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Career information seeking behavior of Croatian psychology students: preliminary data

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Summary: Adaptation to job market requirements can be easier if one possesses adequate skills and uses reliable career information sources. Psychology students have a broad spectrum of skills; however, little is known about their career information seeking behavior. The main goal of the study was to identify sources of career-related information that Croatian psychology students use and to determine their level of satisfaction with the sources, perception of trustworthiness of and accessibility to those sources. These characteristics are important determinants of sources prolonged use. A pencil-paper study was conducted on a sample of 337 psychology students. The main findings are: 1) students on average use 6 career information sources, with friends and immediate family members being dominant; 2) students are the most satisfied with practitioners, who are also trusted the most; 3) Students do not perceive any information source as highly available to them. The present study gives a first insight into career information seeking behavior of Croatian psychology students. Hopefully, more studies and practical implications will follow.

Key words: career development, information seeking behavior, psychology students, sources of career-related information

INTRODUCTION

Study motivation

Career opportunities have become an important aspect of an individual's life because they determine the blueprint which is played by the individual in the future. Psychology students are in a specific position in the labor

market. Due to the wide range of knowledge and competences they can take different career paths (Trapp, Banister, Ellis, Latto, Miell & Upton, 2011). However, although the broadness of the curriculum makes psychology students suitable for various positions in both private and public sectors, it also makes it harder for them to recognize their own competences and the most suita-

ble career path (Maltby, Day, Giles, Gowers & Gill, 2009). The unemployment rate of psychologists in Croatia increases from year to year, according to data from the CES (Croatian Employment Service). Croatian graduate psychology students have difficulties in getting the right job after graduating, possibly for the reasons mentioned earlier. This is why collecting reliable information about career development for psychology students is very important. Career development and employment in the labor market after graduation largely depend on the quantity and type of information on career development opportunities before and during studies as well as their reliability. The amount, type and reliability of information largely depend on career information sources. However, literature on career information seeking behavior of students from specific study groups is scarce, both in national and international contexts. This study is the authors' effort to gain preliminary data on patterns of career information seeking behavior of psychology students in Croatia and to initiate further work on this important topic.

Information seeking behavior

Bergman and Rudman (1985, as cited in Kolarić, Cool & Stričević, 2018) define information seeking behavior as a process which involves identification of information need, determination of accurate sources, information evaluation, and information use. Information need is a state or process that starts when one perceives the gap between the information needed to solve a problem and the solution of the problem (Miranda & Tarapanoff, 2008). In order to reduce the gap, one needs to use information sources. According to Zimmer and Henry (2007) there are two types of information sources: relational (interpersonal; i.e. family members, friends, exper-

ts) and non-relational (impersonal; i.e. books, libraries, journals).

In previous studies on career development, participants reported the use of both relational and non-relational sources. Frequently mentioned relational sources are family members (Chin, Blackburn Cohen & Hora, 2018; Lilley, 2013; Hultgren, 2009; Julien, 1997), experts such as career counsellors, teachers/professors, practitioners (Chin et al., 2018; Lilley, 2013; Hultgren, 2009; Julien, 1997), friends/pears (Chin et al., 2018; Lilley, 2013; Hultgren, 2009; Julien, 1997). When it comes to non-relational sources, participants acknowledged use of libraries, books, pamphlets (Julien, 1997), brochures (Hultgren, 2009), media (Chin et al., 2018), and internet sources (Chin et al., 2018; Hultgren, 2009).

Source characteristics are important determinants of source use (Johnson, Donohue, Atkin, & Johnson, 1995). Kim and Sin (2006) investigated the importance of 11 source characteristics as selection criteria. Trustworthiness and accessibility were two top rated criteria according to participants. The more trustworthy and accessible the source is, the higher the probability an individual will use it. Importance of source trustworthiness and accessibility has also been emphasized in other studies (Lee, Paik & Joo, 2012; Xie & Joo, 2009; Fidel & Green, 2004; Hertzum, Andersen, Andersen & Hansen, 2002; Julien, 1999). Accessibility is an important factor in source selection because it allows individuals to rate source trustworthiness (Hertzum et al., 2002), while trustworthiness is closely related to the satisfaction with the source and its future use (Lee et al., 2012).

Present study

To the best of our knowledge, there is no published study on career information seeking behavior of psychology students in Croatia. Consequently, the main goal of this study was to explore students' use of career information sources and to identify characteristics of those sources in terms of satisfaction, trustworthiness and accessibility. Based on the results of previous studies (Chin et al., 2018; Lilley, 2013; Hultgren, 2009; Julien, 1997), four groups of sources were identified as potentially relevant and included in the study. These are close contacts (immediate family members, extended family members, friends, and peers), experts (high school professors, academics, practitioners, career counsellors), internet sources (web pages and forums), and other sources (library/librarian, promo material, media). Since the primary goal of this study was to get initial data on the relevance of particular information sources in a national context, research hypotheses were not set.

METHOD

Participants

The sample consisted of 337 psychology students ($M_{age} = 21.33$, SD = 2.19) who studied at four public departments of psychology: University of Zadar (n = 97), Osijek Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (n = 92), Rijeka Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (n = 110), and Zagreb Centre for Croatian studies (n = 38). Most of the participants were women (n = 305) and undergraduates (n = 234).

Instruments

In the first part of the questionnaire, sociodemographic data were collected (gender, age, type of high school completed, current university, mother's and father's level of education). Also, participants estimated the importance of career information seeking (0 =not at all, 10 =very important).

In the second part of the questionnaire, participants were asked to circle all (of the 13 listed) career information sources they have been using for the purpose of career development. Additionally, they were asked to estimate their level of satisfaction with the sources they used (0 = not at all, 10 = highly satisfied), as well as trustworthiness (0 = not trustworthy) and the accessibility of each source that was listed (0 = not accessible at all, 10 = accessible whenever needed).

Procedure

Data were collected during the spring semester of the academic year 2017/2018 as part of a broader study on antecedents of career information seeking behavior of psychology students. Participation was anonymous and completely voluntary. Participants filled in the questionnaire during their classes, after a brief explanation of the research goals.

Results

Participants consider looking for career information as highly important (M = 8.89,SD = 1.24). However, not all of them answered this question (N = 281). It is possible that some participants do not consider career information seeking to be highly important, but were unwilling to express as much. Alternatively, some participants may have missed the question. Students report use of information sources (M = 6.09, SD = 2.26) out of 13 possible alternatives. In general, students use both relational and non-relational sources (Table 1). However, they predominantly use people very close to them (immediate family members, friends, peers) as information sources. The least preferred information source is a library/librarian.

Table 1. Students' Use of Particular Information Source

Source	Did participant	use the source?	
	Yes	No	% Yes
Immediate Family	246	91	73.00%
Extended family	169	168	50.15%
Friends	278	59	82.49%
High school professors	218	119	64.69%
Academics	161	176	47.77%
Peers	216	121	64.09%
Library/Librarian	17	320	5.04%
Practitioners	162	175	48.07%
Career counsellors	63	274	18.69%
Promo material	153	184	45.40%
Media	175	162	51.93%
Internet forums	73	264	21.66%
Web pages	120	217	35.61%

Table 2. Students' Satisfaction with Information Sources

Source	Satisfaction v	with the sour	ce	
	М	SD	N of students who rated satisfaction with the source	% of students who used the source and rated satisfaction with the source
Immediate Family	6.43	2.13	246	100%
Extended family	5.96	2.07	167	98.82%
Friends	6.78	1.60	275	98.92%
High school professors	6.73	2.00	216	99.08%
Academics	7.85	1.57	157	97.52%
Peers	6.54	1.93	214	99.07%
Library/Librarian	-	_	-	-
Practitioners	8.56	1.31	153	94.44%
Career counsellors	6.55	2.66	56	88.89%
Promo material	6.34	2.00	151	98.69%
Media	6.64	1.83	157	89.71%
Internet forums	6.81	1.83	67	91.78%
Web pages	7.61	1.60	115	95.83%

^{*} We did not calculate students' satisfaction with the library/librarian due to the low number of students who used it.

Table 3. Students' Level of Trust in Information Sources

Source	Trust in th	ne source		
	М	SD	N of participants who rated trustworthiness of the source	% of responses
Immediate Family	7.25	2.35	310	91.99%
Extended family	6.09	2.42	277	82.20%
Friends	6.88	1.76	317	94.07%
High school professors	7.04	1.89	292	86.65%
Academics	8.13	1.50	272	80.71%
Peers	6.18	1.79	290	86.05%
Library/Librarian	5.01	2.44	203	60.24%
Practitioners	8.71	1.69	259	76.85%
Career counsellors	7.65	2.01	220	65.28%
Promo material	5.72	2.22	267	79.23%
Media	5.71	2.04	262	77.74%
Internet forums	5.32	2.18	230	68.25%
Web pages	5.99	2.13	245	72.70%

 Table 4. Students' Ratings of Accessibility of Information Sources

Source	Perceived level of accessibility of the source			
	M	SD	N	% of responses
Immediate Family	3.42	3.39	271	80.42%
Extended family	4.35	3.16	214	63.50%
Friends	4.26	3.45	262	77.74%
High school professors	5.03	2.65	205	60.83%
Academics	6.01	3.05	201	59.64%
Peers	5.53	3.32	227	67.36%
Library/Librarian	4.31	2.96	153	45.40%
Practitioners	5.02	2.50	181	53.71%
Career counsellors	4.41	2.67	162	48.07%
Promo material	4.89	2.71	196	58.16%
Media	4.55	3.47	209	62.02%
Internet forums	4.00	3.75	207	61.42%
Web pages	3.58	3.64	229	67.95%

Students are, in absolute terms, most satisfied with practitioners, academics, and web pages (Table 2). They are to some extent satisfied with other information sources and are not highly dissatisfied with any source. Since not all participants rated satisfaction with the information sources they used (although the vast majority did), it is plausible that some of them are not highly satisfied with particular source(s), but do not want to express their thoughts. Consequently, estimates of satisfaction with the source may be slightly biased towards higher values.

We asked students to report their level of trust in each source that was listed, regardless of whether they used it or not. However, the percentage of students who rated their level of trust in a particular source ranged from 60.3% (library/librarian) to 91.94% (immediate family members). It is possible that some participants misunderstood the instructions and rated trustworthiness only of sources they used. However, based on missing data on the significance of career information gathering and level of satisfaction with the sources, it is plausible to conclude that some participants purposefully skipped rating their level of trust in particular source(s). Due to the missing data, we believe that estimates of trustworthiness are to some extent biased to higher values. Participants' estimates of trustworthiness of different information sources are presented in Table 3. In absolute terms, students report their highest level of trust in practitioners and lowest level of trust in libraries/librarians.

Estimates of the availability of sources are given in Table 4. Students do not see information sources as highly available to them. In general, they rate all sources as available to the same extent. In absolute terms, they rate academics as the most available source, and immediate family members as the least available source. Again, some participants did not

rate the level of availability of particular sources and we assume that ratings of availability are biased towards higher values. The lowest percentage of answers was for career counsellors (48.36%), while the highest was for immediate family members (80.59%).

DISCUSSION

Results of the study are mostly in accordance with results of previous international studies on career information seeking behavior. Psychology students dominantly rely on interpersonal sources to gain career-related information, and this pattern of career information seeking behavior was observed previously (Julien, 1997). Looking at specific interpersonal sources, it is evident that friends and immediate family members are most frequently used for the source of information. When it comes to life concerns, young people prefer to consult people who are close to them (Chin et al., 2018; Agosto & Hughes-Hassell, 2005; Poston-Anderson & Edwards, 1993). However, experts (practitioners, teachers/academics) are also frequently consulted, which was observed in previous studies as well (Chin et al., 2018; Lilley, 2013; Hultgren, 2009; Julien, 1997). This can be explained by the high importance students give to gaining careerrelated information. In high stake situations, individuals prefer information sources that are trustworthy and can provide them with accurate information (Bansal et al., 2018). Since students report a high level of trust in immediate family members, friends, practitioners, teachers, and academics, they are more willing to ask them for advice. It is important to note that students are most satisfied with the information they get from practitioners, which corresponds to results of previous studies (Lilley, 2013). This is not surprising since young people prefer to get clear instructions (Paszkowska-Rogacz, 2008), and practitioners, due to their practical experience and knowledge of specific job requirements, can give more direct advice in comparison with other experts. This may explain why career counsellors, although perceived as highly trustworthy, are not consulted so often. Career counselling is client-centered, with the goal of empowering individuals to make decisions on their own, which is not in accordance with a client's expectation of getting direct advice (Paszkowska-Rogacz, 2008). Moreover, from results of this study and results of previous studies (Kerins, Madden, & Fulton, 2004; Julien, 1997), it is evident that young people do not prefer to use library/librarian as careerinformation source. According to Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2005), young people do not have enough trust in libraries when it comes to their specific information needs. Estimates of students' trust in libraries as information sources confirm this reasoning. As expected in the digital era (Chin et al., 2018; Hultgren, 2009), students to some extent rely on media and internet sources as career-related information sources. A detailed analysis of students' responses on open ended questions on internet sites they use revealed that students mostly use web pages of academic institutions (n = 23), and other relevant sites were mentioned as well (e.g. job search platforms, the web page of the Croatian Psychological Chamber, the web page of the Croatian Psychological Association, web pages of organizations, Facebook groups of psychologists). This can explain the relatively high level of student satisfaction with web pages. However, it is important to note that some students reported randomly browsing the web, which may not be the best strategy. What is also worrisome is the fact that almost half of the students that use internet forums named "Forum.hr" as their preferred information source (n = 32). Forum.hr is not a specialized site. It is a place where anyone can post and answer questions on different topics. Since student reliance on electronic sources is inevitable, it is important to work on their media literacy to make them able to distinguish sources of information according to the way they are created, and thus their reliability. Moreover, academic institutions should provide as much career related information as possible on their sites to further enhance student experience with their sites.

Although in previous studies (Lee et al., 2012) participants reported close contacts as easily accessible sources, and experts as not so easily accessible, the pattern of results in this study is different. Students do not clearly differentiate between accessibility of information sources (although academics got the highest estimate, the standard deviation of the estimate is high). However, although students do not rate sources they find highly trustworthy as highly accessible, they still dominantly use these sources. A similar pattern of findings was present in the study by Xie and Joo (2009). Participants in their study rated experts as not highly accessible, but still reported their more frequent use than easily accessible sources (such as family members). According to Hertzum et al. (2002), trustworthiness, but not accessibility is a critical determinant of source use. This explains why students are ready to put in additional effort to get information from the sources they find reliable. We did not ask participants about barriers to specific sources, but they are clearly present. It is possible that students lack self-confidence or communication skills necessary to approach the source, that they do not know what kind of information they can get from a specific source, or they received inaccurate information from that particular source, or were discouraged by it (Harris & Dewdney, 1994). Perhaps the source is not physically close, is busy, or students do not feel comfortable with that source. It could be that students are not familiar with a specific source, and that source is not able to provide different types of information at the right level of detail. Using a particular source can be time consuming, and using that source might require a large cognitive load, or the source is not interactive enough (Fidel & Green, 2004). However, further research is necessary to fully understand barriers to specific information sources. It would be especially beneficial to explore barriers to career counsellors since we know that career counselors exist in every major city in Croatia (within the CES and Career Counseling Centers) and that they are present at most universities from which respondents come. Consequently, students should be able to reach them easily. However, only a minority of students have used their services (despite seeing them as trustworthy). Whether the reason for this is the difference in expectations regarding the counselling process (as explained above), the inadequate visibility of career counsellors or something else, needs to be researched further.

The present study has some limitations that should be addressed in future studies. One is having asked students about the history of the use of information sources up to the point when the study was conducted, potentially ignoring changes in preferences towards information sources over time. Indeed, results of previous studies suggest that engagement in proactive career behavior is fluctuating due to environmental factors (Hirschi & Freund, 2014) and time period (Johnson, 1994), meaning that the pattern of results would be different at some other point in time. Additionally, we did not measure how often participants engaged with specific information sources. Trustworthiness, accessibility and satisfaction should be positively related to the prolonged use of any information source (Lee et al., 2012). Moreover, students from the largest department of psychology in the country (Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Zagreb) were not included in the study which limits the generalizability of findings. Last, but not least, responses missing on source trustworthiness and accessibility require interpretation of estimates with some caution. It is possible that some students did not want to express their opinion on trustworthiness and accessibility of specific sources due to topic sensitivity. Responses missing, although to a smaller extent, on the importance of career information seeking and satisfaction with particular sources, further point to this conclusion.

To sum up, this is the first study to explore career information seeking behavior of psychology students in Croatia. Its main findings are in accordance with previous international work. Hopefully, the study will lead to more studies on this topic and practical implications will follow.

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Traženje informacija o karijeri kod studenata psihologije u Republici Hrvatskoj: preliminarni podaci

Sažetak: Posjedovanje odgovarajućih vještina i korištenje pouzdanih izvora informacija o karijeri može pomoći pojedincu pri prilagodbi na zahtjeve tržišta rada. Studenti psihologije posjeduju širok spektar vještina, ali jako malo se zna o načinu na koji traže informacije o karijeri i mehanizmima koji upravljaju njihovim karijernim odlukama. Ova studija provedena je s ciljem definiranja izvora informacija o karijeri koje studenti psihologije koriste i određivanja studentskog zadovoljstva izvorima informacija, njihova povjerenja u izvore i percepcije dostupnosti izvora. Navedene tri karakteristike izvora informacija su važne odrednice njihovog dugoročnog korištenja. Provedeno je istraživanje papir-olovka tipa na uzorku od 337 studenata psihologije. Glavni nalazi istraživanja su: 1) studenti u prosjeku koriste šest izvora informacija o karijeri, dominantno prijatelje i članove uže obitelji; 2) studenti su najzadovoljniji sa stručnjacima iz prakse, kojima također najviše i vjeruju; 3) Studenti ne percipiraju niti jedan izvor informacija kao izrazito dostupan. Provedena studija daje prvi pregled traženja informacija o karijeri kod studenata psihologije u Republici Hrvatskoj. Nadamo se da će uslijediti i druge studije na ovu temu, te da će iz njih proizaći implikacije za praksu.

Ključne riječi: karijerni razvoj, potraga za informacija, studenti psihologije, izvori informacija o karijeri