Choosing a future career is the biggest decision facing secondary school students.

**Objective** - The purpose of this study was 1) to identify the range of factors and influences involved in students’ career choices and 2) to assess whether students choose a career compatible with their personality type.

**Rationale** - This study could help parents, teachers and career guidance counsellors—and perhaps colleges and employers—to understand what motivates student career choices.

**Theory** - This study was based on a localised adaptation of John Holland's Theory of Career Choice available at [http://www.careersportal.ie/careerplanning/interests](http://www.careersportal.ie/careerplanning/interests). This states that job satisfaction and achievement are highest when personality types are matched with compatible work environments.

**Sample** - 260 students in a large rural town in Ireland

- **Gender** - 130 boys/130 girls (from two single-sex schools)
- **Age** - 15-18 years, from 4th year (100) and 6th year (160)

**Data** - Obtained from a two-page written questionnaire

**Survey** - Anonymous to ensure honest responses

**Questions** - Easy to understand and complete in one session

**Distributed** - In career guidance classes as most relevant

**Notes** - Results showed no variation between 4th and 6th year responses, so all responses were combined.

**Dream career** was defined here as a career that was highly desired but seemed unrealistic.

**Conclusion**

- Parents and work experience proved to have the strongest influence on career decisions.
- Parents should be supported with current and relevant information.
- Work experience should be carefully chosen by students.
- Compatibility with chosen careers was low in many career areas:
  - Boys neglected to consider creative and manual jobs.
  - Girls neglected to consider creative and social jobs.

**Recommendation**

- Low compatibility for chosen careers highlights the need for greater discussion of this issue.
- Students need to be exposed to a wider range of career options.

- Job satisfaction was clearly rated as the most important internal factor.
- The link between compatible choices and job satisfaction should be made clear to students.

- Wages was clearly rated as the most important external factor.
- Students should be steered from high-paying to compatible careers.

- Students suggested guidance counsellors could invite more guest speakers.
- Students could gain from inside knowledge and job experience of relevant guest speakers.

- Most students had difficulty with making career decisions.
- Parents and schools should be more involved in career choices.

- Most students decided on their career in 5th/6th year.
- Career discussions should begin earlier to avoid rushed decisions.

**Limitations**

- A larger, more varied sample (e.g., add urban students) would give more reliable results. The margin of error was 6% in this study.
- Students could gain from inside knowledge and job experience of relevant guest speakers.

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