At-risk Swiss youth: A mediational analysis of career adaptation, resilience and life satisfaction

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Type of contribution: Paper

Abstract

At-risk or vulnerable youth population groups have previously been found to be more likely to experience lower levels of life satisfaction and career adaptability, than their low-risk counterparts. In using the career adaptation model as a theoretical framework, the relationship between career adaptation responses and results, as measured by life satisfaction was examined with the mediational role of resilience in a cross-sectional study of an at-risk Swiss adolescent sample. A risk factor score was calculated by including maternal education level, family income, immigrant background and family structure (i.e., intact vs. not intact), each variable was binarized and then summed. This study is important to determine how career adaptation responses are mediated by resilience in at-risk adolescents in order to operationalise career resilience and better understand how resilience and risk can impact adolescents’ life satisfaction. The implications for future research, theory and practice will be discussed.

Keywords: (Career) resilience, vulnerable youth, life satisfaction, career adaptation model, career interventions.

Relation to Conference Theme:

Career model research that includes resilience as a mediator will enable the better prediction of the life course of youth in developmental jeopardy. As a result, more appropriate interventions can be designed to traverse increasingly complex career-life transitions, which is an important contribution to social justice practices.

Research questions & Objectives

Career guidance and counseling practitioners are facing the challenge of how best to address the transitions and traumas associated with a rapidly changing world-of-work (Cohen-Scali, Rossier, & Nota, 2018). However, the emphasis on career self-management, personal agency and other individualized dialogues that focus on an individual’s use of resources overlooks the bigger structural inequalities that mask the differential access to resources that is associated with risk factors such as low socio-economic status, unstable family structures and a low level of maternal education (Blustein, Franklin, Makiwane & Gutowski, 2017; Duchesne, Larose, Vitaro, & Tremblay, 2010). In order to
create context-near interventions for adolescents, the risk-factors associated with specific socio-demographic variables need to be taken into consideration to facilitate career adaptation responses and results.

At-risk or vulnerable youth have been previously mentioned as facing greater challenges in their career development than their more privileged counterparts (Hüsler & Werlen, 2010). In order to enable vulnerable adolescents face career choices, career-related transitions and traumas better, the development of psycho-social competencies has been proposed in theoretical frameworks, such as the career adaptation model (Savickas, 2013). However, the mediational mechanisms of resilience in career development with at-risk adolescents are largely unknown. This quantitative study, theoretically framed by the career adaptation approach, aims to analyse the role of career adaptation responses and resilience on vulnerable Swiss youth’s career adaptation responses, as measured by their current levels of life satisfaction.

**Theoretical Overview**

The career adaptation approach emphasises the development of adaptive responses in career development. According to Savickas, Porfeli, Hilton, & Savickas (2018) there are four dimensions: the first dimension consists of adaptive readiness (i.e., a personality trait implying a willingness and readiness to change); the second dimension is adaptability resources (i.e., a psychosocial construct that denotes self-regulation resources for dealing with change); the third dimension is adapting responses (i.e. the performance of actual behaviors that address changing career conditions and making occupational choices); and the last dimension is the results of adapting responses (i.e., the fit between the individual and occupation as indicated by success, satisfaction, and stability). Therefore, the model proposes that each one of these dimensions leads to the next in a sequence. For example: an individuals’ adaptive readiness mobilizes his/her adaptability resources which shapes his/her adapting responses and ultimately produces adaptation results (Savickas et al, 2108). What is most relevant to the present research is the last two dimensions because we are examining how resilience mediates the relationship between adapting responses and adaption results, (i.e., measured by life satisfaction), which is essential for vulnerable youth in coping with personal and career challenges.

In the present research study, life satisfaction is considered a subjective evaluation based on personal criteria of an individual’s quality of life (Schalok & Felce, 2004). As far as we are aware hardly any studies exist on vulnerable adolescent’s life satisfaction levels in conjunction with their career development, which underscores the relevance of this research to understand how at-risk youth perceive their life satisfaction and are able to explain their cognitive appraisal of stressors associated with the lived-experienced of high risk-factor environments.

Resilience, however, is conceptualised as the ability to handle stressful situations as an adaptive response (Rossier, 2015). The concept of resilience is built on the idea that individuals exhibit positive
adaption in the face of significant adversity or trauma (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000). Resilience has largely been overlooked in career counselling research, theory and practice and this research attempts to add to the slowly emerging research base that supports the development of strengths-based personal attributes to help vulnerable individuals overcome adverse work-life situations and stressors (Richardson, 2002; Rutter, 2006).

**Methodology**

Eighth grade Swiss adolescents were recruited from 33 schools in the German-speaking regions of Switzerland. The focus of this research study is on cross-sectional data collected at T5 (n= 360; M = 13.6 years; SD = .62). This data collection wave is part of a longitudinal study that consists of seven time points that enable career preparedness to be tracked in an adolescent sample over two years, ending in 2020 once they have entered into vocational education and training (VET). In Switzerland the majority of adolescents start with VET after lower-secondary level and qualifications are then obtained in upper secondary level (i.e., at age 15). Although this system has many benefits, it becomes a challenge to stay employable in the changing world-of-work due to the young age at which these individuals receive their VET qualification. There were three measures used in this research study. Firstly, The Student Career Construction Inventory (SCCI: Savickas et al., 2018), The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC: Connor & Davidson, 2003) and The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larson & Griffin, 1985).

**Data analysis**

Participants provided information on socio-economic status, family structure (i.e. intact vs. not intact), immigrant background and highest level of maternal education. This information will be used to calculate a risk score, each being conceptualised in terms of risk and was binarized (i.e., 0 = not at risk, 1 = at risk) (Duchesne et al., 2010). These binary variables will be summed to create a risk factor for each adolescent. Preliminary data analysis will assess the normality distributions of career adaptation responses, resilience and life satisfaction. Thereafter floor and ceiling effects will be analysed. Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations will be computed. Preliminary t-tests and ANOVAS will be conducted to assess if significant across-group differences existed according to gender, socio-economic back ground (SES) and the binarized risk factor. In order to test the hypothesised model we will use structural equation modelling (Mplus 7; Muthén & Muthén, 2014) and a two-step procedure will be followed to examine both the measurement and structural model (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

**Expected Results**

Currently, data is still being collected but will be completed by August 2019. In line with the career adaptation model, the present study aims to examine whether resilience fully mediates the relationship between career adaptation responses and results, as measured by life satisfaction. It is expected that
career adaptation responses influence resilience and that resilience leads to higher levels of life satisfaction experienced (Rossier, 2015). However, we hypothesize that adolescents who have been identified as at-risk will have lower career adaptation response levels, which influences resilience and indicates lower life satisfaction experienced. As a result, interventions are needed that address the constant adaptations required in world-of-work transitions and provide psychological and social sets of skills that may not yet have been developed in vulnerable adolescents or young people worldwide (Cohen-Scali et al., 2018).

References


