

# Career Congruence with Parents from the Perspective of Gender

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**Abstract**— Adolescent-parent career congruence was defined as the degree to which the adolescents perceive parents as fulfilling career exploration, career planning, and career goal setting needs, and the degree to which they perceive parents to be happy, proud, satisfied, or agreeable with their career progress, and the degree to which the adolescents perceive that their parents have similar or matching ideas regarding career interests, career values, career plans, and career goals. This construct is very important in understanding adolescent career development. However, little is known about the dynamics of this construct from the perspective of gender. This study aimed to investigate the differences of the level of congruence between adolescents and their parents regarding career matters in female and male students. We collected data from 291 students from a university in Semarang, Indonesia,  $M$  age = 19.93 years,  $SD$  age = 5.64, 69.1% female. We used the Adolescent-Parent Career Congruence Scale ( $\alpha = .88$ ). Independent sample t-test demonstrated that there the level of congruence between adolescents and their parents regarding career matters is significantly different in male and female students. Compared to their male counterparts ( $53.43 \pm 8.97$ ), female students ( $55.81 \pm 8.56$ ) demonstrated higher level of career congruence with their parents,  $t(164.32) = -2.12$ ,  $p = .04$  ( $p < .05$ ). Female students showed higher levels of supplementary aspect, but not complementary aspect, when compared to male students. Findings from this study highlight the important role of gender in formulating intervention to enhance congruence with parents regarding career matters. Recommendations for students, parents, and practitioners are discussed.

**Keywords**— career, congruence, gender, students, parents

## I. INTRODUCTION

Adolescent-parent career congruence refers to adolescents' perceptions that they and their parents have parallel and corresponding career-related interests, goals, and preferences for the adolescent.<sup>1</sup> The construct of adolescent-parent career congruence consists of complementary congruence domain, i.e., adolescent perceptions that their parents are facilitative in helping them progressing their career goals, and that parents are happy or satisfied with their career progress and track), and supplementary congruence domain, i.e., adolescent perceptions that their parents have corresponding thoughts regarding career aspirations, plans, values, and interest). This construct was developed based on ecological systems theory<sup>2</sup> and person-environment fit concept.<sup>3</sup>

According to Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological systems theory, individuals will be better adjusted and more satisfied in environments that correspond to their attitudes,

aspirations, values, and expectations. They will be more satisfied when there is a congruence between themselves and their environment.<sup>3</sup> Being congruent with parents on career matters demonstrates a fit between adolescents and their family environment in this career-related domain. Such a fit is likely to facilitate and foster career development.<sup>4,5</sup> On the other hand, lack of congruence been identified as a potential external barrier when deciding on a career.<sup>6,7</sup> It has the potential to interrupt career development and lead to poorer adjustment and well-being in the adolescent.<sup>8</sup>

In the career literature, congruence with parents regarding career matters is an important career-related skill for adolescents, especially for those who live in collectivistic contexts.<sup>9,10,11</sup> In collectivistic cultures, individuals define themselves according to their membership in groups (e.g., family). They also emphasize group norms, goals, and needs over their personal ones. In contrast, those in individualistic cultures tend to have less interconnection and more independence. They are focusing on personal rather than group goals and interests.<sup>12</sup>

People in collectivistic cultures are socialized to be primarily responsive to their in-group preference, whereas those in individualistic cultures are more motivated by their own needs.<sup>13</sup> People in collectivistic cultures are also socialized to maintain harmony and to protect important relationships with others by avoiding direct confrontation and other behaviours that could risk the relationships.<sup>14</sup> Thus, they are motivated to be congruent and adjust themselves to their significant others' expectations and needs, and for children, parents are the most important others.<sup>15</sup>

Individuals from collectivistic contexts were more likely to make choices that indicated a preference for conformity, whereas their individualistic counterparts are more likely to decide on choices that represented uniqueness and difference. Similarly, adolescents from collectivistic backgrounds show more willingness and tendency to follow their parents' expectations.<sup>16</sup> For example, they prefer to choose careers that are in line with their parents' suggestion rather than the ones that represent their own passions.<sup>17</sup> As children are likely to consider the needs and desires of significant others in addition to their own when making important decisions<sup>14</sup>, ignoring their parents' wishes when deciding on a career is in contrast with their sense of self and their value system.<sup>18</sup>

Compared to their individualistic counterparts, those from collectivistic cultures perceive more direct influence from their parents on their career goals and preferences.

Therefore, they have to modify their own career interests to meet their parents' expectations and approval.<sup>19</sup> Simultaneously, adolescents perceive that influence and control from their parents as appropriate, and do not wish that their choice in education and career-related domains will be theirs alone to decide.<sup>20</sup>

Adolescent-parent career congruence was found to lead to positive outcomes.<sup>9, 10, 11</sup> For example, adolescent-parent career congruence was found to be correlated positively with life satisfaction, parental support, and living-up to parental expectations.<sup>1</sup> Adolescent-parent career congruence was also found to be associated indirectly with career aspirations, via self-efficacy and outcome expectations, and was found to be related with career planning and exploration via self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and aspirations in a sample of Indonesian high school students.<sup>9</sup>

In their longitudinal study, Sawitri et al. (2015) demonstrated that congruence with parents regarding career matters predicted future career exploration, and congruence was longitudinally predicted by self-efficacy.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, Sawitri and Creed (2015) demonstrated that adolescent-parent career congruence moderated the relationships between mastery-approach and performance-approach, but not performance-avoid, with career aspirations. Mastery-approach orientation was more strongly correlated with career aspirations when congruence was higher; whereas, performance-prove orientation was more weakly associated with career aspirations when congruence was higher.<sup>10</sup> Sawitri and Creed (2017) also found that horizontal collectivism (HC) was more strongly correlated with adolescent-parent career congruence than vertical collectivism (VC), and VC and HC were indirectly associated with career aspirations via adolescent-parent career congruence and career decision-making self-efficacy.<sup>11</sup> Both patterns of collectivism were directly and indirectly correlated with career decision-making self-efficacy via adolescent-parent career congruence, and congruence was indirectly associated with career aspirations via career decision-making self-efficacy.

Further, fitting in with parents' wishes has been found to be important in dealing with career-related issues. For example, Wang and Heppner (2002) demonstrated that students who perceived high parental academic expectations and felt that their performance on the expected areas were inappropriate, were most at risk to experience career decision making difficulties.<sup>22</sup> In addition, Leung, Hou, Gati, and Li (2011) found that students who thought that they had adequate performance in the expected areas might have a larger capacity to face career choice problems than those who felt that they have not performed sufficiently.<sup>23</sup> Further, for an individual from a collectivist cultural background, a career reflects a compromise between parents' wishes and individual goals and preferences.<sup>24</sup> This idea highlights the roles of adolescent-parent career congruence in adolescent career development in collectivist cultures are indisputably important.<sup>25, 23</sup>

Family cultural capital plays a role in supporting student aspirations and achievement through exposure to abstract ideas via art or culture, through provision of resources in the home to support learning and through acquaintance with knowledge about further education and careers.<sup>26</sup>

Parents can influence their children's career interest through their own career-related aspirations, values, and beliefs, providing role models through their own occupations, their network, and social connections.<sup>27, 28</sup> Previous studies have examined the influence of gender differences on parenting behaviors and career-related outcomes, and the results are mixed. For example, parent modelling of interests in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics enables girls to envision themselves in counter-stereotypical STEM roles.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, exposure to gender science stereotypes is pervasive and is correlated with reduced interest in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.<sup>30</sup> Koumoundourou, Tsaousis, and Kounenou (2011) showed that, for male students, the permissive and authoritarian styles of parenting were associated with greater career decision-making difficulties, whereas for female students, only authoritarian style was significantly associated with career decision-making difficulties.<sup>31</sup> However, the influence of gender difference on adolescent-parent career congruence is unknown. To address this gap, the current study aimed to investigate the level of congruence between adolescents and their parents from the perspective of gender.

## II. RESEARCH METHOD

### A. Participants

Participants were 291 students from a university in Semarang, Indonesia, *M* age = 19.93 years, *SD* age = 5.64, 69.1% female. These group of first year students consisted of 25.1% students from Economics and Business, 15.1% from Social and Political Science, 25% from Fisheries and Marine Science, 20.3% from Medical, 10.7% from Animal Science, 6.9% from Science and Mathematics Faculties. *M* GPA = 3.24.

### B. Materials

- Perceived adolescent-parent career congruence

We used the 12-item Adolescent-Parent Career Congruence Scale<sup>1</sup> to assess perceptions that adolescents hold that they have consistent career interests, preferences, and goals as their parents. Sample item: "My parents support me in my career plans." Responses were made using a 6-point Likert-like scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*). Higher scores are reflective of higher levels of congruence with parents regarding career matters. Alpha has been reported as .87 to .89.<sup>1, 9, 11</sup> Construct validity was demonstrated by finding positive correlations with life satisfaction, parental support, and living-up-to parental expectations.<sup>1</sup>  $\alpha = .88$ .

- Demographic variables

We asked the participants to indicate their gender, GPA, and faculty.

### C. Procedure

The author and two research assistants administered the questionnaires in the classrooms. University approval was obtained. The students signed their own consent forms. From three hundred students, three were unable to complete the survey, and six surveys were unusable, leaving 291 students. No reward was offered, and surveys were returned to the first researcher in a sealed envelope.

#### D. Data analysis

We used independent sample t-test to examine whether the level of congruence between adolescents and their parents regarding career matters is significantly different in male and female students.

### III. RESULTS

Independent sample t-test demonstrated that the level of congruence between adolescents and their parents regarding career matters is significantly different in male and female students. Compared to their male counterparts ( $53.43 \pm 8.97$ ), female students ( $55.81 \pm 8.56$ ) showed higher level of congruence with parents regarding career matters,  $t = (164.32) = -2.12$ , ( $p < .05$ ). In addition, female students demonstrated higher levels of supplementary congruence, but not complementary congruence, when compared to male students. Findings from this study highlight the important role of gender in formulating intervention to enhance congruence with parents regarding career matters in university students.

### IV. DISCUSSION

The study aimed to investigate the difference between female and male students on the level of adolescent-parent career congruence. As hypothesized, we found a significant difference between male and female students regarding adolescent-parent career congruence. This finding is in line with previous study by Hou and Leung (2011) which showed that there were gender differences for parents' expectation toward sons and daughters in certain areas of interests. The three most expected occupational fields by parents of male students were Investigative, Enterprising and Social, and for parents of female students was Enterprising, Investigative, and Artistic. While Investigative occupations were the most expected and aspired Holland type for parents and their male children, parents of female students expected their children to pursue Enterprising occupations.<sup>32</sup>

More specifically, compared to their male counterparts, female students showed higher level of congruence with parents regarding career matters. Female students demonstrated higher levels of supplementary congruence. Supplementary congruence involves the situation when individuals believe that they possess similar or correspond perceptions regarding career interests, values, plans, and goals with their parents.<sup>1</sup> Parental and family expectations could shape their children's attitudes toward occupational status and gender-type. Children might aspire to occupational alternatives that are within their parents' approval or expected levels of prestige and sex-type before considering the compatibility between self and occupational alternatives.<sup>33</sup>

This finding is in line with previous study which yielded that parents engaged in certain career areas served as models for their children. They make the children familiar with the choice of the areas, and they help youngsters define themselves through conversation and support, thus parents are helping their children defining themselves.<sup>34</sup> Previous study also supports this finding. The children of parents with higher education qualifications are more likely to have aspirations to achieving at least the same level of education as their parents, when compared with those whose parents do not hold post-secondary qualifications.<sup>35</sup>

Oliver, Woods-McCooney, Maor, and and McCooney (2017) in their study with female students demonstrated that looking beyond first ranking, many of the students saw their mothers or fathers as an inspiration to their involvement in science. The students also referred to their parents as being supportive and providing opportunities that may have sparked their interest in science generally, and physics, specifically.<sup>36</sup>

Finding from this study also showed that there was no gender difference regarding complementary congruence. Complementary congruence captures the situation when individuals perceive that their career exploration, planning, and goal setting need are met by their parents, and they perceive that parents are satisfied with their career-related progress.<sup>1</sup> Previous studies demonstrated that there are general and specific ways in which parents can influence their children.<sup>37</sup> Some general ways parents can support their children are to ask about homework and encourage good grades.<sup>38</sup> This finding is partially consistent with previous study by Lent et al. (2005), which demonstrated that women engineering students did not differ significantly from men in most of the social cognitive variables. Women did perceive more contextual support and fewer contextual barriers than men.<sup>39</sup> This is not in line with Turner et al.'s (2003) study, which demonstrated that girls reported more parent-provided career-related modelling and verbal encouragement than boys.<sup>40</sup>

Our results suggest that, when assisting undergraduate students to develop congruence with parents regarding career matters, counsellors need to consider students' gender. They also need to explore complementary and supplementary congruence aspects in students' experience, so that an appropriate intervention can be delivered adequately. In addition, those working with undergraduate students should help them to be aware of how gender affect their level of congruence regarding career matters.

This study was conducted using a sample of undergraduate students from one university, thus, this situation restricts the results' external validity. Therefore, caution should be taken when generalizing the results to other communities, and additionally, future studies should include students from different samples.

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