Gender Differences in Career Choices and Aspirations among Girls and Boys: A Case of Selected Secondary Schools in Mongu District of Zambia

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ABSTRACT: Career choice has become a complex science with the advent of post-industrial revolution and job competition. The right career made for pupils entering the professional education is critical having life impact on their professional life and future achievement. However, studies have shown that gender plays a deterministic role in career choices. Although significant progress in achieving parity in education is evident, there are limited studies that examine factors that lead to gender differences in career choice as boys and girls progress on academic ladder. This study examined the differences in career choices and aspirations among girls and boys in selected secondary schools in Mongu District of Western Province, Zambia. The target population for the study comprised all grade 11 and grade 12 pupils accounting for 460 pupils and four career guidance teachers. The study sample was 150 representing 73 boys, 73 girls and 4 career guidance and counselling teachers from the two schools. Interviews and Focus Group Discussions were used as data collection methods. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically while quantitative data was analyzed using frequency distributions and tables. The findings indicated that male pupils have more career ambitions unlike girls due to their upbringing and how they are socialized. Prominent factors that came out as affecting pupil's career choice were; Parental influence, the nature of acquired results at grade 12, financial constraints, peer pressure and teachers advice. The study highlighted some of the gender stereotypical segregation where one class of only boys was put in a separate class to take subjects that are perceived to be male dominated like Geometrical Science, Woodwork and pure sciences. This separation clearly showed that the school management was not supporting girls to take up such subjects which in turn gives girls no motivation. The study identified, lack of support from school management when it comes to career pathways of pupils, inadequate time allocated for career guidance services and programs, unavailability of career guidance teachers, as well as lack of role models. Based on the findings, it is recommended that the school board should adopt a gender sensitive and responsive policy on career pathways and programs that support boys and girls academic endeavors, as well as organize trainings for career guidance teachers coupled with latest teaching and learning materials such as career guide manuals for pupils.

KEYWORDS: Career, Gender, Gender differences, Gender stereotype, Career guidance

INTRODUCTION

Career choice has become a complex science with the advent of post-industrial revolution and job competition [1]. The right career made for pupils entering the professional education is critical having life impact on their professional life and future achievement [2]. However, studies have shown that gender plays a deterministic role in career choices. Males and females career choices are normally different because of the difference in their self-concepts [3]. Despite the recent increase of girls in higher education, girls and boys are still concentrated in different career programs and occupation. Such gender segregation results from persisting gender differences in career decision making, which lead to different educational opportunities and labour market [4].

Stereotyped perception makes pupils choose careers conforming to their gender. Males tend to be dominant in subjects perceived as masculine, aspiring to choose careers related to them so are females in feminine perceived subjects. The case in point is that mathematics and science subjects such as physics and chemistry are perceived as masculine while arts subjects are considered feminine. Although mathematics is a compulsory subject in secondary schools, most girls find a reason not to attend mathematics class [5]. The reasons behind this situation could be determined by traditional beliefs within the society, gender differences in career choices, traditional gender roles, lack of career information, gender stereotyping jobs, and roles of the significant others [6].

Perceptions, belief systems, existing knowledge, life styles, goal, needs and drives influence choice and entrance into occupation and professions, thus giving meaning to human experience and the manner in which people think, feel and act within their

environment. One of such areas that have been affected by these factors is choice of career among boys and girls in secondary schools [7].

Children make career choices from as early as the first grade. The direction of their choices reveals the inherent societal biases typical of their back grounds [8]. It also reflects the way they are socialized in their families and epitomizes the gendered nature of their society. Some female learners disregard certain career fields like that of a, driver, builder and others because of stereotypical perceptions. According to theories on gender, roles and work, masculinity is characterised traditionally as dominance and competitiveness, while, in contrast, females select careers that have regular hours of work to enable them fulfil family obligations. Often times, career choices are usually a product of one's socialisation as prescribed by society [9].

The school system is still dominated by gender bias. Not only are girls disadvantaged when it comes to access to education notably in the technical and engineering fields, but also in terms of the quality, relevance and appropriateness of the education and training received which reinforces the negative attitude of girls towards taking up masculine related careers [10].

Career play a very fundamental and significant role in the life of the individual not only because they determine the pattern of income but also because they affect the individual personality and concepts in life [11]. One of the most important functions of education is to help learners make a variety of career choices that match their individual abilities, interests, aptitudes, personality and indeed develop in their chosen careers. Understanding how to make career choice is a life skill that everyone needs. As such, it is worth noting that the decision an individual makes on a career has profound effects on one's life and career development [12]. It is a fact that most young people have challenges of choosing an occupation and relating personal skills, interests and abilities to careers. They should be assisted to acquire skills they need in order to cope with the different circumstances they may encounter later on in life [13].

In as much as career choices are significant in the early years of a child. They are influenced by a variety of factors around the social environment of a child. Therefore, if not well taken care of, a child might be misled by the motivating factors around career choices available. These choices are influenced by multiple factors including personality, interests, self-concept, cultural identity, globalization, socialization, role model, social support and available resources such as information and finance [14]. Each individual undertaking the process is influenced by several factors including the context in which they live in, their personal aptitudes, social contacts and educational attainment [15].

However, it appears that, most of the students lack adequate information regarding various careers hence the choices that they make are embedded on traditional gender stereotyping and the subjects they study in secondary school. The only support students get within the school is from career masters or counsellors as they are mostly referred to and the teachers who are expected to support students in their career choice [14].

Gender differences in career choices are normally different because of differences in their self-concept. Findings from various studies reveal that despite girls having higher teacher rating than boys, they are less likely to choose career in physical science or computing. A study conducted in USA revealed that more girls were likely to indicate interests in biology than physical science and were more likely to predict having future careers in health science than in physical science. Women who reported careers in math and science were more likely to choose careers in life science and business, as opposed to more stereotypically males' careers in physical science and computing [16].

Women have become more likely to indicate interest in certain areas of science, such as life science or biology, although their participation in computer science, physics and engineering remain low [17]. Moreover, the studies have revealed that only 5.0% of female participants chose career in physical science- computing, where as 14.4% of women chose careers in life science and business. Similarly, 12% of males' participants chose careers in physical science and computing; whereas only 4.3 of males reported career in life science [18]. It was found that within the group of 1990 high school seniors who scored above the 90th percentile on the mathematics portion of the scholastic's aptitude test, girls were only two thirds as likely boys to indicate plans for pursuing career in science or engineering [19].

To reason out the factors relevant to the development of gender differences in career choice. It has been suggested that gender difference in career choice is a result of multitude factors, some of them being internally related, and some being environmentally

related [20]. It was viewed that occupational stereotype is one of the factors affecting the vocational interest of one gender. On this basis, people believe that occupations are designed to be appropriate for one gender and not for the other. In secondary schools, females who specialize in science were more likely to be interested in biology than mathematics, chemistry and physics. They were also more likely to pursue career related to subjects like nursing and biology [21].

Studies using males and female adolescent as participants working in part time jobs revealed gender differences whereby jobs such as bus conductors, gardeners, manual labourers, journalists were held almost exclusive by male adolescents, while other jobs such as baby sisters and house maid were held exclusively by female adolescents [18]. Women tend to hold different career aspiration favouring social related jobs. Therefore, gender stereotyping influences career choices among secondary school students [22].

A study conducted in Tanzania by revealed that gender differences in career choices as well in subject choice and specialization. Females concentrated in social sciences seek careers related to that field, and males were mostly in natural science [23]. Furthermore, reports indicate that girls lacked interest in mathematics and natural sciences. From aforementioned girls decision making and choices of future career can be negatively affected. The literature has helped the researcher to set the objectives of the study as well as research hypothesis [5].

There are several factors that influence career choices and these can either be intrinsic or extrinsic or both. Also, most people are influenced by careers favoured by their parents whereas others follow the careers that their educational choices have set for them. Several decide to follow their interests and passion irrespective of how much or little they will turn to while others decide on the careers that have very promising income [24]. Perception of students of being appropriate for certain jobs also has been found to be influenced by a number of factors including cultural background, period of schooling, accomplishment level, science subjects" choice, attitudes and variances in job features [25].

The first factor in choosing a career is the environment factor that influence students" career choice. Students tend to choose a career that is directly linked to the surrounding environment and try as much as possible to solve the existing challenges in the surrounding [26]. For example, students who have lived their entire lives on an island will most likely choose a career dealing with the environment around them which is mostly to do with water, or alternatively choose to have nothing to do with the island, on no occasion to have anything to do with the environment around water again [27]. Maybe someone in the students' life has made a significant impact or impression, leading to a certain choice of career [24]. Parents" educational background may also influence Students" views on whether or not to continue their education. Media influence also play a role in the process of career choices among students; a student may see some prominent media personalities on television who may have influenced them to either make or alter a similar career choice to those personality or parents may have demanded that their Career Choice factors assume a family business [26]. There are various environmental factors that would lead a student to a chosen career [25].

How students have seen themselves in a role in which personality is a determining factor may influence a chosen career [24]. Some careers demand that you have the personality to match the qualities of the occupation [28]. For example, sales people have to be outgoing. Said personality plays an important role in the choosing of the right career [1]. A Students personality must be that of the type of self- motivated, as to explore profession potentials from childhood, and not the type of postponing that delays until they are compelled to decide [26].

Socialization experiences, which refer to the lifelong social learning experiences that people have when interacting with others, play a major role in influencing choices of career for boys and girls [29]. Parents, siblings, teachers, school guidance counselors, other adult role models, peers, the media, and many other sources greatly influence how individuals view themselves based on their gender. It can be said that, from an early age, people in children's social environments reinforce and send consistent messages as to what is expected of them according to their gender [30].

Materials used in primary educational settings also contribute to the socialization experience that causes gender differences. For instance, textbooks often depict men and women in stereotypical occupations (for example, men as doctors and women as nurses) and social roles. For example, fathers go for work and mothers stay at home [31].

The media plays a role in its portrayal of men and women in sex-typed occupational and societal roles, television shows, movies, and advertisements. Peers also exert considerable influence and contribute to the socialization process, particularly during adolescence [32].

Although such socialization experience influences both genders, it is presumed to have greater negative effects on girls because it tends to limit and restrict their options and achievements more so than boys'. For example, healthy adult men are expected to work, but the decision to enter the labor force is presented as a choice for girls [33]. In this way, gender influences the initial decision of whether or not to pursue paid work outside the home. Likewise, socialization experiences strongly influence vocational interests and career choices. Both adolescent boys and adult men report greater interest in scientific, technical, and mechanical pursuits. Adolescent girls and adult women indicate greater interest in social and artistic endeavors. Thus, it is not surprising that men are generally encouraged to pursue careers in engineering, business, and science, whereas women are encouraged to pursue careers in social and helping occupations. It is also noteworthy that male-typed careers tend to offer higher status and pay than female-typed careers, contributing to the observed gender inequities in pay [34].

Concerning gender differences in career choices, availability of same-sex role models also influences vocational interests and subsequent career choice. Due to the differential representation of men and women in various occupations, girls are less likely to have female role models in male-dominated occupations, such as engineering, police and detective work, and construction trades. Girls are more likely to have role models in traditionally female occupations, such as education, nursing, and social work [35].

Although significant progress in achieving parity in education is evident, there are limited studies that examine factors that lead to gender differences in career choice as boys and girls progress on academic ladder. Moreover, although available data depicts irregular gender differences in educational achievement, literature delving into gender differences on career choices tends to cluster around the themes of socio economic factors and biological differences in influencing academic performance. Consequently, limited attention is given to examining gender norms and socio-cultural perceptions in constructing feminine and masculine career choices in the Zambian context.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed methods approach which combines the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data into one empirical study. The rationale for mixing two approaches is that it integrates the strengths and minimizes the weaknesses of both qualitative and quantitative methods [36]. In this study, the researcher employed a Descriptive research design because it allows for collection and presentation of data as it gave a clear picture of the differences in career choices and aspirations that exist among secondary school boys and girls in Mongu district. This design enabled the researcher to gain perspectives from the different types of data or form different levels within the study [37].

The target population for this study comprised of all grades 11 and 12 secondary school pupils, and all the career guidance and counseling teachers of secondary schools. The population was selected because at a school level, the career guidance and counseling teachers are the ones responsible for offering career guidance to pupils and all other career related programs in the school. Secondary school pupils were selected because they are the key beneficiaries to these services and information received from the school from which they come up with careers to take up. The study sample comprised 150 participants broken down as; 73 boys, 73 girls and 4 career guidance and counselling teachers in the two schools. The study used systematic sampling procedure to select the targeted individuals for the study. This interval is calculated by dividing the population size by the desired sample size, in this study, grade 11 and 12 learners were selected for the study using systematic random sampling by selecting, for example, every n^{th} girl and every n^{th} boy from each class depending on the number of pupils in each class. The names of pupils were accessed from the class list gotten from the class teacher. This was done in order to ensure that all classes are represented equally in the sample while ensuring that both genders are fairly represented according to the proportions of boys and girls in each class. Quantitative data obtained through questionnaires was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). This generated frequency tables and cross tabulations. Qualitative data obtained through in depth interview was analyzed using thematic analysis.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance was sought from the Directorate of research and graduate studies (DRGS) ethics committee at the University of Zambia. Permission to conduct the study was sought and granted from Kafue district health office and Verbal or written consent

was sought from participants after the purpose of the study had been explained to them. Confidentiality and privacy was observed during data collection. Questionnaires were coded instead of names being used.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Study participants were asked as to what careers they thought boys and girls can aspire for. Table 1 shows that most boys are more likely to go for Engineering and Medicine as indicated by 23.3% for Engineering and Medicine respectively while most girls would aspire for teaching (27.5%) and Education (21.6%). 23.3% of boys indicated Engineering as their aspired career compared to 9.8% girls. 16.7% of boys indicated teaching as their aspired career compared to 27.5%.

Most girls accounting for 13.7% indicated nursing as their aspired career compared to 6.7% of boys. More boys (15%) chose law compared 5.9% of girls. More girls accounting for 21.6% chose teaching compared to 8.3% of boys. More boys accounting for 23.3% indicated medicine as their aspired career compared to 7.8%.

This shows that males are more likely to aspire for science related careers than girls who would opt for social science related careers like teaching.

Female participants in a FGD pointed out that they are also equal to the challenge of taking careers assumed to be for boys only as indicated by two female participants. "*I'd also like to be an engineer basically because I'd like to challenge the issue of gender where women are almost always involved in jobs that are of low class. I'd like to defy that*" (Female FGD participant). In addition, another said….. "*As for me, I see myself pursuing a career in medicine. At the same time, I was thinking of also becoming an engineer just to break that gender stereotype that engineering is something more associated with boys* (Female FGD participant).

Table 1: Frequency and percentage distribution of the types of career ambitions boys and girls aspire for.

Career ambitions	Male		Female	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Engineering	14	23.3	5	9.8
Teaching	10	16.7	14	27.5
Nursing	4	6.7	7	13.7
Law	9	15	3	5.9
Journalism	3	5	5	9.8
Education	5	8.3	11	21.6
Medicine	14	23.3	4	7.8
Others	1	1.7	2	3.9
Total	60	100	51	100

Factors that Influence Career Choices and Aspirations

Study participants were asked likert scale questions on the factors that would influence their choices of career or career aspiration. Results acquired at grade 12 as represented by 40.5% (20.5% males and 20% females) of those who agreed and 28.8% (18% males and 10.8% females) of those who strongly agreed bringing the total to 74.3%; and 29.7% (16% males and 137% females) agreed and 36.9% (16.9% males and 20% females) strongly agreed (totaling to 66.6%) that financial support is a factor that influences career choices.

Another prominent factor according to table 2 is Job security where 27.9% agreed and 19.8% strongly agreed totaling to 47.7%. In terms of job availability, 30.6% of participants strong agreed and 22.5% agreed bringing the total to 53.1%. 24.3% and 22.5% agreed and strongly agreed respectively (a total of 46.8%) that opportunity to apply knowledge and skill is a factor that influences career choices.

Table 2: Factors that influence career aspirations and choices.

Factor	Male					Female				
	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree	Strongly disagree	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree	Strongly disagree
Available jobs	14.5%	16%	6.2%	18%	1.4%	8%	13.7%	7.5%	12.6%	1.4%
Job Security	13.8%	12.8%	9%	11.8%	2.7%	13.8%	16%	9%	8%	0%
Gender roles	8%	7.9%	8%	10%	6.5%	7.3%	20%	10%	5.3%	16%
Opportunity to apply Knowledge & Skills	15%	16%	10%	6.5%	4%	9.3%	13.7%	5.3%	16%	4.1%
Area of residence	8.5%	17%	4.6%	3.8%	9%	14%	14.5%	8%	7%	12.6%
Optional subjects	10%	12.6%	10%	12%	3%	13.4%	9%	9.8%	11.4%	4.2%
Financial support	16%	5%	5.7%	16.9%	4%	13.7%	4.9%	6%	20%	2.3%
Results acquired at grade 12	20.5%	6%	4%	18%	2.7%	20%	5%	6.8%	10.8%	2.7%
Prestige	17%	8.1%	5%	13.4%	3.8%	12.7%	18%	3.1%	10%	5%
Parental education level	10%	15.6%	4.9%	11%	8%	8.7%	15%	5%	7%	12%
Religious belief	4.9%	12%	6.7%	10%	13%	5%	18.6%	5%	8%	13.1%
Personal interest	6%	10.2%	10%	6.2%	4%	5.7%	15%	17.9%	10%	5.9%

Gender roles was found not be a prominent factor as 27.9% disagreed and 22.5% strongly disagreed to the assertion that gender roles can influence career choices. All the Participants in the FGD indicated financial support and they were asked: where does this financial support come from? A Participant responded: "*Maybe from parents, they may fail to pay for your school fees*"

A female participant 8 added that "*for instance, you can pass with flying colors from secondary school only to find that your parents do not have the money to pay for school, so you can find people who can sponsor you and that way you will have the opportunity to do any kind of course you want.*" Another participant also brought fourth another factor as he said "s*ometimes even performance at school. Like, you are good at sciences, you would be influenced to become a doctor or a nurse*"

In adding to the performance or results acquired at grade 12, a participant said, "*Uh, after writing your exams, results come out and maybe you find out that you did very well in all the subjects especially sciences, you may choose any kind of course you would like to do like medicine, pharmacy, nursing. Because you qualify to do any kind of course you want*"

A female participant mentioned that, "*Uh, financial issues. As in, maybe by the time it is time for me to go to university, my parents may not be around, and the people that may be in the position of being my guardians might not allow me to do the course I intend to do because they may not have the funds.*"

In terms of the influence of school performance, a guidance teacher mentioned that: "*Sometimes even performance, a child may not desire to be something but maybe the performance is good and someone may not have known that maybe I could be a doctor. But because of that good performance, maybe someone has scooped better points, then someone gets inspired to say I can do it, since I*

have reached at this level, so such kinds of things.'' Indicating that performance may affect or alter one's career choice either negatively or positively which may lead to them change their career interests, aspirations and choices.

According to the table above, out of the 111 participants, 29.7% agreed and 23.4% strongly agreed that personal interest affect their career choices and aspirations. More girls accounting for 10% strongly agreed compared to 6% of girls. The table further shows that 18.9% and 17.1% of participants agreed and strongly agreed respectively to the assertion that religious belief affects career choices. More boys represented by 10% strongly agreed to religious belief as a factor compared to 8% girls.

However, 30.6% and 20.7% of study participants disagreed and strongly disagreed to the assertion that religious belief affects career. 30.6% and 26.1% of the participants disagreed and strongly disagreed that parental education level has an influence on career choices and aspirations. Therefore, personal interest is one factor that comes prominent from figure 4.7.

A male FGD participant also added: *"There are some churches that have certain rules that confine some people that prevent some people from taking up certain careers. For example, the SDAs congregate on Saturdays while most Christians congregate on Sunday, and if one is an engineer at a certain company for instance and are usually told to report on Saturdays, they might be discouraged from putting in their best because they are not being given a chance to worship as they would want to.''*

Another participant from a different FGD responded that…. *"The teachings of a church can influence someone's career. For example, some churches are against being a soldier and if one happens to be part of that church, they might be discouraged very greatly''*

Family was also highly rated as a factor as indicated by 26.1% and 22.5% of participants who agreed and strongly agreed respectively. Here more boys represented by 12.5% strongly agreed compared to 10% girls. 13.5% agreed and 16.2% strongly agreed to the assertion that friends or peers influence career choices. However, 35.1% and 18% disagreed and strongly disagreed to the aforementioned assertion which implies that peers may have influence to a lesser degree.

Lack of career incentives was highly rated by participants as a factor that influences career choices and aspirations. This shown by 30.6% agreeing and 40.5% strongly agreeing to the assertion. An even split was observed between boys and girls in terms of career incentives as indicated by 20.1% of boys and 20.4% girls who strongly agreed to lack of career incentives as a factor which affects career choices and aspirations. Thus the findings show that guidance teachers, parents, friends and career incentives are factors which influence career choices to varying extents.

The teachers brought out the influence of teachers in the career choices and aspirations of pupils including the influence which is exerted by their fellow pupils.

A male participant answered that… *"Yes, I think so because as friends we encourage each other on what we would want to be in future.''* He further added….. *"Yes, because there are some things I may not know about the career that I'd like to take up, my friends will be there to offer proper advice depending on what they know.''*

In another FGD, a participant disagreed and said *"sometimes, it's not necessary to listen to what your friends have to say about your career. There are some friends who are only there to tell you things that they want you to do in life. For instance, if a boy was to be interested in Food and Nutrition, his friends will come to discourage him about it by telling him that him that the subject is only for girls. So, it's not always necessary to listen to your friend's advice''*

The participants were also told to mention factors they thought influence their career choices. A participant stated that: *"Our parents' advice and guidance teachers''* (Female FGD participant). A male participant reiterated that: *"Since Zambia is a Christian nation, in the bible it says that a person who walks with people who are wise will become wise as well, so it's important to listen to the advice of our friends if we know that they are logical enough, and they care about me. However, if you realize that they are not as passionate about you as you would want them to be, it is important that you seek advice from other people who care about you and are able to make better decisions. People like your guidance teachers as she has mentioned.''* The participant here placed more emphasis on the influence that friends have on career choices and aspirations.

In another FGD, A Participant agreed that friends have an influence on career choice and said that: *"Yes, friends can influence your choice of career. For example, if you have the desire to want to become a male nurse, but you are surrounded by friends that want to go for careers like becoming a doctor, or an engineer, you might be compelled to want to change your initial and desired career because you don't want to feel inferior to your peers''*

Another one indicated that: *"While interacting with our friends, we discover that most of them tend to desire bigger things than we do. There are also those that may be exposed to more and better opportunities than we have. As a result, that may lead to some form*

of inferiority complex where we begin feeling whatever our friends are doing are better than what we are doing" (Female FGD participant).

In agreeing to the friends and peers as a factor, another participant said: "*Nowadays, people want power. Everything is all about acquiring power. Interacting with your friends will influence you in a manner that whenever you hear that you friends would like to take up a certain career, you will feel the urge to want to do something that is better than that so as to feel on top. This is as a result of the tendency to always want to do better than others because we live in a highly competitive world*" (Male FGD Participant).

In another FGD, a pupil or participant had the following response after being asked the same question as in the previous FGD…….
"*I think, our friends know us better than any of the people we associate with. I also don't think even our parents know us better than our friends know us. In most cases, we are usually found with our friends. We mingle with them, they know our different abilities and disabilities. At the end of the day, parents might put pressure on us because they think they know what is suitable for us while our friends do actually know most of our abilities and disabilities, and so they'll be able to influence you in that direction*" (Female FGD participant)

However, other pupils or participants disagreed with the assertion that friends affect their career choices as indicated by a participant as follows: "*As for me, I wouldn't really be affected by my friends because when it comes to choosing my career, I'd like to do something that involves helping other people which is my passion. My friends can't really affect the passion I have for helping people because I'd be following my heart which makes me feel happy*" (Female FGD participant). Another participant disagreed and said *"as for me, I don't really believe in having friends. I do have friends but they are very few, so I don't think they can do much to influence"*

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study aimed at examining the differences in career choice and aspirations between boys and girls. Under this objective, the study sought to discover factors that may cause differences in career choices and aspirations. It was discovered that there is an association between gender and the view that some careers are more suitable for boys than girls as indicated by a total of 28.8% of respondents who strongly agreed to this assertion.

Findings in the UK indicated that traditional gender beliefs are associated with gender traditionalism of job choice and androgynous subjects where masculine gender roles are seen to have more career aspiration than feminine gender roles [38]. In Zimbabwe, it was also found that gender roles influence the future aspirations and choice of boys and girls. Society has shaped human mind set to consider certain forms of employment to be for a certain gender and changing that mind-set needs uprooting of such beliefs from genealogies [39].

However, the study reviews that more males (23.3%) are more likely to take engineering compared to 9.8% of girls. More males accounting for 15% aspired for law compared to 5.9% of females. This discovery is supported by a study by Puja (2001) in Tanzania which shows that females were more likely to pursue careers in social sciences while males would go for natural sciences. This is also supported by Bleeker and Jacobs (2004)'s finding that women tend to hold careers that are social in nature. However, more females indicated nursing as their aspired career compared to males and nursing is natural science related. This indicates that females are now exploring natural sciences but this is because nursing one of the lowest ranking careers in natural sciences, further indicating that males still have an upper hand in aspiring for natural science related careers compared to females.

Career choice is complicated with the advent of information technology which implies that, there could be many role models but boys and girls are able to choose careers which suit and inspire them also through extensive research from the internet and comparing this research with their own capabilities [40]. Additionally, today, one has not only to make due career planning but also exhaustive career research before making a career choice so as to adjust with the evolving socio-economic conditions [41].

Sometimes, careers are imposed and adopted by learners by virtue of their observance of their role models which changes their comprehension of things and aspirations. Therefore, the influence of role models, though without statistical significance in this study, cannot be overlooked because it plays a pivotal role in career aspirations and choices boys and girls have. In addition, some career paths are taken because of a combination of factors ranging from home upbringing to social, economic and political environments and figures [42].

Gender roles was also discovered not to be a factor that affects boys' and girls' career choices because the percentages of those disagreed and strongly disagreed to the assertion were 22.5% and 49.5% respectively. More girls (16%) strongly disagreed to gender

roles as a factor which influences career aspirations and choices compared to 6.5% males. This confirms that gender roles are not a factor that cause differences between boys and girls in terms of choice of careers and aspirations. This confirms the findings which indicate that among the factors that influence career choice is globalization (change), self-concept, interests, social support rather than just ascribed gender roles and cultural norms and beliefs. This demonstrates that change is bringing some desired change in terms of gender perspectives thereby breaking the differences that may be between boys and girls in career choices and aspirations [14].

Students who have lived their entire lives on an island will most likely choose a career dealing with the environment around them which is mostly to do with water, or alternatively choose to have nothing to do with the island, on no occasion to have anything to do with the environment around water again. This indicates that the findings of this study are no alien as others have found out that residence has an impact while others have discovered that it has no impact on career aspirations and choices [27].

On a bigger scale, it was discovered that financial support is a factor that determines boys and girls aspirations and career choices and in some cases may be responsible for changes thereof. The percentages from the study indicate that 29.7% and 36.9% agreed and strongly agreed respectively. This is highly dependent on the parents' or guardians' economic status, that is whether they are employed or not and whether they are able to earn an income that is sufficient to take them through that career paths. Some boys and girls may have high aspirations but when they consider their financial background, they are forced to steep lower so as to take a cheaper career path. This indicates that career is also influenced highly by availability of finances to fund them [14]. Similar findings indicate that students' career choices are also dependent on what interests them as it would affect their entire life. As earlier mentioned, progression also indicates maturity which also comes with changes career aspirations which might have been made out of naivety [43].

Religious belief was found to be a factor that influences career choices and aspirations among secondary school learners as 10% boys and 8% girls strongly agreed to the assertion. Religion is one extrinsic factor which affects career choices among learners [24]. Additionally, religion is a conduit through which boys and girls socialize. Socialization experiences, which refer to the lifelong social learning experiences that people have when interacting with others, shape aspirations for the young [29].

Mothers seen to be key in this context because they are responsible for home bringing and most African homes are mainly maintained on religious principles. Findings indicate that among the external factors that influence children's career choices are key individuals around them, mothers are important individuals in the upbringing of children. Those who are brought up religious may be advised and understand that as believers in God, they are not supposed to take up careers that will lead them into apostasy such as accounting, business and economics because they may be tempted to steal. Therefore, they might be advised to take careers that are noble such as teaching, nursing, pastoral and so on. This definitely has that influence on career choices of boys and girls and to some extent may be responsible for differences between them [25].

Some parents may choose careers for their children to fulfil their own desires. For instance, some parents might have wanted to be lawyers but because they didn't manage, they would influence their children so as to fulfill their dream. This is consistent with other findings that adolescents' own aspirations are influenced by their parent's aspirations or expectations. Other parents who have been in poverty for long may want to use their children as an escape root by encouraging them to take on lucrative careers which would bring relief to their families. In as much as there is nothing sinister about this action, children's career choices are affected as they may take a career path which they did not aspire for [25].

The variable "family" was discovered to have significant influence on career choices as 48.6% (where 12.5% boys and 10% girls strongly agreed) of the study participants indicated so. As earlier alluded to, family play an important role in shaping career preferences for their children by acting as counsellors and role models for them. They are seen as pillars of their children's education because they influence and shape an individual's career choice. This means that career choices also lie in the hands of significant others through social support from parents and peers [44]. This is consistent with other findings that young adults through interaction with the context of family, school and community learn about and explore careers [45].

It is important to understand that different teachers (both male and female) have different influences on learners which ultimately leads to differences in career choices of boys and girls in secondary school. Others may have negative influence and may make learners not to choose careers which involve subjects taught by bad teachers. However, the choice of a career path is also dependent on whether or the learners have passion for what they intend to be in life [44].

Super (1990) acknowledged that many factors influence career development, such as social learning experiences, personality development, and one's needs, values, and abilities and that development does not happen the same for every child. This puts together factors ranging from family such economic status (poverty level), social status to political and ideological standing in society [46]. These factors then interplay during the schooling and socialization processes which then help in shaping career preferences and aspirations. The differences in the career development process to a greater degree causes the differences in career choices and aspirations between boys and girls in secondary schools [47].

CONCLUSION

The study discovered that there are differences in career choices and aspirations between girls and boys based on stereotypes on males' masculinity which make them suitable for certain careers compared to girls. This was found to work hand-in-hand with the belief that men are more career ambitious than girls because of upbringing and the influence of societal norms. These were found to be responsible for differences in career choices and aspirations among boys and girls. Under the second objective, the study discovered that among the factors that influence career choice is availability of jobs in the labour market. Area of residence was also found as significantly affecting learners' career choices due to differences in the environments. Lack of financial support is one of the prominent factors which influences career choices among boys and girls. Those whose financial status and background are less likely to pursue costly careers even if their capabilities and interests dictate so. Other significant career influential factors include; examination results acquired at grade 12, personal interest, religious affiliation, teachers and parents as both guiders and role models, family, and friends or peers. These factors have varying impacts on differences in career choices and aspirations among boys and girls. Stereotypes were discovered to have a negative effect on career aspirations and choices because they promote males in more ambitious careers such as engineering, medicine, computer studies and others while side-lining females to soft and easier careers such as nursing, hotel management and other careers which are more home oriented. However, it was also discovered that these beliefs are fading in the face of modern change. These findings are in line with most of the previous studies on gender and career choices in the SADC region and worldwide hence proving their reliability. The study identified some challenges in the delivery of career guidance services such as, lack of support from the school management, unavailability of career guidance teachers to pupils as well as inadequate time allocated for career guidance activities. Therefore, there's need to plan for these activities at the beginning of every term or year. Parents should also involve trained career guidance personnel to give career guidance to their children instead of them coming out as guidance experts themselves because sometimes they may choose careers for their children without really knowing the child's abilities and capabilities in that particular field they want.

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