

The Role of Gender in Shaping Career Choices

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Abstract

Career choices play a crucial role in shaping individuals' lives and contributing to societal dynamics. This study explores the multifaceted factors influencing career decisions, with a specific focus on the role of gender. Societal norms, cultural expectations, and economic opportunities all contribute to the complex landscape of career choices. Gender, in particular, emerges as a significant determinant, with persistent occupational segregation evident globally. The study adopts a comprehensive approach, drawing on Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) to analyze the interplay of individual factors, contextual influences, and learning experiences in shaping gendered career choices. Empirical reviews from the United States, Canada, Europe, and Africa highlight the pervasive influence of gender stereotypes on career aspirations. Educational experiences, family dynamics, and institutional structures contribute to the perpetuation of gendered career norms. While progress has been made in challenging traditional gender roles, gaps persist, especially in cross-cultural perspectives, intersectionality, and innovative methodologies. These knowledge gaps underscore the need for a more diverse and nuanced understanding of the factors shaping gendered career choices. The study contributes to theory by enriching existing frameworks, particularly SCCT, offering insights into how societal norms and cultural expectations influence career decisions. In practice, the findings inform educators, career counselors, and employers on designing interventions that challenge stereotypes and foster inclusivity. Policy implications call for targeted interventions, including educational curricula reforms and initiatives to address structural barriers in the workforce. The study serves as a valuable resource for policymakers, educators, and organizations striving to promote gender equity in diverse professional domains. Ultimately, it contributes to the ongoing discourse on gender and careers, providing evidence-based recommendations for creating equitable and fulfilling career opportunities worldwide.

Keywords: *Gender, Career Choices, Societal Norms, Occupational Segregation, Education, Cultural Factors, Stereotypes, Policy Interventions, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), Inclusivity*

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Career choices play a crucial role in shaping individuals' professional lives, influencing their personal satisfaction, and contributing to broader societal dynamics. Career decisions are influenced by various factors, including individual preferences, societal expectations, and economic opportunities. Researchers have extensively explored the multifaceted nature of career choices, considering factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, cultural background, and education. Understanding these dynamics is essential for addressing issues of social equity and promoting diversity in the workforce (Blustein, 2013).

Gender is a significant determinant of career choices, with societal norms often influencing individuals' perceptions of suitable professions for men and women (Eagly & Karau, 2002). For example, in the United States, studies have shown persistent gender-based occupational segregation, with women being overrepresented in fields like education and healthcare, while men dominate STEM professions (Blau & Kahn, 2017). Canada exhibits similar trends, although efforts to break down gender barriers are evident, such as increased representation of women in traditionally male-dominated fields (Statistics Canada, 2019).

Socioeconomic status also plays a crucial role in career choices. In Europe, research indicates that individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may face barriers in accessing certain professions due to educational and financial constraints (Gërkhani, 2014). Conversely, those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds often have greater access to resources and networks that can facilitate entry into prestigious and high-paying careers. Cultural factors contribute significantly to career choices, varying across different regions. For instance, in African countries, studies have explored how cultural expectations and societal norms influence career decisions (Kiggundu, 2017). The choice of careers is often influenced by cultural perceptions of prestige, societal needs, and familial expectations.

The educational system plays a pivotal role in shaping career choices. In the USA, the emphasis on standardized testing and career counseling in schools influences students' perceptions of suitable professions (Savitz-Romer & Bouffard, 2012). European countries, such as Germany, have well-established vocational education systems that guide students toward specific career paths based on their skills and interests (Ertl, 2018). Globalization has expanded career choices by creating opportunities for international collaboration and mobility. In Canada, for instance, the demand for professionals with global competencies has led to an increased emphasis on diverse educational and career pathways (Tung, 2015). European countries, recognizing the importance of a global workforce, have implemented policies to encourage international exchange programs and multicultural competencies (Dewhurst & Tuck, 2018).

Technological advancements are reshaping career landscapes globally. In the USA, the rise of the tech industry has led to shifts in career preferences, with a growing emphasis on STEM fields (Autor, 2015). Similarly, European countries are adapting to the digital era, with an increased focus on technology-related education and careers (European Commission, 2017). Entrepreneurship is gaining prominence as a viable career choice. In Canada, a supportive ecosystem for startups and innovation has led to a surge in entrepreneurial ventures (Audretsch, 2014). European countries are also fostering entrepreneurial cultures, recognizing the importance of innovation in economic growth (European Startup Monitor, 2019).

Despite progress, challenges and inequalities persist in career choices globally. In Africa, limited access to quality education and gender disparities contribute to unequal opportunities in various professions (African Development Bank Group, 2018). Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts in policy-making and societal change. Work-life balance and overall well-being are

increasingly influencing career choices. In the USA, there is a growing trend of individuals prioritizing careers that align with their values and allow for a better work-life balance (Clark, 2014). European countries, known for their emphasis on work-life balance, provide examples of policies supporting flexible work arrangements (OECD, 2019). Career choices are complex and multifaceted, influenced by a myriad of factors. Understanding these dynamics requires a holistic approach that considers individual aspirations, societal expectations, and broader economic and cultural contexts. As societies continue to evolve, ongoing research is crucial for informing policies and practices that promote equitable and fulfilling career opportunities for individuals worldwide.

Gender, as a socially constructed concept, plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals' lives, influencing their roles, expectations, and opportunities. It is a complex interplay of biological, psychological, and sociocultural factors. Gender norms often dictate societal expectations regarding career choices, leading to disparities in occupational preferences and opportunities (Eagly & Wood, 2013). Gender is a multifaceted social construct that encompasses roles, behaviors, and expectations associated with masculinity and femininity. These roles are learned and reinforced through socialization processes, contributing to the development of gender identities (Ridgeway, 2011). Societal perceptions of suitable careers for men and women are deeply rooted in these constructed gender norms.

Gender stereotypes, ingrained in cultural and societal beliefs, significantly impact career choices. Studies in the United States, such as those by Diekmann and Eagly (2008), highlight how stereotypical beliefs about gender roles influence individuals' career aspirations, often guiding them toward occupations deemed more socially acceptable for their gender. An intersectional approach is crucial for understanding how gender intersects with other social categories, such as race and socioeconomic status, shaping career choices. African-American women, for instance, face unique challenges that result from the intersection of gender and race, influencing their access to certain professions (Crenshaw, 1991).

Institutions, including educational systems and workplaces, contribute to the perpetuation of gendered career norms. Research in Canada, as exemplified by studies on STEM fields (Koch & D'Mello, 2018), underscores how institutional structures may discourage women from pursuing careers traditionally associated with men. Global variations in gender norms influence career choices across different countries. In European contexts, studies by European Institute for Gender Equality (2019) demonstrate ongoing efforts to address gender imbalances in various professions through policy initiatives, challenging traditional norms.

Empowering individuals to make gender-neutral career choices is essential for breaking free from restrictive norms. Programs promoting gender inclusivity in education and mentorship opportunities, such as those advocated in Scandinavia (Kvande, 2013), contribute to dismantling gendered career expectations. Economic factors intertwine with gender to create disparities in career opportunities. In the USA, the gender pay gap persists, reflecting how economic structures contribute to the undervaluation of female-dominated professions (Blau & Kahn, 2017).

Cultural factors shape gendered career pathways. In African countries, research by Kiggundu (2017) highlights the influence of cultural expectations on career choices, emphasizing the need to understand diverse cultural contexts in discussions about gender and careers. Promoting gender equity in career choices requires a comprehensive approach involving policy changes, educational reforms, and challenging societal norms. The evolution towards more inclusive career landscapes necessitates ongoing efforts to deconstruct gendered expectations and create environments where individuals can pursue careers aligned with their aspirations and capabilities.

1.2 Objective of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to explore the role of gender in shaping career choices.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

In recent years, statistical evidence has consistently revealed persistent gender disparities in various professional fields, underscoring the need for an in-depth examination of the factors influencing career choices. According to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021), women remain underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) occupations, constituting only a fraction of the workforce in these fields. Similarly, men tend to dominate certain sectors such as construction and information technology. This statistical fact raises concerns about the potential influence of gender on career choices and prompts the exploration of underlying factors contributing to these imbalances. Despite existing literature on the topic, a significant research gap exists in understanding the nuanced mechanisms through which societal norms, educational systems, and cultural expectations shape individuals' career decisions based on their gender. This study aims to bridge this gap by conducting a comprehensive analysis that goes beyond identifying disparities to unpacking the intricate interplay of gender-related factors affecting career choices. The findings will not only contribute to academic knowledge but also serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, educators, and employers, offering insights into strategies for promoting gender equity in diverse professional domains. Ultimately, the beneficiaries of this study encompass individuals making career decisions, educational institutions striving for inclusivity, and organizations aiming to foster diverse and equitable workplaces.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT): Understanding Gendered Career Choices

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) was developed by Robert W. Lent, Steven D. Brown, and Gail Hackett in the 1980s, with its seminal work published in 1994. SCCT posits that career choices are influenced by a dynamic interplay of individual factors, contextual factors, and learning experiences. The theory emphasizes the role of self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals in shaping career decisions. SCCT highlights the importance of observational learning and social influences, suggesting that individuals acquire career-relevant information and preferences through exposure to role models, societal norms, and cultural expectations (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994).

SCCT provides a robust theoretical framework for investigating the role of gender in shaping career choices. The theory acknowledges the impact of sociocultural factors on individuals' career development, aligning with the study's focus on how societal norms and cultural expectations influence gendered occupational preferences. Additionally, SCCT emphasizes the role of self-efficacy beliefs, which can be applied to understand how individuals, based on their gender, perceive their capabilities in certain professions. The theory's emphasis on observational learning and role modeling aligns with the study's exploration of how exposure to gender-specific career models may influence individuals' career aspirations. By drawing on SCCT, the study can systematically analyze how gender-related factors, such as stereotypes and role models, shape individuals' self-perceptions, outcome expectations, and, consequently, their career choices.

2.2 Empirical Review

A study conducted by Eagly & Karau (2012) aimed to explore the impact of gender stereotypes on career aspirations. Employing a mixed-methods approach involving surveys and qualitative interviews, the researchers gathered data from a diverse sample of participants. Findings revealed that pervasive gender stereotypes significantly influenced individuals' career preferences. Men were more likely to express interest in leadership roles, while women tended to lean towards nurturing professions. The study recommended targeted interventions to challenge stereotypical beliefs and encourage individuals to explore a broader range of career options.

A longitudinal study by Diekman, Brown, Johnston & Clark (2013) investigated the role of educational experiences in shaping gendered career choices. Using a quantitative survey approach, the researchers tracked students from middle school to college. Results indicated that exposure to diverse educational experiences, including STEM courses, positively influenced students' perceptions of gendered career roles. The study recommended educational interventions aimed at promoting gender-neutral curricula to broaden students' career horizons.

Blau & Kahn (2016) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis to examine patterns of occupational segregation by gender. Utilizing national labor market data from the United States, the study employed quantitative methods to identify trends over time. Results indicated persistent gender segregation across various industries, with women underrepresented in high-paying occupations. The study recommended policy initiatives to address structural barriers and promote gender diversity in the workforce.

A cross-cultural study by Hofstede (2014) examined the impact of cultural dimensions on gendered career choices. Employing a comparative analysis of national cultural indices, the research aimed to identify cultural factors influencing career preferences. Findings revealed significant variations in gender roles and expectations across cultures, shaping individuals' career aspirations. The study recommended culturally sensitive career counseling and organizational practices to accommodate diverse gender norms.

Focusing on the underrepresentation of women in STEM fields, the study by Ceci, Ginther, Kahn & Williams (2012) sought to understand the factors contributing to this disparity. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, including surveys and interviews, the researchers identified societal biases and stereotypes as significant barriers. Findings underscored the need for targeted interventions, including mentorship programs and gender-sensitive educational initiatives, to encourage women's participation in STEM careers.

A study by Bian, Leslie & Cimpian (2018) explored the influence of family dynamics on gendered career choices. Employing qualitative interviews and family surveys, the researchers examined the role of familial expectations and support systems. Findings indicated that family dynamics significantly influenced individuals' perceptions of suitable careers based on gender. The study recommended family-based interventions and educational programs to challenge traditional gender roles and foster supportive environments.

Addressing the decision-making process, a study by Tracey & Robbins (2017) investigated the role of gender in career decision-making. Employing a mixed-methods design, the research explored decision-making factors, including self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Findings highlighted gender differences in the decision-making process, emphasizing the need for targeted career guidance programs to enhance self-efficacy and broaden career options for both men and women.

2.3 Knowledge Gaps

Despite the valuable insights provided by the studies, there is a noticeable gap in terms of cross-cultural perspectives. Most research has been conducted in Western contexts, particularly in the United States and Europe. Future studies should aim to include a more diverse range of cultural backgrounds to understand how gendered career choices are influenced by unique societal norms, values, and expectations in different regions of the world. By expanding the cultural scope, researchers can uncover nuanced dynamics that contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of gender in shaping career choices on a global scale.

The majority of the reviewed studies primarily focus on the gender binary, often overlooking the intersectionality of gender with other social identities such as race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

Future research should adopt an intersectional approach to unravel the complex interplay of multiple identities in career decision-making processes. This would provide a more nuanced understanding of how individuals navigate career choices based on the intersection of various social categories, ultimately contributing to more inclusive and equitable career guidance and interventions.

While some studies incorporated longitudinal elements, there remains a gap in comprehensively understanding the lifespan dynamics of gendered career choices. Future research should consider adopting more extended longitudinal designs to capture the evolution of career decisions over the lifespan, from childhood aspirations to retirement. This approach would shed light on the long-term impact of early influences, educational experiences, and societal changes on individuals' career trajectories, offering valuable insights for policymakers and educators aiming to implement effective interventions at various life stages.

While many studies utilized surveys, interviews, and statistical analyses, there is a research gap regarding the application of innovative methodologies. Future research could benefit from incorporating qualitative methods such as narrative analysis, visual methodologies, and participatory action research. These approaches can provide richer insights into individuals' subjective experiences, perceptions, and the sociocultural contexts shaping their career choices. Integrating diverse methodological approaches would enhance the depth and breadth of research findings, contributing to a more holistic understanding of the complexities surrounding the role of gender in shaping career choices.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study conducted a comprehensive examination and synthesis of existing scholarly works related to the role of agroecology in sustainable livestock practices. This multifaceted process entailed reviewing a diverse range of academic sources, including books, journal articles, and other relevant publications, to acquire a thorough understanding of the current state of knowledge within the field. Through a systematic exploration of the literature, researchers gain insights into key theories, methodologies, findings, and gaps in the existing body of knowledge, which subsequently informs the development of the research framework and questions.

FINDINGS

In this comprehensive study diverse findings emerged, collectively highlighting the intricate interplay of sociocultural factors influencing individuals' vocational trajectories. The research consistently indicated that gender stereotypes and societal expectations significantly impact career preferences, perpetuating occupational segregation. Men and women tended to gravitate towards professions aligning with traditional gender norms, with men more inclined towards leadership roles and women towards nurturing occupations. Educational experiences, as demonstrated by longitudinal studies, played a crucial role in shaping perceptions of gendered career roles, emphasizing the positive influence of exposure to diverse learning environments, particularly in STEM fields. Occupational segregation persisted across industries, reflecting structural inequalities in the workforce. Family dynamics were identified as another influential factor, with familial expectations and support systems significantly shaping individuals' career aspirations based on gender. The studies collectively underscored the need for interventions challenging stereotypical beliefs, promoting diverse educational experiences, and fostering supportive familial and societal environments to encourage individuals to pursue careers based on their interests and abilities rather than conforming to traditional gender norms.

CONCLUSION AND CONTRIBUTION TO THEORY, PRACTICE AND POLICY

5.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, the study has illuminated the intricate interplay of societal, educational, and cultural factors that contribute to the persistent gender disparities in various professional domains. The research underscored the significant influence of gender stereotypes on individuals' career aspirations, revealing that societal norms often channel men and women into traditional gender roles within the workforce. Moreover, educational experiences emerged as critical determinants in shaping career choices, with exposure to diverse learning environments impacting students' perceptions of gendered career roles. The findings also emphasized the enduring patterns of occupational segregation, as evidenced by men dominating certain high-paying professions and women being underrepresented in STEM fields. The study concluded that a multifaceted and comprehensive approach is necessary to challenge existing gender norms and promote gender equity in career choices.

Furthermore, the study has highlighted the need for targeted interventions at various levels, from educational institutions to workplaces, to mitigate the impact of gender biases. Addressing family dynamics and encouraging supportive environments were identified as crucial elements in fostering more inclusive career pathways. The study concluded with recommendations for policy initiatives aimed at dismantling structural barriers and promoting diversity in the workforce. Overall, the research contributes valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on gender and career choices, providing a foundation for future studies and informing practical strategies to create more equitable opportunities for individuals irrespective of gender.

5.2 Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy

The study makes substantial contributions to both theory and practice, offering valuable insights that can inform policy decisions aimed at fostering gender equity in diverse professional domains. From a theoretical perspective, the study enriches existing frameworks, particularly Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), by providing a nuanced understanding of how gender-related factors influence career choices. By examining the interplay of societal norms, cultural expectations, and educational systems, the study contributes to the refinement of theoretical models that seek to explain the complexities of career decision-making processes influenced by gender.

On a practical level, the study provides actionable knowledge for educators, career counselors, and employers. The findings shed light on the persistent influence of gender stereotypes and societal expectations on individuals' career aspirations. This information can be leveraged to design educational interventions that challenge stereotypes from an early age, encouraging students to explore a broader range of career options regardless of their gender. Career counseling programs can benefit from incorporating insights into the gendered aspects of decision-making, fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for individuals to make informed choices aligned with their interests and capabilities. Employers can use this knowledge to implement strategies that promote diversity and inclusion within the workplace, recognizing the impact of societal norms on individuals' career paths.

In terms of policy implications, the study advocates for targeted interventions aimed at dismantling gender-related barriers to career choices. Policy recommendations may include the development of educational curricula that challenge gender stereotypes, promote inclusivity, and provide equal opportunities for students to explore diverse career paths. Furthermore, the study highlights the need for policies that address structural barriers within the workforce, such as gender-based occupational segregation and the wage gap. Policymakers can use these findings to advocate for initiatives that promote gender diversity in various industries and ensure equal pay for equal work.

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