

Family influences on career decisions by black first-year students at the  
University of KwaZulu-Natal: A qualitative study

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## DECLARATION

I, Ziphozethu Sibonelo Mhlongo declare that

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As the candidate's Supervisor I have approved this dissertation for submission.

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*Finally and most profoundly, I bring all glory to Jesus my Lord and Saviour. I will continue to serve Him fervently all the days of my life.*

## **DEDICATION**

*I dedicate this work to my parents*

***Bhekizipho & Nokuthula Mhlongo***

*Who have raised me to be the man I am today...*

## **ABSTRACT**

This study used a qualitative methodology to investigate black first-year students' perceptions of their families' influence in their career decisions. This was motivated by the fact that, post 1994, the number of career options available to black students has increased. As more opportunities become available, it is vital that students entering tertiary education are equipped with the necessary skills and support to make informed career decisions. There are a number of individual and environmental influences on career decisions. This study focused specifically on family and community influences. Fifteen participants (aged 18 to 30 years) were interviewed in order to answer the research questions. There were nine female and six male participants. The data was analysed through thematic analysis and suggested that there is a strong link between a family's socio-economic status and student career decisions. In addition, the availability of family socio-emotional support was also found to be a major influence in career decisions. The dissertation concludes that appropriate career education and guidance are essential for previously disadvantaged tertiary education students in order for them to maximise the opportunities available to them.

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Since the first democratic elections in 1994, many black South African matriculants, previously excluded from tertiary education are gaining access to educational opportunities and thus being exposed to a wide variety of careers (Robbins, Wallis & Dunston, 2003). This may be an overwhelming experience for both them and their families. The rapid transformation from the limiting apartheid system to an open system has provided many opportunities to reach previously unattainable goals.

It is, however, important to realize that these liberating changes also carry many challenges and responsibilities. Robbins et al. (2003) suggest that young people leaving school and entering tertiary education may have inadequate knowledge and insight to pursue appropriate educational opportunities. One reason for this is the lack of adequate career counselling or guidance available at disadvantaged schools. These factors then impact on the ability of young school-leavers to make career choices and decisions. Career counselling and guidance, especially for these students and their families, is essential for full exploitation of available opportunities. It is therefore vital that a student entering tertiary education be equipped with the necessary skills to make informed career decisions.

There are many specific factors which seem to influence the career decision-making (CDM) process. These factors may include the primary family; individual personality and intellectual traits; family finances; knowledge of appealing careers in a fast-changing environment; availability of advisory staff at tertiary institutions; and deficient forward planning due to previous lack of exposure to CDM. Among these factors, this study focuses on black first-year university students' experiences and perceptions of the influence of their families on their CDM process. The primary family can influence decisions made by students, both while they are still at home, and also while they are at tertiary institutions yet still dependent on their families.

## **1.1 Rationale and aim of the study**

The present study seeks to qualitatively understand first-year students' perceptions of their families' influence in their career decisions. Families have a number of characteristics which may influence a student's career decision-making. Family characteristics such as the family composition, family support, parenting styles and socio-economic status are explored with students to comprehend how they relate to, and perceive them to influence, their career decisions.

This study is making an assumption that a number of black first-year students will have come from backgrounds of historical disadvantage, although it recognizes not all of the participants may be in this position. Nevertheless, it can be argued that some degree of disadvantage relating to family circumstances is likely to be present in the backgrounds of black South African students. Thus, the study aims to examine the participants' perceptions of how the various aspects of their family's characteristics have affected their CDM.

The study is informed by the Interactive model of Career Decision-Making (Amundson, 1995). Traditional career decision theorists tend to emphasize models that concentrate on individual decision-making processes; this refers to the choices one makes individually. In these models, little is mentioned about the influence of environment and contextual issues (Stead & Watson, 2006). However, Amundson (1995, in Stead & Watson, 2006) argues that socio-cultural factors play a vital role in one's career choice. Factors such as family, political, educational, economic and interpersonal dynamics all shape and affect one's CDM process. Career decisions are affected by one's personal aspirations as well as by external influences (Amundson, 1995; Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 1986). This study therefore explores how black students perceive the particular external influence of family to have affected their career decisions.

## **1.2 Objectives of the study**

The research questions to be addressed in this study are as follows:

- How do student participants perceive family composition to have affected their CDM?
- How do student participants perceive parental figures and/or parenting style to have affected their CDM?
- How do student participants perceive family social and emotional support to have affected their CDM?
- How do student participants perceive family socio-economic status to have affected their CDM?

## **1.3 Methodological approach**

The study employs a qualitative research design as it seeks to understand and interpret student participants' experiences of their families' influence in their career decisions. Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson (2002, p.720) explain that "interpretive methodologies focus primarily on understanding and accounting for the meaning of human experiences and actions". The study used a purposeful sampling technique. This technique selects cases with a specific purpose in mind to meet the research questions of the particular study (Neuman, 2003). Purposeful sampling aims to obtain participants that best represent the objectives of the study (Fossey et al., 2002; Neuman, 2003). The researcher selected black first-year university students because, as they enter tertiary education, they are in, or have recently been in, a career decision-making stage of their lives which is the crux of this enquiry. In addition, they and their families are likely to have experienced some degree of past disadvantage.

Data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews which are a useful and appropriate tool in qualitative research (Fossey et al., 2002; Holliday, 2002; Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006). The interview schedule was useful for in-depth and comprehensive information gathering in that "qualitative research interviews aim to elicit participants' views of their lives, as portrayed in their stories" (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, in Fossey et al., 2002, p.727). The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by the

researcher. Finally, the transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis allowed the researcher to capture emerging ideas from the collected information and make sense out of them by making links between direct quotes or paraphrased ideas (Aronson, 1994). The full description of research methodology is presented in Chapter 3.

#### **1.4 Definition of terms**

*Career Decision-Making* – The assumption that individuals have at least two career options available and that they need to make decisions that will yield optimal or satisfactory vocational outcomes (Stead & Watson, 2006). Career Decision-Making is constant and “occurs throughout life as people seek to manoeuvre through education, work and other life experiences” (Amundson, 1995, p.11).

*Career development* – The process of ongoing understanding and implementation of career decisions that provide purpose and direction in one’s vocational future (Peterson, Sampson & Reardon, 1991). It is a process of learning and integrating roles, settings and events that shape a persons career (Peterson et al., 1991; Stead & Watson, 2006).

*Career education* – This entails a broad itinerary of activities which have been systemized to ensure a thorough process of entrenching abilities to question, explore and understand career-related phenomena (Akhurst & Mkhize, 2006). Career education takes a comprehensive approach of integrating all the life experiences of a learner and consolidating them with relevant contextual issues of the occupational world (Akhurst & Mkhize, 2006).

*Career guidance* – A term more focused on giving individual-oriented information, recommendation and advice to help one make a career decision based on “traditional approaches of matching the person to an occupation, such as the trait-factor approach” (Akhurst & Mkhize, 2006, p.140).

*Family* – “Most strictly, the fundamental unit of kinship. In its minimal or nuclear form the family consists of mother, father and offspring. In broader usage the term may refer to

the extended family, which may include grandparents, cousins, adopted children, etc., all operating as a recognised social unit” (Reber & Reber, 2001, p.268).

*Influence* – “The effect that somebody or something has on the way a person thinks or behaves or on the way that something works or develops” (Hornby, Wehmeier & Ashby, 2000, p.614).

*Parenting* – “Behaviour characteristic of a parent; behaviour that is specifically focused on the care, protection, feeding, nurturing, etc. of offspring” (Reber & Reber, 2001, p.510-511).

*Socio-Economic Status* – Standard of living and social functioning with regard to income, education and occupation (Lam, 1997).

*Student* – “A person who is studying at a university or college” (Hornby et al., 2000, p.1190).

*Support* – “To give or be ready to give help or encouragement to somebody if they need it” (Hornby et al., 2000, p.1204). In this study, social and emotional support is the focus.

### **1.5 Outline of the dissertation**

- Chapter 1 - Introduction
- Chapter 2 - Literature review
- Chapter 3 - Methodology
- Chapter 4 - Results and discussion
- Chapter 5 - Summary and conclusion

The following chapter reviews literature that is relevant to this study and links the material with the research questions related to student career decisions and family influences.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Choosing a career can be an overwhelming experience. There are various individual and contextual factors which may influence the career decision process. This study is particularly interested in the influence of the family, as well as other contextual influences, on black first-year students' career decisions. This chapter will review literature that is relevant to this research and identify areas requiring further investigation.

This chapter will discuss Career Decision-Making (CDM) theories which emphasize the relationship between individuals and their contexts in order to link student career decisions with contextual influences, which would include the family, school, church, neighbours and other societal influences within the context.

Family systems as influences will be explored by distinguishing between family structure and family processes. Under the structure of the family, issues such as family composition, culture, parenting and socio-economic status will be discussed. Under the processes of the family, factors of focus include family roles and expectations, family members' attitudes towards student career decisions and family members' social and emotional support towards the student. First-year students' individual traits will also be discussed. Finally, the chapter considers the state of career education and guidance in South Africa.

#### **2.2 Career decision-making models**

There are a number of theories that relate to CDM; this study focuses on the Interactive Model of CDM (Amundson, 1995) and the Goodness-of-Fit model of person-context relations (Vondracek et al, 1986) as they support the rationale of this study.

Most career decision theorists tend to emphasize models that concentrate on individual decision-making processes, which means the choices one makes individually (Peterson, Sampson, & Reardon, 1991; Stead & Watson, 2006). Little is mentioned about the influence of the environment and contextual issues (Stead & Watson, 2006). However, Amundson (1995) and Vondracek et al. (1986) argue that socio-cultural and political factors play a vital role in one's career choice. In addition, Marjoribanks (1979b) assumes that behaviour (like CDM) is a result of continuous interaction between an individual and situations encountered. Marjoribanks (1979b, p.2) further suggests "not only do situations influence individuals but that individuals select and subsequently affect the situations with which they interact".

Peterson et al. (1991) propose that theories that emphasize contextual influences on career choice focus on environmental factors that affect behaviour. Peterson et al. (1991) cite Krumboltz (1979) who proposed that environmental conditions generally outside of the control of individuals can influence career decisions. Krumboltz (1979, in Peterson et al., 1991, p.77) suggests that factors such as "job availability, educational and training opportunities; job entry criteria; salaries; labour laws and policies; family experiences and resources; and community resources may either enhance career opportunities or constrain them".

### **2.2.1 Interactive model of CDM**

The interactive model of CDM (Amundson, 1995) illustrates the interaction between the person making the decision and their environmental influences. Thus, the model considers aspects of CDM such as decision triggers, framing of decisions and the roles of career counsellors, as well as how such decisions are "heavily influenced by factors such as their culture, economic and political events, the interpersonal roles that they have assumed throughout life and their basic self-structure" (Amundson, 1995, p.11). Thus when Krumboltz (1979 in Peterson et al., 1991) discusses the influence of job availability and labour laws in CDM, this concurs with the economic influences mentioned by Amundson (1995). This in essence means students need to consider their internal

preferences yet also acknowledge the realistic influences of the context in which they live when they make career choices.

The interactive model suggests that career decisions are also influenced by situational dynamics, including family and interpersonal factors. Thus, in addition to individual and environmental factors, the *interaction* between the individual and the family environment may predict their future behavioural patterns (Marjoribanks, 2002), including career decisions. Thus, for example, a decision by a destitute, sick person to go to a public hospital is informed by the knowledge that public hospitals offer healing services at reduced rates compared to private hospitals. Similarly, a decision to go to a low-fee university (maybe due to an inability to afford a more expensive university) may reflect the realistic acceptance of their circumstances by a student whose family has limited financial resources.

It is suggested that considering societal norms while holding individual perceptions and opinions, enables one to integrate into society and its systems (Vondracek et al., 1986). Thus, when Amundson (1995) contends that CDM is heavily influenced by cultural, economic and political factors, as well as interpersonal roles assumed throughout life, this suggests that being mindful of one's circumstances prepares one to adapt to both challenging and comfortable conditions. Understanding one's aspirations and the context thereof may be an indication of maturity and resilience. This may be a strong factor enabling one to cope with societal demands that may be constraining personal aspirations.

Amundson (1995) contends that career decisions occur as a result of decision triggers. These are particular events or situations which signal a potential change in one's life. A young person making a career decision goes through a process of thinking about the potential negative and positive outcomes of their decision, including risks and sacrifices, after which they consolidate these dynamics with an initial framing of their decision (Stead & Watson, 2006).



According to Amundson (1995, p.13), the triggering events “serve to highlight the necessity of making a decision and help to mobilize a person toward action”. Thus, the framing of decision is followed by action towards pursuing that career decision (Stead & Watson, 2006).

The nature of the decision triggers differs according to the situation one is faced with at the time. Some triggers are distinct and others are gradual (Amundson, 1995). For example, a Grade 12 student is faced with a distinct decision trigger as they have to leave school. Thus, they have to decide whether they will go to work or try to further their academic goals. This highlights the necessity of making an occupational decision that will enable the student to act appropriately and productively. In contrast, a decision to change from an established career to take a new direction in one’s working life may be gradual and may not really be pressured by time. Nevertheless, at a certain point, the threshold of dissatisfaction with the previous career may be crossed (Maccoby, 1988, in Amundson, 1995) and action may be taken.

These decision triggers are clearly created by both internal and external factors, and these factors may also be interactive (Amundson, 1995). For example, a person’s individual strivings may combine with their observation of the external environment and the triggers then motivate them to act on those strivings. For example, a person may feel they would like to work with and help other people; this desire may be combined with their experience of caring for a sick relative at home and result in them making a decision to work in a health care setting.

In addition, the timing of decision triggers may vary from person to person, even if their circumstances may be relatively similar (Amundson, 1995). Although many decision triggers involve an event occurring, some decision triggers are a result of stagnancy. In other words, if things do *not* happen, an individual may feel dissatisfied and then act to change their circumstances (Amundson, 1995).

### **2.2.2 Goodness-of-Fit model of person-context relations**

According to the Goodness-of-Fit model of person-context relations (Vondracek et al., 1986), career decisions may influence or be influenced by the individual's cognitive, personality, physical, and social development (Vondracek et al., 1986). Vondracek et al. (1986) argue that various theorists have been challenged by the complexity of individuals and their relationships with their contexts. This is because the world and individuals are composed of interacting levels of existence (Vondracek et al., 1986). People and their environments are also believed to be interdependent, changing and/or developing over time "both from the perspective of life-span development and from that of career development" (Vondracek et al., 1986, p.78).

Schein (1971, in Vondracek et al., 1986) therefore asserts that a career is fashioned as an individual, but the person and their environment are embedded in a matrix of interaction. Making a career decision thus requires the individual to decide what they want to do with their lives, while understanding, and responding to, the influences in their environment. This concurs with Amundson (1995) in that people choose careers due to the influence of the roles they have played in their families and the circumstances they are exposed to.

Vondracek et al. (1986) suggest that there are a number of characteristics, both physical and psychological, which individuals bring to a career decision. This would include, for example, their size, strength, talents and skills, and possibly, their appearance, as well as aspects such as temperament (Aron, 2004), motivation, determination and ambition. Vondracek et al. (1986) argue that when individuals display their characteristics in society, they receive feedback from the environment which in turn influences how they continue to present themselves. For example, if one receives constant positive feedback from society for one's singing talent, one may be influenced to continue to sing and possibly even consider a career in music. On the other hand, a person who enjoys sport but who continuously receives insults and discouragement from their participation in sport may be inclined to give it up or may be motivated to prove their critics wrong and persist with sport.

It is imperative to acknowledge the interactive processes between the individual and their social milieu so that the roles of the family, school, peers, community and culture may be adequately considered (Amundson, 1995; Vondracek et al., 1986).

### **2.3 Family influences in student career decisions**

As discussed above, the family and family systems can be an influence in career decisions. This is because the family is one of the aspects of the environment which have circumstances that influence individuals. In particular, career decisions can be influenced through early childhood experiences because “the family is the first major social institution into which a child is socialised during his or her formative years” (Sithole, 1997, p.3). Here, the child is exposed to life roles that underpin family norms and ideals. For example, a child raised in a religious home may grow to hold sacred religious values that would possibly guide their lives to a career linked to religion.

Inasmuch as the student may experience direct or indirect influences from the family, they are also capable of influencing the family context as well (Amundson, 1995; Marjoribanks, 1979b; Vondracek et al., 1986). As the study assumes that families may influence student career decisions, it is imperative to be open to the possibility the students could also be an influence on the family. For example, a parent may be impressed by a student’s academic progress and decide to enrol at a university as well.

Pimpa (2005) argues that, within families, members have an ability to shape one another’s behaviour and lifestyle. This is achieved through influencing one another’s decisions, be they simple or complex. When the student considers the views of family members, this suggests that the family, whether indirectly or directly, has contributed to the formation of their values, beliefs, self-concept and decision-making processes (Pimpa, 2005).

Lam (1997) suggests that research on family influences looks at two paradigms. The first of these considers the structure of the family, which refers to family aspects including the

family composition, cultural ideologies of families, parenting, socio-economic status and other material factors (Lam, 1997).

The second paradigm considers the family processes which concern individual perceptions and relationships among family members and are attuned to experiences between family members and their perceptions of one another (Lam, 1997). The family influences investigated in this study focus on family roles, family members' expectations of the student, family members' attitudes towards student career decisions and levels of social and emotional support towards students. Family structure factors (Lam, 1997) will be discussed in this section while family process factors will be discussed in Section 2.4. Despite Lam's (1997) separation of structure and processes, it is clear that there are some significant overlaps, especially in terms of family culture and expectations.

### **2.3.1 Family composition**

Family composition includes the characteristic features of the family, such as family size. The composition of the family also involves family living arrangements, for example, nuclear and extended family structures, and migratory labour arrangements. Family composition may also include whether the family is 'intact' (two parents living together), or whether there are single parents or reconstructed families. Family composition may influence student career decisions by affecting student academic performance (Ambert & Saucier, 1984, in Lam 1997). In addition, studies by Hetherington and Arasteh (1988), Jeynes (2002) and Dickson (1995) suggest that intact family structures seem to offer positive influences in student career decisions.

In terms of family intactness, divorce is commonly considered to be a painful event that has disturbing consequences for the couple and their children (Lopez, 1987). Ambert and Saucier (1984, in Lam, 1997) conducted a study on teenagers from Montreal. Their objectives were to measure differences in academic performance and attitude to school between teenagers from intact versus non-intact families. Ambert and Saucier (1984, in Lam, 1997, p.12) found that "adolescents from separated/divorced families did less well

in school, liked school less, and expected to abandon school earlier than adolescents from intact families”.

On the other hand, students from intact families were often described as keen and motivated by academic work (Ambert & Saucier, 1984, in Lam, 1997). However, this study did not control for other significant factors such as socio-economic or ethnic factors. Thus, it is uncertain whether student attitudes were a result of the family composition or the family conditions. It may well be that living conditions even before the occurrence of the divorce had influenced the child’s academic work.

The influence of parental divorce on tertiary education students has been investigated by Lopez (1987). Some students reported that, due to parental separation, their self-esteem was compromised (Lopez, 1987). This influence of family composition may lead to career indecision because these students lack confidence in themselves. On the other hand, some students describe experiencing their parents’ divorce as an opportunity to be strong for their parents and to succeed in their studies, hence they did develop a sense of confidence in themselves; others have chosen fields enabling them to assist other students in similar conditions (Jeynes, 2002). This may suggest that although divorce may be disruptive and have negative consequences, it can also have a positive influence on development and reinforce determination and motivation.

In terms of career maturity, some studies have not found divorce to be a disrupting influence. A study by van der Merwe (1993, in Sithole, 1997) found that students from single-parent family structures had developed career maturity levels congruent with the level of students from intact families. This suggests that single parenting does not necessarily affect career maturity; especially if the parental figure adequately plays the roles that two parents can play (Dickson, 1995). However, the study also found that students from families in which a parent had died tended to obtain lower scores in career maturity. Sithole (1997, p.10) suggested that “lower scores in the latter group is [sic] possibly because of the trauma of death and the resultant disturbance in the family homeostasis and uncertainty about the future”.

There seems to be a consensus (Hunsberger & Brown, 1984; Jones & Palmer, 2004; Lam, 1997; van der Merwe, 1993 in Sithole, 1997) that intact families foster enhanced career development processes. While this may be a general view, it is important to consider other familial processes even within intact family structures that could negatively affect student career decisions. For example, an intact family characterized by abusive relationships can negatively influence the student's CDM. Arguing against the generally negative view of the effects of divorce, some studies have found single parents to promote and nurture positive career development opportunities for their children (Dickson, 1995; Hetherington & Arasteh, 1988; Hetherington et al., 1977, in Dickson, 1995; Lupenitz, 1979, in Dickson, 1995).

### **2.3.2 Families and culture**

Amongst the factors influencing career decisions is culture. The values and beliefs instilled in an individual are based on their upbringing which in turn is based on cultural ideologies (Haviland, 1996). Cultures are diverse and unique. Certain cultures are characterized more by individualism, others more by collectivism (Westwood & Ishiyama, 1991, in Amundson, 1995).

Some cultures, for example, many Western cultures, pride themselves on adhering to the tenets of independence and individualism; thus, people from these cultures tend to strive towards individual progress and high achievement. In addition, people in such cultures tend to make individual decisions in certain life events such as choosing and pursuing a career. Other cultures, for example, many African and Eastern cultures, believe in collective engagement in both basic and complex decisions, including the career which a community member will follow. Thus, it is suggested that, in such collective cultures, making a career decision is an inclusive process that is an expression of the collective family and it "can only be considered with reference to the collective needs and wishes of the group in which the individual is imbedded [sic]" (Westwood & Ishiyama, 1991).

The culture of black South Africans, in particular, emphasizes the importance of community cohesion (Mboya, 1999). Indeed, Edwards et al. (1983) state that Africans are

defined by their profound beliefs in collectivism. The concept of 'ubuntu' holds that survival occurs through the assistance and cooperation of others. Thus, how black students have experienced the role of their culture in career decisions is of significance to this study. This is an important factor whether or not they have been aware of this prior to the interview process. Furthermore, it is useful to explore student perceptions about the influence of family involvement, family expectations and family demands in career decisions, with regard to individualism or collectivism.

As suggested above, it is generally believed that in black South African culture, extended family structures promote the beliefs of collectivism (Nzimande, 1996). However, it is also possible that nuclear family structures may possess values of collectivism. Since 1994, many black South Africans, having previously been restricted to peri-urban townships, have gained access to suburban and urban areas. As a result, many South Africans are detaching from the system of extended family structures to form nuclear households (Ziehl, 2002). However, this transition from an extended to a nuclear family system may not necessarily suggest that collectivism is no longer part of family beliefs.

The concept of collectivism as expressed in the family context does not necessarily mean that the family household will have numerous members, but rather it is represented by the significance of being there for one another and showing constant support. Thus, as indicated by the preceding discussion, it is likely that the families of current, black tertiary education students, who may come from rural, semi-rural, suburban and even urban societies, are characterized by diverse family structures. Some come from extended family environments, others come from nuclear households, but this study hypothesizes that most will subscribe, to at least some degree, to values of collectivism (Nzimande, 1996; Ziehl, 2002).

Urdu, Solek and Schoenfelder (2007) suggest that cultural factors contribute significantly to the young person's experience of their career decision. Cultures which believe in collectivism appreciate interdependence, in which the theme of family

obligation is likely to be prevalent; “students with a stronger interdependent self-construal report greater investment in school than do students with a more independent self-construal” (Urduan et al., 2007, p.10).

Students possessing family obligation ideals often view themselves as individuals who have a responsibility to plough their developed talents back into the collective system (Urduan et al., 2007); they feel obligated to the family because they are intertwined with family members. These are the kinds of students who would probably make career decisions based on the needs of the family. They may also feel indebted to parents and extended families, who have sacrificed to provide academic opportunities for them (Urduan et al., 2007).

However, this may also be the case for students from an individualist context who would feel they ought to appreciate their family for their support and assistance. It is possible, though, that those students holding beliefs of collectivism may feel indebted to the family due more to a sense of duty and ubuntu, rather than the sense of appreciating the family.

### **2.3.3 Parenting**

It has been widely identified that parents play a profoundly significant role in student career decisions (Baumrind, 1967, 2005; Bregman & Killen, 1999; Bullock, 1990; Gonida & Urduan, 2007; Jarvis, 2005; Lopez, 1987; Ozdemir & Hacifazlioglu, 2008; Sorkhabi, 2005). Parenting contributes to CDM through introducing a child to a particular system of values, especially in terms of achievement motivation. Parents also contribute through the modelling of career decision-making processes. Research clearly shows that “parents have a great influence on students’ work preference” (Ozdemir & Hacifazlioglu, 2008, p.442).

In addition, a number of research studies (Bregman & Killen, 1999; Bullock, 1990; Jarvis, 2005; Sorkhabi, 2005; Urduan et al., 2007) report that children whose parents are actively involved in their school and vocational lives tend to achieve high marks and display high levels of motivation (Urduan et al., 2007). It is further suggested that parents



who maintain firm and fair levels of discipline, while being supportive of children's needs and demands, have a tendency to raise motivated and goal-directed children (Urduan et al., 2007). Thus, "it appears that parents who are willing and able to provide support to their children, but do not become coercive or controlling in their influence, produce academically motivated children" (Urduan et al., 2007, p.2). It is likely that both these aspects will have an impact on CDM.

One important aspect of parenting is how parents manage their children, in other words, their parenting style. A number of parenting styles have been described (Baldwin, McIntyre & Hardaway, 2007; Baumrind, 1967; 2005). The styles of parenting described by Baumrind (1967) are authoritarian, permissive and authoritative. Each style is characterized by different parenting approaches and methods. Authoritarian parents are described as less responsive, more demanding and often use negative reinforcement for discipline. Authoritative parents are responsive and open to requests, yet foster firm responsibility patterns by often using positive reinforcement. Permissive parents are less responsive, less demanding, disconnected and often unable to control demands made by their children (Baumrind, 2005). Permissive parenting may be associated with ignorance of the child's needs for regulation and direction. Lack of career direction and impulsive CDM may possibly ensue for students raised under this parenting method.

Authoritative parenting is often viewed as the most effective style in terms of developing confidence, responsible and mature behaviours in children (Baldwin et al., 2007; Baumrind, 1967; 2005; Bregman & Killen, 1999; Steinberg, 2001, in Sorkhabi, 2005). Students may choose careers which may be characteristic of the style in which they were raised. For example, if a student chooses a career requiring them to be responsible for others, this may be a reflection of the parenting style they experienced.

However, Sorkhabi (2005) argues authoritative parenting is not necessarily effective in all contexts. Sorkhabi (2005) emphasizes that authoritative parenting may be an appropriate method for people of European descent, as they hold an individualist worldview. Indeed, there appear to be controversies "with respect to the applicability of

Baumrind's authoritative model to cultures (that are) described as collectivist" (Sorkhabi, 2005, p.552). Some collectivist cultures simply do not subscribe to an authoritative approach. Instead, they believe in parental supremacy in that autonomous negotiation between parents and children is not considered (Jourdan, 2006). These cultures contend that a child should respect and follow parental orders and should not negotiate with the parent. Thus in some collectivist cultures, parental authority overrules the aspirations of children. This authoritarian parenting method is considered to be effective in instilling tenets of respect and morality among young people growing up collective cultures (Jourdan, 2006).

However, Steinberg (2001, in Sorkhabi, 2005) contends that authoritative parenting has been found generally to be the more effective with adolescents across many different racial and social backgrounds. This has been substantiated by studies across the world using samples with diverse values and cultural systems (Steinberg, 2001, in Sorkhabi, 2005).

One criticism of most of the studies of parenting is that they are correlational (Baumrind, 2005; Sorkhabi, 2005; Urdan et al., 2007). Hence, causality is uncertain in terms of whether a supposedly effective (authoritative) parenting style enhances motivation and achievement or whether this style is precipitated by children with a motivated and autonomous temperament (Urdan et al., 2007).

#### **2.3.4 Family socio-economic status**

Studies that have investigated familial influences have found that family socio-economic status and parental recommendations appear to be leading influences in student career-related decisions (Pimpa, 2005). Even after the end of apartheid in South Africa in 1994, a majority of blacks continue to experience poverty and socio-economic stress (Dass-Brailsford, 2005; Finchilescu & Dawes, 1998). It is argued that being born under conditions of entrenched socio-economic disadvantage may limit access to basic needs such as food and shelter, as well as to other resources, including a good education (Dass-Brailsford, 2005; Mngadi, 2001).

When a student comes from a background of a low socio-economic status, this is likely to have limiting effects on any aspiration they may have to go to university. Furthermore, they may wish to go to a high-tuition fee university, expecting that it may provide good learning opportunities and well-resourced facilities. However, if they are unable to pay tuition fees and do not meet necessary requirements for funding, these students may opt for a less costly institution. Other students may not be able to afford university study at all and may opt for any of the low-fee Further Education and Training institutions (FETs). Clearly, one's educational options, and therefore one's career decisions, will be limited by financial circumstances.

Families from adversely low socio-economic backgrounds are commonly under pressure simply to try to survive. This may well be the reason such family structures encourage the young aspiring university students to choose well-paying careers which will help the family financially (Marjoribanks, 1979b; Ozdemir & Hacifazlioglu, 2008). In addition, uneducated, low-income parents may pressurize their children to attempt to enter well-paying careers, preferably with professional identities, as they deem those careers to be the most prestigious as well as lucrative (Ozdemir & Hacifazlioglu, 2008). Such families may possess a 'getting-ahead' (Marjoribanks, 1979a, p.16) belief, where feelings of previous inadequate growth or socio-economic status result in a desire to improve the life circumstances.

On the other hand, some parents from low-income families may possess what Marjoribanks (1979a) termed a 'getting-by' core value (p.15), where there is no emphasis on changing the situation; they simply accept it and live each day as it comes. Under these circumstances, it is unlikely that there would be much effort from the parents to show interest in or get involved in student career decisions. The 'getting-by' parents commonly accept lack of ambition and do not expect much academic effort from their children (Marjoribanks, 1979a). This type of parent often believes a high school education is sufficient, so that the child may get employment to cover basic physiological needs (Marjoribanks, 1979a; Maslow, 1954). The 'getting-ahead' parents, in contrast,

often apply pressure to their children to work hard to obtain high marks to facilitate tertiary education entry (Marjoribanks, 1979a).

A study by Ozdemir and Hacifazlioglu (2008) investigated 2,459 final-year high school Turkish students' expectations of their prospective universities and their perceptions of whether or not family background or social status affected their career decisions. The students were grouped according to their first career choice and their responses were evaluated by a questionnaire. The students completed a 6-item demographic questionnaire which assessed their age, gender, the province in which they lived, socio-economic status, educational and family backgrounds.

The results suggested that the family's financial background had a major effect on these students' career decisions, in that a majority of students from low-income families tended to align themselves with careers in the sciences. This tendency is also likely to be a growing trend in the South African context, as the government is strongly emphasizing the importance of exposing students, particularly those students from disadvantaged backgrounds, to careers in science and technology. This is partly an attempt to redress the particular lack of good science education in the former 'Bantu Education' system.

Ozdemir and Hacifazlioglu (2008) also found that students from high-income families tended to follow careers in the social sciences and the arts. They also tended to prefer well-resourced universities with extensive social activities because these institutions provide opportunities to conveniently and thoroughly engage in creative activities such as sports, entertainment and discussion forums.

On the other hand, students from low-income families tended to be exclusively involved in their studies and paid little attention to social activities, as they were mostly concerned with obtaining the good academic results which lead to work opportunities (Ozdemir & Hacifazlioglu, 2008). This suggests that students from elite backgrounds were not as worried about financial hindrances as their low-income counterparts; hence, they enjoyed the luxury of other self-exploratory activities.

The effects of low socio-economic status can have long and devastating consequences for young aspiring students. Makoe (2006) argues that there still need to be thorough transformation initiatives that will address the oppressive history of non-white South Africans. The Bantu education system was designed to entrench the notions that non-white South Africans ought not to engage in specialised careers but rather should have limited education to enable them to carry out unskilled labour (Makoe, 2006; Nkhoma, 2002). Makoe (2006) laments that, this left black households with single parents, mostly women, who took care of children while the fathers went afar to work. One would imagine that this legacy created a new breed of family structures. Furthermore this meant that because of the low income from unskilled work, parents cannot afford to pay for their children's studies once they complete their secondary school years. Unfortunately some students are then forced to stay at home for a year or more trying to find an occupation.

A study by Pimpa (2005) sought to investigate family influences on Thai students' career decisions to study abroad. Choosing to study abroad may be an element in CDM where one considers the effects of such a decision in the person's career development. This qualitative study indicated that student career decisions are largely influenced by family financial conditions. Most participants in the study (Pimpa, 2005) mentioned important career-decision factors as being family financial support for tuition fees, living expenses and other related costs. Participants also noted family influence in the selection of academic programs and university (Pimpa, 2005).

In a South African study, Dass-Brailsford (2005) examined academic achievement and resilience in black students living in poverty. The study adopted a qualitative method where sixteen first-year university students from a disadvantaged community in South Africa were interviewed. These students had finished their first semester at university and they were selected to participate in the study because of their good academic performance in the first semester. Dass-Brailsford's study hypothesized that, because "poverty strikes children at their very core by limiting their access to the basic needs" (Dass-Brailsford, 2005, p.575), that poverty is likely to correlate with poorer academic performance. Thus

Dass-Brailsford (2005) attempted to explore the resilience of those students who had achieved well despite the socio-economic ills of their environments.

Dass-Brailsford (2005) found that these high-achieving students reported self-confidence and motivation to achieve even though they had no money at university. They were consoled by the fact that their families were there to support them socially and emotionally. This possibility becomes highly significant for students who are facing a time of CDM. It seems that, with appropriate emotional support and help, one may be motivated to confidently select a career and work hard towards growing in that particular field, even if the family's financial circumstances are poor.

## **2.4 Family process influences in student career decisions**

### **2.4.1 Family roles and expectations**

The roles and expectations amongst the family members in terms of gender, birth-order, health and social status influence how people come to see themselves (Bradely & Mims, 1992; Ojeda & Flores, 2008). In addition, Amundson (1995) argues that the roles people assume in their families and their society contribute to the formation of their career identity or career decision-making perspectives. Thus, there is a likelihood that a person will follow a career path based on the feedback they have received from family members (and others) about their characteristics and personality (Peterson et al., 1991; Vondracek et al., 1986).

These family roles have been well documented in the literature (Amundson, 1995; Bradley & Mims, 1992; Cruickshank, 2007; Goldberg & Deutsch, 1977; Gonida & Urdan, 2007; Jones & Palmer, 2004; Kazantzis & Flett, 1998). They include, for example, an eldest child assuming more responsibility in the family; hence he or she is more inclined to attempt career roles which are characterized by leadership, authority and responsibility. Another example would be the gender role expectation by a family that a female is expected to serve in the household and not aspire to creative or leadership roles. This could influence the person to limit their career aspirations (Amundson, 1995). Thus, the role an individual plays in the family may eventually develop into a decision to

follow a specific occupation (Bradley & Mims, 1992). This process propels students to integrate their aspirations with the expectations of their family context (Amundson, 1995).

It has been argued that these family factors do influence career decisions; yet, these influences on career decisions occur within a broader context of employment and entrepreneurial career opportunities (Ozdemir & Hacifazlioglu, 2008; Peterson et al., 1991). As discussed in the previous section, the family may encourage a student to choose a career with extensive job opportunities because the family expects the student to acquire skills and enhance the family's living conditions.

Another important expectation from the family may be for the student to do well in order to become a possible role model for others (Robbins et al., 2003). However, these expectations may ignore the reality faced by the student. Thus, the family may continue to hold high expectations, despite the serious challenges faced by the family member starting university. These include living independently, managing their resources and taking responsibility for their own behaviour in both the personal and academic contexts. The family may also not understand that the student is experiencing a major shift in 'cultural' environment. This is particularly so for black first-years in South Africa.

Coming from an African perspective, where perceptions, values, customs and practices are primarily African in nature, black first-years may experience major difficulties when they enter university because the procedures followed in most South African universities are heavily Westernized (Cruickshank, 2007). Thus, the environments of most South African universities reflect Western perceptions, values and customs. For example, this might include the expectation for the student to work independently rather than cooperatively. In addition, the curriculum is mostly based on Western ideologies and even most of the learning material comes from the West (Cruickshank, 2007; Sennett, Finchilescu, Gibson & Strauss, 2003). However, in the context of urbanization and cultural transitions in South Africa, it could be expected that at least some black first-year students will have experienced Western contexts ideologies.

Parental expectations may exert overwhelming pressure on the student, partly because they have to adapt to the very different environment, as described above. This adaptation entails understanding the views and principles of the new context, while still working hard to meet the family expectations. For example, if a student did exceedingly well in matric and then merely passes at the end of the first university semester, they may be faced with interrogations from the family about the apparent drop in the standard of achievement.

Parental beliefs about their children's level of intelligence may also influence the student's CDM (Furnham, Mkhize & Mndaweni, 2004). When parents communicate their beliefs to their children, these may be internalized by children and this has been shown to have important consequences for the children's motivation, development and academic achievement (Furnham et al., 2004).

#### **2.4.2 Family socio-emotional support**

Family members' perceived relationships and support are part of the family process factors which may influence student career decisions. In addition, family support and emotional encouragement may be helpful and ease the tensions for first-year students. Some aspects of this have been discussed in Section 2.3.4.

Families are primarily responsible for supporting and providing the student with resources and care as they develop vocationally (Jones & Palmer, 2004). Family members often provide students with information and feedback about life experiences in general, thus facilitating their understanding of individual and contextual relations (Vondracek et al., 1986). This enables the student to learn to cope with vocational and other life challenges. If a student is equipped at home to be motivated and aspire to achieve, it can be assumed they are able to integrate the support with their own self-concept in order to make reasonable judgments about their career choices and other behaviour.



As discussed above, the confidence of first-year university students to make a career decision may be partly attributed to supportive input from their family, friends, community and helpful academic staff (Day & Livingstone, 2003; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Podbury & Stewart, 2003; Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005). Students receiving strong emotional support and encouragement tend to persevere even when faced with difficult academic and personal challenges in the university system (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008).

Confidence in career decisions may also be facilitated by involvement in university social programs (Cruickshank, 2007). It is argued that students nourished with encouraging support from peers and family members are likely to develop a sense of confidence in academic work and career decisions (Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2007).

Murray-Harvey & Slee (2007) conducted a study aimed at understanding the effects of support, as well as stressors, that family, teachers and peers exert on students and how these factors contribute to the school experience. They collected data from 888 Australian students from three different primary and secondary schools. The participants were heterogeneous as they came from independent and government schools. They were also diverse in terms of socio-economic background. Data was collected through questionnaires about perceived relationships within the family.

Murray-Harvey & Slee's (2007) results showed that the assistance and encouragement received from the family was acknowledged by students as a positive influence and was reported to give them a sense of direction and confidence. On the other hand, students feeling discouraged and neglected by family members reported feelings of inadequacy and confusion (Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2007). Students who experienced stress from family environments, such as discouragement and lack of interest in their school work by family members, reported feelings of isolation. This may be problematic for the CDM process of these students because the interactive model of CDM (Amundson, 1995) and the Goodness-of-Fit model emphasize the complementary connection between the individual and the environment which enables them to make satisfactory career decisions.

Alternatively, discouragement from the family may also be a motivation for students to thrive beyond the negative criticism and commit to attitudes of career success. Thus, negative family influences may induce poor career decisions but it is also possible they may reinforce positive career decisions.

## **2.5 Individual student factors**

Apart from family influences, CDM may also be affected by an individual's personal temperament (Aron, 2004) and their psychosocial development. A useful developmental theory in this regard is the psychosocial stage theory of Erik Erikson. Erikson (1950) based his theory on the relationship between an individual and the social environment they are exposed to. Individual student factors form an important part of CDM; however they are not the focus of this enquiry and will therefore be discussed briefly. Erikson suggests that people progress through a series of stages, each of which entails a developmental 'crisis'. Each stage of psychosocial development is congruent with a particular age range. At each stage, the person either successfully masters the crisis of the stage, developing strengths thereby, or the person struggles with the environmental pressures that come with that particular stage and a negative outcome ensues for that person (Erikson, 1950).

Erikson (1950) maintained that adolescence is characterized by the developmental crisis of identity versus role confusion (Erikson, 1950). Thus, the crisis which adolescents face is to develop a clear sense of identity; if this is not achieved, there may be role confusion. Thus, in this stage of their development, adolescents are confronted with the pressures of establishing their identity with regard to sexual, ethnic and career roles (Berger, 1980). In this stage, adolescents are concerned with making appropriate decisions which will facilitate a healthy lifestyle they can reflect on and feel proud of. If the adolescent is still struggling with role confusion, they may be especially overwhelmed by the many study and work opportunities available to them.

Identity formation is evident in two particular areas of cognitive development: occupational choice and the development of philosophical and political belief systems

(Marcia, 1966, in Grotevant, 1979). At this stage of their development, adolescents encounter challenges requiring learning and adaptation to environmental circumstances. First-year university students are in late adolescence and are moving into early adulthood, which is a time of major transition as they experience changes in many aspects of their lives. They are faced with challenges of adapting to a new environment and system of learning. They are more responsible for their academic outcomes since at university, students are expected to take responsibility for their own progress. First-year students may also be overwhelmed with career opportunities and may not be sure of what they want to do.

Apart from psycho-social development, other individual aspects may underlie CDM. For example, Roe (1986, in Ozdemir & Hacifazlioglu, 2008) mentions internal influences based on Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs. The need for survival and security may motivate students to strive for a position of independence (Ozdemir & Hacifazlioglu, 2008). Thus, aspects like physical needs, safety needs, social needs, and the need for self-respect can be seen as the primary determinants of career decisions, before any 'external' familial circumstances are considered.

Apart from a sense of responsibility towards the people who have provided the study and career opportunities, student career decisions may be driven by their own ambitions (or lack thereof) to succeed. Some students may be driven by hedonism and may therefore waste the opportunity they have at university. Others may take a long-term view, striving to achieve more for the sake of long-term financial rewards and security. Intrinsic student beliefs and personality may define how students react to, and are influenced by, contextual factors. A student motivated by altruism may choose a career in a helping profession and possibly obtain respect and favour from the family because they help others as a vocation. A student driven by financial greed may follow a business-related career enabling them to acquire wealth and power.

## **2.6 Career education and guidance**

Making a career decision can be a difficult process particularly if there has not been much assistance and exposure to the realities of the world of work and careers (Mashiapata, 1998; Mngadi, 2001; Robbins et al., 2003). Moving from high school to tertiary education is a period of transition which may be marked by difficulties in career selection. Students coming from disadvantaged communities often find themselves under a cloud of career uncertainty because of the lack of advice about the broad spread of career opportunities that exist (Mashiapata, 1998).

There is a high likelihood that communities from rural areas are unable to provide school-leaving students with adequate resources and knowledge about careers that will enable them to make informed career decisions. In addition, career guidance and education still remain a fantasy for various communities in South Africa as “career education practice in South Africa still reflects the marked inequalities that characterized apartheid education structures” (Akhurst & Mkhize, 2006, p.139). Lack of financial resources to provide adequate career information in high schools remains a major challenge.

Mtolo (1996, in Akhurst & Mkhize, 2006) distinguishes between guidance and career education. Guidance refers to the process of advising and providing young people with relevant information. This process helps students reflect on their behavioural patterns and link such behaviours to vocational options (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2006). Schreuder & Coetzee (2006, p.135) suggest that career guidance encourages “occupational exploration and matching of career choices”.

Career education, on the other hand, implies a more complex activity of helping people to question, explore and understand their career development through a systematic syllabus design (Akhurst & Mkhize, 2006). Schreuder and Coetzee (2006, p. 136) propose that counsellors who provide career education use structured psychological expertise to teach individuals “to develop career self-management attitudes as well as career competencies such as planning and decision making”.

Career education and guidance should be aimed at helping students to acquire the necessary career decision skills; “career education must take into account and integrate all the life experiences of the learner if it is to be relevant and responsive to contextual issues” (Akhurst & Mkhize, 2006, p.140). Akhurst and Mkhize (2006, p.141) cite Avent (1988) who noted four major forces in a career syllabus in secondary schools in the United Kingdom:

- Fostering knowledge about courses in tertiary institutions, their links to career choices, and the entry requirements.
- Providing information on the whole spectrum of possible occupations, the lifestyle associated with different work contexts and the opportunities available.
- Developing self-awareness through understanding individual abilities, interests, ideals and values, as well as developing personality characteristics which may lead to success in achieving career aspirations.
- Practicing decision-making and developing life skills for coping with transitions (e.g., school work, work unemployment, continued education, changes in work, and re-entry into the job market).

Career education as envisaged above has not been accessible to a majority of school-leavers in South Africa. However, career education has been more available in urban secondary schools and tertiary education institutions (Akhurst & Mkhize, 2006; Mashipata, 1998). This lack of career decision-making input may be a major challenge for a first-year university student who comes from a remote area. Such a student is likely to be faced with the difficult task of having to choose a degree curriculum at the university, without having adequate knowledge or guidance to facilitate this process.

While Akhurst and Mkhize (2006) focus on the importance of equal distribution of career education in all contexts for the welfare of the students, Sithole (1997) moves on to introduce the importance of drawing the family into the process of career education. Because the student is not a solitary being but an active participant in individual-context

relations (Vondracek et al., 1986), the family's exposure to career education also becomes a vital consideration.

Theories of career education have placed much emphasis on ensuring that students are equipped with knowledge and skills to enable them to reason around career opportunities. However, few theories refer to the need to educate families about careers so that they can facilitate and foster guidance to students. As argued previously, families have been described as the initial environment within which the child learns to interact with their context (L'Abate, 1976; Peterson et al., 1991; Sithole, 1997; Vondracek et al., 1986) and are thus critical in the CDM processes of their young members.

## **2.7 Summary**

This chapter has discussed the individual and contextual models that describe the links between family influences and student career decisions. Aspects of family structure such as the impact of divorce, culture, parenting and socio-economic circumstances have been discussed. Family process factors, for example, family roles and expectations, and their influence on CDM, have also been considered.

Factors relating to individual temperament and development have also been described. Finally, the problematic current (and historical) state of career education in South Africa has been highlighted. Chapter Three describes the methodology of the present study.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter describes the methods used to conduct the present study. The aims and objectives of the study are outlined and the approach and design of the study are discussed in depth. The research design includes sampling techniques used, data collection procedures and the analysis of the data. Ethical issues pertaining to the study are presented and, lastly, reliability and validity are discussed.

#### **3.1 Aims of the study**

This study was aimed at understanding black first-year University of KwaZulu-Natal students' perceptions of their families' influences in their career decisions. In particular, the researcher aimed to explore these students' experiences pertaining to their family characteristics, including amongst others, family composition, family support, parenting styles and family socio-economic status, in terms of how these influenced their CDM.

#### **3.2 Research questions**

The research questions addressed in the study were:

- How do student participants perceive family composition to have affected their CDM?
- How do student participants perceive parental figures and/or parenting style to have affected their CDM?
- How do student participants perceive family social and emotional support to have affected their CDM?
- How do student participants perceive family socio-economic status to have affected their CDM?

### **3.3 Research design**

The present study employed a qualitative research design. The study used a qualitative approach because the focus was on exploring how participants have experienced their family influences on their CDM. This research paradigm is appropriate as it can provide a rich in-depth understanding of these kinds of social phenomena (Neuman, 2003). Although qualitative studies are often criticised for lacking empirical strength, Neuman (2003, p. 146) argues that “qualitative data are [indeed] empirical. They involve documenting real events, recording what people say (with words gestures and tone), observing specific behaviours, studying written documents, or examining visual images.” Qualitative research collects a variety of subjective ideas from the population of interest and makes sense of them by examining patterns and themes.

By so doing, qualitative research taps into specific natural details which would possibly be lost when converting social life into numbers (Neuman, 2003). A qualitative approach was particularly useful for this study as it allowed for full exploration of participants’ subjective understanding of their families. Family environments are different and complex and each participant had a unique interpretation of their family dynamics. This approach was therefore useful for this study as it generated the information required to explore the links between participants’ experiences of their families and how these were perceived to have affected their CDM.

Often, qualitative research talks about research questions rather than specific hypotheses (Holliday, 2002). This is because qualitative research is concerned with understanding the quality of social life and exploring all possible occurrences which could emerge. On the other hand, quantitative methods are aimed at reaching conclusive results in response to hypotheses (Holliday, 2002). Qualitative researchers have a “conviction that what it [sic] is important to look for will emerge” (Holliday, 2002, p.6) whereas quantitative researchers have “confidence in established research instruments” (p.6) to assist them in testing their hypotheses.



This research design was appropriate for this study as it allowed the researcher to gather ‘real’, natural data through interviews with participants. This was advantageous because the researcher was able to clarify responses that initially appeared confusing and ambiguous (Dawson, 2007; Holliday, 2002; Neuman, 2003). In contrast, probing and reflections are not possible in quantitative research; hence, this qualitative research design was useful in order to obtain clarifications. Clarifications by participants further enhanced the validity of the study because “central to good qualitative research is whether the research participants’ subjective meanings, actions and social contexts, as understood by them, are illuminated” (Fossey et al., 2002, p.717).

### **3.4 Sampling techniques**

The purpose of the study was to investigate black first-year students’ understanding of the role of their families in their career choices. Thus, the researcher used a purposive sampling technique. This technique involves selecting cases with a specific purpose in mind to meet the research objectives of the particular study (Neuman, 2003). Purposive sampling is often used in qualitative research where participants are selected because they represent a good example of what is being investigated (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). For example, for a study of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), the researcher will choose people who have experienced trauma. Likewise, this study has selected first-year students because as they enter tertiary education, they are in, or have recently been in, a career decision-making stage of their lives.

In this study, 15 black first-year students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), Pietermaritzburg campus, were selected as they suited the rationale and aims of the study. Black students were selected because of the likelihood that, due to historical inequities, they would have experienced some form of disadvantage prior to entering a tertiary institution. There were nine females and six males and their ages ranged from 18 to 30 years. Fourteen participants were South African citizens and one participant was from another African country. All participants were registered with the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences. One participant was from the mainstream academic

program and the others were from the Humanities Extended Curriculum (Access Programme).

Of the 15 participants, seven were planning to major in psychology; two were planning to major in sociology and another two were planning to major in political science. The other four were to major in theology, media, law and information science, respectively. All the students were not yet decided on a second major as they were still learning about the new academic environment. However, in the transcripts, their first majors were articulated as an indication of the career path they aspire to take.

Qualitative sampling, unlike quantitative sampling, does not necessarily require a fixed minimum number of participants to provide sound qualitative findings (Fossey et al., 2002). Qualitative research sampling may use few or many participants; however, the significance is in obtaining sufficient in-depth information that adequately describes the social phenomena under investigation (Fossey et al., 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

A preliminary contact form was devised (see Appendix 1) giving a brief explanation of the study and asking for students to indicate their willingness to be contacted by the researcher. In recruiting the sample, the researcher decided to approach the UKZN (PMB) Student Counselling Centre (SCC) as this would be a convenient source of appropriate participants. The SCC staff, through verbal agreement with a Senior Student Counsellor at SCC, agreed to give contact forms to potential participants for the study. Thus, SCC agreed to distribute contact forms to interested black first-year students as they visited the Centre for various purposes such as psychotherapy, career counselling, time management workshops, academic information enquiries, and so forth. The researcher then contacted those students who had completed the contact form and explained the study to them more fully. Once they had agreed to participate in the study, they were asked to complete the informed consent form (see Appendix 2).

The researcher briefed the SCC staff to clarify with potential participants that this was not an SCC project and that their participation (or refusal to participate) would in no way

affect their access to, or receipt of, services from the SCC, if they were using them. Any black first-year student who went to SCC for any purpose qualified for participation. Hence, a heterogeneous sample was obtained, as the students varied in their backgrounds in terms of SES, socio-political views, career development and also in terms of their reasons for approaching SCC. However, as described above, the sample was not heterogeneous in terms of faculty. This may be because the proportion of black students entering the Faculty of Humanities is higher than for other faculties and more Humanities students access SCC than students from other faculties.

Because the sampling method of the study was open to any black first-year student, this allowed for deviant cases (e.g., students who were not disadvantaged) to be selected. According to Fossey et al. (2002) and Miles & Huberman (1994), this was important because these deviant cases allowed for the portrayal of contrasting perceptions of family influences, in terms of family composition, family support, parenting styles and family SES status. The danger of sampling narrowly in qualitative research is that data may be insufficient to answer the research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). It is therefore essential that “sampling in qualitative research continues until themes emerging from the research are fully developed, in the sense that diverse instances have been explored, and further sampling is redundant” (Fossey et al., 2002, p.726). The 15 participants were deemed sufficient to provide themes that were anticipated by the researcher, as well as any other themes which might emerge from the data collection.

### **3.5 Data collection**

Data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 3). The duration of the interviews varied between twenty and thirty minutes. The interviews were recorded on an audio tape recorder and a digital audio device and then transcribed by the researcher and his associate. The interviews were conducted primarily in English since the participants were a heterogeneous group speaking different languages and one participant was from a foreign country. Also, English is the medium of instruction at the University and therefore appeared to be most appropriate for all participants. However, parts of some of the interviews were conducted in *isiZulu* as some participants felt more

comfortable with talking in their mother tongue. These parts were translated during the transcription process by the researcher. These translations were checked by an associate who has the same qualification and experience as the researcher. The researcher and associate are both first-language *isiZulu* speakers.

The procedure of the interviews was clearly explained by the researcher so that both the researcher and participants understood their roles. Detailed accounts of this are explained in the ethics section later on in this chapter. In addition, the researcher had verbally arranged with a Senior Student Counsellor for referral to a professional staff member at the Student Counselling Centre in the unlikely case of secondary traumatisation during the course of the interviews. However, there were no referrals as none of the participants required psychological aid.

The aims and motivation of the study were explained in detail to participants and they were given an opportunity to enquire about aspects they did not understand about the study. The reasons for sampling black first-year students, the purpose of the types of questions asked in the interview and how data would be managed was explained to participants.

Semi-structured interviews were a particularly useful data collection tool in order to obtain in-depth and subjective information about the participants' experiences of their CDM process. The individual interviews allowed participants the privacy to reflect on their family experiences, some of which had been painful and difficult. This data collection method allowed for rapport to be established between the researcher and participants (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). In addition, clarification on ambiguous details was easily obtainable using this method (Dawson, 2007; Holliday, 2002; Neuman, 2003). Thus, answers which were not understood by the researcher were further clarified by participants when the researcher probed.

However, there may be some difficulties with using semi-structured interviews. They may be overwhelming and daunting for the participant, especially if they lack articulation

skills. The researcher may also unconsciously lead respondents to answer in a particular manner thus affecting essential data (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). In the first instance, the researcher attempted to contain the participants and ensured that they were not intimidated by the process; this facilitated rapport and a sense of comfort in participants. In the second instance, the researcher considered that while probing and aiming to get responses relevant to the research questions, it was imperative to bracket preconceived ideas and remain neutral to the respondent's account of their experiences (Kruger, 1990, in Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

The data collection instrument served a useful purpose by providing sufficient relevant information to meet the objectives of the study. If the semi-structured interview is well developed and adequate material gained, the qualitative inquiry has greater legitimacy, even more so if the analysis of the information is both objective and comprehensive (Fossey et al., 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Wolcott (1994) asserts that qualitative research can never claim to provide absolutely accurate data. Instead, it should provide for the capacity to sift and interpret evidence from volumes of text to generate greater knowledge and understanding. Wolcott (1994, p. 15) emphasizes that the researcher should aim to receive adequate information and then dedicate thorough work to producing acceptable descriptions and interpretations as "at best it can only be similar, never exactly the same as what you observed".

### **3.6 Data analysis**

Fossey et al. (2002, p.728) describe qualitative data analysis as a "process of reviewing, synthesizing and interpreting data to describe and explain the phenomena or social worlds being studied". The interview transcripts were analysed by means of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis focuses on identifiable themes and patterns of living and/or behaviour (Aronson, 1994). From the transcribed conversations, patterns of experiences can be listed and related patterns can be grouped together in themes. In this process, the researcher is attempting to make inferences about the participants' responses (Aronson, 1994). Thematic analysis is particularly useful and advantageous because of its flexibility (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic analysis allows the researcher to capture emerging ideas from collected information and make sense out of them by making links between direct quotes or paraphrased ideas (Aronson, 1994). Possible themes relating to factors in family influence in CDM have been identified in the Literature Review. However, the analysis remained open to other themes emerging from the data (Fossey et al., 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994). When links have been made from common ideas into particular patterns, the identified patterns are expanded on and explained. A detailed account of data analysis will be given in the following paragraphs.

The researcher read the transcripts repeatedly to ensure that all relevant details were captured and reported. The research questions were used as a framework for identifying information relevant to the anticipated themes, thus teasing out the necessary information to write sound descriptions of the data. This enabled the ultimate interpretation of the data based on relevant literature.

The themes associated with each of the research questions were highlighted with different colours. Information that provided answers to a particular question was highlighted with a colour linking that question with a particular theme. The researcher continued to read and highlight the transcripts until the data was reduced to simpler codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As this process continued new themes emerged, notes were written, links were made and data was further refined. This occurred until the material was well refined such that a clear picture of the results emerged.

During this process, the researcher was mindful of one of the major potential limitations of qualitative data analysis, i.e., possible bias in analysis and interpretation (Wolcott, 1994), and possible errors of judgment in thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998). For example, making incorrect interpretations of participant responses because of misunderstanding partially audible taped interviews would be an error in judgement. This is why it is important to measure one's analysis against a colleague's. Comparing interpretations with that of an associate was indeed helpful for the researcher. In addition,

a second opinion, and constant revisiting of research questions and the data, helped eliminate subjective views and allowed the researcher to interpret data objectively and fairly. Furthermore, presenting transcripts to some participants helped in clarifying data.

### **3.7 Ethical issues**

Research ethics are vital for protecting the welfare of participants and also to guard against improper practices when research is being conducted (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Research ethics promote fair, competent and cautious behaviours from researchers so as to avoid exploitation of participants. Non-maleficence and beneficence are important principles in research ethics. The principle of non-maleficence aims to regulate the amount of risk a research participant may be exposed to while the principle of beneficence advocates for the participant to also benefit from the study (Wassenaar, 2006).

In terms of non-maleficence, the researcher ensured that participants were not subject to any form of harm while participating in the study. Specifically, arrangements were made with the SCC for professional staff there to provide supportive counselling if participants were distressed by their participation. As explained earlier, no such referrals were necessary. In terms of beneficence, it is hoped that participants may have benefited from being able to reflect on their CDM and their family's role in this process.

The specific ethical factors relevant to this study were informed consent, autonomy, anonymity, confidentiality, and storage of data. In terms of consent, potential participants were contacted and the study explained to them before their participation in interviews. Participants were asked to give voluntary informed consent by signing a consent form that explained the research process (see Appendix 2). This form clarified the rights of participants in the study and served to protect the researcher, supervisor and participants from any form of misunderstanding. Only participants over the age of 18 years were selected, thus parent or guardian consent was not necessary. In addition, one of the most important principles of research ethics is autonomy and respect for the dignity of persons involved in research (Wassenaar, 2006). Thus, participants were at liberty to withdraw

from the study at any time without any negative consequences for them. However, no participants chose to withdraw.

Anonymity was assured by giving each participant a code name. Although the interview records on audio tape had identifying information, for example, when the interviewer called participants by name, these names were converted into codes during the typing of the transcripts. In addition, only first names were used in the interviews, thus making identification unlikely in the absence of surnames. Only the researcher knew the real identity of participants, thus anonymity was achieved.

In the context of research, confidentiality refers to not sharing with others the private comments of research participants. According to Wassenaar (2006, p. 67), “protection of individual and institutional confidentiality is also an important operational expression of this principle [autonomy]”. Only the researcher, the associate, and the supervisor had access to the full collected data. All these parties are well trained in the ethical principles underlying academic and professional psychological work. Where excerpts from the transcripts have been included in this research report, no identifying information has been included. This principle will also be followed if any of the data is published. The data will be safely stored for a period of five years at the School of Psychology, after which it will be destroyed.

### **3.8 Reliability and validity**

#### **3.8.1 Reliability**

An adequate level of dependability of data is essential in research practice. The primary quest for a research project is to reach substantial and trustworthy results. Neuman (2003) defines reliability as a dependable and consistent account of data. Quantitative researchers endeavour to show that their instruments are consistent and that “there are no errors and bias present, either from the respondents or from the researcher” (Dawson, 2007, p.114). In principle, this appears appropriate; however, there is no guarantee that questionnaires and surveys used by quantitative researchers are properly understood by respondents, which may damage the reliability of the results. On the other hand,



qualitative researchers acknowledge that respondents may be influenced by the research process (e.g., through interview anxiety, among other things), thus affecting their responses. Indeed, this approach acknowledges that humans are neither accurate nor consistent in their responding.

As suggested above, the researcher is also vulnerable to biases. During data collection, the researcher may have injected biased probes; however, every effort was made to avoid this. This was done in the context of the contribution of numerous qualitative writings which warn researchers about such detrimental actions (Dawson, 2007; Fossey et al., 2002; Henning, van Rensburg & Smit, 2004; Holliday, 2002; Neuman, 2003). The researcher took notes during and immediately after the interview sessions to ensure that the process was fully documented. This allowed for the researcher to reflect on his questioning of participants, and their responses. Furthermore, the researcher consulted with an independent research associate who assisted during the data collection phase. The researcher compared his interpretations against the interpretations of the associate in order to help identify, and thus bracket, biased conclusions.

In terms of data analysis, qualitative researchers “also acknowledge that [they] bring their own preferences and experience to the project” (Dawson, 2007, p.114). Thus, qualitative data analysis may lead to quite different results, due to different political and methodological standpoints held by researchers (Dawson, 2007). However, Miles and Huberman (1994) propose that despite the differences in analyses, there needs to be reasonable quality control in that differences in interpretations of data ought not to be notably different. This means that the paths of two researchers should cross substantially at various points, thus showing that the “process of the study is consistent, reasonably stable over time and across researchers and methods” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.278). During the data analysis process, the researcher compared his notes and interpretations against the associate’s findings to ensure that there was relative consistency.

### **3.8.2 Validity**

Validity refers to measuring what is intended to be measured. Neuman (2003, p. 185) argues that qualitative researchers aim to “give [a] fair, honest and balanced account of social life from a viewpoint of someone who lives it everyday”. Validity is an important aspect in research because credible outcomes are determined by examining relevant data. Qualitative researchers are, however, more interested in authenticity than in validity per se (Neuman, 2003). The quest of qualitative analysis is to capture people’s views and provide a detailed account of how respondents feel about phenomena without tainting them with biased perceptions (Neuman, 2003).

Despite Neuman’s views reported in the previous paragraph, there are several kinds of validity that are relevant for qualitative research. These are descriptive, interpretive, internal and external validity. These are discussed below.

Maxwell (1992) explains descriptive validity as the process of reporting the gathered information accurately and non-judgementally. In the present study, this was attained through re-reading transcripts several times, then synthesizing, coding and labelling the themes categorically to present a coherent and logical account of results. In addition, as described above, the researcher reflected carefully on whether he was introducing any biases into the analysis.

Interpretive validity refers to how well the articulations of the respondents have been understood and interpreted on the basis of sound theoretical and methodological foundations. Understanding and accurately interpreting the feelings, thoughts and perceptions of participants, suggests the researcher has achieved interpretive validity (Maxwell, 1992). Through reading numerous articles on data analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Fossey et al., 2002; Maxwell, 1992; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Neuman, 2003; Terre Blanche et al., 2006; Wolcott, 1994), the researcher believes he was able to interpret the findings coherently with limited bias.

Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that a study holds internal validity if in its quest to acquire data, it does not modify the natural events of the research process and researchers do not contrive the process with their presence and actions. This was achieved as the researcher avoided imposing his personal perceptions on what participants articulated. The researcher further obtained affirmation through an independent associate who holds the same experience and qualifications as the researcher.

External validity refers to the ability of the study to be transferable or generalized to other contexts (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This type of validity is fostered by the researcher's skill of accurately drawing conclusions that are objectively plausible and this is facilitated by the emergence of contrasts in the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Through constant practice and reading along with the assistance of the supervisor, the researcher was well able to acquire skills to process, categorize, review, synthesize and interpret data thus making legitimate suggestions based on substantial literature (Fossey et al., 2002). By and large, the credibility of the study lies in accurately, fairly and objectively articulating and interpreting natural respondent accounts (Maxwell 1992; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

### **3.9 Conclusion**

This chapter described the methods applied in conducting this study. The aims and objectives of the study were outlined; in addition, the approach and design of the study were described. The research design, including sampling techniques used, data collection procedures and the analysis of the data were reported. Ethical issues pertaining to the study were also discussed. The following chapter will present the analysis and findings of the study.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

The aim of this study was to understand black first-year student perceptions of family influences in their career decisions. This was understood from within the career decision-making models of Amundsen (1995) and Vondracek et al. (1986). Thus, career decision-making is conceptualised as resulting from the interaction of individual factors and factors in the individual's family and community context. These theoretical models provide the framework for the following discussion.

Data was collected from 15 participants, transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis. As discussed in Chapter 3, thematic analysis can be conducted using a structure of themes anticipated by the researcher but also needs to be alert to additional, different themes that emerge from the data. This chapter will report on themes identified from the data and will attempt to understand the participants' experiences in relation to the literature discussed in Chapter 2.

One of the major challenges of this study was the paucity of research around family influences on student career decisions. Most research focuses on family influences on student academic achievement (Dass-Brailsford, 2005; Lam, 1997; Malott & Magnuson, 2004; Urdan, Solek & Schoenfelder, 2007) and not on career decisions per se. Thus making links between career decisions and student perceptions about their family characteristics and circumstances is quite challenging.

In this chapter, the influences of family structure factors, for example, family composition will be discussed first, followed by factors related to community, parental influences and family socio-economic status. Family process factors, relating to broader family influences, will be presented next. This will include family social and emotional support and family members' attitudes and expectations. The chapter concludes with

discussions of individual factors, as well of the importance of career guidance and counseling, with special focus on the relevance of the contexts of the participants in this study.

#### **4.2 Family composition influences**

Although the data revealed little evidence of family composition influence on student career decisions, some important factors emerged. Parental separation, divorce and the deaths of parents were themes that generated some answers to the research questions.

The great majority of the participants (13 out of 15) came from single parent families or were orphaned. Some of the latter had been raised by a single grandparent. Single parent families were those where the participants were raised in a family structure with at least one caregiver or parent divorced, separated or widowed. Students with only one main caregiver were included in this category, regardless of whether they were from a nuclear or extended family structure.

Only two of the participants were raised in an intact family structure, with at least two or more caregivers or parents living together. Neither of these participants reported any apparent influence of family structure on their CDM. This is interesting as a basic assumption of this study is that intact family structures will support CDM.

Having only two participants from 15 emerging from households with both parents is an alarming statistic. This suggests that the 'traditional' composition of a family with two parents is no longer the prevailing norm but rather that single-parented households are the order of the day. This is indeed a common trend for family structures nowadays in South African society (Mubangizi & Mubangizi, 2005). Considering the current South African context, this could be a consequence of HIV and AIDS prevalence in South Africa which has rendered many households desolate and fragmented (Mubangizi & Mubangizi, 2005). The likely socio-emotional consequences of this are that more and more children receive fewer voices of advice and guidance from elders as there are few or none around; hence, they may lack necessary assistance with life's significant decisions including CDM.

However, for some, living apart from their parents may be preferable. For example, P5 mentioned that the separation between her parents was unpleasant even though it occurred when she was young; she was also “glad” that she did not have to live with “either one of them”. She added that “living with my grandmother has led me to be the kind of person I am”. It seems P5’s upbringing by her grandmother exposed her to church principles which she says influenced her choice to study a caring profession, psychology.

**P5: Even now I’m just glad they didn’t make me stay with one of them because you know what happens with stepmothers and stepfathers. I’m just glad that I grew up with my grandmother.**

The extract above portrays the participant’s negative attitude towards the effects of parental separation. The participant views staying with either of the parents as unpleasant and rather painful (Lopez, 1987) and therefore prefers living with a grandmother, a figure who represents objectivity. P5 went on to say:

**I think that [church values] also has some influence because psychology requires a person who is willing to help other people. So because I grew up with church principles, so in a way I grew the love of helping people and now I just like helping people in any way that I can.**

The above excerpt suggests that although the participant has experienced parental separation, she still portrays elements of dedication and commitment to her career aspirations. This concurs with the views of Jeynes (2002) that although the witnessing of parental separation or divorce may be painful, it may also have positive influences on development and reinforce determination and motivation in children. This report by P5 further disputes the argument by Ambert & Saucier (1984, in Lam, 1997) that belonging to an intact family structure is necessary for a child to be keen and motivated in their academic pursuits.

### 4.3 Community influences

As anticipated, there were themes suggesting that student career decisions are influenced by family and community engagement. The students expressed their career aspirations as a means of empowering their communities and modelling responsibility to younger children.

R: *Are there some things in your family that you think are going to be helped by your career choice?*

P1: **Yes I think so. Not really in my family but I'm thinking that in my community.**

P3: **I said one day I will like to study more about politics then go back to my community and tell them about how politics works.**

These excerpts suggest that the P1's and P3's career decisions may have been individual processes; however, both participants refer to their potential contribution to their community, suggesting that their career motivation is driven at least in part by the tenets of collectivism (Westwood & Ishiyama, 1991, in Amundson, 1995).

Another factor which emerged was the importance of a student's career as a tool to encourage other young children to devote themselves to studying. This was further an indication of the cultural beliefs that a career is a vehicle for the upliftment of the family and community instead of it being purely an individualistic process.

R: *And what are your career plans after you complete your degree?*

P3: **I'm thinking about going back to help the kids there in my town, let them know how important it is to study and let my community know about politics and not these things that are done by councillors.**

Urduan et al. (2007) suggest that cultural factors contribute significantly to the young person's experience of the career decision. Cultures which believe in collectivism appreciate interdependence, in which the theme of family obligation is likely to be

prevalent. This concurs with the beliefs of 'ubuntu' in that one's survival is possible with the assistance of others (Edwards et al., 1983) and, in this case, one's career breakthrough is a success for the whole community. This sense of ploughing back into the community is the product of cultural values entrenched earlier in the student's life which may have also influenced the career decision itself.

Mboya (1999) suggests that community cohesion is of significance to black South Africans. Indeed, these cultural values were evident in the data as the students spoke about roles played by their families and communities in their career decisions. One student stated that the church had played a very significant role in shaping her career decision. As the church and community members were there for her, she deemed it fit to pursue a Theology degree as she spent most of her time with church folk who inspired her.

R: *Did anyone influence you to do Theology?*

P4: **I could say my mom and my church...My father died when I was one month then the Lutheran church was helping. I went to crèche at the church, it's like I grew up in the church. The church is like a father to me.**

Thus, the role of the church was significant in the life of P4 and ultimately influenced her CDM. She reported that after her father's death, the church 'took care' of her and her family 'to see to it' that their basic needs were met. That experience informed her engagement in church activities leading to her choice to study Theology.

This is an example of a child who has been exposed to life roles that underpin family norms and ideals. P4 comes from a single parented religious home where she grew to hold sacred religious values that have channelled her aspirations to a Theological career. The death of her father did not leave the family desolate as the church community gathered to assist the family. This further symbolises African values of 'ubuntu' and communal engagement (Edwards et al., 1983; Mboya, 1999).



#### **4.4 Parental influences**

As mentioned in Chapter 2, parents are likely to play a major role in student career development; this was supported by the data from the present study. However, the idea that types of parenting methods would be important has not been supported in this study.

Nevertheless, a number of participants reported that their parents influenced their career choice in various ways. Some of these were direct (e.g., the parent suggested a certain career and some were indirect (e.g., participants reported seeing their parents' careers as being role models or inspiration). P12 provides an example of a direct influence:

**P12: My mom is a nurse, right. She told me that in the hospital they have lots of departments so they need psychologists, people who can counsel, they need social workers so, ya, I thought maybe social work could work for me because she is quite familiar with it.**

In terms of indirect influences, several students aligned themselves with careers because of their respect for or attachment to their parents. Some of the students' comments suggested that they idealize their parents or caregivers such that they find inspiration from them to pursue a particular career path:

**P3: My mother was a teacher, she was a qualified teacher. And that helped me and motivated me to choose, I mean to go to tertiary level and follow my path.**

Sometimes, the students observe some parental characteristics and wish to apply these characteristics in their career roles because they perceive them to be useful:

**P7: My uncle is a hard worker I also look up to him and he is still studying, he is doing his masters. My mother has also registered for masters; when I came to register, they just inspire me.**

It is interesting that these students still seemed so attached to their parents in terms of their influence on their CDM. Erikson (1950) argues that adolescents detach themselves

from their parents during the stage of searching for their own identity and sense of self. These CDM acts of ‘following’ in their parents’ footsteps may be the result of the fact that these students are in the transition stage between adolescence and adulthood.

In addition to direct and indirect influences and role modelling, some students see themselves as having inherited certain characteristics from their parents which enable them to choose careers that reflect their parents’ influence in their lives.

**P2: ...another thing is I love helping people, like in politics I think I can whether I am a politician or an analyst or a lecturer, helping people to improve their lives...I love helping people, maybe I take it from my mother because she would go out of her way to help people.**

In some instances, the career paths chosen were somewhat symbolic of their parents’ role in their lives. Thus, students who have developed independence from their parents may find a career that makes them stay close to the memory of the parental influence.

**P14: I gained a lot of values from my mother, she was very special. Like learning to love myself, the people around me and that is probably why I chose psychology**

This may be evidence of a career that presents particular characteristics similar to the parents, thus allowing students to internalize the parents who were ‘relinquished’ (Fairbairn, 1952) during adolescence.

Parental support plays a significant role in shaping students’ career decisions (Ozdemir & Hacifazlioglu, 2008). The following excerpts display how students value the role played by parental figures in their career development.

R: *How did you get to choose to do psychology?*

**P7: My mother did psychology. So then she has been helping me with research and telling me more about it, what it is and I have grown to love it.**

R: *So choosing psychology, has it only been mainly influenced by your [mother] or have there been any other people who helped you with this decision?*

P7: **No, it was my decision but she has been my inspiration.**

The student mentions that the mother has been helpful and involved and thus an inspiration during CDM because the mother has shown dedication to the career prospects of the student. Bregman & Killen (1999) suggest that students who are guided and assisted by parents in their academic endeavours tend to display high levels of motivation.

#### **4.5 Family socio-economic status**

As anticipated, the family socio-economic status had an overwhelming influence on these students' career decisions. Part of the rationale of the present study was that it is likely that some degree of disadvantage rests on many black first-year students due to the discrimination which was part of the apartheid regime.

A sub-theme that emerged was that students resented their family's low SES such that they felt that if they had had better learning opportunities and resources, they would have made good grades thus facilitating entry to more lucrative careers with more and better quality bursary opportunities (Mngadi, 2001). This resentment may be a consequence of what Marjoribanks (1979a) termed a 'getting-by' core value where the low income family does not promote academic achievement and the child is not encouraged, nor assisted, in their quests for tertiary entry.

A number of specific aspects emerged from the data which related to family socio-economic circumstances. These included perceptions about the time of entry into tertiary education (i.e., how long the period was between matric and first-year enrolment), perceptions about the choice of degree and tertiary institution, perceptions about the duration of study and perceptions about employment opportunities. These will be discussed in the following sections.

#### **4.5.1 Time of entry**

One-third of the participants reported that they did not enrol for university study immediately after completing Grade 12. All these students attributed their 'late' entry to financial constraints. They reported that their family's financial situation did not permit them to enrol; hence some sought part-time work while others stayed at home for a year or more.

**P2: I finished high school in 2005 so I could not get into university back then because I had no money and that is the only part that impacted me.**

**P5: I finished my matric in 2006 and I was not able to go to any university institution because of financial problems so I had to stay one year.**

R: *Ok so how do you feel about not being able to make it within the time that you wanted to?*

**P5: Well at first it was, it did not really sound nice but I had to accept the kind of background I have got.**

**P6: But then because of finances at home that forced me to stay one year because it was difficult until I got a job.**

This unpleasant reality reflects the adverse conditions many prospective South African students find themselves in. This applies especially to black students, due to historical disadvantage (Finchilescu & Dawes, 1998). This is the legacy of the apartheid era, which enacted segregation on a majority of non-white South Africans, who were also restricted in terms of occupation. This severely impacted on the income generation capacity of many black households resulting in the low socio-economic status of most (Makoe, 2006). Such circumstances made it extremely difficult for non-white citizens to enter into tertiary education. Hence, even after 15 years of democracy, the effects of inequality still exist among many black South African families (Finchilescu & Dawes, 1998; Makoe, 2006).

#### **4.5.2 Degree/curriculum choice**

Amundson (1995, p. 11) contends that “the way in which people make decisions is heavily influenced by factors such as their culture, economic and political events, and the interpersonal roles that they have assumed throughout life”. The choice of degree for students in this study was not only informed by their strivings, but also by their socio-economic circumstances.

Two participants reported that they were unable to follow their first choice of institution or career because of their family’s lack of financial resources. Some students opted for the extended curriculum (access) programme because of the availability of financial aid in that programme.

**P2: The problem was I did not have finances. If I take this augmented course they were going to give me finances, so that is why I’m doing this course.**

P10 also explained that she is studying on the Pietermaritzburg campus, essentially for financial reasons.

**P10: I applied last year for BSc; it was my first choice and Psychology was my second choice. They replied here at PMB first as I applied at Westville also for BSc. They told me I would be admitted into mainstream psychology but I would not get financial aid but Mrs [inaudible] from Humanities said if I needed financial aid, I would have to start in access programme so I got into the access programme. In BSc, they replied after I had completed everything; it was too late.**

*R: In your opinion what possibly stopped you from leaving this campus and go to Westville?*

**P10: It is because they offered me financial aid here and in Westville I was not offered financial aid.**

As students enter university, they then experience the predicament of career indecision as some may not have received adequate preparation and advice from family, school and community members. This is another consequence of historical disadvantage as many black family members cannot assist students with their career decisions because they themselves lack exposure to varied career opportunities (Robbins et al., 2003). It is only

since the introduction of democracy in South Africa that many black students are being afforded an opportunity to venture into specialised careers (Finchilescu & Dawes, 1998; Robbins et al., 2003). It may therefore be the case that older family members, who were limited to unskilled labour and/or other conventional professions such as nursing and teaching, do not have sufficient insight and expertise to guide their children who are prospective university students.

As suggested above, choosing a career is not a simple process whereby one simply decides based on one's goals and wishes (Amundson, 1995; Gati & Saka, 2001; Stead & Watson, 2006). Clearly, some of the participants in this study are part of the majority of young black South Africans who are still faced with limiting barriers such as socio-economic status (Finchilescu & Dawes, 1998; Mubangizi & Mubangizi, 2005). Many of these students are confronted with choosing a career essentially for economic upliftment rather than their personal aims. It is, however, also important to note that there are white students who similarly lack financial resources to enter and proceed with tertiary education. However, the majority of these have not suffered that same degree of historical disadvantage. In addition, they are likely to have received at least some degree of career guidance (see Section 4.8).

#### **4.5.3 Duration of study**

A sub-theme that profoundly influenced student career decisions related to the duration of their studies in university. Seven students raised concerns about the duration of their studies with regard to their financial limitations. This impacted in several ways: Firstly, some students had not been aware of the number of years of study that the training for their chosen career path required. Against this, four participants reported pressure from their families to complete their degrees and begin working so that they could support their families financially. Thus, the duration of the degree became a factor regarding employment opportunities; students wanted to complete within a reasonably short space of time in order to obtain employment and provide for their families.

This was particularly evident with participants who chose a psychology major. When they realised that qualifying as a psychologist required at least six years of studying, they despaired. This became a worry for students who want to be psychologists but are restricted by their financial circumstances. This further emphasizes that the lack of career information can be a barrier to effective CDM (Mashiapata, 1998; Robbins et al., 2003; Stead & Watson, 2006).

R: *Are you aware of the number of years you need to study to become a psychologist?*

P5: **They told us [in career guidance] that it takes about seven years and the problem is that my grandmother cannot afford to pay for so many years; it would have been different if I was close to my father.**

P8: **I love psychology but I usually hear people say you cannot get a job if you have a junior degree only, you have to do masters. But I cannot do masters because I want to quickly finish the degree and get a job.**

A further issue for eight participants was insufficient funds to supplement the university financial aid; thus some were anxious that they would not be able to register in subsequent years.

P8: **It is pressurizing really because what if I have studied and now that I have left my previous job, I happen to stay at home with my education. What will happen at home?**

P15: **It hurts me because others suggested that I take one year or two year courses, things that take little time, hurry-up and study and get a job; so I can say family finances are a negative effect.**

Others reported that family members did not approve of them spending many years at the university.

P5: **She [aunt] told me do I understand that I am going to spend quite a lot of years in psychology than in teaching and already I have wasted two years at home.**

R: *Had conditions been different at home do you think you would perhaps feel the same way of wanting to complete sooner?*

P8: **No I would be free; I would even study for ten years. I would not have a problem.**

#### **4.5.4 Employment opportunities**

Another concern among students was the issue of prospective employment. As discussed in the previous section, most students reported that their families expected them to complete their studies and obtain well-paying jobs. Thus students who wanted to pursue careers which appeared to have limited job opportunities experienced pressure from family members.

P8: **They are worried that if I study because I was working, what will happen at home? So they worry about I will study until when? And once I complete those many years and still not get employment so it will be a waste of time.**

Marjoribanks (1979b) argues that families tend to influence students to choose careers that lead to higher chances of employment so that the family as a whole may benefit. This may clearly conflict with the student's desires or goals as the student may be interested in a different career altogether. Two students mentioned that their families demanded that they pursue scientific careers as they appear to be more lucrative and in demand. This is further strengthened by current governmental initiatives to encourage students, particularly those previously excluded from the sciences, to now undertake training and careers in science and technology.

Thus, a number of socio-economic issues that limit or impose various restrictions on students seemed to lead to a certain level of career uncertainty and doubt amongst them. These factors have made some students even contemplate discarding their intended careers.



**P8: Sometimes that really hurts me [not receiving financial support] to such an extent that I sometimes think I should quit psychology but then again I tell myself that I want to do this.**

Among the 15 participants, only three participants were not on financial aid. This illustrates that although, due to past inequalities, most black families still face the adverse conditions of low SES; some families have now become more financially stable and can afford to support students financially as far as tertiary education is concerned.

In contrast to the above, there were four participants who reported that their family SES has had no significant influence on their career decisions. However, these students are also being assisted by financial aid like the ones who reported being affected by their family SES. Although the four participants were using financial aid, it seems their SES conditions were perceived as not being a dire frustration in their career decisions. Hence, they bring some degree of deviant meaning (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to the spectrum of SES influence on black first-year student career decisions.

However, because this group represents nearly a quarter of the sample, it seems that they furthermore represent a trend. Although these students were on financial aid, their perception of financial burden appears to be different from the others. This may suggest that the new democracy has significantly improved the socio-economic status of black households in South Africa. Similarly, this may be an indication of Dass-Brailsford's (2005) assertions that at least some black university students are resilient enough to withstand financial stresses in their quest for success. Thus, as the students experience financial limitations, they are motivated by the hope of earning in the future; hence, they regard short-term financial constraints as bearable in terms of their potential future success and security.

#### **4.6 Social and emotional support**

Student participants described various levels of interest and involvement from family members in their university lives. There seemed to be a difference here depending on

whether the student was following the family 'script' for their career choices. Students pursuing their career aspirations despite familial pressure to divert to more lucrative careers or careers perceived as having wider opportunities perhaps unsurprisingly reported receiving less support than they felt they would have had if they followed a career of family preference.

Students said they felt motivated when family members were involved and supportive and when they enquired about their adjustment to university. They reported having more confidence in their career pursuits. Clearly, those students receiving career advice from family appreciated it when family members called and asked how they were coping with the demands of the university.

**P9: They are supportive because they ask me all the time how it is going at school. Do I have any difficulties and so on?**

Among the 15 participants, three gave clear indications that they are not receiving socio-emotional support from family members. They attributed this to the career choice they had made. All three participants felt that, had they chosen a different career, they would have received emotional support and encouragement from their families.

**P8: Actually not a single person ever since I arrived here at varsity has ever called me to find out how I am doing.**

*R: Do you feel emotionally supported by your family in your career choice or university life?*

**P8: No I am all by my own. I am just like this; no one is interested in what I am studying.**

Day and Livingstone (2003) suggest that positive and confident CDM is nourished by encouraging input from family, friends and community members. It is argued that students who receive constant encouragement and support tend to display higher levels of persistence and resilience during difficult academic demands (Dass-Brailsford, 2005; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). This clearly reflects the importance of familial support on

students' academic pursuits. This is because even if a student is somewhat unsure of their career decision, the support of significant others brings confidence and the insight to re-evaluate career goals without fear of being discriminated against and/or judged (Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2007).

The other 12 students mentioned that, amongst their families and community members, some people were supportive while others were not. Among the 12 students, four described certain members of their families as less supportive. These students were from family structures where no-one in the family had been previously exposed to tertiary education or to the student's particular career choice.

These students were from the first generation in their families to attend university and it could thus be expected that such a student would receive family encouragement and support. However, family members were often described by students as unable to understand the demands of university life. They were also considered unable to advise students about academic work and the social aspect of university life. Thus, a possible reason for family members being unsupportive is that the family lacks information about tertiary education and career choices.

**P10: At home nobody cares what you are studying; you are on your own because they do not know anything about university. At home I am the only one who has been to university.**

**P13: They do not understand university so they do not know how to support me; others are even jealous. It is only my grandmother who is supportive.**

There seems to be a discrepancy between student participants' levels of expectation for support and the quantity and quality of family support they actually receive. It is also possible that, as with all perceptions, the students' perceptions in this case may be inaccurate but this does not diminish their feelings of lack of support. In contrast to the above, a pattern emerged in which seven students with one or more family members

exposed to tertiary education perceived that they received considerable social and emotional support from their families.

P7: **They are very supportive; my uncle is also very supportive ... my uncle always calls me and asks how I am doing and tells me to study and work hard.**

R: *Do you get a sense that they are supportive?*

P6: **Ya, ya they always ask how I am doing, the life on campus and if I am coping. They tell me if I have problems, they [P6's siblings] are here to help.**

Apart from social and emotional support, some participants received instrumental support. As mentioned earlier, it is suggested that this kind of support and encouragement inspires the student and develops a sense of confidence in academic work and career decisions (Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2007). Some of these students had the advantage of receiving career advice from family members, which increased their career knowledge, thus facilitating efficient CDM.

R: *Is anyone at home interested or especially supportive of your career choice?*

P5: **I have got an aunt from my father's side who is a nurse; she is quite interested because she tells me that they also do some stuff in psychology.**

R: *How did you get to choose to want to do psychology?*

P7: **My mother did psychology. So then she has been helping me with research and telling me more about it, what it is and I have grown to love it.**

Bregman & Killen (1999) suggest that students who are guided and assisted by parents in their academic endeavours tend to display high levels of motivation. Furthermore Bullock (1990), Jarvis (2005) and Urdan et al. (2007) state that children who receive advice and guidance in their vocational lives tend to achieve higher marks.

#### **4.7 Individual student factors**

Notwithstanding that career decisions are influenced by environmental influences such as the family and the community, the students' individual strivings also significantly influence the choices embarked on. The students talked about how, despite familial influence, their career decisions are often an expression of their goals. P6 suggested that his intrinsic motivation grew in response to observing his siblings.

**P6: I was working and I was not paying attention to other things so by observing my siblings, even those younger than I, I saw that they are getting ahead and I am still running around one job then I decided that let me just pull out from work and go to university.**

P6 felt that he probably would not have been motivated to pursue a degree without this. Furthermore, he reported that observing his siblings in professional roles encouraged him to study towards a career with a 'professional' title. This would be indicative of the need for self-respect as a primary determinant of the career decision (Maslow, 1956). This need for professionalism may be an individual striving that has, however, been motivated by observing the success of siblings. P6 went on to say:

**Let me go to university so that I can also get what my siblings got, that I may also have that respect and dignity. Actually at home it is a home of people who love to study.**

P2 also said that his career choice was not motivated by money but rather his own passion towards politics.

**P2: It was not [career choice] motivated by money you know, that I am going to earn this much, but it is my passion to learn politics**

The above excerpts show that the student has developed his own philosophical belief systems that inform his life's choices including his career decision (Marcia, 1966, in Grotevant, 1979).

This is an example of a career decision being a result of a student's internal ambitions despite environmental influences (Roe, 1986, in Ozdemir & Hacifazlioglu, 2008).

#### **4.8 Career education and guidance**

Among the 15 student participants, eight received career education or guidance in high school. Five of the eight students perceived career education to have been important and helpful for their CDM.

**P1: I think it helped a lot because I did not know what I was going to study, ya, and I did not know what I was interested in, ya. It helped a lot.**

**P5: From my previous school, we had career guidance; they taught us about careers and brought people who did those kinds of careers and they had to explain how does it work and I was so interested in psychology.**

**P10: I think it helped because geology was going to be my first choice but because I got to know about the requirements and I did not meet them, I then applied for BSc and Psych.**

The above excerpts show the importance of career education and guidance as, in this instance, it served to inform the student of their choices as they reflected on their abilities and the requirements needed for different careers. This indeed concurs with the views of Avent (1998, in Akhurst & Mkhize, 2006) that career education “provides knowledge about courses in tertiary institutions, their links to career choices, and the entry requirements” (p.141). This helps the student to select a career which matches their goals while being knowledgeable of the limits that may exist.

Career education also seemed to help students understand the differences between various higher learning institutions. This further enabled the students to choose careers based on what institutions offer and what they perceive to be relevant for them.

The excerpt below illustrates that career education has helped P12 understand the differences between institutions and to make a decision based on that knowledge that will suit his academic needs and aspirations.

**P12: Back while I was at school I thought, ya, it is helpful because now I know how to degree the institution [weigh his options based on what he has heard or learnt about the differences between universities and technikons], to evaluate and see, this institution is bad because of this and this, this one is good because, that is why I chose UKZN university not technikon.**

The three participants who reported that they did not see how they benefited from the career education they received felt that it had been 'poorly structured'. This meant that their career education was not fully informative. Students were therefore unable to understand the complex opportunities available in the vocational world and were not able to adequately decide about their careers based on the information received as it was so limited. As these were students from disadvantaged backgrounds, it is expected that their career knowledge would be limited to the more common careers of their parents like teaching and nursing. The problems these participants faced in their career 'guidance' clearly reflects the position of Akhurst and Mkhize (2006) who argue that, where career education is offered, it should be relevant to the contextual issues of the particular students receiving it; by and large, it should seek to bring awareness and insight that will help the student through their CDM. Thus, career education should aim to inform students about the many opportunities available and inform them about how to enter such careers. In particular, students need exposure to the vast career options available so that they can contribute to the advancement of their communities and thus be relevant to the needs of their communities.

Among the seven who did not experience career education, five reported that they would have appreciated having the opportunity to receive it as they thought it would have been an advantage before one enrolls for tertiary education. Students believed that, through career education, they could have made insightful choices which were founded on factual

knowledge and understanding. The other two thought it was unnecessary and that it would not have made any difference in their current career choice.

R: *Do you think receiving career guidance would have influenced your career decision?*

P9: **In career guidance they teach you how to choose your career. If I had that information it could have been easier.**

R: *Do you think receiving career guidance would have influenced your career decision?*

P13: **Yes maybe I would be doing agriculture because I am now learning more about it and I am interested in it.**

One student lamented the fact that he did not receive career education and guidance from teachers but instead received criticism and rejection which has led him to a career which he would not have undertaken had he received adequate knowledge and assistance.

P13: **At school they tend to misjudge you. If you do not make it to top ten, then you cannot do physical science so you will not go to physics, go to other subjects maybe history because they perceived people in history classes as fools. I was also a victim of being sent to history class and I did not know that I could change because around Standard 7 [Grade 9] I was still not serious. When I got to the next grade I got into top ten then the teachers wondered how I got to the history class and I told them I was sent by some teacher and they said I should not be here but there, by then it was already too late I could not go back, you see. That affected me in school meaning that I did not receive support and career guidance.**

Career education appears to be a resource that many underprivileged students perceive to be instrumental, or at least potentially helpful, in shaping their career development (Akhurst & Mkhize, 2006; Naidoo, 1999). Adequate career education may facilitate the process of self reflection among students and allow them to ponder on their abilities and seek opinions from family about their characteristics in order to match or align their vocational abilities with familial expectations and observations (Vondracek et al., 1986).



#### **4.9 Summary**

This chapter has reported and discussed the results emerging from the reports of the student participants. As expected, various factors pertaining to family have had a major influence in participant CDM. However, the different structures of family composition have not been found to be particularly influential. Cultural aspects, such as the African worldview of collectivism, were also found to have a considerable influence in student career decisions. Parental influences were also found to be a significant factor in students' CDM. This was anticipated as many studies suggest that parental influence plays a major role in children's vocational life. Lastly, the data concerning the socio-economic status of families exposed many of the challenges that students face regarding their career decisions.

In terms of family process influences, as anticipated, there were themes suggesting the importance of familial socio-emotional support for novice university students and the amount of influence socio-emotional support is perceived to have on CDM, academic motivation and success.

The chapter also discussed individual factors that influence student career decisions and lastly reflected the importance of relevant career education and guidance that seeks to address students' psycho-social and vocational needs taking into account the contextual factors of students.

The next chapter summarises the whole study. It will evaluate the objectives of the study, the relevance of the methodology, consider limitations of this study and finally recommend further investigation into areas of concern.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

#### 5.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to understand black first-year students' perceptions of their families' influence in their career decisions. Based on an assumption that black students are more likely to have had limited exposure to career information and guidance given their historical disadvantages, the study aimed to tease out family elements which might be a barrier in first-year black students' career decisions. The qualitative information gathered from student participants was useful in understanding the complex family and community dynamics that affect student career decisions.

The study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- How do student participants perceive family composition to have affected their CDM?
- How do student participants perceive parental figures and/or parenting style to have affected their CDM?
- How do student participants perceive family social and emotional support to have affected their CDM?
- How do student participants perceive family socio-economic status to have affected their CDM?

As anticipated in the introduction of this study, various family circumstances were reported to have played significant roles in shaping the student participants' career decisions. In terms of family composition, the extremely fractured nature of South African families was apparent in the fact that only two of 15 participants had been raised in an intact family structure. However, for these 15 participants as a whole, family composition difficulties did not seem to have negatively impacted on their CDM. However, parents and caregivers were viewed as important contributors in student career decisions, in terms of both direct and indirect influences. In addition, the data pertaining

to family socio-economic status clearly showed what a major role this plays in student career decisions. This had an impact in terms of delayed entry to tertiary study, choice of institution, duration of study and potential employment opportunities.

Apart from the family structure factors reflected above, family process factors were also significant. These included the positive effects of family support and involvement, and some participants spoke movingly about the perceived lack of support they experienced. Participants also spoke about how their experiences of support and interest seemed to be related to the family's contact with, or experience of, tertiary study. Several participants also reported feeling pressure from their families' expectations on them to complete their studies quickly so that they could begin contributing to (and repaying) their families.

Some individual factors were also identified as important. These included the expected developmental factors as well as factors related to both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Lastly, participants spoke about their experiences of career guidance or education, with some reporting what they did experience as helpful, and others lamenting either the poor quality of the career help they received or its complete lack.

## **5.2 Value of the study**

This study was motivated by the fact that, post 1994, the number of career options available to black students has increased. As opportunities become available, it is inevitable that many black families will be sending their first generation of students to university. A study of this nature is important to capture the family and other relevant social and community dynamics surrounding the career decision-making processes of black students in the post-apartheid era. The role of the present study was to contribute to the body of knowledge in career psychology to further enhance the discipline and to bring in new insight to career decision theories. This was achieved by linking individual student career decisions with familial influences which are important contributors in career development particularly among black South Africans (Stead & Watson, 2006).

### **5.3 Limitations of the study**

This study used purposive sampling in order to obtain participants who would be appropriate to address the research questions posed. This method was useful for this study as it allowed the researcher to receive adequate and essential data. However, the study only used a sample of first-year students and did not gather data from students in other levels of study. Furthermore, the study only used black participants. Although the sampling method (approaching the SCC) served its purpose in obtaining appropriate first-year participants, a wider search into other departments, such as the Centre for Science Access (CSA) and other faculties, would have most likely have led to the inclusion of students from other faculties into the sampling pool.

The study, therefore, has limitations in terms of maximum variation sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Maximum variation sampling involves including participants who present a variety of differences in multiple levels to further strengthen arguments and hypotheses (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Obtaining views of students in other levels of study such as second year, third year and fourth year would have allowed for greater depth and more understanding of influences among various students. Furthermore, obtaining participants from other races would also strengthen the arguments of contrasts (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Wolcott, 1994).

### **5.4 Recommendations**

Career decision-making is a task which requires personal responsibility and strategy. The ability to strategise and manoeuvre complex educational goals is not an exiguous matter particularly to a novice tertiary education student. Thus it is vital to provide early and continued support and supervision to first-year students especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition, it would be most useful for universities and other tertiary institutions to adopt a holistic career counselling model which focuses on the student's family and other contextual variables. This would be particularly helpful in identifying the student's needs thus informing how to provide relevant help and support.

Students would also be helped by an emphasis on career development as a continuous phase that can be adjusted from time to time depending on the individual's goals and not just a once-off decision that can either be correct or wrong. This would promote career maturity by increasing self-discovery and reducing CDM anxieties. In addition, access programmes which offer foundational courses allowing students to establish themselves gradually within the university system are credible initiatives which support students' aspirations.

As a qualitative study, these results are not generalizable to other black first-year students in tertiary institutions in South Africa. Thus, further quantitative research using large, randomized samples, may be helpful in order to explore some of the issues which emerged in the present study.

High school career education and guidance, combined with university support services such as counselling and financial aid, can be useful tools to address students' psycho-social and vocational needs. These services can anchor students and gradually build their confidence in the university context.

Lastly, further research on family influences is recommended particularly to obtain family members' perceptions around student career decisions. This would further enhance understanding the dynamics which students experience in relation to those most influential to them. This would also create more avenues of research and diversity of intervention in career psychology. This could provide an alternative to the conventional Western ideologies of career psychology (Akhurst & Mkhize, 2006).

## **5.5 Conclusion**

Many career opportunities are now available to previously disadvantaged black students (Robbins et al., 2003). Yet even though these opportunities exist, many students lack adequate exposure and knowledge on how to use these to their maximum benefit. In addition, because of previous disadvantage, financial instability and shortages have been shown to have adverse effects on student career decisions (Dass-Brailsford, 2005; Pimpa,

2005). The family and community provide the context within which these dynamics play out. The family, as the first institution that provides a child with life's lessons and values (Sithole, 1997) should be instrumental in shaping and moulding the young student's vocational future. It is imperative that families and communities support students in their career aspirations. Lastly, the researcher of the present study argues that career education is essential in order to enhance the first-year students' knowledge and confidence so that they can make reasonable judgements and be able to articulate their career aims to their families based on the knowledge they have received. It is argued that this is likely to lead to more confident and crystallized CDM and to facilitate the necessary support from families and communities for their career quests.

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## Appendix 1: Initial Contact Form

### FACULTY OF HUMANITIES, DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

#### School of Psychology

#### Agreement to be contacted for research participation

My name is Zipho Mhlongo and I am a Masters student in the School of Psychology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus. I am researching the influence of the family on career decisions made by black University of KwaZulu-Natal first-year students.

This study requires the participants to participate in an interview in order to investigate their experiences with their families and career decisions. Participants' identity will remain anonymous throughout the study and confidentiality will be maintained. The participants and their details will only be accessed by the researcher. Participants will be protected from any form of emotional and psychological harm.

If you are interested in participating in the study and agree to be contacted about this, please supply your e-mail address and cellular phone number in order to arrange for consultation.

Thank you.

**Zipho Mhlongo**

Name: .....

Age: .....

Cell phone number .....

E-mail address .....





## Appendix 2: Consent Form

### FACULTY OF HUMANITIES, DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

#### School of Psychology

My name is Zipho Mhlongo; I am a Masters student in the school of psychology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus. I am researching the influence of the family on career decisions made by black University of KwaZulu-Natal first-year students.

This study requires you to participate in an audio recorded interview in order to investigate your experiences with your family and career decisions. Your identity will remain anonymous throughout the study and confidentiality will be maintained. The participants' details will only be known by the researcher. My supervisor and other authorized parties such as markers will have access to the interview transcripts but no identifying information will be included. Participants will be protected from any form of emotional and psychological harm. The material recorded during the project will be secured and remain confidential. The participants are at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time should they wish to discontinue their involvement. Furthermore, a decision not to participate will not result in any form of disadvantage to the participants.

I..... (Full names of participant) ..... (Age of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project. I have a right to enquire about any aspect of this study, and to withdraw at any time should I wish to do so.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Researcher:** Zipho Mhlongo. Contact - Cell: 083 963 0653 or [203510833@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:203510833@ukzn.ac.za)  
(Qualifications: B Psych, University of Zululand)

**Research supervisor:** Vivien O'Neill. Contact - Office: 033 260 6180 or [oneilv@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:oneilv@ukzn.ac.za) (Qualifications: MA, University of Natal)



### **Appendix 3: Interview Schedule**

#### **FACULTY OF HUMANITIES, DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

##### **School of Psychology**

###### Degree / Career choice background

How did you get to choose what you would do after school?

Did anyone in your family influence this process? How?

Tell me about your subjects / degree / career plans

How confident are you about your choices?

How do family members feel about your studies / career choice?

###### Family

Please tell me about your family. Who are your caregivers or family members? Who lives with you at home?

What are your parents / caregivers like? Are they strict? Firm? Too lenient? Please explain. Can you give examples of your parents' actions?

Is your family able to support you financially while you study?

Have family finances had an impact on your study/ career choices?

If family finances were different, do you think this would have impacted on your career decision?

Does anyone at home have experience of tertiary education? Tell me more.

Is anyone at home especially interested in or supportive (or not supportive) of your studies? In what way? What is that like for you?

###### Secondary school

Did you receive career guidance and education at school? Tell me about it

How involved were family members in your schooling?

###### Other influences

Has anything else influenced your career choice? (Media, the economy, culture, law of supply and demand, etc.) Please give examples of these?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me or ask me?