



Explanatory Study on Career Decision Making Difficulties

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Author DKM designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author WDNSMT managed the analyses of the study. Author WJAJML managed the literature searches. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Existence of Career Decision Making Difficulty (CDD) is lightly addressed in the career planning and career management body of knowledge. The purpose of this explanatory study was to test the prevalence and the nature of the CDD specifically among the Sri Lankan undergraduates. An explanatory study was carried out with the data of filed survey of 108 valid responses those represent the Sri Lankan universities. The instrument of three facets of CDD [1] was used as the principle measure of responses. Results showed the prevalence of significant level of CDD among undergraduates of Sri Lanka universities. The lack of readiness appears prior to the career decision making process and the great level of CDD is supported by lack of readiness. Lack of information and inconsistent information are too significantly contributing CDD among undergraduates during the career decision making process. Lack of readiness of Sri Lankan undergraduates is mainly due to their dysfunctional belief and general indecisiveness rather than lack of motivation.

Keywords: Career decision making difficulties; undergraduates; Sri Lanka.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Picking a right career at the right time is an important decision to be made very early in student's life. Career decisions are meant to be very critical for students as they lead relationships, personal growth, life satisfaction, quality of life, work-life balance, well-being and much more of their lives. Arriving at career decisions on the other hand is not that simple as nexus of factors affect them. Among them are career interests, ambitions, past achievements, education, peer & parental influences, and abilities & skills. Selecting a career is usually made at several turning points of the educational path. For instance, students are expected to pick an area of specialization in grade 10/12, graduation, post-graduation and/or even later. Choice of subjects is made at the school/college with the view of utilizing those knowledge in future careers. However, career related needs may vary depending on the dynamics of life course and alternating ambitions. As a result, career mobility of contemporary workers is evident to be very high. They keep changing their careers frequently, on average every 2 years. The dynamics of personalities too affect the desire to change the careers. As per the needs theory [2] human beings are primarily guided by their needs. Career is the main drive of reaching work and personal desires along the life span.

As stated by Kelly & Lee [3], in recent years, career indecision has become an increasingly important construct in the field of vocational psychology. The individual's difficulties in his/her effort to make career decisions is included in the concept of career indecision. According to [4,5,6], these difficulties are traced either before or during the decision-making process, are divided into cognitive or emotional difficulties and hinder the decision-making process.

The taxonomy of difficulties in career decision-making is developed by [1]. The difficulties were defined as deviations from an —ideal career decision-maker— a person who is aware of the need to make a career decision, willing to make such a decision and capable of making the decision —correctly in this taxonomy. Any deviation from this model was considered as a potential difficulty that could affect the individual's decision-making process in one of two possible ways: (a) by preventing the individual from making a career decision or (b) by leading to a less optimal career decision. According to the taxonomy, there are three major categories of

difficulty: lack of information (about the self, about the steps involved in the process, about the various alternatives and the sources of additional information), inconsistent information (unreliable information, internal and external conflicts) and lack of readiness to engage in the career decision-making process.

After the completion academic studies, young people find difficulties in making career decisions. Many young people, career choice represents a difficult and complicated process that can detain a state of indecision with negative, long-termed consequences in their professional, personal and social life [7]. Late studies claimed that a significant proportion of university students are undecided about their career paths [8] and that career indecision is connected to various cognitive factors, such as), self-knowledge [1], career decision-making, self-efficacy [9], lack of information [10], dysfunctional career thoughts [11], internal - external conflicts [12] and one's previous working experience [13]. There is still a long research-way to go as each one of the above cognitive factors have separately been an object of numerous research [14,15,9].

Thus, the main purpose of the current study is to explore the prevalence and the nature of career decision making difficulties in the context of Sri Lankan undergraduates.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

People make decisions all over the different stages of their lives. Among the available options, people struggle to make the most appropriate decision. The decisions that made in the young adulthood, may have influence on the whole individual's life. The choice of career can be considered as such decision which determines the way forward. A career is a composition of activities required by all roles in life that one plays at any time of his/her life, and such roles encompass the ones played as an employee, too [16,17]. The concept of a career includes pre- and post-professional roles. Over the course of their career development individuals make various decisions and adopt professional roles.

A suitable profession offers the best positive features and appeal to an individual at a specific moment in time. As stated by [18], the choice of profession involves selecting a role from any number of professions and making a decision to

pursue that particular field. If one is able to make effective decisions, this can lead to an increase in satisfaction with life and help an individual feel good whereas ineffective decisions may give rise to difficulties in life and make an individual feel bad [19]. According to [20], one's attitude for development roles, coupled with a lack of knowledge of and skills in one's choice of profession make it difficult to make a career decision. There are also a number of studies that argue that the socioeconomic and educational levels of parents play a role in individuals' career decision-making processes [21]. In addition, some studies suggest that the wishes and attitudes of parents define a student's choice of profession [20,22]. Other factors that influence an individual's choice of profession include gender, interests, skills, values, culture, politics and economic benefits [23]. The career decision can be considered as the one of the most important decisions made by young people based on their education and experience.

According to [7] for many young people, career choice represents a difficult and complicated process that can detain a state of indecision with negative, long-termed consequences in their professional, personal and social life.

Career decision-making is a complex process, by which the decision makers are required to process information about themselves and information about the world of work [24]. Difficulties in making decisions could occur if decision makers do not possess relevant information, have conflicting information, or do not know how to process the information [25]. Difficulties could also arise when the psychological characteristics of the individual interfere with decision-making tasks [26]. Many college students struggle with the decisions they have to make about a college major and school to work transition. Research on career decision-making problems has been largely focused on career indecision [27], and has been investigated without much effort toward integrating theories and empirical evidence [7].

Recent studies revealed that as stated by [8], significant proportion of university students are undecided about their career paths and that career indecision is related to various cognitive factors, such as career decision-making, self-efficacy [9], dysfunctional career thoughts [11], lack of information [10], internal -external conflicts [12], self-knowledge [1] and one's previous working experience [13].

Cultural and contextual support plays a significant role in the way individuals make career decisions [28]. The contemporary North American emphasizes the importance and necessity of making personal choices, forming judgments, and having one's own opinions [29]. In contrast, Eastern culture does not highlight the explicit separation of each individual, but tends to emphasize collective decisions. Although decidedness and related constructs of career decision making have been well documented in the literature [7,4], its cultural relevancy is relatively unknown. Reviews of career assessment tools suggest that very little has been done to examine applicability of career assessment to the cultural minorities [30,31,32].

The relationship between identity statuses and different kinds of career was studied by [33] and the findings showed that membership in a specific identity status group were significantly related to the nature and amount of career indecision. Achievement responders had significantly lower career indecision scores than respondents in other three status groups. The students who have not yet made a career decision into four groups [34]: (1) Ready to decide- low anxiety, high self-esteem, good vocational identity; (2) Developmentally undecided-- emotionally stable, but do not yet have a clear picture of themselves or the world of work; (3) Choice anxious-- high choice anxiety, little need for career information, low vocational identity; and (4) Chronically indecisiveness-- low vocational identity, high need for career and self-information, low goal directness, and low self-esteem.

A taxonomy of difficulties in career decision-making was developed by [1]. According to this taxonomy, the difficulties were defined as deviations from an —ideal career decision-maker—a person who is aware of the need to make a career decision, willing to make such a decision and capable of making the decision —correctly. The taxonomy includes three major categories of difficulty: Lack of information (about the self, about the steps involved in the process, about the various alternatives, lack of readiness to engage in the career decision-making process and the sources of additional information) and inconsistent information (unreliable information, internal and external conflicts).

The lack of readiness is difficulty that matters prior to the career decision making process. Three theoretical categories of career decision-making difficulties [1] that they believed

contributed to a lack of readiness and those were a general indecisiveness that permeates all types of decision-making for the individual, lack of motivation on the part of the individual to begin career decision-making, and various beliefs in dysfunctional career decision-making myths (e.g., career decisions are best made by experts).

The lack of information and inconsistent information were career decision-making difficulties that occur during the process of career decision-making. The lack of information sub component was divided into four additional categories of career decision-making difficulties: lack of information about the career decision-making process (i.e., not knowing how to make a career decision); lack of information about the self (e.g., not having knowledge about capabilities, personality traits, or interests); lack of information about occupations (e.g., not understanding what work is involved in specific occupations and not knowing about the wide range of occupational options available); and lack of information about ways of obtaining career information (i.e., confusion about how to begin researching vocational options).

The inconsistent information was divided into three categories of career decision-making difficulties: inconsistent information due to unreliable information (i.e., difficulties related to unreliable or fuzzy information); [9] inconsistent information due to internal conflicts (e.g., difficulties related to the evolving personal identity of the individual); and inconsistent information due to external conflicts (e.g., conflicts involving significant others).

A questionnaire (the Career Decision Difficulties Questionnaire) [1] is empirically examines their taxonomy of career decision-making difficulties. They administered this questionnaire to a sample of 259 young Israeli adults who were at the beginning of their career decision-making process and to an American sample of 304 university students. Their results indicated that the pattern of relationship among the 10 decision-making difficulty categories was generally similar to the hypothesized pattern in both samples and that there were no significant differences between the two samples (despite age and cultural differences). They believed their taxonomy of career decision-making difficulties needs further elaboration, especially the 10 decision-making difficulty categories, before it can be claimed that the construct of career indecision is well understood [1].

The present study was designed to address the lack of empirical evidences to prove the existence of career decision making difficulty in Sri Lankan context.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Results of the literature review were validated by administering a 34 items instrument [1] for 108 cases. The questionnaire was distributed among 110 undergraduates and 108 valid responses were recorded. Career Decision Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ; Gati, Krausz & Osipow, [1]), the CDDQ is developed to assess career decision-making difficulties based on the taxonomy proposed by Gati, Krausz, and Osipow [1]. The internal consistency reliability coefficients ranged from 0.70 to 0.93 for the three scales and it was 0.95 for the entire questionnaire. For this study, the alpha internal consistency reliability coefficients were 0.80, 0.95, 0.91, and 0.96 for the Lack of Readiness, Lack of Information, and Inconsistent Information subscales, and the full scale, respectively. As stated by Lancaster, Rudolph, Perkins & Patten, [35]; Osipow, [7] the CDDQ has been found to have a good convergent validity with the Career Decision Scale and good discriminant validity. The descriptive techniques used to assess the prevalence and nature of the career decision making difficulties among undergraduates of Sri Lanka.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that there is a significant level of career decision making difficulties among the undergraduates in Sri Lanka. Table 1 depicts the mean value for CDD 4.84 ensures the prevalence of career decision making difficulties among undergraduates.

Among the three factors which are contributing to the CDD, the Lack of Readiness prior to the process (LR in Table 1) is the most prominent factor (Mean = 5.17) which is contributing to significant level of CDD. The three sub components of Lack of Readiness collectively contributed high CDD than two other indicators of the career decision making difficulty.

However, among the three sub components of Lack of Readiness (Lack of Motivation –LM, General Indecisiveness – GI, and Dysfunctional Beliefs- DB) Lack of Motivation is the lowest contributor to the CDD while Dysfunctional Beliefs recorded as the prominent contributor. As

such, mean CDD for each component is 4.3, 5.39, and 5.64 for Lack of Motivation, General Indecisiveness, and Dysfunctional Beliefs respectively. It implies even though undergraduates are motivated enough to make a career decision, they are not free from dysfunctional beliefs or misperceptions about the careers. For instance, item number 8, 9, 10 and 11 those targeted measuring the dysfunctional beliefs of respondents score the highest than the rest of the items. Item 8 stated, "I expect that entering the career I choose will also solve my personal problems" and more than 65% of the sample assess themselves as believing the same. In Sri Lankan context, 'career' for many is

the deciding arm of many other life related matters such as status, income, marriage, quality of life, personal growth, residence, life satisfaction, etc... The cultural influence tends to form misperceptions about the career choices leading Sri Lankan undergraduates to suffer from greater CDD.

Further, item 9 tests the dysfunctional beliefs about type of the career; "I believe there is only one career that suits me". The frequencies of the responses for item 9 exhibits more than 50% of respondents believe that there is a only one career that suite them. Hence, it is a real hassle for them to arrive at a decision when they

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for CDD

	Grand average of CDD	LR	LI	II
N Valid	108	108	108	108
Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean	4.8368	5.1654	4.6395	4.8069
Median	4.9683	5.3000	4.7917	4.9500
Mode	5.55 ^a	4.70 ^a	3.08 ^a	5.00 ^a
Std. Deviation	1.40126	1.23045	1.73802	1.61940
Minimum	1.88	2.20	1.08	1.00
Maximum	7.83	7.80	8.67	8.00

Source: Survey results

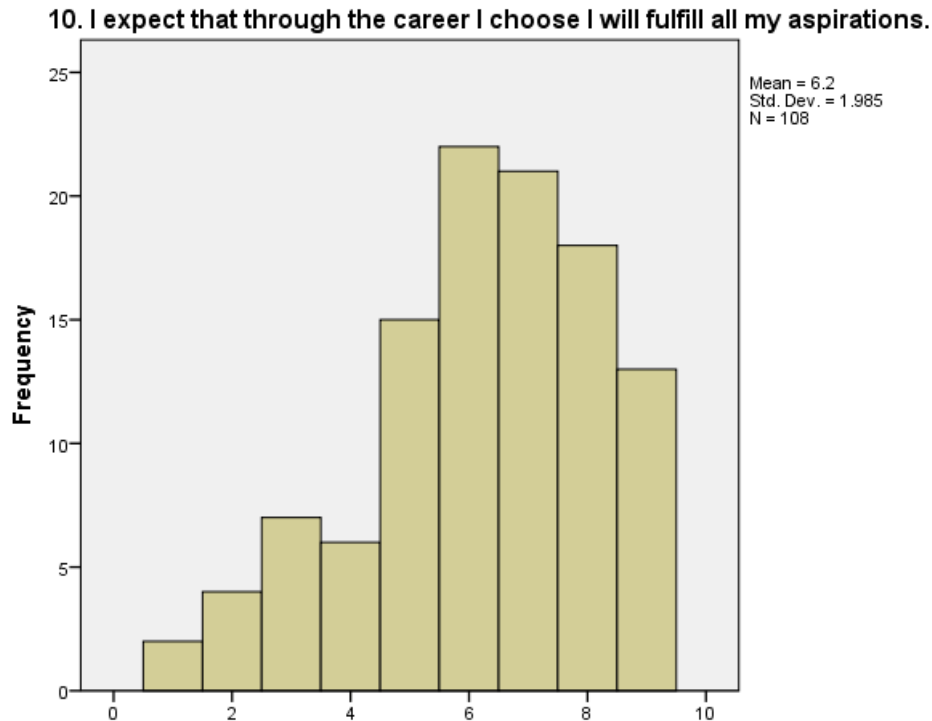


Fig. 1. I expect that through the career I choose I will fulfill all my aspirations

Source: Survey results

happen to meet a alternative career than their preferred one. This is profoundly true for Sri Lankan, where cultural values encourage early learners to dream about professions that are socially perceived to be of high value. For examples, majority of early learners and adolescents' career choice is "a doctor" or "an engineer" and rarely anyone would think of out of box and ambitious of choosing a low ranked career as perceived by the society. This clearly evidenced the high level of dysfunctional beliefs associated with CDD of undergraduates of Sri Lanka.

The item 10 also testes the dysfunctional beliefs of the respondents about the career before entering in to the career decision making process. It states, "I expect that through the career I choose I will fulfill all my aspirations". This is also a dysfunctional belief of respondents that lead to greater CDD. As depicted by the Fig. 1 vast majority expect the "career" to fulfill their all aspirations. Nearly 87% of the respondents possess this misbelief, which makes arrive at career decision difficult for them. Students from their early school life are trained to believe that they should aimed for the top ranks at the examinations and to go for most demanding jobs those appealing for general crowd in the society. Followed by the parental influence which appear

later in this discussion, students are framed to think of picking the demanding careers assuming all their life aspirations will be satisfied through the chosen career. Again, it drives them to difficulty of picking a "career" out of their wish list.

Then, item 11 too tests the dysfunctional beliefs of the respondents. There, it was inquired whether they believe that a career choice is a one-time choice and a life-long commitment (Q 11: I believe that a career choice is a one-time choice and a life-long commitment).

As depicted by the Fig. 2, majority of respondents believe that a career choice is a one-time choice and a life-long commitment and this accounts a 74% of the sample. This ultimately proves the existence of significant level of dysfunctional beliefs among Sri Lankan undergraduates.

The next powerful component of Lack of Readiness towards CDD is the General Indecisiveness (Mean = 5.39). General Indecisiveness is inability to arrive at a decision is the result of indecisiveness. Sri Lankan undergraduates' CDD is significantly determined by their inability to arrive at decisions. The sample comprised of the management faculty

11. I believe that a career choice is a one-time choice and a life-long commitment.

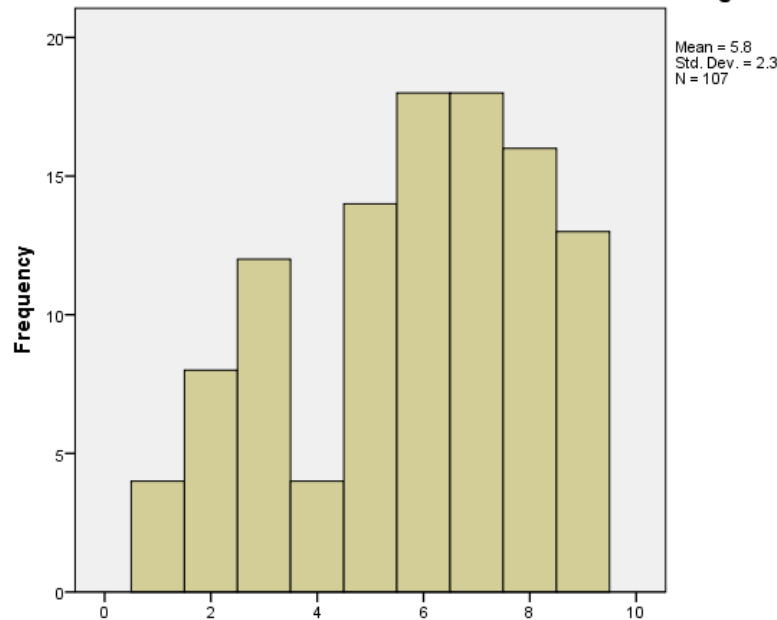


Fig. 2. I believe that a career choice is a one-time choice and a life-long commitment

Source: Survey results

undergraduates. The decision making skill should be one of the leading job skill of them as managers. However, the decision making ability of the Sri Lankan children are not encouraged at the primary and secondary education. Usually they heavily depend on their parents for everything. They are rarely be trained nor given opportunity to make their own decisions to develop their decision making mastery. The university education which is much theoretical thus is also less helpful in developing their decision making skills. This is highly apparent in the sample and has caused higher CDD.

General indecisiveness of the respondents was measured using item number 4, 5, and 6.

As per the Table 2, only 40% are confident that they can make a decision without difficulty. The remaining 60% exhibits indecisiveness. Here, the

question is not testing their career indecisiveness rather it tests how indecisive they are in general. This implies that the high level of indecisiveness result in greater CDD as it is involved making decisions.

Similarly, item 5 and item 6 assess the general indecisiveness of respondents.

Respondents' dependency on third party to make decision is tested here. It is clearly shown by the frequencies that the vast majority (32%) is depended when comes to decision making. In Sri Lankan culture, parental and other third party influences are visible across the life span of a person specifically, at key milestones of a person such as choosing a career and selecting a life partner. Many want others to make such decisions for them to avoid the risk of being failure.

Table 2. Frequencies of Q4: It is usually difficult for me to make decisions

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Does not describe me	9	8.3	8.4	8.4
	2	13	12.0	12.1	20.6
	3	11	10.2	10.3	30.8
	4	10	9.3	9.3	40.2
	5	11	10.2	10.3	50.5
	6	21	19.4	19.6	70.1
	7	14	13.0	13.1	83.2
	8	12	11.1	11.2	94.4
	Describes me well	6	5.6	5.6	100.0
	Total	107	99.1	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.9		
Total		108	100.0		

Source: Survey results

Table 3. Frequencies Q5: I usually feel that I need confirmation and support for my decisions from a professional person or somebody else I trust

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Does not describe me	4	3.7	3.7	3.7
	2	9	8.3	8.3	12.0
	3	7	6.5	6.5	18.5
	4	15	13.9	13.9	32.4
	5	14	13.0	13.0	45.4
	6	12	11.1	11.1	56.5
	7	18	16.7	16.7	73.1
	8	13	12.0	12.0	85.2
	Describes me well	16	14.8	14.8	100.0
	Total	108	100.0	100.0	

Source: Survey results

Table 4. Frequency values for lack of information

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Does not describe me	2	1.9	1.9	1.9
	2	4	3.7	3.7	5.6
	2	5	4.6	4.6	10.2
	2	5	4.6	4.6	14.8
	3	6	5.6	5.6	20.4
	3	6	5.6	5.6	25.9
	4	8	7.4	7.4	33.3
	4	2	1.9	1.9	35.2
	4	6	5.6	5.6	40.7
	5	10	9.3	9.3	50.0
	5	5	4.6	4.6	54.6
	5	6	5.6	5.6	60.2
	6	11	10.2	10.2	70.4
	6	7	6.5	6.5	76.9
	6	4	3.7	3.7	80.6
	7	3	2.8	2.8	83.3
	7	5	4.6	4.6	88.0
	7	7	6.5	6.5	94.4
	8	3	2.8	2.8	97.2
	8	1	.9	.9	98.1
	9	1	.9	.9	99.1
	Describes me well	1	.9	.9	100.0
	Total	108	100.0	100.0	

Source: Survey results

Table 5. Frequency values for Inconsistent information

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Does not describe me	4	3.7	3.7	3.7
	2	4	3.7	3.7	7.4
	2	6	5.6	5.6	13.0
	3	6	5.6	5.6	18.5
	3	4	3.7	3.7	22.2
	4	8	7.4	7.4	29.6
	4	8	7.4	7.4	37.0
	5	8	7.4	7.4	44.4
	5	11	10.2	10.2	54.6
	6	12	11.1	11.1	65.7
	6	10	9.3	9.3	75.0
	7	7	6.5	6.5	81.5
	7	8	7.4	7.4	88.9
	8	7	6.5	6.5	95.4
	8	3	2.8	2.8	98.1
	9	1	.9	.9	99.1
	Describes me well	1	.9	.9	100.0
	Total	108	100.0	100.0	

Source: Survey results

Consequently, due high level of Lack of Readiness by undergraduates has put considerable weight on the CDD. On the other side, their inability to arrive at decision as a general trait is also low leading the career decision making even harder. Even though they are at the doorstep of choosing a career, still they are not ready to perform it. It

emphasizes that undergraduates' decision making is not matured up to the expected level. Usually they are afraid of making decisions due to general indecisiveness and dysfunctional beliefs as Sri Lankan culture is more socially connected. There self-decision making is not much promoted. Now people are competent enough of performing multi tasks. But, still some believes one career and that's why this much of percentage still there.

During the process: Lack of information recorded a significant contribution towards CDD (Mean value= 4.64). Lack of information on occupations is the prominent indicator (Mean value=4.79) which highlight limited range of information available for undergraduates regarding the occupations.

Inconsistent information also depicts considerable bearing on CDD.

Among three indicators (Unreliable information, Internal conflicts and External conflicts), it is found that External factors like parental influence affects when making career decisions. Therefore it is evident that career decision making difficulties among undergraduates in Sri Lanka.

5. CONCLUSION

A gradually growing percentage of students internationally is characterized by career indecision in recent years [8]. This is proved in the current study as well, as the majority of the students facing -or having faced- difficulties in career decision-making. The findings of the current study have also shown that indecisive students have recorded a higher level of dysfunctional thoughts and difficulties than the students that had made a certain career decision. The high correlation between dysfunctional career thoughts and career indecisiveness has been supported widely in research [36,37]. The analysis revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between the CTI factors and lack of information (CDDQ). The lack of information represents one of the main distinctive factors between the vocationally decisive and indecisive students [38,10]. After reviewing the relevant literature, it was clear that inconsistent information and internal/external conflicts as well represent difficulties that are accompanied by career indecision [38,39]. The findings of the present study supported the aforementioned theoretical expectations.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Implications of the study include the investigation of the empirical evidences to establish the claim for the prevalence of CDD specifically in Sri Lankan context. Then the study offered theoretical and empirical proof on the nature of the CDD in the light of three facets of CDD along with career decision making process. Future research agendas may consider investigating the influencers of CDD outside the career decision making process.

DISCLAIMER

The products used for this research are commonly and predominantly use products in our area of research and country. There is absolutely no conflict of interest between the authors and producers of the products because we do not intend to use these products as an avenue for any litigation but for the advancement of knowledge. Also, the research was not funded by the producing company rather it was funded by personal efforts of the authors.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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