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SNAP SURVEY RESULTS REPORT: PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE CAREER CHOICES OF WOMEN IN NAMIBIA

IN 2014, JENNY MARCIONETTI OF THE UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES AND ARTS OF SOUTHERN SWITZERLAND QUIETLY RELEASED THE RESULTS OF RESEARCH SHE HAD CONDUCTED ON FACTORS INFLUENCING CAREER INDECISION IN TEENAGERS IN SOUTHERN SWITZERLAND. Given

the fact that teenagers exist primarily within the contexts of family and school during these periods of their lives,

these contexts are ideal for evaluation with regards to the roles each play in the establishment of a teenager's professional identity. Sister Namibia was interested in the findings of a similar enquiry amongst Namibian women.

Methodology: eMail via SurveyMonkey

Survey population: n = 360

Survey responses: n = 69 (19%)

Date: 15 – 25 March, 2018

In March 2018, Sister Namibia conducted a ten-question snap survey to determine and establish the

impact of parental involvement on the career choices of women in Namibia. Participation was entirely voluntary and not incentivised. It was a retrospective or regressive survey that asked of adult participants to recall specific experiences and perceptions from childhood and youth. Even though the survey was limited in terms of resources and conducted exclusively via email, the results have proven tremendously interesting.

Most of the survey participants, 90%, are economically active women between 19 and 49 years of age. Of these participants, 75% describe

what they currently do as a career and not as a job (the latter being defined in the survey as a short-term activity performed in exchange for monetary compensation). With regards to the family context of teenagers, the majority of the participants, 74%, described the parenting style of their parents and guardians as 'mature, responsible and authoritative', 15% described it as 'authoritarian and controlling', another 8% classified it as 'permissive and indulgent' and finally, 3% of the participants described it as 'neglectful and dismissive' of their needs.

When asked whether they agreed that their parents and guardians were good examples personally, socially and professionally, 77% of the participants strongly agreed, whereas 52% and 25% agreed with the statement that their parents were good personal, social and professional examples. Interestingly, 23% of survey participants did not agree with the statement that their parents were good examples to them on personal, social and professional levels.

In her seminal study, Marcionetti mentioned that one of the difficulties adding to career indecision in teenagers is that there exists a complete absence of thought about the future and by default, a career, for man. This lack of visualising and planning for the future relates directly to the family context of teenagers and young children. A critical question was therefore included in the snap survey conducted by Sister Namibia in that participants were asked how often, as a child or teenager, their parents had discussed with them their expectations regarding their education, careers and lifestyles. Conversations about the future, including verbalised expectations around educational attainment and possible future careers, literally create and shape 'a future' of some sort which will in turn be considered as acceptable or unacceptable in a cognitive negotiation and compromise process by the young child or teenager, as she matures. In response to this question, 78% of the participants said that their parents and guardians regularly and often discussed with them their expectations regarding their education, careers and lifestyles, while 17% of the participants said that similar conversations had occurred but once or never. Refining juvenile ambi-

tion into a realistic career path with milestones along the way has been shown as a critical step in establishing commitment to achieving desired career goals. The last option in this question therefore asked of participants whether their parents or guardians had gone so far as to design a career path with them, indicative of support and commitment in helping them achieve their desired goals. Alarming, only 5% of the participants in the snap survey said their parents and guardians had helped them design a career path. The results strongly contradict the majority of participants' claims that their parents and guardians are/were good examples for them personally, socially and professionally, and that the majority of parenting styles were 'mature, responsible and authoritative' in nature.

Career indecision is also linked to low levels of emotional intelligence (EQ). Individuals with low levels of empathy, self-awareness and self-knowledge have difficulty making career-related decisions. For this reason, two questions were included in the snap survey to assess the opportunities the participants had as children and teenagers to discover, explore and develop their skills, and pursue their own interests and ambitions. The majority of participants, 76%, said their parents/guardians had granted them the freedom and more importantly, the time, to discover, explore and develop their skills. A perturbing 24% of participants said they were not granted the freedom nor the time to discover, explore and develop their skills. In response to the second half of the question, 81% of the participants said they were allowed as children to pursue their own interests and ambitions, while 19% of the participants said they were not allowed as children to pursue their own interests and

ambitions by their parents/guardians.

This is where it gets interesting. Participants of the snap survey were asked who or what had played pivotal roles in their career choices in response to which 39% said they themselves, independently, had made the choice to pursue a specific career. This result is of primary importance because it shows that just under 40% of the participants had sufficient self-knowledge and self-awareness (EQ) to feel confident enough to independently make career-related decisions. It supports the results of a previous question that relates to parents / guardians discussing and designing career paths with their children and teenagers where only 5% of the participants said their parents had actively participated and helped with planning and designing their future careers. On the other hand, this result again contradicts the responses of survey participants, 78% of whom had said their parents often and regularly discussed with them their expectations regarding education, careers and lifestyles because only 37% of the participants said their parents and guardians had played pivotal roles in their earlier choices. Logic dictates this percentage would be much higher if discussions about educational outcomes and future careers had occurred often and regularly. A mere 13% of the participants said that a counsellor, friends, teachers and peers had played pivotal roles in their choices of careers which, again, serves to underline the importance of parental involvement in the career choices of women, and only 11% of the participants attributed their choices of career to external environmental factors such as political, social and economic circumstances.

Finally, the participants

were asked whether or not the expectations of parents and guardians combined with nurturing and supportive family environments will serve to encourage or discourage women in making satisfactory career choices. To this question the majority of participants, 78%, responded that women should feel encouraged, 16% said that parental guidance combined with a supportive and nurturing family environments will neither encourage nor discourage women to make satisfactory career choices and 6% said the aforementioned will serve to actively discourage women from making satisfactory career choices.

Due to its limitations, the snap Sister Namibia survey cannot be considered as representative of the experiences and perceptions of the majority of women in Namibia. The snap survey results are significant in that they highlighted something extraordinary, namely that only 5% of the participants said their parents and/or guardians had helped them with plotting a career path, while 37% said the support of their parents and/or guardians had played a pivotal role in the choices of career which begs the question: how important is parental involvement in the career choices made by women? Despite 78% of the participants claiming their parents/guardians regularly discussed with them their expectations of education, careers and lifestyles, the overwhelming majority, 63%, attributed their career choices to actors and factors other than their parents/guardians, with almost 40% claiming to have made their career decisions independently, by themselves. This contradiction points towards insufficient parental support in the forms of career guidance and planning (allocation of resources) for the futures of young children and teenagers. ♀