



# Effectiveness of a Brief-Structured Group Career Counselling Program in Adolescents

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## Abstract

The aim of this work is to evaluate the effectiveness of a brief-structured group career counselling program in adolescents. Three hundred and twenty one adolescents (190 girls, 59,2% and 131 boys, 40,8%; Mage=15,15, S.Dage=0,49) dealing last year of Obligatory Education in five north-western Portuguese high schools participated in this study (178 in the experimental group and 143 in the control group). The treatment program includes five weekly sessions of 90 minutes with the adolescents, and two sessions with the families. A quasi-experimental design of two independent groups with repeated measures (at the pre-treatment and at the post-treatment) has been used. The results in the post-treatment indicate that the adolescents in the experimental group reduce vocational indecision and they had developed their career exploration behaviours. The within-groups effect sizes and the percentage of change were high for the majority of measures in the experimental group and almost null in the control group, so we can point out that the program is effective, for the reduction of vocational indecision and promotion of career exploration and commitment. The implications of this study for the practice and future investigations are discussed.

## Introduction

The effectiveness of psychological intervention as a key element of the scientific status of Psychology has been recently evidenced (Hamilton & Dobson, 2001). In this sense, it is important to develop the research on career counselling process and outcomes, since it permits us to better understand the conditions associated to effective career interventions. This knowledge can be applied to professional training processes, in order to enhance career services quality and effectiveness (e.g., Spokane, 1991, 2004). This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of a brief-structured group career counselling program in adolescents.

## Method

**Participants.** Three hundred and twenty one 9<sup>th</sup> graders (190 girls, 59,2% and 131 boys, 40,8%; M<sub>age</sub>=15,15, SD<sub>age</sub>=0,49) attending the last year of Obligatory Education in five north-western Portuguese high schools participated in this study (178 in the experimental group and 143 in the control group). The experimental group includes students that voluntarily seek for or were reinforced by parents and teachers to seek career assistance by professionals of the Career Counselling Centre of the University of Minho-CCUM, also in the northwest side of the country. The CCUM frequently offers paid assistance to the public or institutions related with the University activities. Initial interviews with the teachers and administrators of the schools involved were carried out, in order to adjust the intervention plan to students perceived general career assistance needs. The clients were not having extra-treatment support.

**Career Intervention Process.** The treatment program is based on Spokane (1991), and Gibson & Mitchell (1998) models of career counselling process. It includes five weekly sessions of 90 minutes with the adolescents, and two sessions with the families (Table 1).

**Measures.** Pre- and post- test measures of career exploration (CES, Career Exploration Survey; Stumpf, Colarelli & Hartman, 1983) and career indecision (CDS, Career Decision Scale; Osipow, Carney, Winer, Yanico & Koshier, 1976) were administered to experimental (n=178) and control (n=143) groups, between January-May 2004.

Table 1. Model of career counselling process

Phase	Session	Definition
Phase 1 Initiating	Session 1	Carried out with the parents of each student, focalized on the quality of their involvement in the career development of their son/daughter.
	Session 2	Designed to initiate and structure the counselling relationship with the students, to help them in the definition/clarification of the specific decision they are facing, as well as in the discussion of personal thoughts and theories about "career", and in the identification of decision-making difficulties. In addition, the review of personal goals for career counselling, personal background, schoolwork history and style, and aspirations, and the development of an individual intervention plan, are also elements of this phase. General information on career intervention history of each participant was also collected.
Phase 2 Exploring	Session 3	Designed to promote and guide general and in depth career exploration, in order to enhance hypothesis testing and compromise with proximal career development possibilities; specific opportunities to explore self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, values and interests, in relation to life-roles and activities are created in this sessions and for homework.
	Session 4	Evaluation and ranking of preferred and tested options. Perceived resources and barriers to attain success in action are discussed.
Phase 3 Compromising	Session 5	Devoted to promote the progress toward a public compromise with one's choice. Discussion of successfully action approaches. Simulation of choice's implementation.
Phase 4 Finalising	Session 6	Designed to review the counselling process with each client, to elaborate conclusions on the career decision-making process and outcomes, and to close relationship.
	Session 7	Focused on sharing with the pupil's parents detailed information on the intervention process, and on defining eventual need of future interventions with their son/daughter.

## Analysis and Results

A quasi-experimental design of two independent groups with repeated measures (at the pre-treatment and at the post-treatment) has been used. The results in the post-treatment indicate that the adolescents in the experimental group enhance career exploration and reduce career indecision (Table 2). The within-groups effect sizes and the percentage of change were high for the majority of measures in the experimental group and almost null in the control group (Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and level of significance and Within-groups effect sizes and the percentage of change

DV's	Pre-Treatment				Post-Treatment						Experimental Group		Control Group		
	Experimental Group		Control Group		Experimental Group		Control Group				(pré-post treatment)		(pré-pos treatment)		
	M	S.D.	M	S.D.	M	S.D.	M	S.D.	F	Sig.	d	%	d	%	
<b>Level of Indecision</b>	35.97	6.13	33.90	6.96	33.01	6.88	33.53	7.42	21.69	0.00	-0,45	-8,22	-0,05	-1,09	
<b>Beliefs of Vocational Exploration</b>	<b>Employment Outlook</b>	9.41	2.27	9.88	2.14	10.48	1.98	10.04	2.32	24.88	0.00	0,50	11,37	0,07	1,62
	<b>Certainty of Exploration Outcomes</b>	8.20	2.91	8.53	2.92	9.16	2.68	9.41	2.81	26.93	0.00	0,35	11,70	0,31	10,32
	<b>External Instrumentality</b>	37.93	6.45	37.28	7.57	38.79	6.36	37.55	6.77	2.25	0.15	0,86	2,27	0,04	0,72
	<b>Internal Instrumentality</b>	14.50	3.07	14.80	2.86	14.79	2.84	14.45	2.76	0.03	0.87	0,10	2,00	0,12	-2,36
	<b>Importance of Preferred Position</b>	10.76	2.46	10.91	2.62	11.70	2.34	10.98	2.54	2.08	0.15	0,39	8,74	0,03	0,64
<b>Process of Vocational Exploration</b>	<b>Self Exploration</b>	7.20	2.35	8.43	2.47	10.07	2.39	9.66	2.34	5.37	0.02	1,21	39,86	0,51	14,59
	<b>Environment Exploration</b>	4.03	1.62	4.28	1.66	5.01	1.73	4.98	1.80	68.29	0.00	0,58	24,32	0,40	16,36
	<b>Intended-Systematic Exploration</b>	10.13	3.43	11.15	3.69	13.02	2.59	12.39	3.61	90.43	0.00	0,95	28,53	0,34	11,12
	<b>Amount of Information</b>	15.50	3.98	15.75	4.08	17.06	3.86	16.22	4.09	22.65	0.00	0,40	10,06	0,11	2,98
<b>Reactions to the vocational exploration</b>	<b>Satisfaction with - information</b>	8.35	2.34	9.29	2.37	10.12	2.15	9.88	2.33	78.44	0.00	0,79	21,20	0,25	6,35
	<b>Explorational Stress</b>	15.31	4.64	14.70	4.47	15.96	4.69	15.36	4.39	5.37	0.02	0,14	4,25	0,15	4,49
	<b>Decisional Stress</b>	23.95	7.10	21.61	7.47	22.34	7.22	21.57	7.42	4.23	0.04	-0,22	-6,72	0,005	-0,19

## Discussion and Conclusion

The results of CDS and CES Anova for repeated measures of career exploration and career indecision evidence a significant effect for the changeable moment of evaluation for the dimensions: Level of Indecision (F=21.69; p<0.05); Employment Outlook (F=24.88; p<0.01), Intended-Systematic Exploration (F=90.43; p<0.01), Amount of Information (F=2.65; p<0.01), Satisfaction with -Information (F=78.44; p<0.001), and Decisional Stress (F=4.23; p<0.04). These results demonstrate that the adolescents who had received treatment had significantly diminished its levels of career indecision, its punctuations in the amount of undesired stress felt in function of the process of career decision-making, in comparison to other events, in the end of the treatment. Simultaneously, they had registered more positive beliefs, namely, more confidence in the possibility to pursue studies and obtain job in the preferred domain, had developed intentional and systematic search of self and environment information, they had increased the amount of information, and had developed greater satisfaction in relation to the same one, in the end of the treatment.

The within-groups effect sizes indicate that intervention produced a significant increase of the beliefs of employment outlook and external search instrumentality, of the intended-systematic exploration and self exploration, environment exploration, as well as of the reaction satisfaction with information, as effect of intervention in the experimental group. The percentages of change in the experimental group can be considered clinically significant (>20%) (e.g., Borkovec & Costello, 1993). The percentage of improvement in the experimental group for the dimensions of environment exploration, self exploration, intended-systematic exploration, and satisfaction with information obtained, surpass this point of cut clearly. Moreover, although the percentages of change of vocational indecision are low (8,22%), this can be considered a good result since the adolescents who had participated in the program were pupils who presented moderate levels of indecision.

Concluding, the career counselling program present in this study is effective, for the reduction of career indecision and activation of career exploration dimensions.

## Limitations and Future Directions

Limitations of this study could be considered, the questions related with the size of the sample as well as with its selection. Being about a convenience sampling, there may exist factors of self-selection that intervene with the decision of the citizen to participate or not in the study. Because participants in the intervention self-selected themselves to the program, it diminishes the possibility of integrating students in the risk sample, frequently ignored by remedial or preventive interventions. In future programs, it is desirable to proceed to a random distribution of the participants for the two conditions. Another limitation is related with the battery of instruments used. Despite the instruments being suitable to the Portuguese population (Taveira, 1997), for the fact to be measured of auto-story, they are citizens the errors of interpretation and the factors of social desire. Of its side, the fact of the retraction of data of the study if to have confined to the zone north of the Country, constitutes an increased limitation, in this in case that, to the generalization of the results to the remaining portion of the population.

## References

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