male and female students have chosen psychology as a course of study by their own interest. This is particularly important in sustaining the studies and later becoming functioning professionals.

Table 8
Chi square test for independence: Are you happy in studying psychology.

Gender	Counts	Are you happy in studying psychology			Fisher's Exact	Cramer's V
		No	Yes	Undecided		

Male	Ob-served	5	18	1	12.514*	.254*
	Expect-ed	1.0	22.3	0.7		
Female	Ob-served	7	252	7		
	Expect-ed	11.0	247.7	7.3		

*- Significant at .05 level. NS - Not Significant

There is a significant gender difference in satisfaction with the studies in psychology. From an examination of the standardised residuals, it can be seen that more number of boys are not happy with their studies in psychology.

Conclusion

Becoming a Psychologist is the first preference for more than 73 per-cent students, followed by about 12 percent who want to be teachers. Clinical Psychology and Counselling are the favoured fields for most students. There is a glaring lack of awareness about the job avenues and career choices in the field of HR/OB. The trend of students not being keen to become researchers does not augur well for the field of social science research. Research is not generally considered a good career option in India (NDTV, 2014). There have to be steps to change this. Boys are more likely than girls to opt for a career in OB/HRD. Clinical psychology is not a field of choice for most boys. Boys were more dissatisfied than girls with their studies in psychology. Earlier, it has been pointed out that Indian college students show a fatalistic and passive attitude in terms of academic motivation (Beswick & Rao, 1976). Any shortcoming in such areas has to be delineated and remedied. Another interesting finding is that a significantly high proportion of the students surveyed have selected their course in psychology by own choice. This is a marked departure from some earlier research done among management students where family had an important influence on career choice (Agarwala, 2008)

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