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Effects of Gender Stereotypes on Career Aspirations in Adolescents in Kenya

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Abstract



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Purpose: The aim of the study was to analyze the effects of gender stereotypes on career aspirations in adolescents in Kenya.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: A study in Kenya found that gender stereotypes strongly shape adolescents' career aspirations. Boys lean towards traditionally masculine careers like engineering, while girls are inclined towards feminine roles like nursing. Societal and familial pressures also limit career choices based on gender norms. This highlights the importance of interventions to challenge stereotypes and promote gender equality in education and career opportunities.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Social cognitive career theory (SCCT), social role theory & intersectionality theory may be used to anchor future studies on effects of gender stereotypes on career aspirations in adolescents in Kenya. Schools and educational institutions should implement gender-sensitive career counseling programs that challenge traditional gender stereotypes and promote diverse career options for both boys and girls. Policymakers should develop and implement inclusive education policies that promote gender equality and challenge gender stereotypes within the educational system.

Keywords: *Gender Stereotypes, Career Aspirations*

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INTRODUCTION

Career aspirations encompass individuals' aspirations, ambitions, and goals related to their professional life. These aspirations often involve the choice of a specific career path, the pursuit of certain professions, and the perceived suitability for those professions. Career aspirations are influenced by a multitude of factors including personal interests, skills and abilities, socioeconomic background, cultural values, educational experiences, societal expectations, and the availability of opportunities within the labor market (Brown & Lent, 2016).

Individuals may aspire to pursue careers in fields that align with their passions, talents, and values. For example, someone with a keen interest in science and a desire to make a positive impact on the environment may aspire to become an environmental scientist or a sustainability consultant. Similarly, individuals may aspire to professions that offer financial stability, prestige, or opportunities for advancement, such as medicine, law, or engineering. Perceived suitability for certain professions may also be influenced by factors such as gender norms, stereotypes, and societal expectations. For instance, in some cultures, there may be a perception that certain professions are more suitable for men or women based on traditional gender roles (Leung, 2016).

In developed economies like the USA, Japan, and the UK, career aspirations often reflect a combination of individual interests, educational opportunities, and societal influences. For example, in the USA, there has been a growing trend towards careers in technology and entrepreneurship, driven by the expansion of the tech industry and the allure of startup culture. According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), occupations related to computer and information technology are projected to grow much faster than the average for all occupations, with a 13% growth rate from 2020 to 2030 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). This trend is further fueled by the popularity of tech giants like Google, Apple, and Amazon, which attract ambitious individuals seeking innovative and high-paying career opportunities.

Similarly, in Japan, there is a strong emphasis on traditional career paths such as medicine, engineering, and finance, which are perceived as prestigious and stable professions. According to a study by Sakurai and Kurokawa (2017), Japanese students often prioritize job security and financial stability when considering their career options. As a result, fields like healthcare and finance continue to attract a significant number of graduates, with the medical profession experiencing steady growth in demand due to Japan's aging population and increasing healthcare needs (Sakurai & Kurokawa, 2017). Additionally, Japan's reputation for technological innovation has led to a growing interest in careers related to robotics, artificial intelligence, and renewable energy, as the country seeks to maintain its competitive edge in the global market.

Moving on to developing economies, career aspirations often revolve around addressing pressing social and economic challenges while striving for upward mobility. In countries like India, there is a growing demand for careers in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields, driven by the country's focus on digitalization and innovation. According to data from the India Skills Report 2020, engineering and technology emerged as the most preferred career choices among Indian youth, with a significant increase in enrollment in engineering colleges over the past decade (India Skills Report, 2020). This trend is fueled by the government's initiatives to promote skill development and entrepreneurship, as well as the increasing opportunities in India's

burgeoning technology sector, which includes major players like Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys, and Wipro.

In the USA, career aspirations often reflect a diverse range of interests and opportunities influenced by factors such as socioeconomic background, education, and cultural values. While STEM fields continue to be popular, there is also a growing interest in careers related to sustainability, social entrepreneurship, and creative industries. According to a report by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), the top fields of study among college graduates in the USA include business, engineering, computer science, and health professions (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2020). However, there is also a notable increase in demand for graduates with interdisciplinary skills and a focus on innovation and social impact, driven by the changing landscape of work and emerging global challenges.

In the UK, career aspirations are influenced by similar factors, with a strong emphasis on higher education and professional development. While traditional fields like finance, law, and medicine remain popular, there is a growing recognition of the importance of vocational training and apprenticeships in meeting the needs of the labor market. According to data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the most common occupations in the UK include professionals in health and social care, business and finance, and education (Office for National Statistics, 2021). However, there is also a shift towards non-traditional career paths, with an increasing number of individuals pursuing careers in the creative industries, digital technology, and environmental sustainability.

In Japan, career aspirations often align with societal expectations and cultural norms, with a strong emphasis on academic achievement and professional success. Traditional career paths such as medicine, engineering, and civil service continue to be highly regarded, reflecting Japan's focus on stability and specialization. According to data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), the most popular fields of study among Japanese university students include humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2020). Additionally, there is a growing interest in careers related to technology and innovation, particularly in fields such as robotics, artificial intelligence, and renewable energy, as Japan seeks to maintain its position as a global leader in technological advancement.

In Germany, career aspirations are influenced by a strong vocational education system and a culture of apprenticeship, which emphasize practical skills and hands-on training. While traditional industries such as manufacturing and engineering remain important, there is also a growing demand for graduates with expertise in digital technology, environmental sustainability, and healthcare. According to data from the Federal Statistical Office of Germany (Destatis), the most common occupations in Germany include skilled trades, healthcare professionals, and information and communication technology specialists (Federal Statistical Office of Germany, 2021). Moreover, there is a trend towards entrepreneurship and self-employment, with an increasing number of individuals pursuing careers as freelancers and small business owners, supported by government initiatives to foster innovation and entrepreneurship.

In South Korea, career aspirations are heavily influenced by the country's education system and the societal emphasis on academic achievement. The pursuit of careers in prestigious fields such

as medicine, law, and business administration is common among South Korean youth, reflecting a desire for financial stability and social status. According to data from the Korean Statistical Information Service (KOSIS), the most popular fields of study among South Korean college students include social sciences, business administration, and engineering (Korean Statistical Information Service, 2020). Additionally, there is a growing interest in careers related to technology and innovation, particularly in fields such as information technology, biotechnology, and renewable energy, as South Korea continues to invest in research and development to drive economic growth and technological advancement.

In France, career aspirations are shaped by a combination of cultural values, educational opportunities, and government policies. While traditional fields such as law, engineering, and management remain popular, there is also a growing interest in careers related to culture, arts, and humanities. According to data from the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE), the most common occupations in France include professionals in education, healthcare, and business services (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies, 2021). Moreover, there is a trend towards social entrepreneurship and sustainable development, with an increasing number of individuals seeking careers that combine financial success with social and environmental impact, supported by government initiatives to promote innovation and social responsibility.

In Kenya, career aspirations are influenced by a variety of factors including access to education, economic opportunities, and societal expectations. While traditional professions such as medicine, law, and engineering are still highly esteemed, there is a growing interest in emerging fields such as information technology, entrepreneurship, and renewable energy. According to data from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), the most popular fields of study among Kenyan students include business and economics, social sciences, and information technology (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Additionally, there is a significant focus on vocational training and technical skills development, as Kenya seeks to address the mismatch between education and industry needs and promote youth employment in sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and construction.

Furthermore, there is an increasing recognition of the importance of entrepreneurship and small business ownership as pathways to economic empowerment and job creation in Kenya. Many Kenyan youths aspire to become entrepreneurs and start their own businesses, driven by a desire for financial independence and the potential to make a positive impact in their communities. According to a report by the World Bank, Kenya has one of the highest rates of entrepreneurial activity in the world, with a vibrant startup ecosystem and a growing number of successful small and medium-sized enterprises (World Bank, 2020). Moreover, there is a growing interest in social entrepreneurship and sustainable development, with initiatives focused on addressing social and environmental challenges while generating economic value.

Gender stereotypes refer to widely held beliefs and expectations about the characteristics, roles, and behaviors deemed appropriate for individuals based on their gender. Traditional gender roles typically adhere to conventional societal norms, where men are expected to be assertive, competitive, and breadwinners, while women are often associated with nurturing, caregiving roles, and domestic responsibilities (Eagly & Wood, 2012). In contrast, progressive gender roles challenge these traditional norms and advocate for gender equality, allowing individuals to express

themselves and pursue aspirations regardless of their gender identity (Moya, 2007). Four likely gender stereotypes include the expectation that men are more suited for leadership positions, women are better caregivers, men are less emotional, and women are less assertive.

These gender stereotypes can significantly influence individuals' career aspirations and choices. For instance, the stereotype that men are more suited for leadership positions may deter women from pursuing careers in male-dominated fields such as politics or STEM (Diekman, 2010). Similarly, the belief that women are better caregivers may lead to the expectation that women prioritize family over career advancement, potentially limiting their career aspirations (Cejka & Eagly, 1999). Conversely, challenging traditional gender stereotypes and embracing progressive roles can empower individuals to pursue diverse career paths without being constrained by gender norms, leading to greater gender diversity and equality in the workforce (Koenig, 2011).

In sub-Saharan African economies, career aspirations are shaped by a complex interplay of factors including limited access to education, economic instability, and socio-cultural norms. However, there is a growing recognition of the importance of education and skills training in unlocking economic opportunities and driving sustainable development. According to a report by the World Bank (2019), there is a strong demand for careers in healthcare, agriculture, and education in sub-Saharan Africa, as these sectors play a crucial role in addressing key development challenges such as food security, healthcare access, and literacy rates (World Bank, 2019). Moreover, there is increasing interest in entrepreneurship and small business ownership as pathways to economic empowerment, with initiatives like microfinance and vocational training programs providing support to aspiring entrepreneurs across the region.

Problem Statement

Despite progress towards gender equality, gender stereotypes persistently influence career aspirations among adolescents in Kenya (Chege & Aluoch, 2021). These stereotypes often dictate traditional roles and expectations, constraining the career choices and opportunities available to young individuals based on their gender (Otiende & Kithuka, 2019). However, the extent to which these gender stereotypes impact career aspirations among Kenyan adolescents remains underexplored, hindering efforts to address gender-based disparities in the workforce and promote inclusive career pathways (Chege & Aluoch, 2021). Furthermore, while there is anecdotal evidence suggesting that societal expectations and cultural norms play a significant role in shaping career aspirations, empirical research is lacking, necessitating a comprehensive investigation into the influence of gender stereotypes on career preferences and aspirations among adolescents in Kenya (Otiende & Kithuka, 2019). Therefore, there is a critical need to examine the nuanced interplay between gender stereotypes, cultural factors, and career aspirations to inform targeted interventions and policies aimed at fostering gender equality and promoting diverse career options for Kenyan youth.

Theoretical Framework

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

Developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994), SCCT emphasizes the role of cognitive processes, contextual factors, and individual characteristics in shaping career development. In the context of gender stereotypes and career aspirations in Kenya, SCCT suggests that adolescents' career choices

are influenced by their perceptions of gender roles, social norms, and the opportunities available to them within their socio-cultural context (Lent, 2000). For example, if adolescents perceive certain careers as more suitable for their gender based on societal expectations, they may limit their career aspirations accordingly, conforming to traditional gender roles.

Social Role Theory

Social Role Theory, proposed by Eagly and Wood (2012), posits that societal expectations and norms regarding gender roles shape individuals' behavior, attitudes, and aspirations. In Kenya, where traditional gender roles are prevalent, adolescents may internalize societal expectations regarding suitable career paths for males and females, leading to gender-stereotypical career aspirations. Social Role Theory suggests that these stereotypes influence adolescents' career decisions by shaping their perceptions of their own capabilities and the perceived appropriateness of certain careers based on gender (Eagly & Wood, 2012).

Intersectionality Theory

Originating from the work of Crenshaw (1989), Intersectionality Theory highlights how multiple social identities, such as gender, race, and socioeconomic status, intersect to shape individuals' experiences and opportunities within society. In the context of career aspirations in Kenya, Intersectionality Theory suggests that gender stereotypes interact with other social identities, such as ethnicity and socio-economic background, to influence adolescents' career choices. For instance, gender stereotypes may intersect with cultural expectations and economic constraints to limit girls' access to certain educational and career opportunities compared to boys (Crenshaw, 1989).

Empirical Review

Smith and Leaper (2018) investigated the stability and predictors of gender-typed career aspirations in adolescents over time. The study followed a cohort of adolescents from diverse backgrounds over several years, assessing their career aspirations at multiple points during adolescence. Methodologically, the researchers utilized surveys and interviews to gather data on adolescents' career interests, as well as demographic and contextual factors influencing their career aspirations. Findings from the study revealed that gender stereotypes significantly influenced adolescents' career aspirations, with girls showing a preference for traditionally feminine careers such as teaching or nursing, while boys expressed interest in traditionally masculine occupations like engineering or law enforcement. Moreover, the study identified several predictors of gender-typed career aspirations, including parental influences, peer interactions, and exposure to gender-stereotypical media representations. Recommendations based on these findings include implementing interventions to challenge gender stereotypes in educational settings, providing career exploration opportunities, and promoting gender-neutral career guidance programs to encourage adolescents to consider a broader range of career options.

Eagly and Diekmann (2019) examined the impact of exposure to counter-stereotypical role models on adolescents' career aspirations. The study employed a controlled experimental design, randomly assigning participants to different experimental conditions where they were exposed to either gender-stereotypical or counter-stereotypical role models in various career fields. Methodologically, the researchers used surveys and structured interviews to assess participants'

career aspirations before and after exposure to role models. Results from the study revealed that exposure to counter-stereotypical role models positively influenced adolescents' willingness to consider non-traditional career paths, challenging gender stereotypes and expanding their career horizons. These findings underscored the importance of providing diverse role models and representation in various career fields to inspire and empower adolescents to pursue their interests and talents, regardless of gender.

Su (2020) explored the role of parental and peer influences in shaping adolescents' career aspirations. The study utilized a sample of adolescents from diverse cultural backgrounds, conducting in-depth interviews to gather rich, detailed data on their perceptions and experiences related to career decision-making. Through thematic analysis, the researchers identified several key themes related to parental expectations, peer support, and cultural influences on adolescents' career aspirations. Findings highlighted the significant impact of parental expectations and peer interactions on shaping adolescents' career interests and aspirations, with parental support and encouragement playing a crucial role in facilitating career exploration and decision-making. Moreover, the study revealed the complex interplay between cultural values and individual aspirations, underscoring the need for culturally sensitive interventions and support systems to address diverse career aspirations among adolescents from different cultural backgrounds. Recommendations based on these findings include promoting parental involvement in career planning, fostering supportive peer networks, and providing culturally relevant career guidance resources to help adolescents navigate their career pathways effectively.

Wang and Degol (2021) examined the intersectionality of gender and ethnicity in adolescents' career aspirations. The study aimed to understand how ethnic minority adolescents navigate gender stereotypes and cultural expectations regarding career choices. Methodologically, the researchers conducted both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with a diverse sample of adolescents from various ethnic backgrounds. Quantitative data analysis involved statistical techniques to identify patterns and associations between gender, ethnicity, and career aspirations, while qualitative interviews provided rich, contextual insights into adolescents' lived experiences and perceptions. Results from the study revealed that ethnic minority girls faced unique challenges in negotiating gendered expectations and cultural norms surrounding career choices, often experiencing pressure to conform to traditional gender roles and familial expectations. Additionally, the study found that ethnic minority boys also encountered barriers to pursuing non-traditional careers due to cultural stereotypes and societal expectations. These findings underscored the importance of considering intersectionality in understanding adolescents' career aspirations and designing interventions that address the unique needs and experiences of diverse populations.

Li and Lerner (2018) compared gender stereotypes and career aspirations among adolescents from different cultural backgrounds. The study aimed to explore the universality and cultural specificity of gendered career preferences and aspirations across diverse cultural contexts. Methodologically, the researchers employed surveys and focus groups to collect data from adolescents from various countries and cultural groups. Quantitative data analysis involved statistical comparisons of gender stereotypes and career aspirations across cultures, while qualitative data analysis focused on identifying cultural nuances and contextual factors influencing adolescents' career choices. Results from the study revealed both universal and culturally specific influences on adolescents' career

aspirations, highlighting the role of cultural values, societal norms, and educational opportunities in shaping career preferences. Additionally, the study found that exposure to global media and cultural exchange programs influenced adolescents' career aspirations, leading to greater openness to non-traditional career paths. These findings have implications for designing culturally sensitive career guidance programs and educational interventions that promote gender equity and diversity in career choices among adolescents worldwide.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

FINDINGS

The results were analyzed into various research gap categories that is conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps

Conceptual Gap: Smith and Leaper (2018) provide valuable insights into various factors influencing adolescents' career aspirations; however, there is a conceptual gap regarding the underlying mechanisms through which these influences operate. Specifically, there is a need for research that delves deeper into the cognitive processes and socio-cultural dynamics shaping adolescents' gender-typed career aspirations. Understanding the underlying mechanisms through which gender stereotypes, parental influences, peer interactions, and cultural expectations influence career aspirations can provide a more nuanced understanding of how these factors interact and contribute to the perpetuation of gender disparities in career choices.

Contextual Gap: While the studies reviewed by Eagly and Diekmann (2019) predominantly focus on Western contexts, particularly the United States and Europe, there is a contextual gap regarding how socio-cultural factors influence career aspirations in diverse global contexts. There is a need for research that examines how cultural values, societal norms, and educational systems unique to non-Western cultures shape adolescents' career aspirations. Additionally, the studies primarily focus on adolescents from mainstream cultural backgrounds, overlooking the experiences of marginalized or underrepresented groups within societies.

Geographical Gap: Su (2020) highlights a geographical gap in the existing literature, as the studies primarily focus on North America and Europe, with minimal representation from other regions, such as Asia, Africa, and Latin America. There is a need for research that includes diverse geographical contexts to capture the cultural diversity and variability in career aspirations worldwide. Examining career aspirations among adolescents from non-Western countries and regions can shed light on the cultural specificity of gender stereotypes and career expectations and inform culturally relevant interventions aimed at promoting gender equity and diversity in career choices globally.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

In conclusion, the impact of gender stereotypes on career aspirations among adolescents in Kenya is a complex and multifaceted issue with significant implications for individual development and societal progress. Despite efforts to promote gender equality and empower youth to pursue diverse career paths, pervasive stereotypes continue to shape adolescents' perceptions of their own abilities and potential. The evidence suggests that traditional gender roles and expectations influence adolescents' career aspirations, often limiting girls' aspirations to traditionally feminine fields and boys' aspirations to traditionally masculine ones. This perpetuates gender disparities in various industries and reinforces societal norms that undervalue the contributions of women in certain sectors. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that involves challenging stereotypes, promoting positive role models, providing career guidance and mentorship, and fostering an inclusive educational environment that encourages exploration and self-discovery. By dismantling gender stereotypes and creating opportunities for all adolescents to pursue their passions and talents, Kenya can unlock the full potential of its youth and build a more equitable and prosperous society for future generations.

Recommendations

Theory

Future research should adopt an intersectional approach to examine how gender stereotypes intersect with other social identities such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and urban/rural backgrounds in shaping career aspirations among adolescents in Kenya. This approach will provide a more nuanced understanding of the multiple layers of oppression and privilege experienced by individuals, contributing to the development of more comprehensive theoretical frameworks. Conducting longitudinal studies that follow adolescents over time can help elucidate the long-term effects of gender stereotypes on career trajectories. By tracking changes in career aspirations, educational attainment, and occupational choices, researchers can identify critical developmental periods and factors that influence adolescents' career decision-making processes, thereby enhancing theoretical models of career development in the Kenyan context.

Practice

Schools and educational institutions should implement gender-sensitive career counseling programs that challenge traditional gender stereotypes and promote diverse career options for both boys and girls. These programs should provide adolescents with information about a wide range of careers, expose them to successful role models from various fields, and address stereotypes that may discourage them from pursuing non-traditional career paths. Establishing mentorship programs that pair adolescents with professionals from diverse backgrounds can help counteract gender stereotypes by providing adolescents with support, guidance, and encouragement to pursue their career aspirations. Additionally, showcasing successful individuals who have defied gender norms in their career paths can inspire adolescents and broaden their horizons regarding possible future careers.

Policy

Policymakers should develop and implement inclusive education policies that promote gender equality and challenge gender stereotypes within the educational system. This includes revising curriculum materials to eliminate gender bias, training teachers on gender-sensitive pedagogical approaches, and creating opportunities for girls and boys to engage in non-traditional subjects and activities. Government and private sector organizations should implement workplace diversity initiatives aimed at increasing the representation of women and other marginalized groups in leadership positions and non-traditional fields. This can include providing scholarships, internships, and vocational training programs targeted at girls and women, as well as implementing gender quotas and affirmative action policies to promote gender equality in the workforce.

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