

# Comparison of career decision difficulties between nursing freshmen and interns

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## Comparison of career decision difficulties between nursing freshmen and interns

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### ABSTRACT

Career selection is one of the most important decisions an individual makes in his life. High career expectation could result in career decision difficulties. This study aimed to compare and analyze the career decision difficulties between nursing freshmen and interns. This cross-sectional study involved 110 and 66 nursing freshmen and interns respectively (n=176) in two private nursing colleges. Career decision difficulties questionnaire was used in data collection. Descriptive statistic and independent sample t test were used in data analysis ( $\alpha < 0.05$ ). Results showed that most respondents experienced moderate difficulties in both groups. Overall, there was no significant difference of career decision difficulty found between groups ( $p = 0.057$ ), but indecisiveness, dysfunctional myths, lack of knowledge about the process of career decision making, lack of information, lack of information about occupations, lack of information about ways of obtaining additional information, and internal conflicts were significantly different between groups (all  $p < \alpha$ ). Career decision difficulties occur similarly both in nursing freshmen and interns.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Career decision making is vital in career development (Betz, 1992) [1]; and related to career expectation. Parsons (1909) [24] explains that career decision making process is an individual process of understanding himself and understanding the world of work, and has the ability to integrate these two domains to decide which career to choose [1]. High career expectations have the potential to cause difficulties in deciding a career, so that individuals are increasingly hesitant to make career choices. Construct of career decision difficulty has been used to refer to problems that individuals may have in deciding their careers (Slaney, 1988) [2].

Several theoretical approaches have been used to explain the causes of difficulties in deciding a career with emphasis on different aspects. Psychodynamic theory suggests that individual problems can be calcified based on internal resources rather than visible symptoms (Bordin [25], Kopplin, 1973) [2]. Development theory suggests that the problem [25] arises normally because it relates to the stages of individual career development, with an emphasis on the concept of vocational maturity (Crites, 1978) [2]. Theory of vocational attraction / interest suggests that problems occur due to a lack of crystallization of interest (major factor) that prevents individuals from making decisions (Holland, 1985; Roe, 1956; Salomone, 1982) [2]. Based on the various theories above, Gati, et al (1996) made a construct of career decision difficulties [2]. Career decision difficulties include several dimensions, such as: lack of readiness, indecisiveness,

5 dysfunctional myths, lack of knowledge about the process of career decision making; lack of information about self, occupations, and ways of obtaining additional information; unreliable information, internal and external conflicts [2].

Based on a study towards 304 students in America, it is known that problems arise in two periods of time, namely at the beginning of the learning process in the college, and during the process of studying in the college. Problems that occur in the initial phase include a lack of individual readiness, which is described as four main problems, namely: 1) lack of motivation, 2) presents of doubts, 3) the existence of dysfunctional myths circulating in the community, and 4) lack of knowledge about the learning process in the college. While the problems that occur during the study process phase include two main categories, namely: 1) lack of information about self, the work in question, and how to get the right information, and 2) information inconsistencies due to improper information, and the existence of conflict (internal and external) [2].

This study aimed to compare and analyze the career decision difficulties between nursing freshmen and interns. In Indonesia, the nursing education in Bachelor degree is divided into two phases. The first phase is 4-years academic degree of nursing, and the second phase is 1-year nurse professional degree which fully conducted in clinical setting; therefore the student nurse in this phase is called "intern."

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This cross-sectional study involved 110 and 66 nursing freshmen and interns respectively in two private nursing colleges in the middle part of Indonesia, both institutions were "B" accredited. Inclusion criteria were at least 16 years old and being an active student in the commencement of even semester, academic year of 2018/2019. Exclusion criteria were rejection on filling out the consent form, and late submission of questionnaire. Total sampling was applied and sample size of 176 was obtained. Data were collected since February until March, 2019, in both sites. Ethical clearance was issued by Faculty of Medicine, Widya Mandala Catholic University Surabaya, Indonesia, with certificate number of 009/WM/14/KEPK/T/2019.

The career decision difficulties questionnaire was developed by Gati et al (1996) [2]. This instrument initially consisted of 44 statements covering nine domains, namely: 1) lack of readiness, 2) indecisiveness, 3) dysfunctional myths, 4) lack of knowledge about the process of career decision making, 5) lack of information about self, 6) lack of information about occupations, 7) lack of ways of obtaining additional information, 8) unreliable information, 9) internal and external conflicts. The answer choice consists of nine alternatives in a particular response range, starting from "does not describe me" (score 1) to "describes me well" (score 9). The results of instrument testing procedure towards 25 nursing students showed that there were 42 valid items ( $r=.402-.867$ ) and have high reliability (Chronbach Alpha=.978). Item 2 about perception of work as the most important thing in life and item 39 about abilities are insufficient for the requirements of the preferred career alternative were proved to be invalid, so they were removed from the instrument. At the end of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to assess the severity of the difficulties experienced (1=not at all until 9=very severe) and write additional barriers that could prevent them from making career decisions (qualitatively assessed). The maximum value that can be obtained is 378, while the minimum value is 42. To ease the data presentation in the result section, career decision difficulties were divided into three categories, namely: 1) mild difficulties (total score 42-154), 2) moderate difficulties (total score 155-266), and 3) severe difficulties (total score 267-378). The data distribution of career decision difficulty was normal ( $\alpha=.307$ ). Descriptive statistic and independent sample t test were used for analyzing the data ( $\alpha<.05$ ).

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Most respondents were single females aged 18-20 years old, Balinese, and living with parents whose profession was non-nursing. Most interns were older than freshmen. Some interns even experienced marriage life during their study period. Table 1 explains demographic characteristic of respondents in details.

The results of descriptive statistic showed that the Mean of career decision difficulty was higher in nursing freshmen compared to interns, and the  $\alpha$  was more homogenous due to lower SD (Mean=191.32 vs. 174.39, SD: 43.38 vs. 74.06). The results of independent sample t test showed that overall there was no significant difference of career decision difficulty found between nursing freshmen and interns ( $p=.057$ ). But, the results of deeper analysis towards each item of career decision difficulties questionnaire showed that there were significant differences found between groups in 14 items. The domain of "lack of information" seemed to be the key of these significant differences, as four items were affected. Table 2 explains the significant differences between groups in details.

Table 1. Demographic characteristic

Characteristic	Freshmen (n=110)		Intern (n=66)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1. Age (years old)				
a. 16-17	14	12.73	0	0
b. 18-20	90	81.82	1	1.52
c. 21-23	5	4.55	58	87.88
d. 24-26	0	0	7	10.61
e. >26	1	0.91	0	0
2. Gender				
a. Female	85	77.27	49	74.24
b. Male	25	22.73	17	25.76
3. Ethnic				
a. Javanese	18	16.36	10	15.15
b. Balinese	58	52.73	47	71.21
c. Chinese	2	1.82	1	1.52
d. NTT or east Indonesia	18	16.36	5	7.58
e. Borneo	3	2.73	0	0
f. Sulawesi	0	0	2	3.03
g. Others	11	10.00	1	1.52
4. High school (HS) background				
a. HS in Bali	64	58.18	47	71.21
b. HS in East Java	17	15.45	11	16.67
c. Outside Java (RI)	29	26.36	8	12.12
5. Marital status				
a. Single	96	87.27	39	59.09
b. In a relationship	14	12.73	23	34.85
c. Married	0	0	3	4.55
d. Separated	0	0	1	1.52
6. Socioeconomic status				
a. Middle	83	75.45	53	80.30
b. Low middle	25	22.73	8	12.12
c. Middle up	2	1.82	5	7.58
7. Living at home with				
a. Parents	59	53.64	52	78.79
b. Sibling	4	3.64	2	3.03
c. Extended Family	13	11.82	6	9.09
d. Friends	30	27.27	5	7.58
e. Alone	4	3.64	1	1.52
8. Profession of house-mate				
a. Nurse	3	2.73	4	6.06
b. Doctor	1	0.91	1	1.52
c. Pharmacist	1	0.91	0	0
d. Others	105	95.45	61	92.42
9. Nurse is parent's profession				
a. Yes	6	5.45	4	6.06
b. No	104	94.55	62	93.94
10. Reason of choosing nursing major				
a. Making family proud	1	0.91	0	0
b. Being able to care the family	9	8.18	6	9.09
c. Personal dream/preference	54	49.09	13	19.70
d. Being able to help others	32	29.09	14	21.21
e. Many job opportunities	3	2.73	8	12.12
f. Others	11	10.00	25	37.88
11. Motivator				
a. Parents	90	81.82	54	81.82
b. Self	18	16.36	10	15.15
c. Others	2	1.82	2	3.03

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Difficulties in deciding on a career are the most frequent academic and vocational problems (Amir & Gati, 2006; Osipow, 1999; Tagay, 2014) [3]. Many students struggle in making career decisions at the higher education level while experiencing a transition from the period of education to the world of work (Mau, 2004) [3]. Difficulties in deciding a career refer to problems that individuals may have in deciding their careers (Slaney, 1988) [2].

Results showed that the majority of respondents in both groups experienced moderate difficulties in deciding their careers. This result was supported by a study towards 232 students who had different ethnic and racial backgrounds, which found that the majority reported moderate difficulties in deciding their careers and groups of Asian Americans reported higher levels of difficulty than other ethnic or racial groups [4]. This result was also supported by another study study towards White, African, Hispanic, and Asian American high

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school and university students which found that Asian American students perceived significantly more difficulties in career decision making than other groups, they reported difficulties before the learning process and more difficulties during the learning process [5]. The moderate difficulties experienced by these study respondents potentially cause by Asian ethnic.

Table 2. Significant differences of career decision difficulty between nursing freshmen and interns

Item Number	Statement	Domain	Freshmen (n=110)		Interns (n=66)		T-statistic	Mean dif. (CI95%)	p-value
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
5	A general need for confirmation and support for decisions	Indecisiveness	6.74	2.47	5.74	2.66	2.509	.994	.013
9	The belief that there is an ideal career which can fulfill all aspirations	Dysfunctional Myths	6.84	1.90	6.11	2.39	2.237	.730	.027
10	The belief that a career choice is a one-time thing and a life-long obligation		7.29	1.79	6.18	2.40	3.486	1.109	.001
12	About the factors to take into consideration	Lack of Knowledge About the Process of Career Decision Making	4.63	2.10	3.48	2.25	3.400	1.142	.001
13	About how to combine information concerning the self and career alternatives		4.61	2.17	3.81	2.63	2.158	.791	.032
16	Lack of information about preferred career alternatives	Lack of Information	4.40	2.08	3.44	2.27	2.869	.961	.005
17	Lack of information about career-related preferences		4.40	2.29	3.30	2.41	3.015	1.097	.003
18	Lack of information about abilities in the future		4.67	2.40	3.67	2.39	2.697	1.006	.008
19	Lack of information about personality traits in the future		4.51	2.41	3.65	2.43	2.274	.858	.024
23	Lack of information about the characteristics of the career or training alternatives that best fit the individual	Lack of Information About Occupations	4.74	2.22	3.95	2.55	2.140	.782	.034
24	Lack of information about the variety of future career or training alternatives		4.63	2.23	3.86	2.60	2.065	.764	.040
27	Lack of information about ways of obtaining additional information about career and training alternatives	Lack of Information About Ways of Obtaining Additional Information	4.50	2.40	3.57	2.55	2.415	.924	.017
35	Several equally attractive career alternatives	Internal Conflicts	6.82	2.01	5.50	2.50	3.833	1.318	.000
40	Abilities exceed those required in the preferred career alternative		5.15	1.92	4.20	2.16	3.056	.958	.003
Overall	Career Decision Difficulties	1) lack of readiness, 2) indecisiveness, 3) dysfunctional myth, 4) lack of knowledge about the process of career decision making, 5) lack of	191.32	43.38	174.39	74.06	2.563	22.830	.057



1  
information about  
self, 6) lack of  
information about  
occupations, 7)  
lack of ways of  
obtaining  
additional infor-  
mation, 8)  
unreliable  
information, 9)  
internal and  
external conflicts.

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According to Mau (2004) and Tagay (2014), culture can influence one's career development and career decision making processes [3]. In this study, most respondents are Balinese, but 100% Asian. Most Asian students choose a college major because of parents and other authority figures. A study towards 375 junior and senior college students (Taiwanese) found that students' academic commitment to a college major tend to increase when they choose their majors based on personal and career preferences, and sequentially this high levels of academic commitment lead to high levels of career self-efficacy which augments the extent of career-decision readiness [6]. In this study, we found the majority of freshmen (49.09%) chose nursing major because of personal dream/preference, while only a small number of interns (19.70%) chose accordingly; but both groups experienced moderate difficulties similarly. Coon (2008) argues that students who have low career self-efficacy and optimism tend to use avoidance coping methods that make it difficult to decide on a career increase; there are also some cognitive variables that influence the difficulty. There was a significant relationship between career decision-making self-efficacy and difficulty in deciding career for students [4]. Therefore, academic commitment, career self-efficacy, optimism, and cognitive variables in nursing students need to be explored further.

In this study, we found more female students and this is common in nursing major. Difficulties in deciding on a career are not significantly different between male and female students [7]. A study towards 1,006 college students showed that no gender differences in global levels of problems in career decision making; women reported more problems with life-goal awareness and authority orientation than did men, while men reported more problems with secondary gain motivations than did women [8]. Therefore although we found most respondents were females in both groups, there was no significant difference of career decision difficulties found between groups. Another study towards 347 Australian high school students (199 females, 148 males) from single-gender and coeducational schools in a regional city in South-East Queensland found that there was no gender differences regarding overall levels of career decidedness, although boys reported a higher level of career knowledge, and girls indicated that they were more motivated and more flexible with regard to careers; students at single-gender schools were more undecided than students from coeducational schools [9]. In the context of nursing, similar study is a bit difficult to be conducted due to males are less preferred to choose nursing major, especially in Indonesian context, otherwise multicenter study needs to be conducted to analyze the differences between female and male nursing college students regarding their career decision difficulties.

In this study, freshmen experienced higher difficulties than interns (Mean: 174.39 vs. 191.32). This is potentially influenced by the age differences between groups, in which most of nursing interns were older than the freshmen. A study towards 209 veteran and active students at the University of Midwest, USA; which found that younger respondents turned out to be less prepared so that the difficulty in deciding a career was higher compared to the older students [3]. Another study towards 121 high school students compared to 127 adults found that career decision difficulties was experienced by people of different ages, although older career deciders reported fewer difficulties than students [10]. Different patterns in time perspective are associated with different types of career decision-making difficulties in adults [11]. Freshmen experienced more difficulties than interns also potentially because of low self-efficacy. Another study towards 149 freshmen in Canada found that there was a significant negative correlation between career decision-making difficulties and self-efficacy, which discriminated among degree of career indecision and whether or not freshmen had changed their career plans since attending university [12].

34 Most respondents in both groups are living with their parents whose profession is other than nursing. Family belongingness was significantly related to career decision-making difficulties in undergraduate university students [13]. A study towards 229 college students showed that higher levels of family cohesion were associated with lower levels of decision-making confusion, commitment anxiety, and external conflict; higher levels of family adaptability were associated with lower levels of external conflict [14]. This study also found that external conflict was not significantly different between groups. There is a high possibility that most respondents experience moderate level of family adaptability and cohesion, so that most of them

experienced moderate difficulties in career decision-making. Another study towards 98 new students at a private university in the Midwestern showed that there was a significant relationship between adaptability, emotional intelligence, intrapersonal and interpersonal values, and stress management to difficulties in deciding a career [15].

Overall, there was no significant difference in career decision difficulty between nursing freshmen and interns ( $p=.057$ ); especially aspects of lack of readiness and inconsistent information which seemed to be similar in both groups (both  $p>.05$ ). Prior to the beginning of learning process in the university, there were three domains of career decision difficulty affected by significant differences between groups (75%), namely: indecisiveness, dysfunctional myths, and lack of knowledge about the process of career decision making; while during the learning process or study period in the university, there were four domains affected (80%), namely: lack of information, lack of information about occupations, lack of information about ways of obtaining additional information, and internal conflicts (all  $p<.05$ ). Lack of information seemed to be the key of significant differences found between groups.

This study results were supported by a study towards 782 university students which found that most responses were certain about their future career; significant predictors of career uncertainty were found to be: 1) lack of information about the decision-making process, 2) lack of information about occupations, 3) inconsistent information due to internal conflict, 4) exhaustion, 5) lack of information about ways of obtaining information, 6) inconsistent information due to external conflict, 7) cynicism, and 8) lack of dedication [16]. Another study towards university students in Greece also found that factors of lack of information, inconsistent information, and lack of readiness were positively correlated with dysfunctional career thoughts, decision-making confusion, commitment difficulty, and lack of determination; but oppositely, all aforementioned factors were negatively correlated with generalized self-efficacy [17].

Gati, et al. (1996) found that lack of readiness caused by lack of motivation, general indecisiveness, and dysfunctional beliefs [2]; motivation was not identified in this study. Results showed that indecisiveness (item 5) and dysfunctional myths/beliefs (item 9 and 10) were significantly different between groups, but lack of readiness was experienced similarly in both groups. Low motivation is potentially being the cause of lack of readiness in both groups. A study towards 496 college students majoring in natural sciences and education showed that lack of motivation acted as asymmetry factor for both the difficulty of making the choice and the certainty about one's decision [18].

Another study towards 222 college students showed that career indecisiveness, self-concept, and identity-related career decision-making difficulties were associated with depression for both men and women [19]. Depression was not identified in this study, but it potentially influences the career indecisiveness in nursing students. Lipshits-Braziler, et al. (2015) proposed three strategies for managing career indecisiveness in college students, namely: productive, support-seeking, and nonproductive coping strategies [20]. Their study towards 251 students in a college preparatory program showed that the use of nonproductive coping strategies at the beginning of the program was associated with and predicted a higher degree of individuals' career decision-making difficulties, while a decrease in the use of it over time predicted a decrease in individuals' career decision-making difficulties; a decrease in the use of nonproductive coping strategies and an increase in the use of productive ones predicted individuals' advancement toward making a career decision [20]. Another study towards 364 students showed that career decision-making strategies and resilience contributed 46% to the variance in career decision difficulty [21].

Dysfunctional myth is thoughts or beliefs that are rather irrational, however influential to individual's decision. A study towards 496 college students majoring in natural sciences and education showed that dysfunctional myths acted as bifurcation factor for both the difficulty of making the choice and the certainty about one's decision [18]. Another study towards 446 Korean college students showed that dysfunctional career thoughts were negatively correlated with career decision self-efficacy and vocational identity, and it was partially mediate the association between both variables [22]. Similar study in nursing students was not found yet. In different population, a study towards 46 adult immigrants showed that dysfunctional career thoughts were significantly related with attachment anxiety and avoidance which correlated with decision-making confusion and external conflict [23]. Dysfunctional myth seems to strongly correlate with career decision self-efficacy which potentially being a good predictor of career decision difficulty in university students.

Lack of knowledge about the process of career decision making was significantly different between groups (item 12-13). It is more common to be found in junior college students, especially freshmen. A study towards 496 college students majoring in natural sciences and education showed that factors related to lack of knowledge about the steps involved in the process of career decision-making acted as asymmetry factor for both the difficulty of making the choice and the certainty about one's decision [18].

Results showed that despite of inconsistent information the significant differences found between groups were mostly influenced by lack of information (item 16-19) compared to other domains of career

decision difficulty, especially lack of information about occupation (item 23-24) and ways of obtaining additional information (item 27). Lack and inconsistent career information is commonly experienced by undecided college students who reported lower career decision-making self-efficacy with more career decision difficulties and negative career thoughts [24]. A study towards 496 college students majoring in natural sciences and education showed that lack of information about the various occupations and lack of information about self and lack of motivation acted as asymmetry factor for both the difficulty of making the choice and the certainty about one's decision [18].

A further analysis towards Career Decision Difficulties Questionnaire which compared to Career Decision Scale and Career Factors Inventory showed that there were six reliable factors of career decision problems, namely: lack of information, need for information, trait indecision, disagreement with others, identity diffusion, and choice anxiety. From these six factors, three factors were being the structure of the indecision domains, namely: information deficit/identity diffusion, decision process inhibitors, and choice inhibitors [25]. This analysis results supported this study result which found that among all domains of career decision difficulties reported by Career Decision Difficulties Questionnaire, lack of information being the most affected domains between groups; it was foundational domains of career decision difficulties requiring special attention and treatment from academic advisor and counselor or psychologist.

Conflicts may arise in every individual. In this study, we found that external conflicts happened similarly in both groups, but internal conflicts were significantly different between groups (item 35 and 40). Internal conflict could cause inconsistent information which is being one of the significant predictors of career uncertainty in university students [16]; and this inconsistent information could develop dysfunctional career thoughts, decision-making confusion, commitment difficulty, and lack of determination [17]. Therefore, academic advisor needs to be cautious about internal conflicts in university students because it could be one of the roots of career decision difficulties encounter by the students afterwards.

In general, the results of this study showed that moderate difficulties were found in nursing freshmen and interns, especially aspects of lack of readiness and inconsistent information were found to be similar in both groups, regardless the influence of age, sex, and culture. There was no significant difference of career decision difficulty found between groups indicated that future career decisions for university students are still being something that is relatively difficult to decide on their own. Therefore, the involvement and support from parents, lecturers, academic advisor, and peers are important contributions in the career decision making process. Counseling during the study period in the university should be given to students who in need, and if necessary their parents need to be presented in the meeting in order to match the career expectations between both parties so that the future career/profession can be decided together.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Most nursing freshmen and interns experienced moderate difficulties in deciding their future career. Overall, there is no significant difference in career decision difficulty between nursing freshmen and interns, especially in aspects of lack of readiness and inconsistent information. However, more career decision difficulties were found in nursing freshmen compared to interns, which influenced by indecisiveness, dysfunctional myths, lack of knowledge about the process of career decision making, lack of information, lack of information about occupations, lack of information about ways of obtaining additional information, and internal conflicts. Specific intervention in the higher education level targeting modification of these aspects in the beginning or during the study period in the university potentially leads to the decrease of career decision difficulty encountered by nursing students.

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# Comparison of career decision difficulties between nursing freshmen and interns

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