

Effects of Social Relationships on the Association between Family Economic Status and Adolescents' Career Identity

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가족 경제 상황과 청소년의 진로정체감과의 관계에서 사회관계의 매개 효과에 대한 연구

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Abstract This study aimed to examine the associations between family economic status, social relationships, and the career identity of adolescents. The study assessed the mediating effects of social relationships on the relationship between economic status and the career identity of adolescents, utilizing data from the Korean Children and Youth Panel Survey (KCYPs). The result indicated that family economic status was related to the quality of the social relationships that significantly affected the career identity of adolescents. These findings suggested that the inequality in career development of adolescents due to family economic status could be reduced by promoting positive social relationships. Convergent interventions that help adolescents to build positive social relationships would be necessary to improve the career outcomes of those from low-income families.

Key Words : Social relationship, Family economic status, Adolescent, Career identity, Career development

요약 본 연구는 가족의 경제적 상황과 청소년의 사회적 관계 및 진로정체감 간의 상관관계를 규명하는 것을 목적으로 한다. 본 연구는 한국아동·청소년 패널데이터를 활용하여 가정의 경제적 상황과 청소년의 진로정체감 간의 관계를 확인하고, 사회관계의 매개 효과를 검증하고자 하였다. 연구 결과, 가족의 경제 상황이 사회관계의 질적인 측면과 상관관계를 가지며, 이러한 청소년의 긍정적인 사회관계는 진로정체감에 유의미한 영향을 미치는 것으로 나타났다. 이러한 연구 결과는 가정의 소득 수준에 따른 청소년의 진로발달 격차를 긍정적인 사회관계의 증진을 통해 완화할 수 있다는 가능성을 보여준다. 저소득 가정 청소년들의 진로 성과를 향상시키기 위해서 긍정적인 사회관계의 형성을 돕는 통합된 진로지도 개입이 요구된다.

주제어 : 사회관계, 가족의 경제 상황, 청소년, 진로정체감, 진로발달

1. Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine associations among family economic status,

social relationships and the career identity in adolescence. In particular, the study assessed the mediating effect of social relationships on the association between family economic status and

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the career identity of adolescents. Career identity formation is one of the central developmental tasks that adolescents must achieve[1]. Holland[2] defined career identity as the possession of a clear and stable picture of one's goals, interests, personality, and talents[3]. Individuals who have a concrete career identity have a clear sense of their interests, talents, and personality characteristics and thereby have the confidence to make informed career decisions[1]. The failure to form a clear and stable career identity often results in career indecision[1,4].

Career maturity is considered as a major outcome of high school education. High-school students are required to decide whether they wish to pursue post-secondary education or enter the labor market after graduation. The direction of an individual's career and life can be determined by the level of career decision-making while in high school[5]. Therefore, it is very important for high-school students to form a clear and stable career identity. However, many college students reported that they had difficulties in deciding their major when entering college because of their lack of confidence in their capacity and aptitude[5]. Therefore, this study examined the career identity of high-school students who were at a crucial phase of career exploration.

Social relationships refer to the connections that exist between people who have recurring interactions that are perceived by the participants to have personal meaning[6]. Intimate social relationships and social supports would contribute to the formation of career identity in adolescence. Previous studies consistently found that close relationships with friends and family members affected the wellbeing of adolescents[7,8]. For example, family cohesion and parental attachment helped adolescents develop career identity and make proper career decisions[9-12].

Economic status is considered a significant factor that affects adolescents' career identity

formation. Previous research suggests that the educational attainment of parents and their income are significantly related to the career identity of their offspring[13,14]. Individuals with higher economic backgrounds tend to be more successful in developing their career aspirations and are generally better prepared for the world of work[15].

However, some findings suggest that the socioeconomic status of parents does not directly affect the career identity of youth. Kim[16] found that economic wealth positively affected the career identity of adolescents only when high levels of social capital existed among family members. This finding suggests a possible mediating effect of social relationships on the correlation between family economic status and career development of adolescents. For example, improvements in family income may be beneficial for parent-child relationships[17-19], and thereby positively affect the career development of youth.

Conger, Conger, and Martin[20] reviewed previous studies and suggested the family stress model as theoretical frameworks that might explain the associations among family wealth or income, parent-child relationships, and children's development. According to the family stress model, family economic hardship results in parents' emotional and behavioral problems and thereby adversely affects parenting behaviors[20]. It has been observed that harsh, inconsistent, and uninvolved parenting has a detrimental effect on children's development.

On the other hand, according to the investment model, economic resources increase the investments that parents make for their children's development, thus promoting a wide range of academic and social competencies in children[21,22]. Therefore, economic resources can contribute directly to the career development of adolescents by providing various career-related activities and private educational opportunities.

In contrast, some studies proposed that high socioeconomic status might not be beneficial to the career development of children. According to Kim and Ahn's findings[23], parental socioeconomic status affected career decision making through achievement pressure. The high expectations of parents can burden their children and thereby deteriorate children's career decision-making efficacy. Therefore, there is a possibility that the high socioeconomic status of parents can affect the career development of adolescents adversely by imposing excessive pressure on their children to obtain high academic achievement.

Beyond parent-child relationships, socioeconomic status is related to the structure and quality of social relationships. People with high socioeconomic status are likely not only to engage with more people but also to gain more resources from their social network[24,25]. On the contrary, people with low socioeconomic status are more likely to experience social exclusion and thereby are less likely to mobilize adequate resources and opportunities from their social ties[26-29].

In adolescence, young people spend more time outside the home, and their social network is extended to include people outside the family. Social relationships with peers and teachers come to have important effects on adolescents. Peer attachment has been found to be a significant factor in the formation of career identity during adolescence. According to previous studies, adolescents who had close relationships with their friends tended to report high levels of career maturity[30]. In addition, adolescents who developed good relationships with teachers tended to report a higher level of career maturity compared to those who did not[31].

Overall, the present study aimed to examine if social relationships would mediate the association between the economic status and the career identity of adolescents. Social bonds with parents, friends, and teachers may be important

sources of support in developing stable career goals and making career decisions.

The study addressed the following research hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. Adolescents from affluent families are more likely to experience positive social relationships compared with those from poorer families (Model 1s).

Hypothesis 2. Adolescents from affluent families are more likely to develop concrete career identities compared with those from poorer families (Model 2)

Hypothesis 3. The quality of social relationships mediates the relationship between a family's economic status and career identity in adolescence (Model 3s)

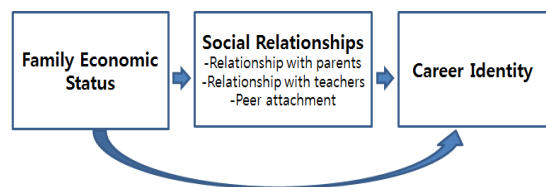


Fig. 1. Research model

2. Research Methods

2.1 Data and sample

The study analyzed the data from the middle-school student panel in the Korean Children and Youth Panel Survey (KCYPS) collected by the National Youth Policy Institute. The first set of data from the KCYPS was collected in 2010, when members of this panel were in the first grade of middle school. At the time of the sixth survey, they were third-grade high school students. The study utilized the data collected in the sixth survey. The dataset contained information from 2,351 individuals.

2.2 Measurement

2.2.1 Family economic status

Family economic status was reported by the respondents, who evaluated their economic status by choosing one of five alternatives indicating economic condition, from very poor to very rich.

2.2.2 Parent-child relationship

Parent-child relationship was evaluated on the basis of parental behaviors. The parental behavior scale consisted of six dimensions: parental monitoring, warmth and support, inductive reasoning, over-expectation, over-interference, and inconsistency. The result of factor analysis indicated that parental behaviors could be further reduced to three factors: (1) parental monitoring and warmth, (2) inductive reasoning, and (3) negative parenting behaviors (over-expectation, over-interference, inconsistency). Values for Cronbach's alpha were 0.83, 0.83, and 0.85, respectively.

2.2.3 Peer attachment

Peer attachment was measured with a nine-item self-report scale that asked to what degree the respondents communicated with, felt close to, and trusted his or her friends. Cronbach's alpha was 0.84 for the scale of peer attachment.

2.2.4 Social relationship with teachers

Respondents' relationships with teachers were measured with a five-item scale that asked to what degree the respondents felt close to their teachers. Survey respondents indicated how much they agreed with each item using a four-point Likert scale (1-disagree, 2-somewhat disagree, 3-somewhat agree, 4-agree). Cronbach's alpha was 0.84.

2.2.5 Career identity

Adolescents' career identity was measured by the total scores of eight items, with higher scores indicating a more concrete career identity. The total scores were divided by the number of items. Each item of the scale asked respondents whether they had a job field that they wanted to pursue in the future and how much their decisions were specific and concrete. Cronbach's alpha was 0.89 for the scale of career identity.

2.3 Data Analysis

A three-step regression analysis proposed by Baron and Kenny[32] was conducted to assess the mediating effect of social relationships. The first step of regression analyses used economic status as an independent variable that predicted the social relationships of adolescents (Model 1s). The second regression model (Model 2) employed economic status as the independent variable that predicted career identity. For the third step, the regression model (Model 3s) used family economic status and the quality of social relationship as predictors of career identity. If the quality of social relationships remained a significant predictor of career identity while family economic status no longer predicted the career identity of adolescents, the mediating effect was supported[33]. The variables of sex, school types, and academic achievement were included in the analysis models as control variables.

In addition, the Sobel test was used to test the statistical significance of the mediating effect, as suggested by MacKinnon[34].

Research models were proven to satisfy the assumptions of regression analyses such as linear relationships, multivariate normality, no multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity.

3. Results

3.1 Results of Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 below shows the characteristics of the respondents. About half (50.5%) were boys. Eighteen percent of respondents were enrolled in career high schools. More than one third of respondents evaluated their academic achievement as satisfactory. Seventy respondents evaluated their academic achievement as excellent while 47 respondents evaluated their academic achievement as unacceptable. About two thirds of respondents perceived their economic status as neither poor nor rich. Respondents reported a higher level of peer attachment than positive parent-child relationships (e.g., parental monitoring, warmth, and inductive reasoning).

Table 1. Results of descriptive statistics

Variables		Frequency	(%)		
Sex	Boys	1014	(50.5)		
	Girls	994	(49.5)		
Type of school	General	1637	(81.5)		
	career	371	(18.5)		
Academic achievement	7-Excellent	70	(3.5)		
	6-Very Good	185	(9.2)		
	5-Good	390	(19.4)		
	4-Satisfactory	791	(39.4)		
	3-Acceptable	340	(16.9)		
	2-Barely acceptable	183	(9.1)		
	1-Unacceptable	47	(2.3)		
Economic status	Poor	100	(5.0)		
	Somewhat poor	261	(18.0)		
	Neither poor nor rich	1269	(63.2)		
	Somewhat rich	247	(12.3)		
	Rich	131	(6.5)		
Variables		Mean	SD	Min	Max
Peer attachment		3.11	0.43	1	4
Relationship with teachers		2.95	0.59	1	4
Parenting behaviors	Parental monitoring and warmth	3.05	0.47	1	4
	Negative parenting behaviors	2.82	0.53	1	4
	Inductive reasoning	2.77	0.61	1	4
Career identity		3.02	0.59	1	4

3.2 Economic status and social relationships

Table 2 below shows that Adolescents reporting lower economic status were less likely to experience positive parenting behaviors, such as parental monitoring, warmth and support, and inductive reasoning

Table 2. Associations between the economic status and positive parenting behaviors

Variables	Model 1-1 (Monitoring and warmth)				Model 1-2 (Inductive reasoning)			
	B	SE	Beta	t	B	SE	Beta	t
(Constant)	2.45	0.06	-	39.05***	2.32	0.08	-	28.18***
Sex	0.04	0.02	0.05	2.10*	-0.08	0.03	-0.06	-2.78**
Type of school	-0.03	0.03	-0.03	-1.26	0.05	0.03	0.03	1.42
Academic achievement	0.06	0.01	0.16	7.12***	0.04	0.01	0.09	3.93***
Economic status	0.08	0.01	0.14	6.44***	0.10	0.02	0.14	6.31***
F (df)	30.03 (4, 2003)***				18.53 (4, 2003)***			
R ²	0.06				0.04			
Adjusted R ²	0.06				0.03			
SE of the estimate	0.46				0.60			

*p< .05; **p< .01; ***p< .001

However, as shown in Table 3, family economic status was not correlated to negative parenting behaviors such as over-expectation, over-interference, and inconsistency. Overall, family economic status affected positive parenting behaviors, but not negative parenting behaviors. Parents with high socioeconomic status tend to be warm and supportive, be aware their offsprings' whereabouts, conduct and companions and help their offsprings understand the effect of their behaviors on others. However, high economic status does not reduce the negative parenting behaviors such as imposing excessive pressure on their children's achievement.

Table 3. Associations between the economic status and negative parenting behaviors

Variables	Model 1-3 (Negative parenting behaviors)			
	B	SE	Beta	t
(Constant)	2.55	0.07	-	35.72***
Sex	0.11	0.02	0.10	4.68***
Type of school	0.06	0.03	0.05	2.10*
Academic achievement	0.02	0.01	0.05	2.18*
Economic status	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.25
F (df)	7.88 (4, 2003)***			
R ²	0.02			
Adjusted R ²	0.01			
SE of the estimate	0.53			

*p< .05; **p< .01; ***p< .001

As shown in Table 4, adolescents who perceived themselves to be "very rich" also had stronger attachment to their peers. These findings suggest that family economic status is positively related to the quality of social relationships with peers.

Table 4. Associations between the economic status and peer attachment

Variables	Model 1-4 (Relationship with peers)			
	B	SE	Beta	t
(Constant)	2.77	0.06	-	47.75***
Sex	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.63
Type of school	-0.02	0.02	-0.02	-0.76
Academic achievement	0.04	0.01	0.11	4.89***
Economic status	0.04	0.01	0.09	4.10***
F (df)	12.76 (4, 2003)***			
R ²	0.03			
Adjusted R ²	0.02			
SE of the estimate	0.43			

*p< .05; **p< .01; ***p< .001

However, as shown in Table 5, family economic status was not related to adolescents' relationships with teachers significantly. Levels of academic achievement is the most significant predictor of adolescents' relationships with their teachers (t=7.00, p<0.001). In addition, boys seem to have better relationships with their teachers than girls (t=-3.76, p<0.01).

Table 5. Associations between the economic status and relationships with teachers

Variables	Model 1-4 (relationship with teachers)			
	B	SE	Beta	t
(Constant)	2.75	0.08	-	34.68***
Sex	-0.10	0.03	-0.08	-3.76***
Type of school	0.04	0.03	0.03	1.22
Academic achievement	0.07	0.01	0.16	7.00***
Economic status	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.77
F (df)	16.73 (4, 2003)***			
R ²	0.03			
Adjusted R ²	0.03			
SE of the estimate	0.58			

*p< .05; **p< .01; ***p< .001

3.3 Economic status, social relationships, and career identity formation

Least squares regression analyses were conducted to further unpack the relationship between adolescents' economic status and their career identity. Two steps of analysis were conducted to examine whether social relationships mediated the correlation between the economic status and career identity

Table 6. Associations between the economic status and career identity

Variables	Model 2			
	B	SE	Beta	t
(Constant)	21.94	0.56	-	38.87
Sex	-0.18	0.21	-0.02	-0.89
Type of school	-1.17	0.27	-0.10	-4.36***
Academic achievement	0.48	0.08	0.13	5.85***
Economic status	0.25	0.12	0.04	1.97*
F (df)	16.08 (4, 2001)***			
R ²	0.03			
Adjusted R ²	0.03			
SE of the estimate	4.63			

*p< .05; **p< .01; ***p< .001

Model 2 in Table 6 included the economic status as an explanatory variable affecting career identity. The result indicated that family economic status was positively related to the

development of career identity. Adolescents from families with high economic status were more likely to develop concrete career identity than those from families with low economic status. In addition, types of schools and levels of academic achievement were significant predictors of the career development of adolescents. Adolescents who were in academic high schools and with high academic achievement had more concrete career identity than those in vocational high schools and with low academic achievement

Model 3s added the variables of social relationships (i.e., relationships with peers and parents,) as an explanatory variable in Model 2. Table 7 shows that the economic status was significantly related to the development of career identity among adolescents. However, after adding the variables regarding social relationships, economic status ceased to be a significant predictor of career identity ($p>0.05$).

According to the results of Model 3-1 and Model 3-2 in Table 7, the variable of parental monitoring and warmth and the variable of inductive reasoning were positively related to the development of career identity even after controlling for family economic status. This

findings suggested the mediating effect of positive parenting on the association between family economic status and career development in adolescence.

In addition, as shown in Table 7, the variable of peer attachment was positively related to career identity of adolescents after controlling for economic status. This finding suggests that peer attachment would be a significant factor explaining a correlation between economic status and career development in adolescence.

The results of Sobel test confirmed that family economic status indirectly affected youth's career identity through positive parent-child relationships. Sobel test statistic was 5.88 for parental monitoring and warmth ($p<0.001$) and 3.54 for inductive reasoning ($p<0.001$). In addition, peer attachment significantly carried the influence of family economic status to the youth's development of career identity ($Z=3.77$, $p<0.001$).

Overall, adolescents from affluent families tend to have secure attachment relationships with parents and friends and thereby develop concrete career identities.

Table 7. Associations among the economic status, social relationships, and career identity

Variables		Model 3-1				Model 3-2				Model 3-3			
		B	SE	Beta	t	B	SE	Beta	t	B	SE	Beta	t
(Constant)		2.05	0.10	-	20.09***	2.46	0.09	-	26.61***	1.77	0.11	-	15.83***
Sex		-0.04	0.03	-0.03	-1.40	-0.02	0.03	-0.01	-0.64	-0.03	0.03	-0.02	-1.12
Type of school		-0.14	0.03	-0.09	-4.15***	-0.15	0.03	-0.10	-4.50***	-0.14	0.03	-0.09	-4.27***
Academic achievement		0.04	0.01	0.10	4.41***	0.06	0.01	0.12	5.45***	0.05	0.01	0.10	4.77***
Economic status		0.02	0.01	0.02	1.04	0.03	0.01	0.04	1.71	0.02	0.01	0.03	1.40
Parenting behaviors	Parental monitoring and warmth	0.26	0.03	0.21	9.57***	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Inductive reasoning	-	-	-	-	0.10	0.02	0.11	4.73***	-	-	-	-
Peer attachment		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.34	0.03	0.25	11.42***
F (df)		32.34(5, 2002)***				30.57(9, 1996)***				40.33(5, 2002)***			
R ²		0.08				0.04				0.09			
Adjusted R ²		0.07				0.04				0.09			
SE of the estimate		0.57				0.58				0.56			

* $p<.05$; ** $p<.01$; *** $p<.001$

4. Conclusion

Previous research found that high school students who had concrete ideas of what jobs they wanted in the future tended to well adapt to college lives and be satisfied with their major, which resulted in the successful transition from school to work[35]. In addition, the development of career identity was an important predictor of the labor market outcomes in the future[36].

According to this analysis, adolescents from low income families were less likely to experience positive relationships with parents and peer attachment bonds. A lack of positive social relationships could be related to unstable career identity and could thereby negatively impact the future careers of adolescents. These results suggested that adolescents from low-income families might have insufficient opportunities to explore and consider various available career options and prepare for finding a desirable job. As a result, adolescents from low-income families might easily end up in unsatisfactory careers for reasons not directly related to economic resources. The development of positive social relationships could play a role in helping to clarify an adolescent's career identity, possibly through social comparison and exposure to novel ideas, and improve the career outcomes of individuals from low-income families.

Overall, we may need to innovate our typical way of career guidance that provides job-related information and conducts psychological tests. Career guidance practice in the classroom by teachers as a part of the curriculum has no significant effect on the career development[37]. Convergent interventions that help youth to develop and maintain positive social relationships would be necessary to improve the career outcomes of those from low-income families. Career guidance programs for adolescents from underprivileged families may need to encourage

the involvement of parents in the career development of their offsprings and actively use peer groups in the process of career exploration activities. This approach would contribute to achieving overall development tasks of adolescents as well as their career maturity.

The research models in this study explained only about 10 percent of the variation in the scores of career identity. Previous research indicated that personal characteristics such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and competence were significant factors affecting the development of career identity[38]. Future study will therefore need to assess the career development of adolescents using research models considering social, familial, and personal factors. In addition, in-depth research will be needed on the associations between close social relations and career development.

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