

Perfectionism and career decidedness of Filipino college students

Datu, Jesus Alfonso D. ✉

Counseling and Educational Psychology Department,
De La Salle University-Manila / Colegio de San Juan de Letran-Manila (jess.datu@yahoo.com)

Received: 18 March 2013
Available Online: 4 August 2013

Revised: 21 July 2013
DOI: 10.5861/ijrse.2013.493

Accepted: 25 July 2013

ISSN: 2243-7703
Online ISSN: 2243-7711

OPEN ACCESS



Abstract

The short report investigates the impact of perfectionistic tendencies on career decidedness. One hundred seventy two Filipino college students (N=172) served as respondents of the inquiry. Findings revealed that *organization* positively correlates to *occupational knowledge and training* while *parental expectations* positively correlate to *decidedness*. Parental expectations served as the robust predictor of *decidedness*. Students with low perfectionism scored higher on *decidedness* and *comfort*. On the other hand, those with high levels of perfectionism experienced greater *self-clarity*, *occupational knowledge and training*, *decisiveness*, and *career choice importance*. From these results, the positive and negative contributions of perfectionism on the process making career decisions are illustrated. Implications of the findings are elaborated.

Keywords: career decidedness; Filipino college students; parental expectations; occupational knowledge and training; perfectionism

Perfectionism and career decidedness of Filipino college students

1. Introduction

Career decidedness is one of the robust markers of defining occupational success. It involves effectively identifying and selecting career choices that reflect individuals' aspirations. In addition, it is a dynamic and continuous process of making decisions due to transitions in educational or occupational status (Gati, Krasuz, & Osipow, 1996). Yet, changes in education and occupation may frequently result to difficulties in choosing career options or career indecision (Gati & Osipow, 2000).

Recognizing the potential impact of career-decision making on personal growth and happiness (Uthayakumar, Schimmack, Hartung, & Rogers, 2010), past empirical studies examined person-related variables that affect career decidedness. These include personality traits (Borges & Savickas, 2002; Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2009; Starica, 2011), emotional intelligence (Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2009), anxiety (Campagna, 2007; Kelly & Pulver, 2003), academic self-esteem (Starica, 2011), and career decision-making self-efficacy (Creed, Patton, & Bartrum, 2004). Evidently, dispositional, emotional, and cognitive factors play an important role in the process of making career decisions.

Despite these empirical investigations on what person-related factors predict career-decision making, there is a dearth of studies that assess the contributions of perfectionism on the capability of individuals to choose and implement career choices. Perfectionism is a dispositional characteristic typified by adherence to unrealistically high personal standards and constant monitoring whether these standards are met (Hewitt & Fleet, 1991). However, a more recent conceptualization of perfectionism emphasized the involvement of parental expectations and parental criticisms in examining the perfectionistic tendencies of individuals (Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990). In other words, personal and parental standards play important functions in the performance and assessment of various life tasks.

From a theoretical standpoint, perfectionism would have an impact on the career decision-making abilities of individuals. Based on multidimensional model of perfectionism (Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990), it is possible that perfectionism can be linked to negative outcomes when personal standards and dysfunctional thoughts are intertwined. To the extent that personal standards are accompanied by negative thoughts, vulnerability to maladaptive outcomes like depression (Blatt, 1995), eating disorder (Goldner, Cockell, & Srikameswaran, 2002), and suicide (Blankstein, Lumley, & Crawford, 2007) increases.

Consistent with the premises of the model, previous studies revealed that higher levels of perfectionism are linked to higher levels of career decision-making difficulties (Frost & Shows, 1993; Page, Bruch, & Haase, 2008). Though, a recent formulation argues that perfectionism can be further dichotomized into adaptive and maladaptive forms (Gansky & Ashbe, 2007). Maladaptive perfectionism assets that inclinations to be perfect lead to the aforementioned dysfunctional outcomes due to negative schemas about one's self and the unrealistic expectations of others (Lehmann & Konstam, 2011; Page, Bruch, & Haase, 2008). On the other hand, the adaptive nature of perfectionism implies that perfectionism substantially contributes to personal growth and well-being (Lehmann & Konstam, 2011).

Evidently, the available literature pointed to the need to examine the positive and negative contributions of perfectionism on the domains of career decidedness. As most empirical inquiries emphasized the negative impact of perfectionism on career decision-making (Frost & Shows, 1993; Page, Bruch, & Haase, 2008), it is also promising to look at how perfectionistic tendencies may lead to adaptive behavioral outcomes. Even with its practical significance, this area of research was not prioritized in the Philippine context. Hence, the current study purports to assess the relationship and impact of perfectionism on the career decidedness of Filipino college students. This will lead to awareness of how perfectionistic tendencies affect the career decision-making process

and the development of career counseling interventions that address maladaptive dispositional inclinations of individuals who are experiencing career indecision.

2. Methods

2.1 Participants

The study employed one hundred seventy two Filipino college students (N=172) who are enrolled in a private collegiate institution in Manila City. Their ages ranged from 16 to 19 (M = 17.25, SD = .93). Most of the respondents are female (N=92) while the rest are male adolescents (N=80). All the respondents were given consent forms prior to the administration of the surveys. In addition, they were given incentives in lieu of their participation in the current study.

2.2 Instruments

The present study utilized two scales to answer the research questions which include the following:

Career Decision Profile

Career Decision Profile (CDP) is a 16-item inventory developed by Jones (1989) that measures individuals' susceptibility to experience career indecision. The instrument has six dimensions which involved; decidedness, comfort, self-clarity, knowledge about occupations and training, decisiveness and career choice importance. Higher scores would imply higher levels of career indecision. The present reliability of the scale is 0.72.

Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS)

The FMPS is a 35-item instrument constructed by Frost (1990) to examine perfectionistic tendencies. It consists of 6 domains which include: parental control, parental criticism, parental standards, doubts about action, concern about mistakes and organization. The current reliability of the instrument is .81.

2.3 Data analysis

With the use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 17.0), the descriptive statistical measures such as mean, standard deviations, and reliability coefficients were computed. The perfectionism scores were dichotomized into those who belong to the 90th and 10th percentiles respectively which represent the participants who have high and low perfectionistic tendencies. Then, bar graphs were devised to illustrate the difference on the career decidedness dimensions of adolescents with high and low perfectionism scores. In addition, correlational and regression analysis were executed to identify dimensions of perfectionism that correlate and predict career decidedness domains.

3. Results

The measures of descriptive statistics and correlational analyses showed interesting pattern of findings. On one hand, the respondents garnered the highest score on decidedness. On the other hand, they got the lowest score on career choice importance. Organization seemed to be the most apparent domain of perfectionistic tendencies (See Table 1).

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of age, perfectionism, and career decidedness domains

| | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|-------------------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Age | 17.25 | .94 |
| Decidedness | 6.30 | 1.20 |
| Comfort | 5.46 | 1.56 |
| Self-Clarity | 5.82 | .86 |
| Occupational Knowledge and Training | 4.90 | .42 |
| Decisiveness | 4.60 | .78 |
| Career Choice Importance | 3.14 | .30 |
| Concern over mistakes | 3.81 | .15 |
| Personal Standards | 4.95 | .90 |
| Parental Expectations | 4.73 | .36 |
| Parental Criticism | 3.38 | .01 |
| Doubt about Actions | 4.44 | .97 |
| Organization | 5.19 | .74 |

As shown in Table 2, organization was positively correlated to occupational knowledge and training, $r = .36$, $p < .05$. This implies that the degree to which the respondents systematically classify and arrange things enhances their abilities to become more knowledgeable about the career opportunities they intend to choose.

Table 2

Correlation coefficients of perfectionism and career decidedness

| Variables | R | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-------|-------|-------|-----|-----|----|--|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | |
| 1. Decidedness | - | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Comfort | .45** | - | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Self-Clarity | -.12 | -.24* | - | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Occupational Knowledge and Training | -.15* | -.24* | .60** | - | | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Decisiveness | -.21* | -.43* | .41** | .39** | - | | | | | | | | |
| 6. Career Choice Importance | .46** | -.21* | .12 | .12 | .32** | - | | | | | | | |
| 7. Concern over mistakes | .10 | .17 | .11 | .23** | .04 | .00 | - | | | | | | |
| 8. Personal Standards | -.12 | .20 | .16 | .28 | .23 | .25 | .53* | - | | | | | |
| 9. Parental Expectations | .14** | .27 | .50 | .18 | .28 | .08 | .14 | .18 | - | | | | |
| 10. Parental Criticism | .05 | .19 | .11 | .16 | .05 | .12 | .24 | .25 | .49** | - | | | |
| 11. Doubt about Actions | -.05 | .26 | .07 | .10 | .14 | .00 | .62** | .53** | .25 | .25 | - | | |
| 12. Organization | .03 | .13 | .29 | .36* | .17 | .14 | .38* | .29 | .15 | .05 | .05 | - | |

Note. ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$

When concern over mistakes, personal standards, parental expectations, parental criticisms, doubts about actions, and organization were entered as predictor variables of decidedness, the regression model accounts for 13% of the variance in career decision making, $F(6, 175) = 9.86$, $R^2 = .13$, $p < .05$. Parental expectation was the lone significant predictor of decidedness ($\beta = .34$, $t = 2.21$, $p < .05$).

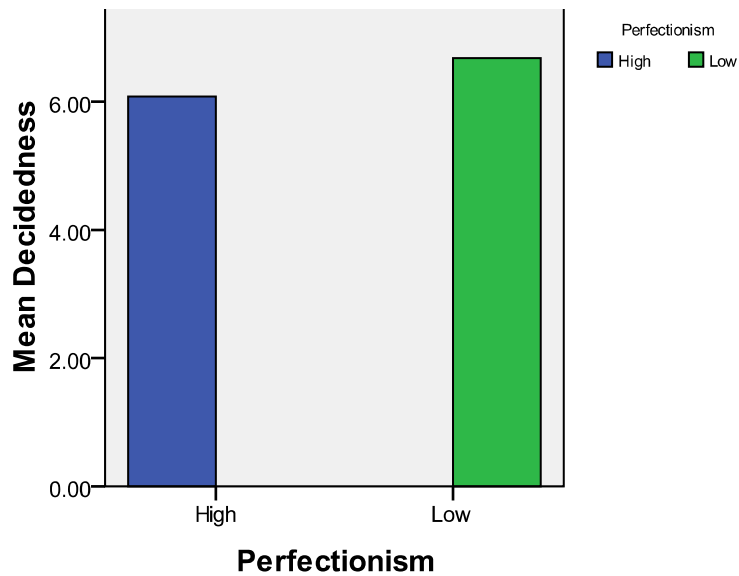


Figure 1. Career decidedness of respondents with high and low perfectionism

To further illustrate the difference on the career decidedness of individuals with high and low levels of perfectionism, the scores of respondents belonging to the 90th and 10th percentiles were examined. Those with high and low scores on perfectionism were compared in terms of decidedness, comfort, self-clarity, occupational knowledge and training, decisiveness, and career choice importance.

As shown in Figure 1, those who garnered low scores on perfectionism had higher scores on decidedness. Similarly, respondents who had low scores on perfectionism had higher scores on comfort as compared to those who got high scores on perfectionism (See Figure 2).

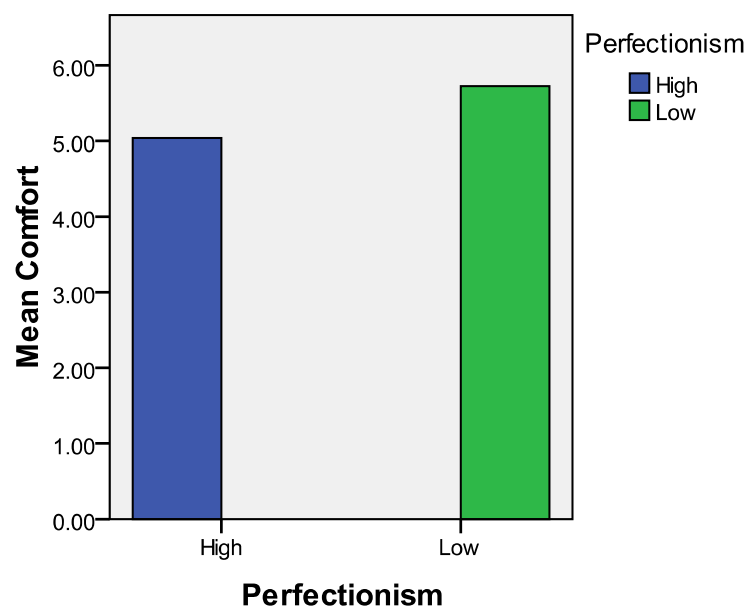


Figure 2. Comfort of respondents with high and low perfectionism

Conversely, those who had higher scores on perfectionism got higher scores on self-clarity, occupational knowledge and training, decisiveness, and career choice importance. These results pointed to the promising impact of high perfectionism scores on various domains of career decidedness (See Figure 3, 4, 5, and 6).

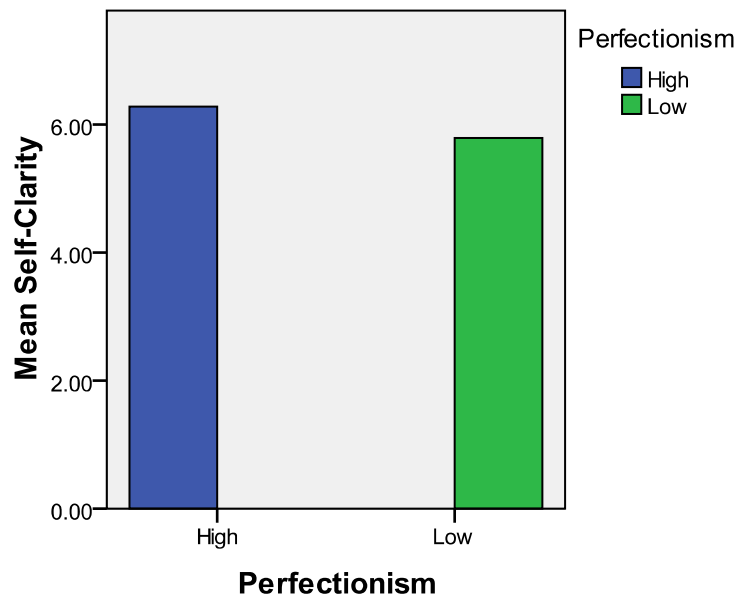


Figure 3. Self-clarity of respondents with high and low perfectionism

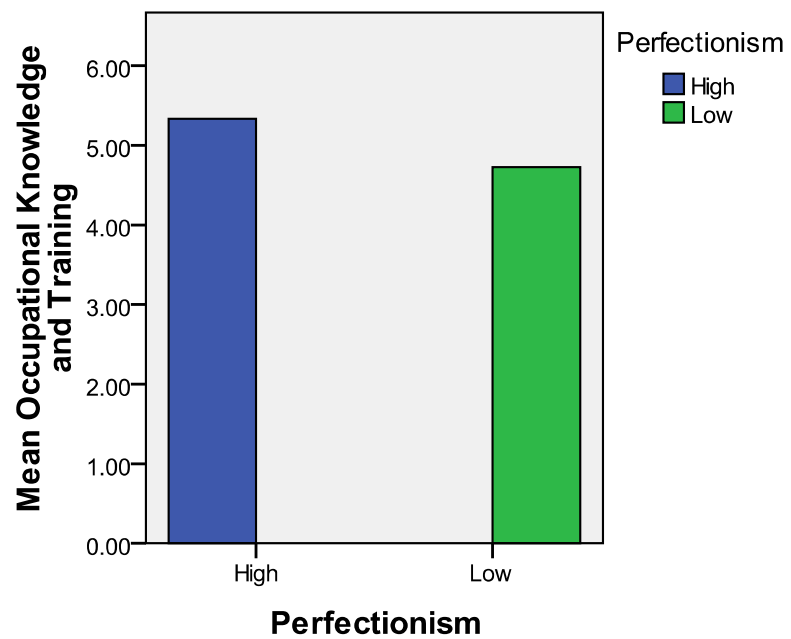


Figure 4. Occupational knowledge and training of respondents with high and low perfectionism

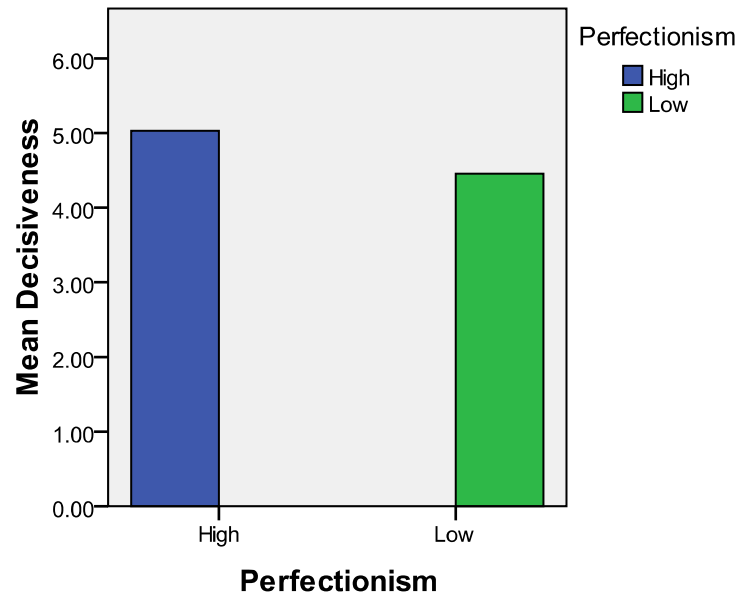


Figure 5. Decisiveness of respondents with high and low perfectionism

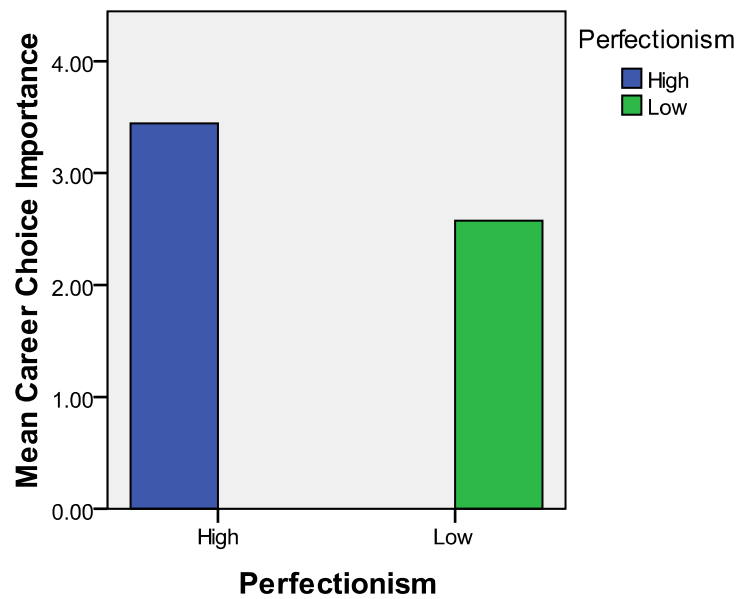


Figure 6. Career choice importance of respondents with high and low perfectionism

4. Discussion

The objective of the current study is to assess the relationship and impact of perfectionism on the career decidedness of Filipino college students. Findings of the study validated results from previous studies concerning the significant influence of perfectionism on career decision-making process (Frost & Shows, 1993; Page, Bruch, & Haase, 2008). Yet, it presented an interesting result on how individuals may benefit from their inclinations to a self that prioritized higher personal standards.

With the substantial link between organization and knowledge of occupation and training, it can be argued

that individuals, who adopt more systematic, controlled, and planned cognitive strategies may potentially acquire greater information about the possible career opportunities they can engage in. This is practically plausible as more organized individuals would most likely exert systematic approaches in reaching their academic and career-related goals which will eventually lead them to efficient ways on gathering information about the career options that they intend to undertake.

Though, the extent to which individuals are committed to the occupational options they engaged in is significantly related to parental expectations. This implies that as parents set higher expectations, college students show greater commitment on their chosen career endeavors. In the Philippine context, this finding may have practical relevance as college students are usually financed and supported by parents. Given that Filipino college students realize the substantial contributions of their parents in their collegiate education, they may feel that they are obliged to exert more efforts to finish the occupational choice they have taken.

In addition, individuals with higher perfectionism scores experienced greater self-clarity, occupational knowledge and training, decisiveness, and career choice importance. These findings presented empirical evidence about the potential benefits of adaptive perfectionistic tendencies. Results of the current study strengthened the contention that perfectionism has adaptive functions in the efficient performance of various tasks (Gansky & Ashbe, 2007; Lehmann & Konstam, 2011). Thus, inclinations to set higher personal standards should not be automatically linked to dysfunctional consequences as perfectionistic tendencies may also lead to positive psychological outcomes like career decidedness.

Most importantly, findings of the present empirical inquiry pose significant implications on the practice of vocational counseling. Particularly, counseling psychologists are recommended to conceptualize and devise career interventions and programs that address the needs of college students with various levels of perfectionistic cognitions. Future studies are encouraged to examine mechanisms that account for the relationship between perfectionism and career decidedness. This can be done through looking at possible cognitive variables that mediate the impact of perfectionistic tendencies and career decision-making capabilities. Since the present study is cross-sectional in nature, it is recommended for future researchers to design experimental studies to strengthen the assertions about the causal link between perfectionism and career decidedness. In addition, it may be promising to examine other psychological outcomes that may potentially profit from adopting a perfectionistic mindset.

5. References:

- Blankstein, K. R., & Lumley, C. H. (2008). Multidimensional perfectionism and ruminative brooding in current dysphoria, anxiety, worry, and anger. *Journal of Rational - Emotive & Cognitive - Behavior Therapy*, 26, 168–193. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10942-007-0068-z>
- Blankstein, K. R., Lumley, C. H., & Crawford, A. (2007). Perfectionism, hopelessness, and suicide ideation: Revisions to diathesis-stress and specific vulnerability models. *Journal of Rational-Emotive & Cognitive Behavior Therapy*, 25(4), 279–319. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10942-007-0053-6>
- Borges, N. J., & Savickas, M. L. (2002). Personality and medical specialty choice: A literature review and integration. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 10(3), 362–380. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/10672702010003006>
- Di Fabio, A. & Palazzeschi, L. (2009). Emotional intelligence, personality traits and career decision difficulties. *International Journal of Educational and Vocational Guidance*, 9, 135-146. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10775-009-9162-3>
- Frost, R. O., & Shows, D. L. (1993). The nature and measurement of compulsive indecisiveness. *Behavior Research and Therapy*, 31, 683–692. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0005-7967\(93\)90121-A](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0005-7967(93)90121-A)
- Frost, R. O., Marten, P., Lahart, C., & Rosenblate, R. (1990). The dimensions of perfectionism. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 4, 449-468. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/BF01172967>
- Ganske, K. H., & Ashby, J. S. (2007). Perfectionism and career decision-making self-efficacy *Journal of*

- Employment Counseling*, 44, 17-28. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1920.2007.tb00021.x>
- Gati, I., & Osipow, S. (2000). Validity of the career decision-making difficulties questionnaire: Counselor versus career counselor perceptions. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 56, 99–113. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1006/jvbe.1999.1710>
- Gati, I., Krausz, M., & Osipow, S. H. (1996). A taxonomy of difficulties in career decision making. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 43, 510–526. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.43.4.510>
- Goldner, E. M., Cockell, S. J., & Srikameswaran, S. (2002). Perfectionism and eating disorders. In G. L. Flett & P. L. Hewitt (Eds.), *Perfectionism theory, research, and treatment* (pp. 5–31). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/10458-013>
- Page, J., Bruch, M. A., & Haase, R. F. (2008). Role of perfectionism and five-factor model traits in career indecision. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 45, 811–815. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2008.08.013>
- Starica, E. C. (2011). Predictors for career indecision in adolescence. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 33, 168-172. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.01.105>
- Uthayakumar, R., Schimmack, U., Hartung, P. J., & Rogers, R. J. (2010). Career decidedness as a predictor of subjective well-being. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 77, 196-204. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2010.07.002>

