
Background Profiles and Occupational Decision Factors: The Case of Greek Physical Education Students

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Abstract

Using occupational socialization theory, the present study explored Greek Physical Education (PE) students' personal attributes, sport participation social situation backgrounds, being influenced by significant others on occupational choice, and other occupational decision factors. Data were collected from 564 recruits through questionnaires. Greek PE students shared some similar personal attributes with their counterparts in previous studies. Also, they had extensive backgrounds in sport with the majority participating in organized sports during high school and in recreational/leisure activities during university. Coaches and parents were the most significant others in influencing their occupational choices. The majority of the respondents were early deciders and reported that they would stay in sport related occupations even after 5 years from graduation. These results are explained within a teacher socialization framework and with reference to past research.

1 Introduction

Occupational socialization refers to "all kinds of socialization that initially influence persons to enter the field of Physical Education (PE) and later are responsible for their perceptions and actions as teacher educators and teachers" (Lawson, 1988, p.267). Occupational socialization provides the theoretical framework for describing the process of socialization into PE teaching and has dominated research on PE Teacher Education (PETE) (Lawson, 1983; Stroot & Williamson, 1993). A construct, central in the occupational socialization model, is that of subjective warrant; that is a person's perception of the requirements and benefits of a work in a given profession weighed against self-assessment of aspiration and competence (Dewar, 1989; Lawson, 1991).

Occupational socialization literature has identified three phases of socialization into PE teaching: (a) recruitment socialization; (b) professional socialization; (c) organizational socialization (Lawson, 1983; Sage, 1989; Lawson & Stroot, 1993). The recruitment phase is the time prior the college years when people make a decision to enter a given field (Dewar & Lawson, 1984). It is believed to be vital in the overall socialization (Sage, 1989; Dodds, Placek, Doolittle, Pinkham, Ratliffe & Portman, 1991) because people begin to develop a

subjective warrant for a particular occupation. During that phase questions such as "Why does one choose PE teaching?" or "What effect do childhood experiences and one's education have on one's decision to enter PE?" arise.

Certainly, an occupational choice doesn't take place in a vacuum: when it comes to make a decision concerning one's career, one considers the influence of a variety of variables related to one's personal attributes and sociocultural factors. The study of vocational behaviour has focused not only on personal variables but also on sociocultural factors (social class, race, gender, family) and the role they play in influencing individuals' vocational decisions and outcomes (Lawson & Stroot, 1993; Ossipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). Similarly, occupational socialization theory in PE points out that a person's subjective warrant is moulded by certain societal influences. These influences are significant others (i.e., parents, teachers, or peers), primary and secondary involvements in sport and exercise in schools or in others settings as well as some personal characteristics (such as family background and academic performance) (Lawson, 1983; Lawson, 1988; Dodds et al., 1991). In addition, Dodds et al (1991) argue that the age and firmness of occupational decision as well as career maps (long-term visions of one's work life) are important indicators of a person's aspirations and commitment to an occupation.

Some personal attributes such as socioeconomic status, academic achievement, or gender are indicators of recruits' vocational aspirations and behaviours. For example, higher socioeconomic status people tend to expect and attain more education and higher level jobs and be more vocationally mature (Ossipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). Research has shown that, teachers in general and PE recruits in particular, come from working or middle class families (Lortie, 1975; Hatziharistos, Zounhia & Kotzamanidis, 1989; Hutchinson, 1993; Lindbland & Prieto, 1992; Su, 1996). With respect to gender, previous findings showed that teaching is a female-dominated occupation (Dick & Rallis, 1991; Green & Weaver, 1992; Lindbland & Prieto, 1992; Serow, 1994; Su, 1996; Montecinos & Nielsen, 1997; Cox, 1999; Spear, Gould & Lee, 2000; Varnava-Skourea et al., 2000). Also, results of research on recruits' high school academic profile indicated that those who chose PE teaching as a profession had lower grade point averages than did university recruits in general (Sage, 1980; Templin et al., 1982; Dewar & Lawson, 1984; Dodds et al., 1991; Belka, Lawson & Lipnickey, 1991).

Previous research has revealed that during high school or college years, PE recruits or Physical Educators participated extensively in sporting events ranging from competitive sports or recreational/leisure activities to secondary sport roles (Hatziharistos et al., 1989; Dodds et al., 1991; Hutchinson, 1993; Placek, Dodds, Doolittle, Portman, Ratliffe & Pinkham, 1995; O' Bryant, Sullivan & Raudensky, 2000; Wright, 2001). It is noteworthy that the individuals, who participated in the above research, described past sporting experiences as influential in pursuing PE teaching/coaching careers (Hutchinson & Buschner, 1996; O' Bryant et al., 2000; Curtner-Smith, 2001). In other words, sport socialization during preadolescence is an important factor, which contributes to individuals choosing PE teaching over other professions (Lawson, 1983). According to the same author, sport socialization is the process by which individuals acquire the knowledge and the skills necessary for sport participation as well as the meanings derived from such participation (Lawson, 1988).

Another important factor influencing one's decision to enter a profession is significant others. There is ample evidence showing that family members (father, mother, siblings), peers, and personnel working in school or in sport settings (PE teachers, coaches or other teachers) encourage young people to follow teaching/coaching careers (Lawson, 1983; Dewar & Lawson, 1984; Dodds et al., 1991; Green & Weaver, 1992; Belka et al., 1991; Hutchinson & Buschner, 1996; O' Bryant et al., 2000).

Other factors such as age of decision and long-range plans may explain a person's occupational choices. The literature provides support for both early (Lortie, 1975; Sage,

1989; Doods et al., 1991; Belka et al., 1991) and late deciders (Lortie, 1975; Chu, cited in Sage, 1989; Segrave, cited in Sage, 1989)¹. In addition, research findings on other occupational decision factors, including firmness of decision and projected future work (Dodds et al., 1991), are conflicting: some recruits are firmly committed to teaching even 5 or 10 years after graduation (Dodds et al., 1991) while others are not (Belka et al., 1991).

Constructed on the basis of factors such as personal biography, the effects of significant others, societal influences, and direct experiences in schools, recruits' subjective warrants influences their career directions and form the foundation for professional training (Lawson, 1983; Hutchinson & Buschner, 1996). Therefore, examining these factors and understanding their influences on recruits' subjective warrant can provide the insight to develop recruitment patterns and improve PETE programmes. However, the data we have about the background profiles of Greek PE recruits are almost nonexistent. Thus, a survey study was conducted to report information about PE students' personal attributes (gender, family Socioeconomic Status - SES, high school academic performance), sport participation (in high school and college), family activity background, the influence of significant others (family, peers, school personnel) on students' choosing PE teaching as a career, and occupational decision factors (firmness of decision, early or late deciders, career maps).

2 Method

2.1 Participants and Setting

The Faculties of PE and Sport Science of National & Kapodistrian University of Athens and Democritus University of Thrace were purposefully chosen to conduct the research. The sample was consisted of five hundred and sixty-four, third year PE students. All PE students fell within the age group, typical of traditional third year students ($M = 21.1$ years; $SD = 0.5$). Of those 564 students, 94 came from the Faculty of Democritus University of Thrace (40 males, 54 females) while 470 came from the Faculty of National & Kapodistrian University of Athens (225 males, 245 females). For the purposes of this paper, students from both Faculties were combined into one group. We chose the above Faculties because we had easy access to them and the full cooperation of their personnel and their students. Both Faculties offer programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels and their main aim is to prepare students to teach in primary/secondary schools of Greece. The undergraduate programme, is of a four-year duration.

2.2 Questionnaire

Based on occupational socialization constructs (Pooley, 1975; Templin, Woodford & Mulling, 1982; Dewar & Lawson, 1984; Dodds et al., 1991), a 32-item questionnaire was designed to provide information about PE students' personal attributes, background in sport situations, significant others, and occupational decision factors.

Therefore, the questionnaire consisted of four groups of questions. The first part tapped information about students' personal attributes (gender, family SES, type and track of high school, grade point average - GPA -). The Duncan Socioeconomic Index (DSI) was used to determine the family SES. The DSI (Reiss, 1961) is a 100-point scale on which occupations are rated according to their prestige, income level, and educational requirements. The higher the rating, the more prestigious the occupation. Because the DSI doesn't provide with clear-cut SES groupings, we used the ones suggested by Dodds et al (1991) (1-39 low SES, 40-74 middle SES, 75-100 high SES). Fathers' and mothers' occupational attainments are given because they are both considered to be the most common indicators of social class (Ossipow & Fitzgerald, 1996).

In the second part, PE students were asked to indicate the level of participation in sport social situations before and after university entry as well as their family activity background. Namely, organized sports (such as championships or leagues), recreational or leisure activities (i.e., fitness activities, aerobic, football, or basketball), and secondary sport roles (like coaching, managing, or scorekeeping).

The third part of the questionnaire addressed information about the influences of significant others (family members, peers, school personnel) on occupational choice. A 5-point Likert scale ranging from *least influential (1)* to *most influential (5)* was used for this purpose. The last section of the questionnaire elicited information about occupational decision factors (when the respondents chose the occupation, the firmness of their decision, and what they expected to be doing several years after graduation). To establish construct validity, three Greek specialists, experts on instrument development, reviewed the questionnaire. Also the questionnaire was piloted tested twice for clarity of language and meaning on a small sample of PE students ($n = 46$).

2.3 Data Collection

Contacts were made with the Faculty of PE and Sport Science of Democritus University to request participation and find out the number of students. A total of 94 questionnaires together with instructional protocols were sent to the above Faculty. The researchers of the present study work in the Faculty of PE and Sport Science of Athens University. Therefore, they were responsible for administering the rest of the questionnaires to the PE students of Athens University. The questionnaire was anonymous to make sure that the participants would answer it honestly. In addition, participants were told that there were no right or wrong answers. Prior to completion of the questionnaire instructions were given to the students on how they should complete it. Students were also allowed to ask the researchers questions. It took them 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

2.4 Data Analysis

The SPSS-10.0 programme (SPSS-10.0, 1999) was used to analyse the data. The descriptive statistic indexes (frequencies, means, standard deviations) were calculated. The percentages of personal attributes and occupational decision factors categories were compared using chi-squares. Because some data were missing on some questionnaire items, the chi-squares included different numbers for each analysis.

3 Results

3.1 PE Students' Personal Attributes

Table 1 displays information on participants' personal attributes. The majority were females (53%). Most of their fathers (57.3%) and mothers (70.5%) did not receive a university degree. Parent occupation data (one of the indicators of family SES) revealed that most fathers (60.3%), fell into the middle category (i.e., teachers, officials and administrators, bank clerks, traders, policemen). On the contrary, the majority of mothers (53.5%) were in the lowest group, doing such work as manual or assembly labor (the most common was housewifery). Only a few fathers (8.5%) and mothers (5.1%) fell in the upper group, represented by occupations such as physicians, engineers, dentists, lawyers, or architects.

Table 2 shows data, on PE students' high school background, which is part of personal attributes (Dodds et al., 1991). Almost, all PE students attended public high schools (95.7%). Also the vast majority of the recruits (92.9%) were in a university preparatory education track while very few were either in a vocational (0.2%) or in a general education track (6.7%). Most PE students (43.1%) got a GPA between 14.1 and 16.0, while around a third (34%) passed with distinction and very few (8.2%) fell above an 18.1 average.

Table 1: Percentages and Chi-Squares for Personal Attributes of PE Students

Personal attributes	%	N ^a	X ²
Gender		564	2.1
Male	47.0		
Female	53.0		
Parent Education			
Father		558	463.8*
<University degree	57.3		
University degree	41.3		
Mother		562	320.1*
<University Degree	70.5		
University degree	29.1		
Parent occupation (grouped DSI)			
Father		549	457.6*
1-39	28.5		
40-74	60.3		
75-96	8.5		
Mother		546	213.7*
1-39	53.5		
40-74	38.1		
75-96	5.1		

^aNumber varies due to missing values

*p<.01

Table 2: Percentages and Chi-Squares for High School Background of PE Students

High school background	%	N ^a	X ²
High school type		564	472.1*
Public	95.7		
Private	4.3		
High school track		563	907.8*
University preparatory	92.9		
Vocational	.2		
General	6.7		
High School GPA		563	352.4*
<12.0	2.1		
12.1 – 14.0	12.4		
14.1 – 16.0 ^b	43.1		
16.1 – 18.0 ^c	34.0		
18.1 – 20.0 ^d	8.2		

^aNumber varies due to missing values

^bPass

^cPass with distinction

^dPass with excellence

*p<.01

3.2 Sport Participation Social Situations

Before University Entry. Table 3 displays information on participants' sport participation social situations. The majority of PE students (60.3%) participated in organized sports (athletics, basketball, swimming, football, volleyball). Around a third participated in recreation/leisure sports (35.5%) and very few (0.7%) participated in secondary sports roles

(timers, scorekeepers, coaches). Also, a very low percentage of respondents were inactive during high school years (3.5%).

After University Entry. The percent of the recruits, who participated in organized sports after university entry, dropped to 35.4%. On the contrary, the majority of PE students, participated in recreation/leisure sports (50.8%). In addition, more recruits took part in secondary sport roles (4.6%) after university entry than before university entry. Also, the percent of inactive PE students increased to 9.3%.

Family Activity Background. PE students reported that their fathers were more active than their mothers (33.2% and 11.3% respectively). They both participated in organized sports and/or in recreational/leisure activities. Recruits' siblings, like their brothers or their sisters, were more active than their parents (50.4%) – a pattern similar to the respondents'.

Table 3: Percentages for Sport Participation Social Situations of PE Students and Their Families

	% ^b		N ^a	X ²
Sport social situations				
Before university entry				
Organized sports	60.3	30.5	512	79.7*
Recreation/Leisure sports	35.5	56.9	521	22.8*
Secondary sports roles	.7	83.0	472	456.1*
Inactive	3.5	80.5	474	397.4*
After university entry				
Organized sports	35.4	50.0	482	7.5*
Recreation/Leisure sports	50.8	45.1	23	5.6
Secondary sports roles	4.6	80.2	478	341.5*
Inactive	9.3	76.0	482	284.0*
Family activity background				
Father	33.2	60.8	530	45.9*
Mother	11.3	82.3	528	303.0*
Siblings	50.4	47.0	549	.7*

^aNumber varies due to missing values

^bThe left column includes the percentage of PE students who participate while the right those who do not

*p<.01

3.3 Significant Others

According to Table 4, the most significant others, who influenced PE students' decision to choose teaching as career, were coaches and mothers. PE teachers and other school personnel, were the least influential.

Table 4: Mean Scores of PE Students for Significant Others

Significant others	M	SD
Coach	2.59	1.42
Mother	2.56	1.36
Father	2.50	1.37
Peers	2.27	1.30
Siblings	1.74	1.07
PE teacher	1.94	1.19
Other school personnel	1.62	1.17

3.4 Occupational Decision Factors

Table 5 includes the following three occupational decision factors: age of career choice, firmness of decision, and career maps. Age of career choice is divided into the early deciders (those whose age at decision time was 17 years or younger; usually before university entry) and the late deciders (those whose age of decision time was 18 years or older). Most PE students, were early deciders (69%) than were late deciders (31%).

More than a third of the respondents (40.1%) stuck to one occupation, whereas the majority listed alternative occupations (59.9%). When the students were asked to project their future perceptions about their work orientations, 5 years after graduation, the majority reported that they would stay in sport-related occupations (62.5%). When they were asked to project for 10 years, the percent dropped dramatically (43.6%) whereas about half reported that they did not know what they would be doing with reference to future work orientations (53%). Also, a small minority of PE students, would change occupation after 5 and 10 years from graduation (4.1% and 3.4% respectively).

Table 5: Percentages and Chi-Squares of PE Students for Occupational Decision Factors

Occupational decision factors	%	N ^a	X ²
Age of career choice		561	80.8*
Early deciders (≤17)	69.0		
Late deciders (≥18)	31.0		
Firmness of decision		564	22.2*
Sure of choice	40.1		
Listed alternative occupations	59.9		
Career maps			
5 year		563	135.2*
Stay in sport-related occupation	62.5		
Change occupation	4.1		
I do not know	33.4		
10 years		562	287.8*
Stay in sport-related occupation	43.6		
Change occupation	3.4		
I do not know	53.0		

^aNumber varies due to missing values

*p<.01

4 Discussion

The descriptive results give a detailed picture about the personal attributes of Greek PE students. Also, they provide information about socialization factors (significant others, sport participation during high school years) that shape students' perceptions and beliefs, about teaching to consider careers in PE teaching.

Because our study is similar to, Dodds et al (1991) and Hatziharistos et al (1989) studies, extensive reference to them is made in the discussion. Although Hatziharistos et al (1989) study, was conducted in Greece and represents a first attempt to provide information about the socialization of Greek PE recruits into teaching, the present study is a more in-depth work on Greek PE students' background profiles, with special reference to occupational socialization theory. In general, some personal attributes of the recruits were similar to those, reported in previous research in a number of respects including gender, parent education and occupation, and high school background.

When gender is considered, data show that female students were drawn more and males were drawn less to teaching PE, which does not mirror results of previous studies (Dodds et al., 1991; National Statistical Service of Hellas, 2001). Data on parents' education and occupation

mirror those of Dodds et al (1991), Lindblad & Prieto (1992), and Su (1996) studies but do not support the findings of Hatziharistos et al (1989) study. Hatziharistos et al (1989) found that most Greek PE students' fathers fall into the lower group of occupations on the DSI (workers or farmers) and only 10% of them, possess a university degree. However, the present findings on the above two indicators of SES reveal that, the students came from lower to upper middle-class families; most participants' parents, especially mothers, received secondary education. The SES of the students partially explains, why they chose PE teaching as a career, although SES is a basic influential factor on educational and occupational aspirations, its effects cannot be easily separated from other variables such as ability or family (Ossipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). However, because teaching offers opportunities for social mobility (it is considered as a middle class profession), people who grew up in lower-class families, choose it in an attempt to improve their SES (Lortie, 1975).

Results on PE students' high school background reveal that, the vast majority of the participants graduated from public schools, which is in line with the findings of other studies (Hatziharistos et al., 1989; Dodds et al., 1991). Although private schools can be found everywhere in Greece nowadays, parents prefer sending their children to public schools, because most cannot afford the very expensive tuition fees required in private education.

Another personal attribute, which merits discussion is academic achievement. Academic achievement as evidenced by the participants' high school GPAs, was average to low (see Table 2). The majority had a GPA lower than 16.0 which is indicated as "pass" on the grade record of each pupil. There is ample evidence which supports our own: according to Wright (2001), several studies reveal that PE recruits arrive in PETE programmes with mediocre academic records. Probably, PE students' "subjective warrants may be based partially on perceptions that, PE teaching/coaching occupations require less academic ability and depend more on personal performance skills and enthusiasm for sports as prerequisites" (Dodds et al., 1991, p. 172). Moreover, the hypothesis suggested by Dewar and Lawson (1984), that PE recruits with low GPAs may be attracted by PE programmes because of their low entry requirements, is supported by the findings of the present study as well as by other studies (Sage, 1980; Templin et al., 1982, Lawson, 1988). Certainly, our PE recruits' mediocre GPAs were good enough to meet the low PE Faculties' entrance requirements for following PE teaching career.

Influences from sport-participation situations may explain, why Greek PE recruits chose PE teaching. Research in PE teacher socialization reveals that prospective PE teachers participate in sport, often beginning at young ages (Hatziharistos et al., 1989; Dodds et al., 1991; Hutchinson, 1993; Placek et al., 1995; Wright, 2001) which is line with the present study's results. A tentative explanation for this is what Lawson (1988) calls socialization, into sport, and socialization, via sport. Socialization into and via sport is an integral part of the recruitment phase of teacher socialization (Hutchinson & Buschner, 1996). Socialization, into sport, is a process by which one selects and participates in sports. Socialization, via sport, has to do with participants' acquiring consumer preferences and life style patterns. Socialization, into sport, often leads to socialization, via sport (Lawson, 1988). It seems that socialization, via sport, provides experiences that lead participants to choose a sport-related career. Research data provide support for this: PE recruits consider experiences in sport to be a major influence, for their wanting to teach PE (Hutchinson & Buschner, 1996; O' Bryant et al., 2000; Curtner-Smith, 2001).

Additionally, Table 3 shows that although PE students remained physically active at the university level, their participation in organized sports was not as extensive as in high school. Also, unlike high school years, during university more students were inactive. Given greater time investment in attending lectures and in meeting the high demands of being a university student in general, the above result is not surprising. It is also notable that after university entry the percent of PE students who fulfilled different secondary sport roles increased. Thus,

a small percentage of PE students (4.6%) entered secondary sport roles related to teaching or coaching before they are formally trained.

Apart from sport-participation situations, influences from significant others can add to the explanation why Greek PE students chose PE teaching. According to Lortie (1975) significant others are a kind of facilitator, which ease entry into a profession or influence career choice. Persons rated most influential included coaches and the family (mothers, fathers). In other similar research the coach or the PE teacher has been found to be the most influential person (Templin et al., 1982; Dodds et al., 1991; Hutchinson & Buschner, 1996; O' Bryant et al., 2000). However, only in Belka et al (1991) study, the mother or the father was the most influential person. Certainly, interactions with significant people can help us to understand what it means to be a PE teacher. Mawer (1996) suggests that, interactions with people who teach or coach sport, play a key role in the process of prospective teachers' socialization. In the present study, a big percentage of recruits (60.3%) participated in organized sports before university entry, which means that on an almost daily basis they spent more time with coaches than with PE teachers². This may explain why the coach and not the PE teacher was the most influential person for them.

Apart from the coach, mothers and fathers had a big influence on the recruits. This supports the contention that family encouragement is a powerful recruitment resource (Lortie, 1975) as well as studies of parents showing that they engage in a variety of behaviours to shape their children's life paths (Ossipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). Unlike Dodds et al (1991) study, PE teachers and other school personnel were the least influential persons, which does not reinforce the differential impact of the school as a social system.

The last factors we examined were the age of decision and career maps. These factors serve as indicators of recruits aspirations and commitment to an occupation (Dodds et al., 1991). Table 5 reveals that Greek PE students reported long range career maps: The majority were early deciders and a considerable number of students intended to remain in the chosen field after 5 and 10 years from graduation. Dodds et al (1991) study yielded similar results. Apparently, for our recruits commitment to remain in PE teaching appeared quite firm but not high considering that we had many undecided recruits. A notable finding is that we had both early and late deciders in our sample, which shows that teaching is a profession with wide range decision; people can decide on teaching late or early in their lives and still implement the decision (Lortie, 1975). However with the majority being early deciders, teaching occupation allows for early decisions as this has been established by several studies (see Lortie, 1975).

Also a high percent of recruits listed alternative occupations, as well as they did not know what they would be doing, with reference to future work orientations (see Table 5). Perhaps, the uncertainty of these students can be linked to the very high percentage of unemployment (National Statistical Service of Hellas, 2004) found in the teaching profession and to the relatively low status of teaching PE in schools.

In closing, one of the most important issues in occupational socialization research is the process by which an individual choose a profession. Present data stress the importance of personal attributes, sports participation during high school and college years, significant others, and certain occupational decision factors in influencing Greek PE students to choose teaching. However, the specific mechanisms by which the above factors affect the subjective warrant are not clear yet. Thus, other research strategies such as intensive interviewing of recruits and ethnographic studies should be employed to help us explain and understand more deeply these mechanisms as well as detail the profile of Greek PE recruits.

It is argued that experiences as a pupil are important for socialization into the teaching profession (Lindbland & Prieto, 1992). Understanding the significance of these experiences on students' career decision may serve to guide teacher educators to improve the effectiveness

of PETE programmes. If our research manages to highlight the above need and encourages further similar research in Greece, then one goal will have been achieved.

Footnotes

¹ Early deciders make their decision sometime between early adolescence and entrance into university, while the late deciders range from university entrance to after their entry to teaching (Sage, 1989).

² In Greece high school students spend two hours per week with the PE teacher, while those who participate in organized sport, spend around ten to fifteen hours per week with the coach.

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