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## **Chapter 17: Career Preparedness in Adolescents: An Overview of Empirical Research and Suggestions for Practice**

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*Abstract:* The present chapter provides an overview of the theoretical and empirical research on career preparedness among adolescents and derives implications for practice. We integrate various conceptualisations of career preparedness and suggest that career preparedness can be understood as a multidimensional construct consisting of attitudes, knowledge and competencies, and behaviours. Moreover, we summarise recent research on predictors and outcomes of career preparedness. Research on outcomes highlights that career preparedness is related to beneficial outcomes in various domains of adolescents' lives (e.g., work, education). Research on predictors demonstrates the relevance of personal factors (e.g., work-related attitudes and motivations) as well as environmental factors (e.g., career interventions) to foster career preparedness in adolescents. Finally, based on the empirical evidence discussed in this chapter, we develop suggestions and guidelines for practitioners on how adolescents can be supported in the process of career preparation.

*Keywords:* career preparedness; adolescents; career preparation; career maturity; career readiness.

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## Introduction

Work plays a central role in most people's lives, at least in western industrialized societies (e.g., Schwartz, 1999). During adolescence, central development tasks focus on work and career-related issues, specifically on career preparation, that is, the process of becoming prepared for a career (e.g., Savickas, 2002; Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996).

As successful completion of any developmental tasks, also the developmental task of adequate career preparation has various beneficial implications for individuals. For example, adequate career preparation fosters well-being and positive future work experiences (e.g., Super et al., 1996); while insufficient preparation can impede well-being and adjustment through various vocational problems (Skorikov, 2007).

Having said this, it is clear that career preparation is a relevant topic for researchers and practitioners, which is reflected by the fact that the topic of career preparation has stimulated considerable theoretical and empirical work, and that supporting adolescents in career preparation is an important part of career guidance in many countries (cf. Hartung, Savickas, & Walsh, 2015).

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the theoretical and empirical research on career preparedness among adolescents and derive implications for practitioners. We start with a definition of what career preparedness is, which is important as various concepts and theories do address career preparation among adolescents. We then summarise recent research on outcomes of career preparedness and discuss effects of career preparedness. We proceed with providing a summary of recent research on predictors of career preparedness and current findings on how career preparedness can be promoted. We then use the theoretical and empirical work discussed in this chapter to derive suggestions and guidelines for practitioners on how adolescents could be supported in the process of career preparation. The chapter ends with a short conclusion summarizing main findings.

### **What is Career Preparedness?**

No single theoretical framework of career preparedness exists, yet a number of existing concepts and theories do address what it means for adolescents to become prepared for a career. Dominant approaches to career preparation and development include the work of Super and colleagues on career maturity (Super, 1955; Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996) and the work on career readiness (Peterson, Sampson Jr, Lenz, & Reardon, 2002; Phillips & Blustein, 1994). More recently, researchers have begun to give attention to the terms preparation (Skorikov, 2007) and preparedness (Lent, 2013).

In this section, we provide an overview of the different theoretical frameworks that address the subject of adolescent career preparation. We then suggest that career preparedness could be considered as a multidimensional construct that incorporates a number of different aspects from existing theories.

#### **Career Maturity**

In his life-span, life-space theory of career development, Super (1977, 1990) proposed five developmental stages through which individuals pass through during the life-course in relation to their career development. Each of these five stages is accompanied by key developmental tasks. Integral to this theory is the idea that individuals need to display sufficient maturity to successfully manage the developmental tasks associated with each stage. Thus, maturity was defined as “the ability to cope with the vocational or career developmental tasks with which one is confronted” (Super, 1977, p. 294).

The developmental stage in which adolescence is situated is the stage of exploration that typically extends up until age 24. Here, adolescents are faced with the main developmental task of exploration which includes exploration of both the self and various occupations (Savickas, 2002). Self-exploration requires that individuals gain insight into themselves in terms of their vocational interests, strengths, values, and abilities. Exploration

of occupations entails the accumulation of information pertaining to occupational fields that one finds interesting and the necessary educational requirements to enter this occupation. The goal of this self and environment exploration is that of decision-making. Thus, adolescents need to engage in sufficient exploration to be able to make a well-founded career choice, and if they are able to accomplish this, they are thought to be sufficiently mature.

Maturity, according to Super (Super, 1955; Super et al., 1996), and alternate conceptualisations such as the one provided by Crites (Crites, 1971, 1973), consists of both attitudes toward and competencies for developing a career. Attitudes are concerned with feelings, subjective reactions, and dispositions that an individual has towards making a career choice. Competencies are more concerned with the cognitive aspects of choosing an occupation. Refinements to models of career maturity resulted in two main attitudes (i.e., exploration and planning), and two main competencies (i.e., decision-making competence and occupational information or knowledge) (Savickas, 2002). Thus, adolescents should be particularly concerned with exploring and planning for their career choice, as well as developing their decision-making competence and gathering occupational information.

### **Career Readiness**

Three main theoretical approaches to defining and conceptualising career readiness are presented here. First, it can be seen as a synonym for maturity in that some definitions of maturity refer to the readiness for making age-appropriate career decisions (Super et al., 1996). Second, the developmental processes of planning, exploring, and deciding are known collectively as career choice readiness (Phillips & Blustein, 1994). Third, the cognitive information processing (CIP) theory adds a contextual perspective and defines readiness as “the capability of an individual to make appropriate career choices, taking into account the complexity of the family, social, economic, and organisational factors that influence an individual’s career development” (Peterson et al., 2002, p. 316). Similar to the competencies

dimension of career maturity models, CIP highlights three key factors in making a career choice: self-knowledge, occupational knowledge, and decision-making skills (Peterson et al., 2002). Along with decision-making competence, CIP proposes that individuals need to deal with career problems, which have been defined as “a gap between an existing state of indecision and a more desired state” (Peterson et al., 2002, p. 315). As such, the theory proposes that individuals should develop problem solving skills so that they can resolve these career problems and move towards certainty and clarity as this pertains to career decisions (Peterson et al., 2002). Lastly, the meta-cognitions of self-talk, self-awareness, and monitoring and controlling are required for the successful pursuit of self and occupational knowledge, and the application of decision making skills (Peterson et al., 2002).

### **Career Preparedness and Career Preparation**

Many of the elements that appear in maturity and readiness models appear in conceptualisations of preparedness or preparation too. According to career construction theory, planning, decision making, confidence, and exploration make up the key aspects of career preparation (Savickas, 2002). Similarly, Skorikov (2007) proposed that career preparedness consists of planning, confidence, and decidedness. He argued that these three elements represent certainty and commitment whereas exploration is characterised by uncertainty and was thus not included in his conceptualisation of preparedness.

More recently, in an attempt to supplement existing career models and theories, Lent (2013) proposed that preparedness could be a supplement to planning. He suggested that as individuals face less certain and more unstable professional futures, traditional planning (that focused more on stable aspects of the self and environment) may not afford individuals sufficient flexibility to cope with growing complexity (Lent, 2013). He defined preparedness as “a healthy state of vigilance regarding threats to one’s career well-being as well as alertness to resources and opportunities on which one can capitalize” (p. 302). Building on social

cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002), he suggested that preparedness might be particularly important in relation to barrier management and identifying support. Thus, in the exploration phase, adolescents should also be concerned with identifying potential barriers, considering the likelihood of encountering these barriers, and preparing coping strategies, while also looking to actively develop resources and identify sources of social support (Lent et al., 2002). In essence, preparedness should foster an individual's capacity to be resilient and adaptable when facing unexpected career events.

One commonality that emerges across all the theories and models reviewed above is their shared focus on desiring to see adolescents develop their decision-making capacity to the point at which they are able to make a well-founded vocational or career choice. Thus, being decided, or reaching a state of decidedness emerges as a central aspect of career preparedness. To reach this state of being decided, individuals require sufficient self and occupational knowledge as well as decision making competence which are elements that were highlighted in early work on career choice (Parsons, 1909). However, these elements are not the only aspects of career preparedness, a consideration we develop further in the next session.

### **Career Preparedness as a Multidimensional Construct**

Based on a review of empirical research in adolescents and students, Johnston and colleagues (under review) proposed that career preparedness could be considered as a multidimensional construct that includes career preparedness attitudes, knowledge and competencies, and behaviours (see Figure 1). This conceptualisation of preparedness accounts for the key aspects that have been used in empirical research but that also emerge in the different theoretical approaches reviewed above. The use of this conceptualisation permits a holistic perspective on career preparedness that acknowledges that individuals may have strengths or weakness in any number of these aspects, which need to be addressed through

career counselling guidance and interventions, as we will elaborate further below in the Practical Implications.

In what comes next, we will discuss the beneficial effects of high career preparedness, and thereby illustrate that career preparedness is a highly relevant construct for both researchers and practitioners.

### **What are the Effects of High Career Preparedness?**

Being well prepared for a career can have beneficial effects for various domains of adolescents' lives. In what comes next, we will address beneficial effects of career preparedness for (a) career-related outcomes, (b) academic outcomes, and (c) well-being.

#### **Career-Related Outcomes**

Research illustrates beneficial effects of career preparedness on various career-related outcomes. More precisely research has found career preparedness to be positively associated with favorable work attitudes, such as occupational and organisational commitment (Nägele & Neuenschwander, 2014), as well as with satisfaction outcomes, such as satisfaction with the present career choice (Kleiman, Gati, Peterson, Sampson, Reardon, & Lenz, 2004) or job satisfaction (Hirschi, Freund, & Herrmann, 2014; Hirschi, 2014).

Additionally, research indicates that adolescents higher in career preparedness have a clearer sense of their future career in terms of vocational identity (Cox, Bjornson, Krieshok, & Liu, 2016) and occupational plans (Busacca & Taber, 2002), compared to adolescents who are less prepared. Similarly, Patton and Creed (2007) investigated in a cross-sectional study the relation of high career preparedness with occupational status aspirations and expectations in Australian high-school students. Career preparedness included career decision-making self-efficacy, career indecision, as well as career maturity knowledge and attitude. The results showed that students' occupational status aspirations and expectations were both positively related to higher career maturity knowledge and career decision-making self-efficacy.



Furthermore, students' occupational status aspirations were related with lower career indecision, and students' occupational status expectations were higher when students also possessed higher career maturity attitude.

Longitudinal evidence also supports the importance of high career preparedness for career-related outcomes in adolescents. Nurmi, Salmela-Aro, and Koivisto (2002) investigated the effects of high career preparedness in Finnish adolescents on finding a job appropriate to their education over a time-span of 18 months. Career preparedness was assessed by the adolescents' occupation-related goal appraisals. The researchers found that the more adolescents put emphasis on their occupational goals, and the more they had a sense of progress towards their goals, the more likely they were to have found a job appropriate to their education and less likely to be unemployed after finishing a vocational school. Furthermore, career preparedness in adolescents has been found to be related to higher earnings in adult life (Ashby & Schoon, 2010) and less resignation behaviour (e.g., ending employment) five years after graduation (Earl, Minbashian, Sukijjakhamin, & Bright, 2011).

### **Academic Outcomes**

Adolescents' academic and career development are highly interrelated (Kuijpers & Meijers, 2012), which led researchers to investigate whether career preparedness would positively influence academic outcomes. Indeed, studies have found that high career preparedness was related to higher satisfaction with a university major (Tak & Lee, 2003) and higher retention rates in majors, especially for majors that generally have high attrition rates like STEM majors (Belser, Prescod, Daire, Dagley, & Young, 2017). In addition, career preparedness has been found to positively affect the academic performance of adolescents (Oliveira, Taveira, & Porfeli, 2017; Perry, Liu, & Pabian, 2010).

To illustrate, Oliveira, Taveira, and Porfeli (2017) examined the effects of high career preparedness on Portuguese adolescents' grades. Career preparedness was assessed through

adolescents' career exploration, career outcome expectations and career planning. The authors found that all of these facets of career preparedness significantly improved the adolescents' academic achievement.

Perry and colleagues (2010) similarly investigated in American high-school students whether career preparation had an effect on students' grades. The researchers defined career preparation as a latent construct represented by career decision-making self-efficacy and career planning. The results showed that high career preparedness predicted the adolescents' grades, mediated through higher school engagement. In other words, adolescents who displayed higher career preparedness were more engaged in school, and as a consequence, received higher grades.

### **Well-Being**

In addition to the positive effects of high career preparedness on career- and education-related outcomes, many studies have also found positive relationships between career preparedness and adolescents' well-being. Both emotional stability (Stringer et al., 2012) and life satisfaction (e.g. Kim, Ahn, & Fouad, 2016; Jiang, Hu, Wang, & Jiang, 2017) have been found to be significantly and positively related with career preparedness. Furthermore, career preparedness has been found to have a significant negative relationship with anxiety, depression and somatic disorders in college students (Tak & Lee, 2003). In particular, Skorikov (2007) extensively investigated the effects of high career preparedness on well-being of American high-school students from grade 11 to 12. The author defined career preparedness as a latent construct represented by career planning, career confidence, and career indecision. Several well-being outcomes were assessed, such as self-actualisation, life satisfaction, emotional stability, social adaptation, depression and anxiety. The results indicate that across measurements, adolescents high in career preparedness had higher social

adaptation, emotional stability, life satisfaction, and self-actualisation. Additionally, depression and anxiety were inversely related to career preparedness.

Taken together, in this section, we have illustrated that high career preparedness has many important consequences for adolescents, in terms of their career and academic development but also in terms of general well-being. Nevertheless, we would like to highlight that empirical research addressing outcomes of career preparedness is relatively scarce. Instead, many researchers have focused on investigating which factors promote high career preparedness in adolescents, which we will discuss in the next section.

### **What Factors Promote High Career Preparedness?**

Several theoretical approaches propose that personal factors originating within the individual, as well as contextual factors originating in the family, society, or the economy, can make it more or less difficult for adolescents to develop career preparedness (e.g., Peterson et al., 2002). In the next sections, we thus discuss contextual and individual factors that have been found in empirical research to be related to high career preparedness.

We thereby focus on factors that are of particular relevance for practitioners in the sense that they are malleable in principle. We do not discuss static and relatively unchangeable factors that have been found to also relate to career preparedness, like demographic characteristics or personality traits (for an overview, see Johnston et al., under review)

### **Contextual Factors Fostering Career Preparedness**

In the following sections, we discuss the importance of (a) career interventions and (b) social support from key others as contextual factors that promote career preparedness among adolescents.

#### **Career interventions.**

Career interventions are a prominent means to foster adolescents' career development including career preparation (cf. Hartung et al., 2015). Indeed, several career interventions have been shown to increase career preparedness (e.g., Hirschi & Läge, 2008; Kiuru, Koivisto, Mutanen, Vuori, & Nurmi, 2011; Janeiro, Mota, & Ribas, 2014; Perdrix, Stauffer, Masdonati, Massoudi, & Rossier, 2012). In general, researchers have used various approaches and exercises in their interventions to increase career preparedness, such as improving self-concept knowledge (e.g., Janeiro, Mota, & Ribas, 2014; Hirschi & Läge, 2008), exploring career options (e.g., Koys, 2017; Perdrix, Stauffer, Masdonati, Massoudi, & Rossier, 2012), being able to deal with setbacks and obstacles (e.g., Vuori, Koivisto, Mutanen, Jokisaari, & Salmela-Aro, 2008; Perdrix, Stauffer, Masdonati, Massoudi, & Rossier, 2012; Koen, Klehe, & Van Vianen, 2012), and committing to an implementation plan (e.g., Obi, 2015; Vuori, Koivisto, Mutanen, Jokisaari, & Salmela-Aro, 2008). For example, Kiuru et al. (2011) ran a 5-day intensive career intervention with 738 Finnish ninth-graders. During the course, the adolescents learned a multitude of skills, such as how to use resources in order to advance their careers; how to create concrete action plans to promote their educational career; identifying potential barriers and how to deal with them; and lastly, they committed themselves to their career plans. This career intervention was found to be effective for increasing adolescents' preparedness to deal with obstacles and career choice self-efficacy, at least when measured directly after the intervention, with small ( $\eta^2 = .03$ ) and medium ( $\eta^2 = .09$ ) effect sizes for preparedness to deal with obstacles and career choice self-efficacy, respectively.

Additionally, other career-related interventions, such career education modules (e.g., Park, 2015), peer counselling programs (Wong, Chui, Chan, Ting, & Lam, 2016) and advisory mentoring programs (Wu & Chang, 2009) have also been found to be effective in promoting career preparedness. For example, Talib and colleagues (2015) designed a 9-week

college exploration module for Malaysian community college students, which provided content on career-related information and skills, and offered guided and supportive learning experiences. The module was highly effective in increasing the students' career planning, career self-efficacy, and career maturity, indicated by a large overall effect size ( $\eta^2 = .95$ ) when considering a combination of the three career preparedness variables (i.e. career planning, career self-efficacy, and career maturity).

Lastly, research has also found that non-career specific interventions were effective in strengthening adolescents' career preparedness. Lim et al. (2010) found that a cognitive-behavioral group therapy positively affected career maturity attitude. Werch et al. (2008) found a health intervention to increase career preparedness in adolescence. These results once again show how closely well-being and career preparedness are linked to each other (e.g. Skorikov, 2007).

### **Social support.**

Not only formal career-support in terms of an intervention, but also social support in general (e.g., Hirschi, Niles, & Akos, 2011; Rogers, Creed, & Glendon, 2008) and specifically parental support (e.g., Kim, Ahn, & Fouad, 2016; Lee, Rojewski, & Hill, 2013; for longitudinal evidence, see Bae, 2017; Yon, Joeng, & Goh, 2012) have been found to be key elements to foster career preparedness among adolescents.

Keller and Whiston (2008) investigated in a cross-sectional study the relationship between supportive parenting behaviours and career preparedness of American middle school students. More precisely, they investigated the effects of parental general psychosocial support and career-specific parenting actions on adolescents' career decision-making self-efficacy and career maturity. Parental general psychosocial support included parental behaviours like expression of interest in various teenage issues or expression of proudness towards the adolescent. Career-specific parenting actions included parental behaviours like

helping the adolescent to understand results from a career test or informing adolescents about specific occupations or careers. The results showed that both types of parenting behaviours were positively related to children's career preparedness, although general psychosocial support provided by parents was even more relevant than career-specific actions, especially for children's career decision-making self-efficacy.

The importance of general parental support for adolescents' career preparedness is further corroborated by longitudinal evidence: Bae (2017) investigated in a sample of Korean adolescents how parental involvement in terms of how frequently parents were personally involved in various life domains of their children, was related to adolescents' career maturity from age 17 to 25. Results indicate that adolescents with more involved parents started with higher levels of career preparedness at age 17. At the same time, the effect of parental involvement on career maturity decreased over time, indicating that general social support from parents became less important for adolescents' career preparedness when adolescents grow older.

Overall, these findings illustrate that general parental support in terms of a family environment that is characterised by warmth and respect is highly facilitative of career preparation, and potentially is even more important than career-specific parental support, at least at relatively younger ages. At the same time, parents' career-specific support might become more relevant when adolescents grow older and face more immediate career decisions, such as choice of a university major or a vocational track (Keller & Whiston, 2008).

Beside parental support, support from teachers or counsellors (e.g. Lapan, Poynton, Marcotte, Marland, & Milam, 2017; Perry et al., 2010), as well as peers (e.g., Lazarides, Rohowski, Ohlemann, & Ittel, 2016; Lundberg, 2014) is a relevant resource to foster career preparation in adolescents. For example, Perry and colleagues (2010) investigated in a cross-

sectional study among American high-school students the relationship between teacher support and students' career preparedness. More precisely, they investigated teacher support in terms of the extent to which teachers were invested in students, showed positive regard or emotional support, held high expectations for students, and were accessible for students. Students' career preparedness included students' career planning and career decision-making self-efficacy. As expected, the relationship between teacher support and students' career preparedness was positive. Interestingly, teacher social support was even more strongly related to adolescents' career preparation than was parental social support (which was also assessed). This finding might be at least partly explained by the fact that not all adolescents have regular access to high-quality parental career support. Indeed, research indicates that lower socio-economic background in terms of lower household income and parental education can impede career preparedness (e.g., Bae, 2017; Lee et al., 2013). Hence, for adolescents with less supportive homes, teachers might assume a particularly prominent position in their career preparation (Perry et al., 2010).

### **Individual Factors Fostering Career Preparedness**

One way through which more distal factors such as career interventions and social support from key others can promote career preparedness among adolescents can be through their beneficial effect on more proximal individual factors. In the following sections, we discuss the importance of adolescents' (a) educational attainment and school achievement, (b) career-related attitudes and motivations, and (c) work experience as factors that promote career preparedness.

#### **Educational attainment and school achievement.**

Educational attainment and school achievement are considered as important human capital factors that can facilitate career preparedness. Indeed, several studies found that higher school achievement or educational attainment was related to higher levels of career

preparedness (e.g., Choi & Kim, 2013; Hardré & Hackett, 2015; for longitudinal evidence, see for example, Bae, 2017; Creed, Patton, & Prideaux, 2007). For example, Choi and Kim (2013) investigated the cross-sectional relationship between self-reported academic achievement and career preparedness in terms of career decision-making self-efficacy and career planning among American and Korean students who majored in hospitality and tourism. They found that higher academic achievement was related to higher career decision-making self-efficacy and career planning, especially among Korean students. The cultural difference in the strength of the relationship was at least partly explained by differences in motivation orientation between American and Korean students. More precisely, Korean students were more strongly motivated by intrinsic study factors such as enjoyment and challenge. Intrinsic study motivation in turn was more strongly related to academic achievement compared to external study motivation in terms of compensation and prestige. The importance of intrinsic motivation for career preparedness is further supported by longitudinal evidence indicating that also intrinsic work values are related to higher career preparedness (Hirschi, 2010; Yon et al., 2012, see further below). In addition to work values, also other attitudes and motivations towards the world of work and careers are related to career preparedness—a point that we elaborate in more detail next.

### **Career-related attitudes and motivations.**

Adolescents' career related attitudes and motivations can be important determinants of career preparedness. This is potentially because adolescents with more favorable attitudes towards the world of work and those who are more motivated towards working, invest more energy and resources in their career preparation. Indeed, work commitment in terms of how important work is in one's life, has been found to have a positive relationship with adolescents' career preparedness. Patton and Creed (2002) found in a cross-sectional study that work commitment was positively related to career preparedness in terms of career



maturity attitude and career maturity knowledge among Australian high school students. Also for Australian secondary school students, Creed and Patton (2003) found that students' work commitment was a main predictor of their career maturity attitude and knowledge.

In addition to work commitment, other career-related attitudes and motivations have been shown to foster career preparedness. These are career goals (Clair, Hutto, MacBeth, Newstetter, McCarty, & Melkers, 2017; Punch, Creed, & Hyde, 2005), career interests in terms of interest elevation and differentiation (Jaensch, Hirschi, & Spurk, 2016), or calling (Hirschi & Herrmann, 2013). Moreover, work values can play a role in career preparation (Hirschi, 2010; Yon et al., 2012). For example, Hirschi (2010) found among Swiss high school students that students who endorsed more intrinsic work values (e.g., who valued interesting work) showed a faster increase in career preparedness through grade eight compared to students who endorsed more extrinsic work values (e.g., who valued prestigious work). This finding might be at least partly explained by the fact that students placing greater importance on intrinsic work values have clearer and more specific reference points from which to evaluate different career options matching with their personal needs (Yon et al., 2012). Indeed, there is indication that also the perceived fit between occupational interest and occupational expectations has beneficial effects on career preparedness (Hirschi & Läge, 2007).

### **Work experience.**

Making real experiences in the world of work can be a way to foster adolescents' career preparedness for various reasons. First, work experience can sensitize adolescents to the need to make decisions about their future career, associated with an increase in career focus. Second, work experiences can expose adolescents to a wide array of people that may act as a resource in the process of career preparation (see above). Third, gaining (positive) work experiences can motivate adolescents to think about and prepare for their careers.

Indeed, several studies indicate that making real experiences in the world of work is a way to foster career preparedness (Lee et al., 2013; Talib & Aun, 2009; for longitudinal evidence, see Creed et al., 2007; Wu & Chang, 2009). For example, Creed and colleagues (2007) investigated among Australian high school students the relationship between work experience and career preparedness in terms of career planning and career exploration from grade eight to ten. They found that increasing work experience from grade eight to ten was accompanied by an increase in career planning and exploration.

Although empirical evidence overall consistently shows positive effects of work experience on adolescents' career preparedness, some boundary conditions apply. First, the number of working hours might play a nonlinear role for how work experience relate to career preparedness in young people. More precisely, detrimental effects of work experience on career preparedness can occur when adolescents work overly long hours (e.g., Barling, Rogers, & Kelloway, 1995; Steinberg & Dornbusch, 1991). This is likely due to the fact that these students lack the necessary energy for preparing their next career steps and for investing sufficient time and energy in schoolwork, while school performance and academic achievement are related with career preparedness (see above). Second, congruence of occupation with adolescents' career interests can play a role in the sense that work experience in an occupation that is congruent with adolescents' career interests is more beneficial for career preparation compared to work experience in an occupation that is relatively disconnected from adolescents' career interests (Luzzo, McWhirter, & Hutcheson, 1997). Finally, also cultural factors can play a role in how work experience affects career preparedness. For example, Yon and colleagues (2012) found a negative relationship between having a part-time job and career preparedness in a sample of Korean high school students. This might be at least partly due to the fact that Korean students are usually encouraged by

their parents and teachers to focus on school only, and, thus, it is uncommon for Korean adolescents to have a part-time job (Yon et al., 2012).

### **Practical Implications**

The theoretical and empirical evidence discussed in this chapter has various important practical implications. A first implication is related to the proposed conceptualisation of career preparedness. More precisely, the multidimensional conceptualisation of career preparedness can foster a deepened understanding of what career preparedness is and of what aspects it consists, which is essential for the design of effective career interventions. Indeed, the multidimensional nature of career preparedness can be used to guide the development and implementation of career guidance and counselling interventions that are focused on specific aspects of career preparedness (i.e., attitudes, knowledge and competencies, behaviours). Targeting specific aspects of preparedness means that career guidance and counselling techniques can be tailored to provide a more effective intervention and/or tailor the content of an intervention to the specific needs of intervention groups. For example, providing career-relevant knowledge and training career competencies might have large effects for one group of adolescents who largely miss such knowledge and competencies. Yet, another group of adolescents might already have developed sufficient career-relevant knowledge and competencies, and, thus, might mostly profit from an intervention targeting another aspect of career preparedness. This means that it could be useful to assess, prior to an intervention, the specific strengths or weaknesses in the various aspects of career preparedness in a target group, as it has been done for the assessment of other career constructs, like career resources (cf., Hirschi, Nagy, Baumeler, Johnston, & Spurk, in press).

A further practical implication can be derived from empirical evidence illustrating that social support is a crucial resource that helps adolescents to prepare for their careers. This indicates that increasing opportunities for adolescents to receive social support should be a

priority for people assisting adolescents with career preparation (e.g., teachers, career counsellors). Importantly, empirical research has demonstrated that general social support like showing empathy and understanding is at least as important as career-specific support. This means that teachers and career counsellors can use general social support behaviours (e.g., showing empathy, expressing pride) along with career-specific support as an explicit element in their classes or counselling sessions.

Moreover, practitioners in educational and counselling settings should ensure that adolescents also receive sufficient support from their personal relationships, especially from parents. A first step in this direction could be to assess the degree of social support adolescents receive from their parents. Then, if necessary, practitioners could include parents in at least some of the counselling sessions and help them understand that supporting their child in career preparation is important not only for the overall well-being of their children but also for their career development. Practitioners could even use career outcomes as a reason for encouraging supportive parental behaviours (Keller & Whiston, 2008), like expressing interest, trust, confidence, and pride in their children.

In addition, counsellors could encourage adolescents to strengthen relationship with others from which support is also likely to occur, like extended family members, peers, or a mentor. Related to that point, schools could provide opportunities to develop such supportive relationships, like “lunch with favourite professor” (Walker, Pearson, Murrell, 2010) or through social activities in class to foster positive peer relationships. Specifically, group-oriented career interventions or mentoring programs could be a promising way to foster supportive relationships with a mentor and peers.

Research on the positive effects of educational attainment and school achievement on career preparedness has relevant practical implications, too, especially for teachers. More precisely, it suggests that teachers should pay particular attention to students who appear to be

less connected to school (e.g., high absence, low school engagement) (Akos, Konold, & Niles, 2004). These students are at risk of suffering low levels of career preparedness, which combined with the fact that they might also be poorer school performers, can have long-lasting negative implications for their careers. This suggests that teacher support increasing students' general education- and career-related motivations might be at least as important for students' career preparation as are specific career preparation activities (e.g., career choice interventions).

Another practical implication can be derived from empirical evidence illustrating beneficial effects of early work experiences on career preparedness. This body of research implies that schools and career counselling centres may consider including formal work experiences as part of school or counselling programs (Creed et al., 2007). Ideally, adolescents should be guided to make their first work experiences in an occupation that is related to their future career goals. This might be a way to foster their career preparedness through better knowledge about the preferred occupation and/or increased fit between occupational aspirations and expectations. Furthermore, for making work experiences most beneficial, adolescents should also be supported to find a sound balance between working part-time and meeting expectations in school, because overly long work hours can have detrimental effects on career preparedness due to decreased school performance.

Finally, yet importantly, the theoretical and empirical evidence discussed in this chapter can have implications for practitioners from other disciplines, like clinical psychologists who work with adolescents. More precisely, these practitioners could keep in mind that increasing career preparedness is one way to foster positive well-being outcomes (e.g., life satisfaction) and prevent negative well-being outcomes (e.g., depression) among adolescents. Hence, discussing career-relevant topics in clinical interventions and, if

indicated, refer adolescents to a career counsellor, can increase overall well-being of adolescents, thereby also potentially increasing the effectiveness of clinical interventions.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The focus of this chapter has been on current empirical findings regarding career preparedness among adolescents and implications for practitioners on how career preparedness can be fostered. More precisely, we discussed existing concepts and theories that address career preparedness, and integrated these various conceptualisations by suggesting that career preparedness can be understood as a multidimensional construct consisting of attitudes, knowledge and competencies, and behaviours. Moreover, we summarised recent empirical research on outcomes of career preparedness and discussed beneficial effects of career preparedness for various domains of adolescents' lives, that is, work and career, education, and well-being. The summary of recent research on predictors of career preparedness supports person-context conceptualisations of career preparation (e.g. Peterson et al., 2002), indicating that both personal factors (i.e., educational attainment and school achievement, work-related attitudes and motivations, work experience) as well as environmental factors (i.e., career intervention, social support) are important to foster career preparation in adolescents. Finally, based on the empirical evidence discussed in this chapter, we developed suggestions and guidelines for practitioners (e.g., career counsellors, teachers) on how adolescents could be supported in the process of career preparation. In conclusion, we are confident that this chapter provides new insights into career preparation among adolescents for researchers as well as practitioners and hope that this chapter is informative for the development and design of novel career guidance and counselling interventions.

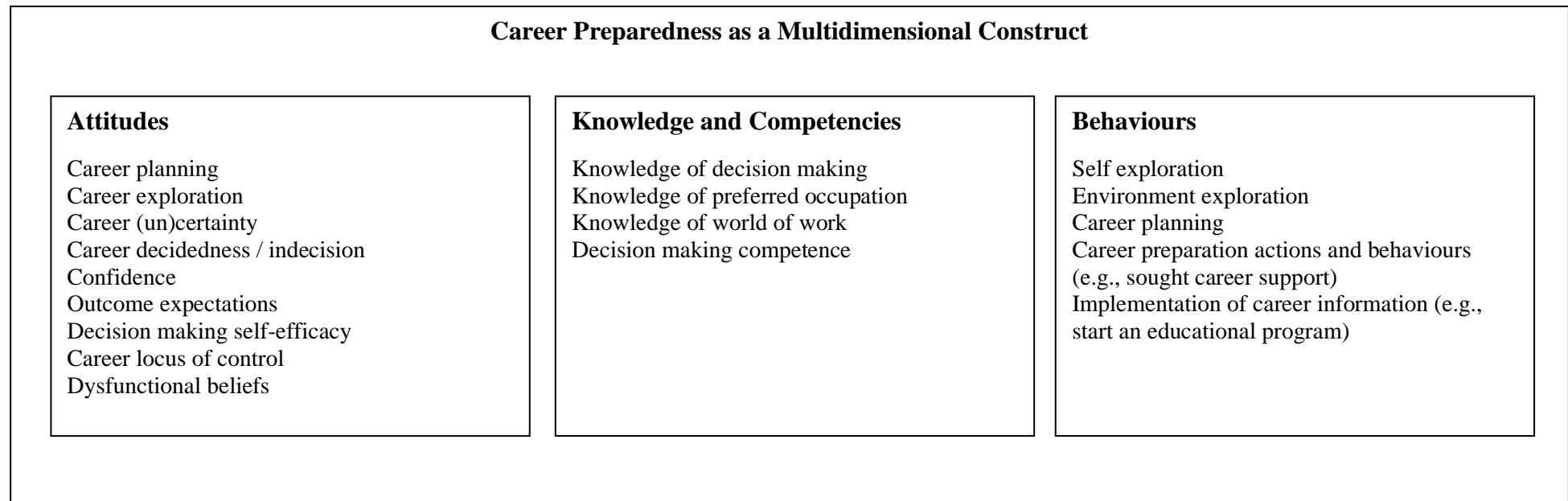
**Figures**

Figure 1. Career preparedness as a multidimensional construct

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