

Transition from School to Work

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Abstract

The research examined and investigated occupational aspirations, choices and developments of three groups of adolescents: Asians, Afro-Caribbean and White Britons during their immediate periods of transition from school to work. In total, 456 adolescents participated in the research. A questionnaire was employed as the main focus of this study comprising the pupils' questionnaire and self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965). The results were analysed using ANOVA. There were no statistically significant differences among the groups on self-esteem, however, there were some statistically significant differences among the groups on their beliefs about the influences on transition from school to work. These findings are discussed in the context of other studies of ethnicity and occupational aspirations. Limitations and implications of the findings are explored. Recommendations for future research are also addressed.

Introduction

Transition is defined as 'a change or passage from one state or stage to another'. (*Collins Concise English Dictionary*, 1992, p.1433). This research is concerned with one specific transition that is made by virtually all members of society at some stage in their life cycle: the transition from school to work. The significance of transition from school to work has become increasingly apparent with implications for individuals, families, institutions and the entire country (Verma, 1999). The potential importance of work in the life of each individual makes it imperative that educators, career guidance counsellors and occupational psychologists examines both the process of career and occupational development and the factors that promote or impede its growth (Hodkinson & Bloomer, 2003, Verma, 2001).

The current research examines and investigates occupational aspirations, choices and developments of three groups of adolescent school leavers (Asians, Afro-Caribbean and White Britons) from multicultural inner-city areas of Liverpool and Manchester during their immediate periods of transition from school to work. In addition, the research examines factors that might be related to occupational aspirations, choices and developments such as personal/psychological factors, formal and informal career guidance systems and job search strategies. These factors are unlikely to be divorced from demographic information, ethnic background, situational/environmental influences, and personality (for example self-esteem), interests, and occupational knowledge. The factors outlined are all partly moulded by the home and school environment. Throughout the occupational literature, theorists and researchers (see, for example, Bagley *et al.*, 1979) have assumed that Afro-Caribbean adolescents have low self-esteem, external locus of control and consequently negative concepts of work.

Very few objective empirical studies have been carried out in this area. New research is needed as there is relatively little published material on inner city adolescents, particularly those young people approaching school leaving age who are now known as 'Britons', this includes the 2nd/3rd/4th generations of ethnic minority groups. Furthermore, the field of occupational aspirations/choices/developments has as yet been relatively unexplored in relation to important and diverse factors that might be related to inner city adolescents' occupational aspirations, choices, and developments. This research aims to fill some of these gaps.

Ethnic minorities

Defining an ethnic minority group is by no means straightforward. In general, the term is used in the U.K. by the Commission for Racial Equality and government agencies to refer rather loosely to groups of individuals who share some or all of the following: a religious affiliation, a linguistic or cultural heritage, a common history and experience, a common geographical origin. They may also share colour of skin, hair type, facial features, personal mannerisms or style of dress.

Many methods of classifying ethnic minority group exist. According to Kandola (1985) the essential ingredient of all the classifications on whatever criterion they are based is that they attempt to reliably identify disadvantaged groups.

Major ethnic minority groups who have settled in the United Kingdom include people of West Indian/Afro-Caribbean/African-Caribbean and Asian descent. Initially, teachers described their children as immigrant (see Ballard, 1983; Milner, 1975). As most of their children were born in United Kingdom, many prefer the term Afro-Caribbean, rather than West Indian or African-Caribbean, as it denotes the full historical origins of this group; others choose to use 'Black British'.

which acknowledges fully their status as British. New terminology such as Asian Britons or Afro-Caribbean Britons or Black Britons might help reflect pupils' bicultural status. Throughout this paper the terms Black youth/Black or Black Briton are shorthand for all young people of ethnic minority origin, be it West Indian or Afro-Caribbean or Asian. Of course the authors recognise that there are vast differences between these groups, and all the research (see for example, Modood, *et al.*, 1997; Wrench *et al.*, 1997) shows that disadvantages, discrimination and problems related to occupational issues are to a greater or lesser extent common to all. The term Black is used, where appropriate, to maintain language consistency when citing earlier studies.

Research on factors influencing occupational aspirations/choices

The transition from school in the final year of schooling is regarded as a crucial time in a school-leaver's educational/occupational career. Smith & Rojewski (1993) claim that the transition from school to work is not a single event in the lives of youth but rather an extended process with several milestones. The transition is influenced by the individuals' occupational aspirations and choice, which in turn is related to a variety of issues. (Rojewski and Yang, 1997). Some decisions will be made relating to whether the individual leaves the formal education system and obtains a job or continues in further education. Whatever transition the school-leaver makes will be difficult for various reasons. At this point of difficulties, parents/teachers/career advisers and other significant others often provide advice on the best options to follow.

In the United Kingdom, ethnic minority groups (Asians and Afro-Caribbean) have had highly disadvantaged situations in the occupational field, evidenced not only by lower wages and salaries but also by concentration in less desirable occupations and under-representation in more highly-paid occupations (Brown & Gay 1985; CRE, 1998, 2003; EOC, 1994, 1999, 2004; Penn & Scattergood, 1992; Philips, 2004).

It has been consistently demonstrated that Asians and Afro-Caribbeans suffer from multiple disadvantages (Archer & Yamashita, 2003; Basit, 1996; CRE, 1978, 1988; Gillborn & Mirza 2000; Modood *et al.*, 1997; Smith, 1976), and restricted education and employment opportunities (Dooley & Prause, 1997; Forsyth & Furlong, 2003; Sly, *et al.*, 1999; Verma, 1981, 1999, 2001). Research studies (see, for example, Mirza, 1992; Taylor, 1981) have shown that Asians and Afro-Caribbean adolescents have 'over-aspiration' and 'under-achievement'. Both these phenomena have been ascribed to cultural factors (Baker, 1978; Beetham, 1967; Dale *et al.*, 2002; Gupta, 1977).

More recent studies (see, for example, Verma, 2001) point out that ethnic minority youths are more ambitious than their counterparts and they desire upward social mobility through education and careers and whilst at school have

high self-esteem. (Basit, 1996; Mirza, 1992; Verma, 1984, 1999). However, research (for example, Basit, 1996) shows that the future facing ethnic minority youths does not appear to be much brighter than the situation their parents had to contend with in their search for jobs. (Basit, 1996; Drew *et al.*, 1991). A recent quote by Philips (2004) makes an interesting point: 'We have known for some time that whatever class you belong to, your race is an obstacle all by itself'.

There are however, various factors to be taken into account when one is examining the employment and occupational behaviour or development of ethnic minority pupils. Major issues include the entire concept of career or occupational choices and development, the career maturity of youths, the types of intervention strategies used and the measurement devised to gauge their career progress, interests and choices. What influences do personal/psychological factors, background/situational/environmental factors, formal and informal career guidance system/job search strategies assume in an individual's career or occupational behaviour? To what extent may patterns of employment be explained by occupational values, expectations, aspirations/choices, or by one's ethnicity?

The relevance of occupational choice theories to the career choices and aspirations of ethnic minorities

Both psychologists and sociologists have for many years studied the ways in which individuals choose occupations. The results of these studies have supplied the raw material out of which a variety of theories have been built as well as providing much-needed information for those who advise and guide others through the transition from education to work (Kidd *et al.*, 1994).

Career development theory, research and practice have been severely criticised as inadequate for ethnic minorities. (Brown, 2002; Diamond, 1987; Greenhaus, 1971; McWhirter, 1997; Osipow, 1983; Osipow & Littlejohn, 1995). In spite of these difficulties, certain observations about the current state of ethnic minorities strongly support the following observations about the special needs of ethnic minority groups. Firstly, ethnic minorities are under-represented at professional levels (Lerman, 1994; Smith, 1980, 1994; Wentling & Waight 2001; WFM, 2004). Secondly, ethnic minorities face special obstacles in the world of work. Racism is one obvious obstacle, which suggests that there is a need to help ethnic minorities to develop strategies to deal with discrimination. Lower class, inner-city (Black) youths may need additional help with learning job interview and job search skills (Lee & Wrench, 1983, 1984). Thirdly, the effect of the barriers on the (individual) ethnic minority group member can be multiple and far reaching. Gottfredson and Becker (1981) believed that limited opportunities affect aspirations. Smith (1975) asserts that society imposes negative self-images on Blacks, and

theorists (see Bagley, *et al.*, 1979) associate low self-esteem with Black youths. Hauser's (1971) studies showed that Black youths foreclosed vocational and self-identity exploration; these findings suggests that the youths are defeated before they even start.

There are few research studies in the United Kingdom on occupational aspirations, choices and expectations of Black youths. Although some contradictory studies exist, considerable research (see Archer & Yamashita, 2003; Verma, 2001) suggests that occupational aspirations, choices and expectations of Blacks are not lower than those of Whites. A certain amount of information can be gleaned from previous studies in related areas.

Earlier studies carried out on Black youths, particularly, Afro-Caribbean youths pointed to the very disappointed and depressed aspirations of these youths (Bagley, *et al.*, 1979; Banton, 1955). Later studies (Figueroa, 1969; Walker & Biye 1997; Wrench, *et al.*, 1997; Wrench & Qureshi, 1997), however, emphasised that there were no significant differences between their aspirations and those of their White counterparts. Beetham's (1967) study found that Asian and West Indian (Afro-Caribbean) school children had higher educational and occupational (job) aspirations than their (English) White counterparts. He saw these expressed aspirations as unrealistic, based on their school achievement and the local job opportunities in their area. Beetham (1967) also found that the main influence on Asian and West Indian children's career aspirations were their parents who were prepared to enable them to stay on for further education.

The findings of Wrench *et al.*, (1997) indicated that Afro-Caribbean youths, despite their low performance in educational systems, still hold the positive values and high aspirations expected from second and third generations of an ambitious migrant population. The study by Wrench and Qureshi (1997) of young men of Bangladeshi (Asian) origin also identified high aspirations and strong parental support among their sample.

Gupta (1977) studied the effect of race on educational and occupational aspirations and inter-generation occupational mobility. He found that Asian pupils were much less likely to consider leaving school at the age of 16 and were considerably more ambitious in their educational aspirations than their English (White) counterparts. Asians also had significantly higher job intentions compared to the English (White) group. Gupta (1977) suggests reasons for this difference between the races. He finds evidence that Asian parents are seen by their offspring to be more involved and to exert more pressure on their children's aspirations. Gupta (1977) and others (see Abbas, 2002; Verma 1984, 2001) have pointed out, however, that the high aspirations of Asian school-leavers may be attributed to their higher parental occupational status.

In summary, Baker (1978), Basit (1996), CRE (1988), Gupta (1977), Fowler *et al.*, (1977), Siann and Knox, (1992), and Verma (1981, 1984, 2001), have all discussed the relevance of 'cultural' influences on occupational aspirations/choices and expectations. The results obtained by these studies are remarkably consistent in that they all conclude that Black youths in particular the Asian youths had higher aims than their White counterparts. Fowler and her colleagues (1977) also reported a stereotyped viewpoint on the part of career officers in Glasgow, where over-aspiration was seen as a barrier to appropriate job choice for 'Asian' youths. These researchers, however, found that this theoretical framework was inadequate to explain disappointment and failure in the labour market. They also produce evidence-showing unfamiliarity on the part of the sample studied with application procedures, educational requirements and job availability.

The general picture, which emerges from various studies conducted in the past, is that there exist differential aspirations. Most of the explanations have concentrated upon cultural and social influences. What has been lacking from most analyses one would argue, has been an adequate treatment of the way in which these aspirations are constructed, both socially and psychologically. Such factors are moderated by personal factors. In addition there is an indication that negative attitudes and discrimination by others in education, social and occupational fields may negatively affect the Black youth's self-esteem, academic achievement, occupational aspiration/choices, expectations and employment prospects.

In summary, much of the research findings pertinent to the Black adolescent's occupational aspirations/choices/expectations have produced conflicting hypotheses and results. Some questions, among many, that need answering are 'Are there significant differences in self-esteem, occupational aspirations and choices of Black and White adolescents?' and 'What factors influence occupational aspirations/choices/expectations of Black and White adolescents?' It is not the intention of this paper to address all the above questions raised. This particular study focuses on two key areas: the self-esteem of groups with different ethnic backgrounds and the factors that they believed exert (positive or negative) influences on their occupational choices.

Method

Participants

In total 456 students took part in the study. All participants were defined as a 'school leaver' by Manchester and Liverpool education authorities. This definition of 'school leaver' consisted of males and females aged 15-16 who were finishing compulsory education. The 456 subjects were derived from ten different schools, comprising, five from an inner-city area of Manchester

and five from an inner-city area of Liverpool. The decision to select ten schools from inner-city areas was to ensure ethnic representation. The schools in the inner-city areas of Manchester and Liverpool varied in size, ethnicity and gender. Table 1 provides details of the total number of students in each school.

Table 1: Sample sizes by school location and gender

SCHOOLS*	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
1L	20	11	31
2L	17	31	48
3L	21	19	40
4L	0	57	57
5L	48	0	48
6M	29	32	61
7M	22	19	41
8M	0	30	30
9M	25	24	49
10M	26	25	51
TOTAL	208	248	456

*1L-5L = schools located in Liverpool area.

6M-10M = schools located in Manchester area.

In total, there were 248 (54%) females and 208 (46%) males. The gender of the students was not controlled. However, social class and ethnicity were controlled to a certain extent due to the fact that schools were selected from as near as possible to the inner-city areas of Liverpool and Manchester in order to obtain a more ethnically diverse sample. Based on participants' self classifications and perception of their ethnic origin, they were grouped into Afro-Caribbean (African/West Indian/Caribbean, British Afro-Caribbean, Other Afro-Caribbean), Asians (Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani, British Asians, Other Asians), and White (White British, White Other). At the time of the study the CRE office in Manchester approved the classifications and terminology used. On the basis of participants' self-reported information on ethnicity, adolescents (pupils) of three different ethnic groups (Afro-Caribbean, Asian and White) were represented in the sample. The Afro-Caribbean group consisted of 45 (10%) adolescents (24 (53%) female, 21 (47%) male). The Asian group consisted of 98 (22%) adolescents (48 (49%) female, 50 (51%) male). The White group consisted of 313 (68%) adolescents (176 (56%) female, 137 (44%) male). The proportion of participants for each group was a close approximation of their ethnic representation in the schools' pupil population. The age of students ranged from 15 to 16. The students belonged to diverse socio-economic groups.

Measures/Instruments

The Rosenberg **self-esteem scale** (RSE) (Rosenberg, 1965) is a 10-item Guttman scale designed to measure

self-esteem. Two-week test-retest reliability studies indicate correlations of .85 and .88. The RSE also has a .92 Guttman scale coefficient of reproducibility (Fischer & Corcoran, 1994). Concurrent construct, and predictive validity have been well documented (Rosenberg, 1979). Construct validity has been demonstrated by significant correlation with theoretically similar measures (e.g., Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory) and by lack of correlation with dissimilar measures. The self-esteem scale by Rosenberg was designed to measure attitudes towards the self along a favourable-to-unfavourable dimension. It expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval, and indicated the extent to which the individual believes himself/herself to be capable, significant, and worthy. Rosenberg (1965) designed the self-esteem scale with several criteria in mind. One was his conception of self-esteem:

'When we speak of high self-esteem... we shall simply mean that individual respects himself, considers himself worthy, he does not necessarily consider himself better than others, but he definitely does not consider himself worse, he does not feel that he is the ultimate in perfection, but on the contrary, recognises his limitations and expects to grow and improve.'

The RSE has been widely used in the United Kingdom and the United States and claims to be a reliable and valid measure of self-esteem. (Robinson and Shaver, 1973).

The **pupils' questionnaire** was validated to ensure construct validity. As well as collecting demographic information on such variables such as age and race/ethnicity, the questionnaire investigated three main areas that might be related to occupational aspiration/choice: a) personal/psychological factors, b) background situational/environmental factors and c) formal and informal career guidance and job search strategies. The questionnaire was divided into 11 subscales utilising factor analyses. These subscales measured respondents' beliefs about the influences on them. The calculated subscales reliability coefficients (Alpha) range from 0.65 to 0.87 and the subscales overall contained 32 items. The subscales are:

- Importance of background factors in getting a job. (Sample item: 'when discussing my choice of career, the teachers make assumptions according to my race').
- Negative influences on school performance - self. (Sample item: 'the following people have prevented me from doing well in school, for example - myself').
- Negative influences on school performance-others. (Sample item: 'the following people have prevented me from doing well at school, for example - friends, parents, teachers/career advisers').
- Factors believed to influence job prospects. (Sample item: 'I believe that the following are important in getting a job - good career advice, good school record, help from parents/teachers').
- Negative influences on job prospects. (Sample item:

'the school career adviser has not been interested in my career choice').

- Do well in school - friends. (Sample item: 'the following people have helped me to do well at school, for example - friends').
- Do well in school - parents. (Sample item: 'the following people have helped me to do well in school, for example - parents').
- Do well in school - career advisers. (Sample item: 'the following people have helped me to do well in school, for example - career advisers').
- Job information - parents/family. (Sample item: 'the following people/places have already given me information about jobs, for example - parents/family').
- Job information - friends. (Sample item: 'the following people/places have already given me information about jobs, for example - friends').
- Job information - career centre. (Sample item: 'the following people/places have already given me information about jobs - career advisers/career centre').

Procedure

Pupils from 10 different schools took part in this study. They were invited to participate in a study investigating transition from school to further education/work and in particular occupational aspirations/choices of school leavers. Before the study took place permission from the education authorities both at Liverpool and Manchester was sought. A letter explaining the purpose of the study was sent to the education authorities. Follow-up contact (i.e., phone calls, visits, individual meetings) was made to answer any appropriate questions regarding the research. Permission was granted by the chief education officers to carry out the study in any schools within Manchester and Liverpool via formal letters. A list of all of the secondary schools in Liverpool (L) and Manchester (M) was obtained from the education authorities. Five schools from each city were chosen by random selection. The schools were chosen by their proximity to the city centre. Schools closest to the city centre were chosen because of their higher ethnic diversity in comparison to schools on the outskirts of a city centre. After discussion with either the head-teacher, the head of careers or the head of Year 11, five schools in each city agreed to participate in the study (see Table 1). Once all of the ten schools had agreed to co-operate with the research, dates and times were arranged to visit the school and administer the questionnaire. Once at the schools, the questionnaire was administered randomly to appropriate year groups at each school. The questionnaire was handed out to every individual in classes selected at random and a simple set of instructions was stated as follows:

'Please complete the whole of the questionnaire on your own as honestly as possible. It is not a test or exam. Your answers will be kept confidential. No teacher or head-teacher from your school will view your answers.'

The pupils were then asked to begin. At every school it was ensured that all pupils completed the questionnaire individually. There was no time limit specified, yet all of the questionnaires were completed within a maximum time length of 40 minutes. Other methods of administration such as postal or delivering them and returning a week later for collection were considered. However, these were viewed as expensive and unreliable in some cases and thus not undertaken in this study. After completing and returning the questionnaires the participants were debriefed about the study. Once all of the questionnaires were completed/collected, the results were recorded. For each question following the Likert scale format the answers were scored from '4' to '1' for positively phrased questions with '4' depicting 'Strongly Agree' and '1' representing the response 'Strongly Disagree'. For the negatively phrased questions '1' characterised the response 'Strongly Agree' and '4' stood for 'Strongly Disagree'. Item scores were reversed where necessary, indicating either high (Hi) or low (Low) score. The data was analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).

Results

Table 2 shows the measures of self-esteem for the three ethnic groups: Afro-Caribbean (Afro-C), Asians and White adolescents. To determine if differences existed among the groups on self-esteem, a one way ANOVA was conducted. The one-way ANOVA was not statistically significant ($F = 1.65$, $p = .19$) indicating no differences among the groups on self-esteem. From observation of the means of the group, all ethnic groups in the sample had high self-esteem, with Afro-Caribbean scoring the highest (31.27) compared to White (29.93) and Asian (29.82).

Table 2
SELF-ESTEEM ONE-WAY ANOVA

	Number of cases	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	F	Sig.
Afro-C	37	31.2703	5.1782	.8513	1.656	.192
Asian	89	29.8202	4.3211	.4580		
White	291	29.9347	4.2854	.2512		

Table 3 summarises the results indicating ethnic groups' differences in relation to the 11 subscales in the pupils' questionnaire.

Table 3 Beliefs about influences on transition from school to work

	Ethnic Group	N	Mean	F	Sig.
a) Importance of background factors in getting a job 4 Hi 1 Low	Afro-C Asian White	42 95 304	2.09 2.09 1.76	14.415	.000
b) Negative influences on school performance - Self 1 Hi 4 Low	Afro-C Asian White	40 87 293	2.92 2.67 3.00	4.932	.008
c) Negative influences on school performance - Other 1 Hi 4 Low	Afro-C Asian White	40 89 296	3.07 2.88 3.08	4.296	.014
d) Factors believed to influence job prospects 4 Hi 1 Low	Afro-C Asian White	43 97 311	2.84 2.99 2.76	10.478	.000
e) Negative influences on job prospects 4 Hi 1 Low	Afro-C Asian White	42 94 303	3.09 3.13 3.17	.733	.481
f) Do well in school - Friend 4 Hi 1 Low	Afro-C Asian White	41 92 298	2.56 2.83 2.74	2.301	.101
g) Do well in school - Parent 4 Hi 1 Low	Afro-C Asian White	41 92 298	3.24 3.44 3.43	2.064	.128
h) Do well in School - Career Adviser 4 Hi 1 Low	Afro-C Asian White	41 92 298	2.92 2.83 2.61	4.542	.011
i) Job Information - Parents/ Family 4 Hi 1 Low	Afro-C Asian White	42 93 298	3.04 2.90 3.10	4.115	.017
j) Job Information - Friends 4 Hi 1 Low	Afro-C Asian White	41 91 298	2.75 2.84 2.80	.299	.742
k) Job Information - Career Centre 4 Hi 1 Low	Afro-C Asian White	41 92 299	2.95 3.09 3.00	.643	.526

The findings on beliefs about influences on transition from school to work are summarised below under appropriate subscales:

a) Importance of background factors in getting a job: Afro-Caribbean and Asian youths compared to White youths appeared to regard background factors as more important in getting a job. This result was statistically significant. Mean scores for Afro-Caribbean, Asian, and White were 2.09, 2.09, and 1.76 respectively. Comparisons between all three ethnic groups showed statistically significant differences in their mean scores.

b) Negative influences on school performance – self: This result was statistically significant. Asian compared to Afro-Caribbean and White youths did not see themselves as negative influences on school performance. They appeared more positive. Mean scores for Asians, Afro-Caribbean, and White youths were 2.67, 2.92, and 3.00 respectively.

c) Negative influences on school performance – others: This result was statistically significant. Asians were more likely than Afro-Caribbean and White youths to claim that others were not negative influences on their school performance.

Other noticeable statistically significant results were:

d) Factors believed to influence job prospects: Asians and Afro-Caribbean youths appeared to see the role of parents, career advisers and teachers as significant influences in getting a job compared to White youths.

h) Do well in school - career advisers: Afro-Caribbean and Asian youths believed that career advisers were more influential in helping them to do well in school compared to their White counterparts who saw career advisers as not influential.

i) Job information - parents/family: Asians believed that job information from their parents were not influential compared to their Afro-Caribbean and their White counterparts. There were no statistically significant differences between the groups on any other sub-scales.

Discussion and conclusions

This study was conducted to investigate transition from school to work.

The present study aimed to examine three ethnic group transitions from school to work by raising a number of questions. The results regarding self-esteem (see table 2) indicated no statistically significant differences between the three ethnic groups. All ethnic groups in our sample had high self-esteem. This result may be cautiously interpreted to agree with the conclusion that ethnic minorities, in particular Afro-Caribbean in our sample,

do not have low self-esteem. This finding is consistent with most previous research carried out, particularly those carried out in the USA (e.g. Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991; Gray-Little & Hafidahi, 2000; Hughes & Demo, 1989; Phelps, et al., 2001; Twenge & Crocker, 2002) where the concept of the self-fulfilling prophecy resulted in programmes aimed at redressing negative attitudes and low self-esteem.

There are some minority findings in the UK (e.g. Stone, 1982; Verma, 1999) that have found similarity in the level of self-esteem of ethnic groups which have been attributed to cultural values, perceptions, attitudes towards education and the nature of schooling. Whilst at school it was argued (e.g. Verma, 2001) that these youths had high levels of self-esteem as some had not yet been relatively exposed to the wider world of work and employment where racism is seen as norm for ethnic minorities in Britain. (CRE, 1998; CRE, 2003; Verma, 2001). It is perhaps possible to suggest that despite differences in life experiences and group experiences in relation to widely held view of discrimination in British society that high self-esteem is maintained whilst still at school for some ethnic groups.

Some writers (see Bagley *et al.*, 1979; Verma, 1999) have suggested that ethnic minority youths are more likely to experience discrimination when applying for a job, the consequences of this is low self-esteem and negative attitudes towards work. However, there is little systematic research to support this assumption. The label that is often given to Black youths is one of low achievement/low self-esteem. It is quite clear from this empirical research that the participants in this study do not fall in to the mode of 'self-fulfilling prophecy'. Researchers must further seek to understand the current results as they relate to the Black-Britons. Researchers also need to continue to examine and ascertain whether the current results are applicable/generalisable and in particular the exact meaning in the light of the current situation in transition from school to work in multicultural Britain.

Existing reviews also seems to indicate that ethnicity and self-esteem have implications for a wide range of situations, for example, psychological functioning, occupational aspirations/choices, and career guidance. These variables according to researchers (Bhaget, *et al.*, 1990; Gottfredson & Becker, 1981; Verma, 2001) can have a significant impact on the personal lives of Blacks.

Researchers (see Loudon, 1983; Verma, 1999) have consistently maintained that individuals with high self-esteem are psychologically better adjusted, internally controlled, achieve better academically, better adjusted educationally, and are not easily influenced by others. (Louden, 1983; Maqsd, 1983; Rosenberg, 1979; Spring & Khanna, 1982; Verma, 1999). Furthermore, research (see Bagley *et al.*, 1979; Mansfield 1973) evidence has demonstrated that self-esteem plays a major role/part in

predicting occupational aspirations/choices. Mansfield (1973) indicated that individuals high in self-esteem seek occupational roles which are congruent with their self-perceived characteristics, and are more adept at making a better fit. Other previous researchers (see Hughes & Demo, 1989; Loudon, 1983; Verma, 2001) have consistently identified that individuals with higher self-esteem were more likely to have higher educational, occupational aspirations/choices. It is clear from the present study that all ethnic groups in this sample had high self-esteem despite negative stereotypes pertaining to Black youths. Self-esteem as a variable clearly needs to be taken into account when one is analysing factors believed to influence transition from school to work.

In addition to self-esteem, the study was done to explore any ethnic groups differences in relation to beliefs about factors that influence transition from school to work. These findings are discussed below.

The findings from this study suggests that Afro-Caribbean and Asian youths compared to White youths regards background factors as more important in getting a job. This result was statistically significant (see (a), table 3). What this finding suggests is that at this early stage of transition, Afro-Caribbean and Asian youths received disadvantages in the job market which the White youths did not. Afro-Caribbean and Asian youths perceived background factors such as race, skin colour, ethnic group, gender, being born in Britain, family background, and perception of teachers in relation to race and career choice, as important in getting a job. Based on our current findings, White youths clearly disagree with this. Other findings (CRE, 1998, 2003; Drew, *et al.*, 1992) support this result, in that Black youths feel disadvantaged in the labour market due to perceived discrimination in the world of work. This perception often means that the youths are defeated. The current results suggest that there is a need to help ethnic minorities, particularly Asian and Afro-Caribbean youths to develop strategies to deal with issues of discrimination and to prevent lack of aspirations. Researchers such as Gottfredson & Becker (1981) and Verma (2001) have argued that discrimination and limited opportunities affect educational, occupational aspirations/choices. It is vital that prevention becomes the basis for recommendations.

The result on perceived negative influences (self) on school performance was statistically significant (see (b) table 3). This result identified that Asians compared to Afro-Caribbean and White youths did not see themselves as negative influences on school performance. Asian youths appeared more positive about their transition from school to work and seemed to be taking some form of responsibility in attributing blame on themselves if they were unable to secure a job or do well in school.

Results and findings, relating to negative influences

(others) on school performance was statistically significant (see (c), table 3). Asian youths were more likely than Afro-Caribbean and White youths not to see others as negative influences on school performance which again suggests they are taking more responsibility. This result indicates that Asian youths are less likely to blame others such as teachers and career advisers as negative influences on their school performance and transition from school to work, compared to their counterparts.

Asian youths may have a different set of cultural values and norms which enables them to take more responsibility (Kim, Atkinson & Yang, 1999). Researchers (e.g. Siann & Knox, 1992) suggests that cultural and religious traditions influence and inform attitudes to both education and work, set Asians youths apart from their counterparts as they are positively encouraged by their culture and parents to take responsibilities.

Other interesting findings from this study relate to factors believed to influence job prospects (see (d) table 3) which was statistically significant. The result indicated that Asians and Afro-Caribbean youths appear to see the role of parents, career advisers and teachers as significant influences in getting a job compared to White youths. Other studies (Arnold *et al.*, 1988; Dale *et al.*, 2002; Lightbody, *et al.*, 1997) have consistently demonstrated how vital the influences of parents, teachers and career advisers are in youth transitions from school to work. Evidently, most researchers tend to agree that Asian and Afro-Caribbean parents have high aspirations for their children and are likely to be supportive of their children's education and occupational aspirations/choices (Basit, 1996; Beetham (1967); Davey and Norburn, 1980; Foner, 1977; Gupta (1977); Pollak, 1979; Pryce, 1979; Rex and Tomlinson, 1979; Taylor (1981); Verma, 2001). They also tend to agree that for a variety of cultural reasons these parents value education as a means to occupational and vocational success (Basit, 1996; Loudon, 1983; Wrench *et al.*, 1997). Good career guidance and help from teachers, career advisers and parents significantly influence transition from school to work for Asian and Afro-Caribbean youths.

This current study also discovered that Afro-Caribbean and Asian youths believed that career advisers were more influential in helping them to do well in school compared to their White counterparts, who saw career advisers as not influential. This result was statistically significant (see (h) table 3). Researchers (Arnold, *et al.*, 1988; Lightbody, *et al.*, 1997) have argued that school influences particularly the influence of career advisers often depends on the length in school and when career guidance began. Findings from the current study suggests that Asian and Afro-Caribbean youths are more likely to perceive the school and career advisers as helpful and reported that career advisers had a positive influence on their occupational aspirations/choices.

Further interesting findings from this study relate to sources of job information. Evidently, from our current study, it was discovered that Asian youths believed that job information from their parents was not influential compared to their Afro-Caribbean and White counterparts. Again this result was statistically significant (see (i) table 3). This result does not necessarily contradict previous findings (see Allen, 1998; Kalra *et al.*, 1999). Asian parents may have high aspirations for their children, however, they may not be knowledgeable about how to obtain relevant job information. These parents may lack knowledge of criteria needed to attain appropriate jobs. Research (see Allen, 1998; Verma, 2001) has consistently shown parental influence to be the single most important factor for youths in their transition from school to work (Arnold *et al.*, 1988; Lightbody *et al.*, 1997). However it has been claimed that parents from an ethnic minority background who may not have been educated in the UK may lack relevant information regarding jobs. Arguably, this finding may suggest that Asian parents are likely to be ill-equipped, and may be attributing unrealistic aspirations due to lack of knowledge in the area of job information. It is difficult to compare findings of other researchers in this area as methods varied enormously. However, in earlier research findings, (see for example, Arnold, *et al.*, 1988; Allen 1998; Kalra *et al.*, 1999) in nearly all the studies the influence of parents play a bigger part than that of formal influence such as teachers and career advisers. More recent studies (Archer & Yamashita 2003; Dale *et al.*, 2002; Johnson, 2004) have outlined some positive formal influences depending on resources available and the provision of career guidance. In view of our findings, the importance of involving parents in career education, information, and guidance programmes cannot be over-stressed, and clearly this has implication for career guidance and counselling.

It is imperative that more thought is given to the education of parents, careers teachers, and careers advisers in the area of career guidance and counselling as the nature of career guidance would continue to change to meet the needs of a growing number of ethnic minorities in Britain.

The available evidence from this study clearly indicates that the actions and attitudes of young people themselves must be considered in any exploration of causal factors in the association between occupational aspiration/choices, attainment and labour-market outcome.

It is likely that the occupational aspirations of youths will be affected by combinations of personal/psychological factors, environmental influences, ethnic background, family, schools, career guidance systems and significant others. This research area could be improved by more replication of studies and by publications and dialogue between researchers, participants, teachers, career advisers and parents.

The present study certainly paves the way for future investigations into transition from school to work. Future research should consider a longitudinal study and a larger sample size covering a wider location beyond the North-West of England. More research of this type is needed to continually address issues raised in this research, particularly with references to ethnic minority youths in Britain.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the education authorities, schools and the young people who took part in this study. Many thanks to various colleagues for their encouragement and support for this article.

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NICEC News**Personnel changes**

Congratulations to Jeffrey Defries on his appointment as Chief Executive of CRAC and Director of NICEC starting in April 2006. Jeffrey has experience as a freelance consultant and facilitator, working primarily for the European Foundation for Management Development and as a lecturer for the Civil Service College. Prior to this, Jeffrey held a number of directorships including Director of Corporate Affairs at the NHSU (the corporate university of the NHS), Deputy Dean at the London Business School and Assistant Director at the Science Museum.

NICEC also has a new 'Chair'. David Andrews, an existing fellow of NICEC, has agreed to take on the role of chairing the network. David Andrews has been a Fellow of the National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling (NICEC) since 1992. He works as an independent education consultant and trainer, specialising in careers education and guidance and in the Queen's New Year's Honours List 2003 he was awarded an OBE for services to careers education. David thanked Ruth Hawthorn for her achievements in leading the network over the last year. Ruth has stepped down from the role of Acting Director but will serve as Deputy chairperson.

NICEC would like to welcome its two new overseas fellows: Professor R. Sultana of the Faculty of Education, University of Malta, and Dr Gideon Arulmani of the The Promise Foundation in Bangalore.

At the Cutting Edge of Careers Education and Guidance
Swanwick, Derbyshire 11-13 December 2006

The National Institute of Careers Education and Counselling's 'At the Cutting Edge' event is a three-day residential conference which aims to push forward the careers education and guidance agenda through discussion and debate amongst practitioners, researchers and policy makers. The 2006 event will focus on the reciprocal relationship between research, policy and practice taking in issues from all age careers guidance, the growth of independent and private sector guidance and the differences in provision between nations.

It will be of interest to:

- careers practitioners in schools, colleges and HEIs
- academics
- independent and private sector careers advisers
- employers who inform the careers guidance agenda
- public policy makers
- Connexions Service advisers
- Learning and Skills Councils staff.

As a result of attending this conference, participants should:

- o have a clearer understanding of current and emerging policy and strategy, recognising the factors that influencing its formation and the impact on practice that will result
- o be better informed about recent and current research in the field of career guidance
- o be more aware of the respective roles of policy makers, researchers and consumers
- o be more confident about your role in contributing to, using, disseminating or doing relevant research
- o have developed a greater understanding of definitions of terms like 'guidance', 'career' and 'occupation'
- o have some insight into the different systems in place in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales
- o have had the opportunity to explore the role and contribution of other academic disciplines, such as psychology and economics, in guidance research and practice

For further information, please contact Julia Jones
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