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**STUDENTS' PERCEPTION CONCERNING THE CAREER
COUNSELLING PROGRAMS**

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Abstract

Students' perception concerning the career counselling programs is determined by the extent to which these programs are adjusted to their counselling needs. The present study is based on a constatative and correlational design and is conducted on a population of 257 students (N=257). These participants were aged between 19 and 21 years. 77 were males and 180 females. The research aims to investigate how the career counselling activities, conducted during the SOPHRD program SOPHRD/161/2.1/G/137510 entitled *Professional counselling, internships and simulated enterprise: an extra chance in finding a job for students specializing in public administration and communication, public relations and advertising*, responded to the recipients' needs and also if there are gender differences at the level of their perception. After attending different activities within the counselling program, the students were asked to fill in a feed-back questionnaire. The obtained findings show that the career counselling activities have significantly responded to the students' expectations. Gender differences in the students' perception concerning the career counselling program were also found.

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Keywords: Career counselling, counselling programs, counselling needs, gender differences, counselling activities.

1. Introduction

Kavale (2012) pointed out that career counselling needs of young people and adolescents have often been approached, in terms of attitudes, beliefs, potential solutions to problems, beliefs, satisfactions/dissatisfactions, aspirations or in terms of wishes. Among the studies that have approached this issue more objectively we can mention the study offered by Fouad et al. (2006) that investigated the needs of awareness and use of counselling services among students. The authors of this study analyzed the

counselling needs from the perspective of three dimensions, namely the need to evaluate, the level of awareness and the extent of use of offered services. Based on the obtained data, the research team confirmed that the students indicated counselling needs both in terms of career decision and also of aspects regarding the stress determined by this stage. Additionally, in a study conducted by Crişan, Pavelea and Ghimbuluţ (2014) on a sample of 130 bachelor students it was found that the students are poorly informed regarding employment opportunities and that their expectations for the future are not connected with their own knowledge and skills, having no coherent outlined career plan and thus facing major obstacles in the process of career decision making. This fact indicates that the students present a low degree of awareness of the advantages they can benefit from after the involvement in career counselling programs.

Another study, conducted this time on a sample of 900 10th-grade students, by Volodina & Nagy (2016) examined the role of gender, among other variables, such as school achievement, self-concepts and vocational interests, within the vocational choices in adolescence, namely for predicting the transition from school to different fields of education and training. They obtained 50% common variance for the gender variable, which means that vocational interest were most closely linked to gender.

The role of career counsellors and students' perception on the services provided by these counsellor have been widely discussed in the literature (Walker et al, 2006; Alloway, Walker, Patterson, Dalley & Lenoy, 2004; Aspen, et al., 2015). Thus, if many studies highlight the benefits of implementing such programs at the curriculum level (Brown & Ryan, Krane, 2000; Whiston, Sexton & Lasoff, 1998), there are also studies that indicate the reluctance of beneficiaries in the recourse to such services, either as a consequence of the lack of information or as uncertainty in the identification of potential solutions to the problems they are facing (Menon, 2010; Agi, 2014). Taking these aspects into account, Egbo (2015) considers that individually respecting and recognizing of students are essential for the proper conducting of the career counselling and guidance programs, which have positive consequences on the effectiveness of the programs and, implicitly, on the attitude of the beneficiaries regarding the quality of these programs. Furthermore, the positive relationship between the counsellor and the person being counseled, based on trust and commitment, orientation towards individual needs more than towards providing information, (Patterson and Levy, 2007) facilitates the effective conduct of the counselling activities, having beneficial effects on students (Badu, 2011). Rafeffesberger (2010) quoted by Awinsong, Dawson and Gidiglo (2015) confirmed by a performed study that a positive counselling relationship is essential for the success of the counselling process. Confidentiality, flexibility, adjusting to the needs of the persons being counseled and the location of the counselling centers facilitate all the establishment of a positive relationship between counsellor and counseled. Kirschner et al. (2008) found that if the counsellor focuses more on feelings, insight, challenges, it can facilitate a favorable context in which the client can acquire a significant increase in self-understanding, hope, taking responsibility and achieving new perspectives.

Hirschi and Lage (2008) investigated the efficiency of long term career counselling by implementing a career counselling program for Swiss teenagers. They observed that career decision, career planning, exploring the occupational environment and vocational identity increased significantly during the 3 months that the program lasted.

Some authors (Bimrose & Barnes, 2006; Bimrose, 2008) conducted, within a longitudinal study, a research regarding the efficiency of career counselling on a sample of 50 teenagers from England. The participants described the use of counselling during the 5 years of study. They discovered that career counselling is useful when specialized information was assured, including information related to the labour market, details about training courses, trainings, employment opportunities; and also when certain alternatives were offered in order to help them concentrate and to motivate them, to increase their self-confidence, their self-awareness and also when structured opportunities for reflection and debate were proposed. One of the main conclusions of this study showed a decrease of the unemployed students from 34% to 3%.

Luzzo (1995) mentioned a study conducted by Farmer (1985) that showed that women are much more likely than men to experience effects of confusion and environmental factors of stress within the process of career development. This can mean that career counselling programs are more likely to be useful for females than for males, responding better to their specific needs.

The present study aims to investigate students' perception concerning the effectiveness of the counselling program, implemented within the SOPHRD program, according to their career counselling needs. This study can also be considered as a try to fill in the present gap in knowledge in the field of studies and researches conducted in order to identify students' perception about career counselling programs.

2. Methodology of the Conducted Research

2.1. Participants

The study was conducted on a sample of 257 participants aged between 19 and 21 years ($M=20,3$, $SD=1,2$) of which 77 were males and 180 females. All participants are students of the *Babes-Bolyai* University Cluj-Napoca, Romania and are beneficiaries of the career counselling program conducted within the SOPHRD/161/2.1/G/137510 program – Professional counselling, internships and simulated enterprise: an extra chance in finding a job for students specializing in public administration and communication, public relations and advertising.

The participation in the investigation was voluntary and anonymous. Participation agreements, data confidentiality and other ethical aspects were assured.

2.2. Measures

The data regarding the students' perception concerning the efficiency of the career counselling program was collected by applying a questionnaire that included 7 closed-ended questions, the answers being recorded on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means full compliance (very much) and 5 refers to the lack of compliance (not at all). The following aspects were aimed within the questionnaire: Q1. adjustment to the counselling needs of students; Q2- benefits of career counselling activities; Q3 – the way of structuring the career counselling program; Q4-effectiveness of the materials used within the program; Q5 – the efficiency of self-knowledge activities; Q6 – the themes approached within the themed workshops, and Q7- the attitude and professionalism of the career counsellors.

The questionnaires were applied after completion of the entire career counselling program, in the paper-pencil form, being filled in by each student individually.

2.3. Research Design

In the present study we chose a correlational design, in order to investigate the relationship between the two genders (female and male) and the effectiveness of the career counselling program. In this respect, we started from the following research questions:

Q1 Are there significant differences between the participants, according to their gender, in terms of providing feedback regarding the benefits of the conducted counselling program?

Q2 Are there gender differences regarding the following aspects: evaluation of counsellors, the level of interaction within the counselling activities and the adjustment of the counselling sessions to the students' needs?

Q3 Are there gender differences between the aspects appreciated by the participants in the implemented career counselling program?

2.4. Procedure

In the first stage all participants to this study were informed about the aim of the investigation and about the instrument used for data measuring. Thus after participating to the career counselling program, within the program SOPHRD/161/2.1/G/137510 – Professional counselling, internships and simulated enterprise: an extra chance in finding a job for students specializing in public administration and communication, public relations and advertising, the students filled in a feed-back questionnaire. The questionnaire was completed in paper-pencil form and was applied to each student individually. The questions focused on the students' perception regarding the efficiency of the conducted activity within the program.

The career counselling program included minimum 3 counselling sessions for each student, of which one individual session and 2 group sessions. In the individual session each student discussed with the counsellor about his own vocational profile, about his counselling needs and developed an initial career plan. In the group sessions the students filled in several psychological tests based on which a report regarding their psychological and vocational profile was made. Also, the students had the possibility to participate to several themed workshops (minimum one workshop). Within the workshops aspects regarding the field of career counselling were approached.

The students evaluated the whole program based on the conducted activities. Their evaluation was carried out in light of seven different aspects. The opinions provided by students allowed us to identify their perception regarding the program efficiency.

3. Results and Discussions

According to the obtained data, we can observe significant gender differences between male and female students in the feed-back offered regarding the benefits brought on them by the career counselling program. The feed-back consisted in expressing opinions about the benefits brought by this counselling

program. By analyzing the values of mean and standard deviation included in Table 1, we observe significant differences regarding some aspects related to the workshop quality. For example, female participants (M=2,73; SD=1.46) argue that the activities conducted within the program were organized taking into account their needs and expectations, while the male participants don't share the same opinion (M=2,12; SD=0.83). Also, regarding the benefits of the counselling activities the female students (M=2,69; SD=1.47) consider that these were beneficial for their career decision as against the male participants (M=2,46; SD=1.10), who have another perception. Gender differences are also found concerning the following issues: importance of using certain instruments and materials within the counselling sessions (female: M=2,58; SD= 1.58; male: M=2,41; SD=1.19), counselling sessions designed with the aim of developing a high level of self-knowledge (female: M=2,73; SD=1.36; male: M=2,46; SD=1,24), themes and subjects approached in the counselling sessions (female: M=2,72; SD= 1.61; male: M= 2,15; SD=1.10) and also the evaluation of the career counsellors at professional and attitudinal level (female: M=5; SD=0; male: M= 3,93; SD=0.63).

Table 1. Descriptive indicators regarding the evaluation of the efficiency of the workshops according to the gender of the participants

Case Summaries							
Gender	The counselling activity conducted within the project responded to Your needs and expectations?	Benefits of the counselling activities	Do You find the way in which the counselling activity was structured as being useful?	The importance of using materials (tests, sheets, etc.) within the counselling activities	The efficiency of the first counselling sessions in the self-knowledge process	The themes approached in the workshops were in accordance with Your needs?	Evaluation of the attitude and professionalism of the career counsellors
masculin	N	77	77	77	77	77	77
	Mean	2.1299	2.4675	2.4545	2.4026	2.4675	3.9351
	Median	2.0000	2.0000	2.0000	2.0000	2.0000	4.0000
	Std. Deviation	.83273	1.10721	1.15332	1.19494	1.24165	.63531
feminin	N	180	180	180	180	180	180
	Mean	2.7389	2.6944	2.6222	2.5889	2.7389	5.0000
	Median	2.0000	2.0000	2.0000	2.0000	3.0000	5.0000
	Std. Deviation	1.46986	1.47643	1.40691	1.58128	1.36747	.00000
Total	N	257	257	257	257	257	257
	Mean	2.5564	2.6265	2.5720	2.5331	2.6576	4.6809
	Median	2.0000	2.0000	2.0000	2.0000	2.0000	5.0000
	Std. Deviation	1.33965	1.37804	1.33598	1.47634	1.33444	.59895

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Gender	1.7004	.45898	257
The counselling activity conducted within the project responded to Your needs and expectations?	2.5564	1.33965	257
Do you consider that the counselling activities were beneficial (which were the benefits)?			

Do You find the way in which the counselling activity was structured as being useful?			
The importance of using materials (tests, sheets, etc.) within the counselling activities	2.6265	1.37804	257
The efficiency of the first counselling sessions in the self-knowledge process			
The themes approached in the workshop were in accordance with Your needs?	2.5720	1.33598	257
Evaluation of the attitude and professionalism of the career counsellors	2.5331	1.47634	257
	2.6576	1.33444	257
	2.5564	1.50186	257
	4.6809	.59895	257

The correlations presented in Table 2 show that there is a significant positive correlation between gender and the following aspects mentioned in the feed-back offered by students: appreciation of the counselling sessions for being focused on the desires and needs of the participants $r_{(255)}=0,20$, $p<0,01$, (255 represents the freedom degrees, $df=N-2$, where N represents the number of the participants), which means that between the two variables is no association; the quality of the approached themes and subjects within the counselling process $r_{(255)}=0,17$, $p<0,01$ and the evaluation of the attitude and professionalism of the career counsellors $r_{(255)}=0,81$, $p<0,01$. Instead, there is no significant statistical correlation between gender and the following three elements: the evaluation of the benefits of the counselling sessions ($r_{(255)}=0,72$, $p=0,22$), the evaluation of the used methods ($r_{(255)}=0,58$, $p=0,33$) and the evaluation of the counselling sessions based on developing the self-knowledge ($r_{(255)}=0,93$, $p=0,13$). So, we can affirm that the first hypothesis of this study is confirmed only partially.

Table 2. The correlation regarding the offered feed-back and the gender of the participants

		gender	The counselling activity conducted within the project responded to Your needs and expectations?	Benefits of the counselling activities	Do You find the way in which the counselling activity was structured as being useful?	The importance of using materials (tests, sheets, etc.) within the counselling activities
Gender	Pearson Correlation	1	.209**	.076	.058	.058
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001	.227	.358	.355
	N	257	257	257	257	257
The counselling activity conducted within the project responded to Your needs and expectations?	Pearson Correlation	.209**	1	.109	.188**	.183**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001		.082	.002	.003
	N	257	257	257	257	257
Benefits of the counselling activities	Pearson Correlation	.076	.109	1	.670**	.726**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.227	.082		.000	.000
	N	257	257	257	257	257
Do You find the way in which the	Pearson Correlation	.058	.188**	.670**	1	.651**

counselling activity was structured as being useful?	Sig. (2-tailed)	.358	.002	.000		.000
	N	257	257	257	257	257
The importance of using materials (tests, sheets, etc.) within the counselling activities	Pearson Correlation	.058	.183**	.726**	.651**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.355	.003	.000	.000	
	N	257	257	257	257	257

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

		gender	The efficiency of the first counselling sessions in the self-knowledge process	The themes approached in the workshop were in accordance with Your needs?	Evaluation of the attitude and professionalism of the career counsellors	Feed-back_ total
Gender	Pearson Correlation	1	.093	.175**	.816**	.221**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.136	.005	.000	.000
	N	257	257	257	257	257
The efficiency of the first counselling sessions in the self-knowledge process	Pearson Correlation	.093	1	.602**	.014	.780**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.136		.000	.820	.000
	N	257	257	257	257	257
The themes approached in the workshop were in accordance with Your needs?	Pearson Correlation	.175**	.602**	1	.107	.843**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.000		.087	.000
	N	257	257	257	257	257
Evaluation of the attitude and professionalism of the career counsellors	Pearson Correlation	.816**	.014	.107	1	.167**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.820	.087		.007
	N	257	257	257	257	257
Perception_total	Pearson Correlation	.221**	.780**	.843**	.167**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.007	
	N	257	257	257	257	257

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Regarding the differences that exist between gender and the appreciation of the counsellors, the interaction level within the counselling sessions and the adjustment of the counselling sessions to the needs of the students, the obtained values included in Table 2 demonstrate that the female students appreciated more than the male participants the following aspects: the counsellors attitude, the interaction level and the adjustment of the counselling sessions to their needs and wishes.

Table 3. The analysis of the beneficial aspects of the counselling activities according to the gender of the participants

		Gender		Total
		male	Female	
Workshop evaluation ^a	Count	77	123	200
	counsellors attitude			
	% within \$feedback	38.5%	61.5%	
	% within gen	100.0%	71.1%	
	% of Total	30.8%	49.2%	80.0%
	Count	77	163	240
	professionalism			
	% within \$feedback	32.1%	67.9%	
	% within gen	100.0%	94.2%	
	% of Total	30.8%	65.2%	96.0%
	Count	77	148	225
	used materials			
	% within \$feedback	34.2%	65.8%	
	% within gen	100.0%	85.5%	
	% of Total	30.8%	59.2%	90.0%
	Count	77	119	196
	approached themes			
	% within \$feedback	39.3%	60.7%	
% within gen	100.0%	68.8%		
% of Total	30.8%	47.6%	78.4%	
Count	77	167	244	
interaction level				
% within \$feedback	31.6%	68.4%		
% within gen	100.0%	96.5%		
% of Total	30.8%	66.8%	97.6%	
Count	77	123	200	
adjusting to the needs of the counselled persons				
% within \$feedback	38.5%	61.5%		
% within gen	100.0%	71.1%		
% of Total	30.8%	49.2%	80.0%	
Count	77	60	137	
developing self-knowledge				
% within \$feedback	56.2%	43.8%		
% within gen	100.0%	34.7%		
% of Total	30.8%	24.0%	54.8%	
Count	77	103	180	
acquiring new knowledge				
% within \$feedback	42.8%	57.2%		
% within gen	100.0%	59.5%		
% of Total	30.8%	41.2%	72.0%	
Count	77	173	250	
Total				
% of Total	30.8%	69.2%	100.0%	

Analysing the beneficial aspects of the counselling activities in relationship with the gender of the participants, Table 3 shows that from the total of the valid cases (250 subjects), 123 girls (49,2%) appreciated the attitude of the counsellors. 167 girls that appreciated the interaction level during the counselling sessions represent 66,8% from the total of participants that appreciated at least one aspect within the counselling sessions and 123 girls (49,2%) considered as an important aspect the adjustment of the counselling activities to their desires and needs. However, 77 men (30,8%) appreciated that

conducting an activity that aims developing a high level of self-knowledge is a positive aspect of the counselling sessions.

Perception differences were also found, according to the gender differences, at the level of the aspects appreciated by the participants within the implemented counselling program, as it can be observed by analysing the values included in Table 3.

Table 4. Comparison of means of the participants according to information considered useful for the insertion in the labour market

	Gender	CV	Career_plan	CPG_Guide	Themed_wor kshops	Vocational_profile
Masculine	Mean	1.2338	1.3766	1.6104	1.8701	1.8701
	Std. Deviation	.42600	.48772	.49086	.33836	.33836
	N	77	77	77	77	77
Feminine	Mean	2.0000	2.0000	1.9167	1.7611	1.7611
	Std. Deviation	.00000	.00000	.27716	.42759	.42759
	N	180	180	180	180	180
Total	Mean	1.7704	1.8132	1.8249	1.7938	1.7938
	Std. Deviation	.42138	.39049	.38079	.40538	.40538
	N	257	257	257	257	257

Comparing the results from Table 4 we observe that there are significant differences between the means registered for the participants to the present study. The differences are related to the usefulness of the information provided within the counselling sessions for the insertion of students in the labour market. Thus the female subjects claim that resume (CV) writing (M=2, SD=0), the career plan writing (M=2, SD=0), and also the information from the guide of counselling and professional guidance (M=1.91, SD=0.27) were useful for them, in comparison with the students that affirm that the themed workshops (M=1,87; SD=0.33) and the identification and evaluation of features, values and skills that compose the vocational profile of each student will help them to integrate in the labour market (M=1,87; SD=0,33).

In conclusion, there are gender differences in the students' perception concerning the career counselling program. Thus the female participants believe that the activities conducted within the program were organized taking into account their needs and expectations, considering them useful for their decision regarding the career, as against the male participants, who didn't share this opinion. The female subjects also appreciated more than the male ones the following aspects: the counsellors attitude, the interaction level and the adjustment of the career counselling to their needs. In case of the female participants the most appreciated aspects within the program were related to the information regarding the resume (CV) writing and the career plan, while by the male subjects the identification of the vocational aspects (features, values, skills, abilities) was the most appreciated aspect.

4. Conclusions

The practical implications of this study include the importance of the awareness of the counselling needs of students. Also, as the results show us, it is important that a counsellor tries to adjust the career

counselling activities according to the gender of the counselled persons in order to be as efficient as possible, since males and females have different opinions regarding their future professional life.

It is also important to mention some of the limits of the present research that represent simultaneously proposals for future studies approaching the same issue.

One of the limits of the above presented study is referring to the unequal number of the participants; the study was conducted on a sample composed of 77 males and 180 females. This unequal number of participants according to the gender variable can influence significantly the obtained results. Another issue is that the participants are students specializing in a specific small number of domains, namely: public administration and communication, public relations and advertising. A similar study could be conducted in the future on a sample that is equal from the point of view of the gender of the participants and also on a sample of students specializing in many other fields of study (for example psychology, educational sciences, sociology).

The activities included in the career counselling program could also be more varied and better adjusted to the specific features and needs of male and female participants, for example themes such as social expectations for women and men could be approached within the workshops.

The instrument used in the present study consisted in a questionnaire. This instrument was created by the researchers and it is not a validated instrument. Further studies in this field could use instruments that fulfil better the criteria of validity. Also, the collection of data regarding students' opinion could be done by using a larger number of research instruments, both quantitative and qualitative.

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