

“Students career planning: A Pandemic Perspective”

Jaya Sukul, Research Scholar, Centre for Psychology and Human Behaviour Shobhit Institute of Engineering and Technology
Deemed to be University Meerut UP 250110
Riya Rathore, Student, Pro Garten, New Delhi

Abstract

“One’s present circumstances don’t determine where they can go, they simply determine where they can start from”. The Outbreak of the Novel Coronavirus changed the circumstances drastically which led to the air of tension among the students and concern regarding their academic and career development. This time period gave students a chance to think clearly about their future. Thus, to understand the students’ attitude towards their career planning during the lockdown a 16 item questionnaire including demographics was constructed and shared via google forms to collect responses. A total of 560 duly filled responses were received from school and college students. A cross sectional study design was used to comprehend students’ behaviour towards academics and steps to their career during global pandemic 2020. Professional help such as career counselors have taken a front seat to help individuals understand trends and workings of different industries so they can make an informed decision regarding their education and career. The obtained results revealed that the majority of the students researched their career plans and found online career counseling helpful. Career counselors’ availability on various online platforms made it easier for students to contact professionals and clear their doubts regarding future career planning.

Keywords: Students’ attitude; career planning; lockdown; counselors.

Introduction

The outbreak of the Novel CoronaVirus has been a major health crisis affecting several nations. Lockdown imposed across many countries due to the spread of COVID-19 created a pressure on all members of the society, especially influencing over 89% of students all over the world (figures by UNESCO). In India, the students suffered due to a lot of pressure from family, schools, colleges and tuitions. Due to delay in entrance exams and foreseen economic recession, the future of many students is at serious threat. As reported by India Today, around 10 million students worldwide will never be able to go to schools after this pandemic (The India today, July 2020). Students might also have to change their future plans because of industries shutting down. Government has started some Vocational courses and e-learning platforms but due to lack of awareness and unavailability of resources, it has been inaccessible for some students. Uncertainty of exams gave anxiety and unwanted stress to students as well as parents. Change in the mode of education, from offline to online, has also created a concentration gap due to this pandemic and which not only affected the physical but also the mental health of the students.

From the onset of deciding on which career to choose has always been tough for students. School, family, community, and professors play a vital role in deciding the career of a student (Palos, Ramona & Viş cu, Loredana., 2010). For the past few years professionals have been helping students pursue their passion as their profession. Career selection becomes pertinent after class tenth because of stream selection in the following class, due to taboo ridden culture present in India which can be illustrated by science being considered for intelligent students and humanities for academically poor students. Due to strong cultural bias in the Indian society, science students are considered to become more successful in comparison with humanities students or commerce students. To achieve the goal of becoming successful, students end up choosing careers that they do not have an aptitude for and regret their choices. . A survey conducted by Mindler showed that 93% of the students know only about 7 career options whereas there are more than 250 career options available in India.

Committing to a career choice is one of the main tasks that college students face, approximately

half of the students face career related problems. To help students take such difficult decisions many career counselors have taken a front seat. Counseling is the process of helping someone by providing unconditional and unbiased support and guiding them. Career counseling specifically refers to helping an individual to understand trends and workings of different industries so they can make an informed decision regarding their education and career. It is rather unfortunate that many career counsellors working in this domain do not belong to the mental health background. There have been reported instances of individuals who have involved themselves in malpractices such as sending a particular student in a particular career to earn their own commission. It has also been noted that unvalidated and unreliable tools are used to find out the best career choices for students. Many of them are incapable of identifying mental health issues like learning disabilities or socio-environmental circumstances which the student is co-existing in.

Counselling by mental health professionals helps students deal with a variety of problems ranging from low concentration to conflict between the family and the individual regarding their career. It also helps gain important insight into the individual's competencies in reference to various opportunities using psychometric tests such as personality tests, aptitude tests, etc. Since the right career choice is a decision that impacts virtually all aspects of a person's life, it is one of the most important decisions to be made and a career counselor helps facilitate the process to the best outcome. The process of counseling also reaffirms the client about the ups and downs that awaits them and that enhance their self confidence. When a student sees that their chosen career and career personality does not match, counseling helps to bridge the gap. All this guidance helps people to bring stability in their thoughts, lessen frustration related to work and perform better in their careers.

It is the lockdown which has trapped everyone in the houses, some are with their families and others are just alone stuck in a different city far away from families and friends. This has been a tough time for all. But it has also given all of us a little extra time to spend with our own selves and deem what we are heading towards, in our personal lives, our professional lives, our career path and what not.

Students have never had so much time to think about their careers in their life. The lockdown presented them with an opportunity to consider and research more about the career path they want to pursue and what kind of ups and downs their choice of career is going to face.

Thereupon, this research has been done to understand the student's attitude towards their career plan. And how career counselors can help students get through this tough phase of pandemic, economic recession and job seeking.

Review of literature

The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic has spread rapidly across countries, with the country responding with lockdowns, leaving nearly 1.5 billion students at home worldwide. Being at home, gave students an opportunity to anticipate their career plans. It was found that 93% students only knew about 7 out of 250 career options available in India. (figures mentioned by Mindler)

Gupta and Parimal (2020) studied the effect on personality change during lockdown on university students of Vadodra. The results revealed a significant relationship between personality dimensions and psychological well-being. A positive correlation was found between conscientiousness, agreeableness, and psychological well-being and negative correlation was found between openness to experience, extraversion, neuroticism and psychological well-being. Which indicated that personality traits play a very important role in determining the role of psychological well-being. It was concluded that the students should have good social support to equip the students with appropriate skills, abilities and knowledge to adjust with the situation of COVID-19 lockdown.

Grijia (2020) studied the interest of students using social media in learning during lockdown period results revealed that students were comfortable, interested and happy in online learning. The study found that hundred percent of students were interested in learning online and only one percent of the students were not able to effectively use online learning due to connectivity in their area of Andaman islands.

Kant (2020) studied the problem and anxiety faced by students during lockdown. The results of the study showed that maximum students were worried about studies and anxious about the effects of the pandemic. Many students accepted that they did not study because of panic and anxiousness due to the increasing number of infections. Some students spent more time studying and long term stay at home developed more attachment towards families among them.

Elmer, Mepham and Stadtfeld (2020) studied students' social networks and mental health trajectories. It was found that university lockdown and social distancing had negatively affected the social interaction of some individuals as they were left isolated in the time when more social support was required to cope with the stressful scenario of COVID-19.

Methodology

Primary data collection was used for the current research. An online google survey form was created to understand students behaviour towards their career during COVID-19 lockdown. Snowball sampling was used to collect the data. Total five hundred and sixty (n=560) responses were received. The sample population includes 407 school students, 76 college students and 77 working professionals. A self-constructed questionnaire consisting of 16 items including demographic details was sent online through google forms. The google form was sent to school and college students and working professionals from all over the country.

Research Design

A cross-sectional study was conducted on students to understand their perspective towards academics and steps towards their career amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Procedure

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the whole country was put on lockdown. Colleges and schools have been shut down and the traditional form of teaching was replaced by online mode which has created a digital platform for every student to learn and explore new things. Thus, the topic of the present study was conceptualised to understand the students' behaviour towards their academics and career path. For the purpose of this research a cross sectional study was conducted and accordingly, a list of 16 multiple choice questions were formalised with closed ended responses with options of 'yes', 'no' and 'somewhat'. These questions were formalised after considering the current situation of worldwide pandemic, economic slowdown, health and academic concerns, online counselling and its effects on the students' attitude concerning their career planning. The online google form was created and shared to various students and working professionals across the country. In the google form, all the items were made compulsory, so that no question is left unattended. The participants were given a consent form to be filled in advance explaining the purpose of the study and seeking their permission to use their information in our research. After the information was collected the results were computed, analysed and discussed.

Result

The present study consists of a total of 560 samples. Out of which 407 were school students, 76 were college students and the rest 77 were working professionals.

The results revealed that 72.3% (table 2) of the sample was conscious about their health during lockdown. To pass their time, the majority of the sample i.e 87.3% (table 6) learned new skills and 40.5% (table 7) of the sample self-learned some skills.

It was found out that due to lockdown, 81.3% (table 8) of the sample is worried about future

career prospects. Lockdown also gave a new career perspective to 73.8% (table 9) of the sample. 67% (table 5) of the sample found online career counseling helpful and about 65% (table 4) of the sample researched about a career plan.

As per the results, 84.8% (table 1) of the participants have been productive during the lockdown and about 52.5% (table 3) of the sample have been engaged in academic activity and 34.1% (table 3) have only attended virtual activities and did assignments.

It was seen that only 62.3% (table 10) of the sample had awareness about salary cut and job insecurity in the post COVID-19 era.

Discussion

This research was conducted to understand the attitude students' behold towards their career plans during the lockdown imposed by the Indian government during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Students had their own perspective for their life and career to one extent but when this worldwide pandemic hit the society, everyone was taken aback from what they have sought to be the perfect career. Some people got a new perspective and some of them were not able to piece their thoughts together productively. This is an extremely traumatic event and unfortunately not everybody has the fortune to cope well which is hampering them to think beyond COVID-19 at the current moment. Most of the students who found novel career perspectives took steps towards it by researching new opportunities. On account of uncertainty about the near future, it has been a disturbing thought of sticking to the old career plan. Furthermore, the financial crisis of the family being faced has led to people losing purchasing power and due to this students get to reconsider their schooling and college goals in a different way. Keeping this in mind students approached online career counsellors and the majority of sample students found it really helpful as some of them had been feeling completely lost in the situation.

Social media has created a need about being productive during the lockdown. Majority of the students were productive but the results suggest around one third of them didn't get a chance to do anything productive because of the household workload. Even after the lack of proper resources, people have expectations of being productive. Due to unrealistic expectations being set because of family and peer pressure they are not satisfied with themselves even after putting in a lot of effort. When there is no support from family and friends, the student's interest in doing something productive goes down. Although some people took it as an opportunity to spend time with family, learning new skills, applying for online courses and workshops, and approaching new career perspectives which came out to be beneficial for them. Most of the students learn new skills through the self-learning process. Some of them learnt something from their family members and few of them learnt through online courses. Majority of the students used this lockdown for self-growth by learning new skills through various modes of e-learning. Mostly students learnt something new to enhance their skills not just for resumé but also for self-improvement.

A major part of the sample population are able to engage in academic activities on a daily basis but mostly students have adverse situations which hampers their schedule for studies. Due to the shift in educational platforms the students are facing a lot of academic distress as many of them do not have proper facilities and resources to cope up with technological advancement. Majority of the students are distressed and worried about their future due to the uncertainties of examinations and admission procedures. Students had plans for studying in different states and countries. All of these plans are postponed or even canceled because of current circumstances. Many lives have been lost during this pandemic which has been traumatic for many families creating a long lasting effect on their lives. Such traumatic incidents impact the mental health of the students. Many of them may now choose to live with family and try to find jobs in the city. Most of the students show concern about health and this is the time when the whole world

stands united in health concerns. Students are not only concerned about their health but also about their family's health. This lockdown has been a blessing in terms of preventing the virus from spreading on a large scale but when it comes to world wide economic status it has proved to be a curse as the world is going through a major economic crisis. Majority of the students were well aware of the fact of salary cuts, and absence of job security. Therefore, this research gave us insights towards the attitude students upheld during the lockdown towards their education and career plans. The findings support that a large majority of participants held a positive attitude towards their career planning during lockdown.

Conclusion

In the era before COVID-19, students chose their career based on limited options known to them. Whereas now they worry about which career is going to flourish in the era post COVID-19. Individuals have dreams about their careers and future, and now those dreams are at stake as there is a lot of stress created amongst the students and their parents. This research was an attempt to study and understand students' attitudes towards career planning during this period of lockdown.

A self-constructed questionnaire was designed and sent to students and professionals across the world keeping in mind their current state of anxiety and stress. As per the results 81.3% (table 8) of the sample population is worried about future career prospects and around 67% (table 5) of the participants found online career counselling helpful during lockdown.

There are some limitations in the present study which includes that the current study was done keeping an open range for students and done on a limited sample considering the population of students in India.

Suggestions for further research includes taking up a large group of samples, and stratas can be created to compare among various age groups. Thus allowing each sample to be representative of their population. This research can be used by teachers and academicians to understand students' perspectives towards their career choices. Also different methods of data collection can be used, such as semi-structured interviews, to get a more accurate and in-depth understanding of the students' attitudes.

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