

## PERSONALITY TRAITS, PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL AND PARENTAL BEHAVIORS AS DETERMINANTS OF CAREER DECISION-MAKING DIFFICULTIES IN ADOLESCENCE

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### Abstract

This study examines the impact of personality traits, psychological capital, and parental behaviors on career decision-making difficulties. It involved 560 students from various high schools in Croatia, assessed twice over the course of one year, in their third and fourth grades. Participants completed the Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire, the HEXACO-60 personality inventory, the Compound Psychological Capital Scale, the Parental Career-Related Behavior Scale, and a Sociodemographic Data Questionnaire. The results show a moderate level of career decision-making difficulties among students. Personality traits, psychological capital, and parental behaviors together explain 34% of the total variance in career decision-making difficulties. The findings also suggest that individuals with higher levels of extraversion and conscientiousness, as well as stronger psychological capital, experience fewer difficulties in making career decisions. Conversely, those with higher levels of parental interference and disengagement face greater challenges. Notably, psychological capital emerged as the strongest determinant, which is promising since it is more amenable to change through interventions. In conclusion, personality traits, psychological capital, and parental career-related behaviors significantly influence career decision-making difficulties.

**Keywords:** *Career decision-making difficulties, career choice, personality traits, psychological capital, parental behaviors.*

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### 1. Introduction

Effective career development requires individuals to establish a personal career path and make various career-related decisions. Gati and colleagues (1996) proposed the concept of an "ideal career decision-maker"—someone who recognizes the necessity of making career choices and possesses both the willingness and ability to make well-informed decisions. Any deviation from this ideal may hinder the decision-making process or lead to suboptimal career choices due to difficulties in making decisions (Gati et al., 1996). The authors introduced a hierarchical classification of career decision-making difficulties, categorized into three main groups: lack of readiness, lack of information, and inconsistent information. Lack of readiness, which occurs before the decision-making process begins, includes low motivation to engage in decision-making, general indecisiveness, and dysfunctional beliefs about career choices. The second category, lack of information, refers to insufficient knowledge about the decision-making process, about personal characteristics, existing career options, and methods for gathering relevant information. Lastly, inconsistent information encompasses unreliable data and both internal and external conflicts. The latter two categories specifically pertain to challenges encountered during the decision-making process (Gati et al., 1996). Previous studies have highlighted that both personal and contextual factors can influence an individual's career development, including career decision-making difficulties. Research has shown that extraversion and conscientiousness have a positive impact, while emotionality has a negative effect (Albion & Fogarty, 2002; Di Fabio et al., 2014; Gati et al., 2011). Additionally, psychological capital—rooted in resilience and optimism—has been identified as a valuable asset (Dudasova et al., 2021). Moreover, families can play a crucial role in personal growth and career development, either supporting or hindering the process (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009), which can also influence career decision-making (Marcionetti & Rossier, 2016; Šimunović et al., 2020).

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## 2. Objectives

This paper aims to examine the potential origins of career decision-making difficulties among high school students by exploring both personal factors (such as personality traits and psychological capital) and contextual influences (including parental career-related behaviors).

## 3. Methods

### 3.1. Study design

We employed a longitudinal research design with two measurement points, ensuring a one-year gap between two assessments. This study is part of the Croatian Science Foundation project "Free Career Choice" (Project No. IP-2019-04-7537), which explores the career development of young and middle adolescents.

### 3.2. Sample

The sample consisted of adolescents who were followed throughout during high school. At T1, they were in the 3rd grade (approximately 17 years old,  $N=747$ ), and at T2, they were in the 4th grade (approximately 18 years old,  $N=660$ ). The number of adolescents who participated in both time points was  $N=560$  (61.3% girls).

### 3.3. Instruments

To assess career development difficulties among adolescents, we used the Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire - Revised (CDDQ-R; Gati et al., 1996). This instrument evaluates three distinct challenges in the career decision-making process: lack of readiness, lack of information, and inconsistent information. It provides scores for each of these dimensions as well as a total score reflecting overall career decision-making difficulties. The CDDQ-R has demonstrated strong psychometric properties in both international and Croatian samples (Babarović & Šverko, 2018). In this study, the questionnaire showed excellent internal consistency, with an alpha coefficient of .95.

To assess the personal and contextual determinants of career decision-making difficulties, we utilized measures of personality, psychological capital, and perceived parental career-related behaviors. We used the *HEXACO-60* (Ashton & Lee, 2009) to assess six personality traits: honesty-humility (H), emotionality (E), extraversion (X), agreeableness (A), conscientiousness (C), and openness to experience (O). The HEXACO model has demonstrated strong cross-cultural validity (Thielmann et al., 2019), including in Croatian samples (Babarović & Šverko, 2013). Reliability in our sample was adequate, with alpha coefficients ranging from .72 to .81, aligning with findings from the original study (Ashton & Lee, 2009). We assessed psychological capital using the *Compound Psychological Capital Scale* (CPC-12R; Dudasova et al., 2021), which measures four dimensions: hope, optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy. While the original study supported a four-dimensional structure (Dudasova et al., 2021), our data indicated a strong general dimension of psychological capital, with excellent internal consistency ( $\alpha = .93$ ). The *Parental Career-Specific Behaviors* measure (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009) was used to assess three types of career-related parental behaviors: support, interference, and lack of engagement. The three-factor structure has been well established in Croatian samples (Šimunović et al., 2020), and in this study, internal consistency of the three scales was high, with alpha coefficients ranging from .90 to .92.

The assessment was conducted in schools using an online testing platform. Prior to administration, approvals and consents were obtained from the Ministry of Education, the Ethical board at the Institute, school principals, as well as from the students and their parents.

## 4. Results and discussion

Our results suggest that high school adolescents experience a moderate level of career decision-making difficulties ( $M = 4.46$ ), which is consistent with our previous findings from similar samples (Babarović & Šverko, 2018). Adolescents reported facing somewhat greater challenges with lack of readiness ( $M = 4.81$ ,  $Sd = 1.16$ ), while inconsistent information was identified as the least pronounced difficulty ( $M = 4.17$ ,  $Sd = 1.88$ ).

*Table 1. Career decision-making difficulties, personality traits, psychological capital and perceived parental behaviors in adolescent sample.*

	<i>N</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Sd</i>
Lack of Readiness	662	1.00	9.00	4.81	1.16
Lack of Information	662	1.00	9.00	4.41	1.88
Inconsistent Information	662	1.00	9.00	4.17	1.74
Career decision-making difficulties	662	1.00	9.00	4.46	1.44
Honesty	747	1.00	5.00	3.18	0.69
Emotionality	747	1.00	5.00	3.15	0.62
Extraversion	747	1.00	4.88	3.11	0.67
Agreeableness	747	1.20	5.00	2.98	0.58
Conscientiousness	747	1.70	4.80	3.25	0.52
Openness	747	1.10	5.00	3.22	0.71
Psychological capital	660	1.42	6.00	4.52	0.94
Parental Support	660	1.00	5.00	3.91	0.88
Parental Interference	660	1.00	5.00	2.39	1.10
Parental Disengagement	660	1.00	5.00	1.95	0.97

As expected, the three career decision-making difficulties were highly correlated. However, lack of readiness showed a notable deviation from the other two difficulties, which displayed a strong intercorrelation. Additionally, somewhat different patterns of relationships were observed between career decision-making difficulties and the personal and contextual characteristics considered in the study.

*Table 2. Correlations between career decision-making difficulties, personality traits, psychological capital and perceived parental behaviors.*

	LR	LI	II	CDDQ	H	E	X	A	C	O	Psy Cap	PS	PI
Lack of Readiness LR													
Lack of Information LI	.56												
Inconsistent Information II	.52	.86											
Career decision-making difficulties	.72	.95	.93										
Honesty H	-.17	-.09	-.12	-.13									
Emotionality E	.18	.07	.08	.11	.20								
Extraversion X	-.25	-.31	-.23	-.31	-.06	-.18							
Agreeableness A	.05	.08	.04	.07	.25	.01	-.07						
Conscientiousness C	-.21	-.24	-.27	-.27	.23	-.02	.16	.05					
Openness O	-.08	-.01	.00	-.03	.05	-.05	-.11	.03	.12				
Psychological capital PsyCap	-.27	-.40	-.34	-.39	.04	-.12	.41	.05	.32	.03			
Parental Support PS	-.09	-.24	-.23	-.23	.07	.15	.22	-.02	.19	-.07	.33		
Parental Interference PI	.25	.28	.37	.34	-.14	.02	-.08	.06	-.12	.04	-.08	-.12	
Parental Disengagement PD	.23	.35	.41	.38	-.15	-.11	-.11	.05	-.15	.05	-.18	-.43	.53

Regression analysis revealed that career decision-making difficulties can be explained by personality traits, psychological capital, and parental career-related behaviors, accounting for 34% of the total variance. The strongest positive contributors were psychological capital, extraversion and conscientiousness, which tend to reduce career decision-making difficulties, while parental interference and disengagement played a detrimental role, exacerbating career decision-making difficulties. Considering the three individual career decision-making difficulties, a very similar pattern was observed, with some deviations. Lack of readiness was better explained by personality traits, which is not surprising as it is considered a more general personal characteristic, not solely tied to the career decision-making process (Gati et al., 1996). The other two difficulties, related to lack of information and inconsistent information, showed very similar patterns of influential determinants, with only a few discrepancies, which is expected due to their strong intercorrelation.

Table 3. Regression analysis: contribution of personality traits, psychological capital and parental career-related behaviors for explaining career decision-making difficulties (N=560).

	Lack of Readiness	Lack of Information	Inconsistent Information	Career decision-making difficulties
Honesty	-.17***	-.05	-.04	-.08*
Emotionality	.17***	.04	.06	.09*
Extraversion	-.14**	-.13**	-.06	-.12**
Agreeableness	.08*	.09	.04	.08*
Conscientiousness	-.08	-.06	-.13**	-.10*
Openness	-.05	-.01	.01	-.01
Psychological capital	-.16***	-.31***	-.23***	-.28***
Parental Support	.07	-.01	.01	.06
Parental Interference	.15**	.12**	.20***	.17***
Parental Disengagement	.11*	.18***	.24***	.21***
R	.47	.56	.57	.59
R <sup>2</sup>	.22	.31	.33	.35
adjR <sup>2</sup>	.21	.30	.31	.34

This study highlights key determinants of career decision-making difficulties in adolescence, emphasizing the role of both personal and contextual factors. As expected, protective factors include psychological capital, extraversion, and conscientiousness, while risk factors are parental interference and disengagement. These findings underscore the need for interventions that foster adolescent psychological capital and involve parents, who play a crucial role in shaping career-related behaviors.

While the longitudinal design of this study is a strength, voluntary participation introduced limitations, affecting the final sample. Future studies should focus on minimizing attrition and include more diverse adolescent samples.

## 5. Conclusion

Personality traits, psychological capital, and parental behaviors are key determinants of career decision-making difficulties, responsible for 34% of variability in career decision-making difficulties. Among considered determinants, the psychological capital was found to be the most significant. Given its influence on all aspects of career decision-making, and its relative ease of change compared to the other factors, it is crucial to develop strategies and interventions to enhance psychological capital. Therefore, interventions should focus on strengthening the components of psychological capital (resilience, optimism, hope, and self-efficacy) to improve the career decision-making process during adolescence. However, it is essential to acknowledge the negative impact of parental interference and disengagement. Therefore, this study emphasizes the need for interventions that actively involve parents as key contributors to adolescent career development.

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