CAREER CHOICES IN EARLY ADULTHOOD - COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present the dominant career orientation in early adulthood. A total of 463 Bulgarian secondary and university students (254 males, 209 females), aged 15-24 years, were included in the study. The Big six method for career choices was administered, adapted for Bulgarian conditions by S. Karabelyova (Karabelyova, 2015). Differences in the score values of the types were found in the hexagon model of the career preferences. The structure of the career profiles is irregular hexagon in both groups- the group of the secondary students and the group of the university ones. When examining variations in the different types of career choices, the following trends were identified: the conventional type is relatively more stable, since it differentiates significantly from gender, age and the group of the respondents. The investigative and the social type are the most variable.

Key words: *career choices, early adulthood, big six, secondary students, university students*

1. INTRODUCTION

Career has a significant place in a man's lifetime. He spends most of his life working and striving for professional success. Career greatly influences the sense of meaning and fulfilment. In the contemporary world economics and new technologies are rapidly developing in certain industries while others are declining. That is why people in early adolescence become interested in their future professional development, depending on their competences, traits and interests. In addition, they have to comply with the requirements of industries and think of the financial satisfaction in order for them to have success in their career choice. In that sense, necessity of research on career attitude and preferences arises so that young people can be aware of their needs and choose professions which satisfy them to the full.

Emerging adulthood is historically embedded and culturally constructed [1] [2]. It is not a universal period of life. Emerging adulthood exists only in cultures that allow young people a prolonged period of independent role exploration during the late teens and twenties [3]. Empirical studies with participants from 18 to 29 years in Bulgaria unanimously agree on the thesis that the specificity of this age period exists in Bulgaria and is characterized by personality traits postulated by Arnett [4] [5] [6]. As early adulthood emerges, young people gradually begin to answer questions about their identities, develop a better sense of who they are and what job is best for them [2].

There are two main directions of focus in the literature on career choice and development. The first one is in the field of occupational psychology, which focuses on career choices and early career decision-making [7]. The second direction emphasizes on the stages of career development. It is mainly influenced by organizational psychology, sociology and research in management [8]. Career choice has different meanings. Subjectively speaking, it is defined as amount of preferences, aims, intentions and orientations of a man. Objectively speaking, it is defined by the socioeconomic and sociocultural context, which is determined by family and education [9].

Psychologists who work in the field of career choice pay great attention to the impact of personal characteristics such as abilities, preferences and value system, when career decisions from early adulthood are made. The question of the extent to which the education and career path one chooses reflects her personality and abilities has attracted considerable interest in applied psychological research. The major theoretical framework of Holland explains educational and vocational interests as reflections of personality traits and proclivities [10]. His idea of similarities between a person and

work environment is one of the most widespread and applied ideas in the field of career counseling. The author assumes that "career choice is expression of personality" [11]. This logic of the researcher is based on the statement that "If professional interests are an expression of personality, then the internal manifestation of personality is the pursuit of those inner interests" [11]. This model has been complemented by research documenting differences in the personality traits [12] and abilities [13] [14] of people following different career paths or having different occupational interests.

In his theory J. Holland differentiates six personality types and six similar model work environments. His main assumption is that most of the people can be categorized in one of the six vocational personality types- realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional. The author also suggests that people look for environments that allow them to express their interests, competences and values. The personal characteristics are associated with the preferences or antipathy to certain activities. Liking or disliking depend on personal, social and cultural factors as well as the environment. The first ones turn into interests and skills which lead to domination of certain traits. The six types are visually represented by a hexagonal model. The correlations between the types closest to each other are stronger than the ones of the opposites [15].

This paper reports on a psychological study which examines students' leading career preferences in Bulgarian high-school and university settings in different cities. The study had two specific objectives: (1) to test the Bulgarian version of Parkison's method for career choices, adapted and standardized for Bulgarian sociocultural environment by S. Karabeliova, and to identify the dominant career preferences; (2) to test if these preferences are significantly affected by independent variables such as gender, age and group of respondents.

2. METHOD

2.1 Participants

The sample consisted of 463 adolescents (254 males and 209 females) from different schools and universities in Sofia, Plovdiv and Burgas. Students' age ranged from 15 to 24 years. People over 24 years (to 57 years) were also included in the study for comparison of the results. Participants' age was conditionally divided into three groups: from 15 to 18 years, from 18 to 24 years and over 24 years. The biggest number of people was from 15 to 18 years (248 or 48,7%), followed by the ones from 18 to 24 years (215 or 42,2%). The participants over 24 years were 46 or 9% of the total number of adolescents.

2.2 Measure

Career preferences were appraised through the Bulgarian version of Parkison's method for career choices. The instrument was translated into Bulgarian and adapted for Bulgarian conditions by S. Karabeliova [9]. The questionnaire was created by M. Parkison [16] and was based on the theoretical model of P. Costa and R. McCrae for the big five personality traits. Originally it includes 88 statements and the scale is dichotomous of "yes" and "no". The Bulgarian version which was used comprised 48 statements responded to on a 4-point scale, ranging from 1 ("it doesn't apply to me at all") to 4 ("it completely applies to me"). M Parkison identifies six dimensions; five of them measure the big five factors for personality traits, based on the model of P. Costa and R. McCrae and the sixth dimension appraises social desirability.

2.3 Procedure and statistical analysis

The aims and rationale of the study were explained to the respondents in advance. All adolescents were given the instruction that they participated voluntarily in an anonymous study about their career interests. The study in the schools was conducted after consent of the principals and class teachers. They informed the parents of the students about the study and that their data was only going to be used for scientific purposes. After a brief group explanation on confidentiality, the aim of the activities and the instructions, students were asked to fill out an anonymous paper-based self-report questionnaire

including the research instrument and sociodemographic questions. All the data was then transferred to and analysed via the computer programme SPSS-21.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Descriptive statistics

The analysis of the results obtained from the methods of descriptive statistics for the dominant career preferences distinguishes the following main tendencies. The data is presented in table 1, which shows the descriptive statistics on the scale of the big six method. It can be clearly seen that the standard deviation is within the acceptable range for normal distribution of data. The examination of the mean scores indicated that the most preferred type among students was the Investigative one (24.94), followed by the Artistic (24.41) and the Conventional one (24.34). The same preferences were observed among the undergraduates as well, with similar scores- Investigative (24.65), Artistic (24.61), Conventional (24.60). The least preferred type is the Realistic one - 23.12 among students and 23.37 - among undergraduates.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the Big Six Interests and global score (N=509)

Students-Undergraduates		Realistic	Investigative	Artistic	Social	Enterprising	Conventional
Students	N	162	162	162	162	162	162
	M	**23.12**	**24.94**	**24.41**	**23.41**	**24.09**	**24.34**
	Median	23.00	25.00	24.50	24.00	24.00	25.00
	Mode	22.00	26.00	23.00	24.00	22.00a	23.00
	SD	3.47	3.57	4.20	4.43	3.88	3.76
	Skewness	-0.21	-0.58	-0.33	-0.53	-0.46	-0.23
	Kurtosis	-0.09	0.46	-0.52	-0.04	0.33	-0.71
	Min	13.00	11.00	13.00	9.00	10.00	15.00
	Max	31.00	32.00	32.00	31.00	32.00	32.00
Undergraduates	N	347	347	347	347	347	347
	M	**23.37**	**24.65**	**24.61**	**24.19**	**23.50**	**24.60**
	Median	23.00	25.00	25.00	24.00	23.00	25.00
	Mode	25.00	24.00	27.00	25.00	21.00	24.00
	SD	3.38	3.77	3.95	3.70	3.79	3.68
	Skewness	0.04	-0.31	-0.24	-0.30	-0.09	-0.50
	Kurtosis	-0.33	-0.34	-0.47	0.08	-0.44	0.30
	Min	13.00	14.00	12.00	11.00	13.00	12.00
	Max	32.00	32.00	32.00	32.00	32.00	32.00

Note: Big Six Interests = Big Six domains of vocational interests Inventory

Mean scores are displayed in bold

This is how the data looks like hexagons, shown on figures 1 and 2.

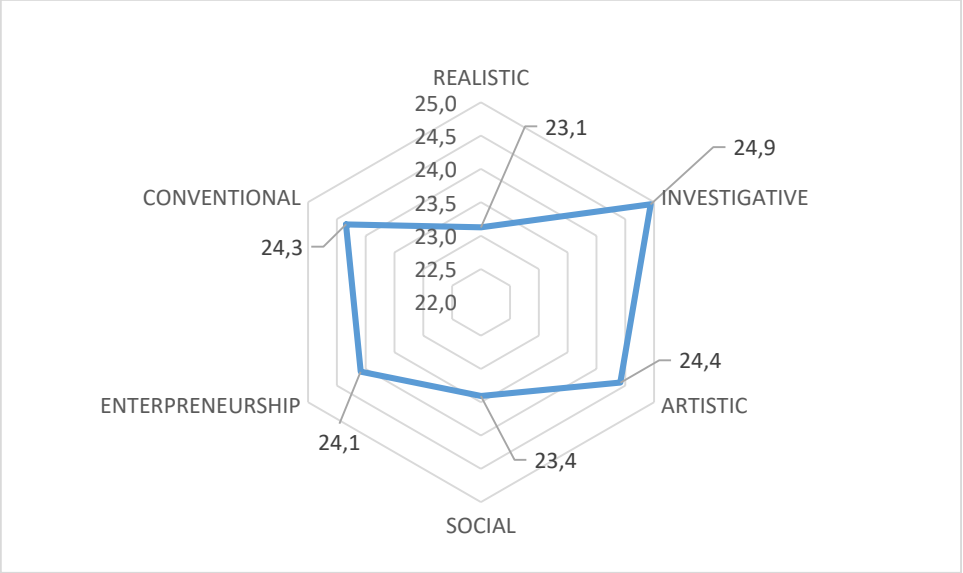


Fig. 1. Structure of the career profiles among students

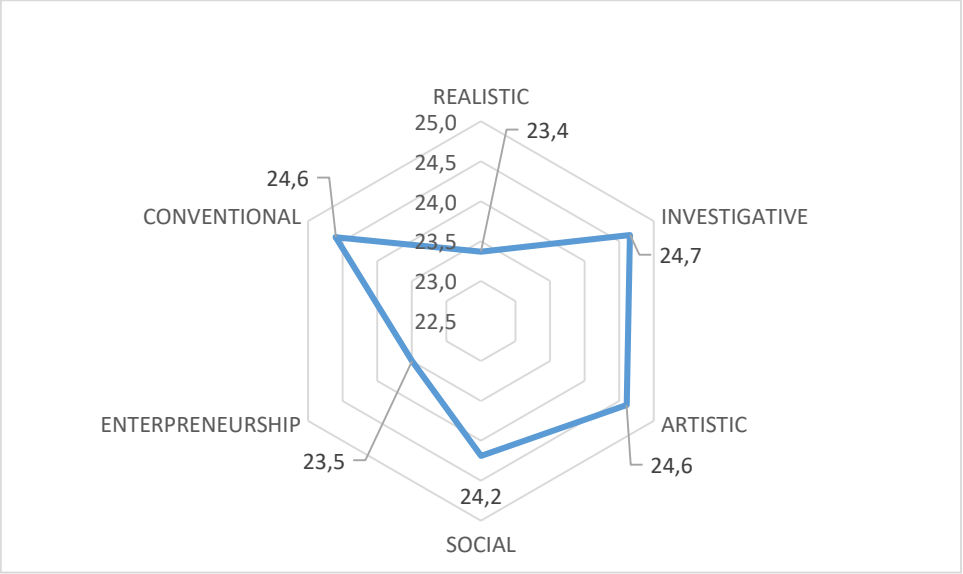


Fig. 2. Structure of the career profiles among undergraduates

As it can be seen from Figures 1 and 2, there are some differences in the order of career interests in the Bulgarian context. In this sense, the conclusion that can be drawn is that the arrangement of the career preferences of the respondents is IACSER, unlike the original – RIASEC. These results confirm the ones from other investigators about the different structure of the model for career types [17].

The high significance of the Investigative type means that the respondents are characterized by curiosity and precision. It is associated with the pursuit of solving abstract problems, demonstration of scientific competence and finding non-standard solutions independently. Taking into account the prevailing young age, it is understandable why this career orientation is leading. To some extent this personality type in the model of J. Holland resembles the career anchor of E. Schein's "Autonomy / Independence" [18].

The second place reported in the study is for the Artistic type which focuses on work requiring unsystematic activities in which the end product is a piece of art by manipulating human, physical or

verbal material. In this sense, respondents consider themselves as emotional and open to communication. These results can be associated with a strong desire for independence, self-reliance and resistance to rigorous discipline, which also resemble the "Autonomy / Independence" career anchor of the E. Schein model.

The third place is for the Conventional type. It is characterized by organization, responsibility, consistency and accuracy, but by weak imagination and creativity. The desire to work in structured and familiar situations prevails. On the one hand, this personality type can be linked to the career anchor "Security / Stability" of the E. Schein model, which differentiates with the preference to integrating career with family life. On the other hand a connection with the career anchor “Main/Basic identity can be made. That anchor also means that people often sacrifice their career development for the sake of the family (there again).

The fourth place among the undergraduates is for the Social type, which is in the fifth place for the students. It emphasizes on human relationships and the desire to work in a team, responsibility and concern for the well-being of others. This personality type is similar to the career anchor "Concern for the others / commitment to a cause" in the model of E. Schein.

The fifth place among the undergraduates and the fourth place for the students is the Enterprising type. It is characterized by qualities such as self-confidence, ambition and a desire for adventures, as well as an orientation to developing leadership skills. It is similar to the career anchor of the E. Schein's Challenge / Diversity model, linked to the desire to overcome barriers, tackle challenges and competition, and flexible behavior (there again).

The last place for both students and undergraduates is for the Realistic type. It is characterized by orientation to work with objects, not people and ideas, physical activity, outdoor activities or farming and stock-raising. The preferred work allows application of technical skills. In this sense, orientations towards professions that are associated with the realistic type can be attributed to the career anchor "Technical / Functional Competence" of the E. Schein's model. It is characterized by an striving for the technical content of the work but it is also important that people feel competent to do it (there again). This type is also in the last place of a study of S. Karabeliova [9]. It is important to mention that in the current research the undergraduates study in the field of humanities which has an impact on their weak preferences to this career type.

3.2 Independent variables

In order to answer the second research question, we examined the influence of demographic variables, such as gender, age and group of respondents. Results showed that gender significantly impacts the career preferences. An analysis of variance was applied, the data of which is shown in table 2. The most preferred type among women is the Artistic one (25.4019), followed by the Social (24.8230) and the Investigative type (24.8086). The fourth place is for the Conventional type (24.6268), followed by the Enterprising (23.3971). The least preferred type is the Realistic one (22.9665). The structure of the model is ASICER. The females reported higher scores on the Artistic and Social type than the males did. These results are logical and are also comparable to studies in other sociocultural settings. The gender-role stereotype of women to be more oriented towards careers related to the care of others- in the field of education, health and social services- was confirmed. Similar results were reported by A. Bandura and colleagues [19]. A study of gender-role stereotypes in early adulthood in Bulgaria in 2004 found that women were already perceived as “reliable, sincere, persistent, principled, energetic, ambitious, confident ... and active - qualities that are traditionally associated with men in Western cultures” [20].

The most preferred type among men is the Investigative one, followed by the Conventional and the Enterprising ones. The fourth place is for the Artistic type, followed by the Realistic one. The least preferred is the Social type. The males reported higher scores on the Enterprising (24.1181) and the Realistic type (23.4606) than the females (23.3971 and 22.9665 respectively). It is understandable because these types require strength, courage, technical competence, adventurous spirit, qualities and skills that are more common among the representatives of the strong sex. The results which were obtained in this study are similar to the cited study of gender-role stereotypes in early adulthood for

the Bulgarian sociocultural environment. „Men continue to be perceived as ... skillful mathematicians and businessmen, resilient, ambitious ..., competitive, confident and acting as leaders...“ [20].

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the mean scores of career preferences based on gender

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Realistic	Males	254	**23,4606**	3,40373	,21357
	Females	209	**22,9665**	3,50602	,24252
	Total	463	23,2376	3,45530	,16058
Investigative	Males	254	24,3346	3,45413	,21673
	Females	209	24,8086	3,95427	,27352
	Total	463	24,5486	3,69176	,17157
Artistic	Males	254	**23,5472**	4,11155	,25798
	Females	209	**25,4019**	3,57894	,24756
	Total	463	24,3844	3,98470	,18518
Social	Males	254	**23,0236**	4,18913	,26285
	Females	209	**24,8230**	3,58848	,24822
	Total	463	23,8359	4,02630	,18712
Enterprising	Males	254	**24,1181**	3,89611	,24446
	Females	209	**23,3971**	3,78258	,26165
	Total	463	23,7927	3,85789	,17929
Conventional	Males	254	24,2047	3,80729	,23889
	Females	209	24,6268	3,63139	,25119
	Total	463	24,3952	3,73084	,17339

Note: Mean scores that are significantly different from one another are displayed in bold.

To analyze the significant differences in the career types more precisely, analysis of variance was applied. The data is presented in Table 3. The results show that there is a high degree of significance, regarding the Artistic, Social and Realistic types among students and the Artistic, Social and Enterprising types among undergraduates. This proves the impact of this demographic variable on the career preferences.

Table 3. ANOVA-test results for the mean scores obtained from the Big Six Interests general scale and subscales based on gender.

Groups	Type	Gender	N	M	SD	df	F	p
Students	Realistic	Males	83	23.84	3.46	160	**7.61**	**.006**
		Females	79	22.37	3.35			
	Investigative	Males	83	24.60	3.64		1.51	.221
		Females	79	25.29	3.49			
	Artistic	Males	83	22.89	4.33		**25.86**	**.000**
		Females	79	26.01	3.40			
	Social	Males	83	22.31	4.56		**11.04**	**.001**
		Females	79	24.56	4.00			
	Enterprising	Males	83	24.30	3.99		0.52	.471
		Females	79	23.86	3.76			
	Conventional	Males	83	24.06	3.90		0.94	.334
		Females	79	24.63	3.61			
Undergraduates	Realistic	Males	193	23.45	3.34	345	0.22	.636
		Females	154	23.27	3.42			
	Investigative	Males	193	24.51	3.51		0.61	.436
		Females	154	24.83	4.09			
	Artistic	Males	193	24.01	4.08		**10.28**	**.001**
		Females	154	25.36	3.67			
	Social	Males	193	23.63	3.91		**10.23**	**.002**
		Females	154	24.89	3.30			
	Enterprising	Males	193	23.98	3.73		**7.26**	**.007**
		Females	154	22.89	3.80			
	Conventional	Males	193	24.40	3.71		1.29	.256
		Females	154	24.85	3.63			

Note: Big Six Interests = Big Six domains of vocational interests Inventory. Mean scores that are significantly different from one another, are displayed in bold.

In terms of age the results showed that it is with high degree of significance in four out of the six career preferences: the Investigative one (p = .000), the Social (p = .000), the Conventional (p = .000) and the Artistic type (p = .004). The career profiles of the three groups are presented in table 4.

Table 4. ANOVA-test results for the mean scores obtained from the Big Six Interests general scale and subscales based on age.

Type	Age	N	M	SD	df	F	p
Realistic	up 18 years	248	23.13	3.43			
	from 18 to 24 years	215	23.36	3.49		.90	.409
	over 24 years	46	23.83	2.85	508		
Investigative	up 18 years	248	24.02	3.97			
	from 18 to 24 years	215	25.16	3.24		**13.17**	**.000**
	over 24 years	46	26.72	3.32			
Artistic	up 18 years	248	24.09	4.16			
	from 18 to 24 years	215	24.72	3.76		**5.52**	**.004**
	over 24 years	46	26.15	4.17			
Social	up 18 years	248	23.25	4.20			
	from 18 to 24 years	215	24.51	3.71		**7.79**	**.000**
	over 24 years	46	24.98	3.06			
Enterprising	up 18 years	248	23.93	3.86			
	from 18 to 24 years	215	23.63	3.85		2.37	.095
	over 24 years	46	22.61	3.34			
Conventional	up 18 years	248	23.87	3.87			
	from 18 to 24 years	215	25.00	3.48		**8.440**	**.000**
	over 24 years	46	25.74	3.17			

Note: Big Six Interests = Big Six domains of vocational interests Inventory. Mean scores that are significantly different from one another, are displayed in bold

In the group of the youngest respondents – to 18 years – the strongest preferences are for the Artistic type, followed by the Investigative one. The lowest scores were observed for the Realistic type. The probable explanation is the strong curiosity during this age and it is also relatively early for young people to make direct career choices. Moreover, at this period of development, interests in prestigious, popular and intriguing careers of the artistic type prevails. On the other hand the preferences for the Investigative type reveal the adolescents' need to try new and unknown activities which help self-knowledge, awareness of interests, abilities and values.

In regards to the second group, 18 to 24 years, there are some differences. The Investigative type takes the first place, followed by the Conventional and the Artistic types. The Realistic type is the least preferred one again. The likely cause of the increased interest in the Investigative type can be found in the theory of Gottffedson. According to him after the age of 15 the adolescents enter a period of self-orientation. During that time the interest in the resemblance of self to others is replaced by the interest in one's unique abilities [21]. The high scores on the Investigative and Conventional types can be explained by the fact that most of the adolescents are undergraduates and have already made an important decision about their future career path. Solving problems during that transitional period has a long-term effect on the future development of the individual. Young people are focused on finding the most appropriate and desirable job. On the one hand the respondents show curiosity, abstract thinking and discovering solutions on their own. On the other hand they have become more organized, consistent, responsible and they want to work in familiar environment. In the model of D. Super, then

supplemented by M. Savikas, up to the age of 24 a man determines more precisely his preferences for a profession. In order to successfully complete these tasks, young people narrow their career choices down and try their first [22].

In the third age group – over 24 years- the first place is again for the Investigative type, followed by the Artistic and the Conventional ones. The interest in the Investigative type indicates that as youngsters grow up, the pursuit of careers related to solution of abstract ideas and scientific problems increases. In this age group, the slightest interest is in the Realistic and the Enterprising types. There is a gradual decline of the Enterprising type in all three groups of respondents. It is interesting to note that the other types show increase. Taking into account that the undergraduates study in the field of humanities, the low interest in the Enterprising and Realistic types is understandable. The first one implies the pursuit of success, coping with challenges and competition - skills that are required mostly for the business sector. The second type requires technical skills, physical activity, handling objects, which is quite far from the humanities.

In regards to the group of the respondents – students and undergraduates- the results showed that the Social type had the most significant impact ($p=.038< 0.05$). The mean scores are 23.41 among students and 24.19 among undergraduates (table 5). This could be explained by the increased interest in relationships with the others, humanitarian activities as well as concern for people and establishing strong and stable social contacts. Other significant scores were not observed.

Table 5. ANOVA-test results for the mean scores obtained from the Big Six Interests scale and subscales based on the group of the respondents

Type	Groups	N	M	SD	df	F	p
Realistic	Students	162	23.12	3.47	507	0.57	0.450
	Undergraduates	347	23.37	3.38			
Investigative	Students	162	24.94	3.57		0.65	0.421
	Undergraduates	347	24.65	3.77			
Artistic	Students	162	24.41	4.20		0.25	0.618
	Undergraduates	347	24.61	3.95			
Social	Students	162	23.41	4.43		**4.31**	**0.038**
	Undergraduates	347	24.19	3.70			
Enterprising	Students	162	24.09	3.88		2.62	0.106
	Undergraduates	347	23.50	3.79			
Conventional	Students	162	24.34	3.76		0.54	0.461
	Undergraduates	347	24.60	3.68			

Note: Big Six Interests = Big Six domains of vocational interests Inventory. Mean scores that are significantly different from one another are displayed in bold

4. DISCUSSION

To sum up, the present study has been an attempt to investigate the career preferences in early adulthood in Bulgarian schools and universities. The results clearly outlined the most preferred career choices for the participants - the Investigative, followed by the Artistic and the Conventional types among students and undergraduates. Then the students ranked the Enterprising, the Social and the Realistic types whereas the undergraduates ranked the Social, the Enterprising and the Realistic ones. Overall the results are congruent with previous research in Bulgarian high education setting [9] which

revealed that the order of the preferred types was as follows: Artistic, Social, Investigative, Enterprising, Conventional and Realistic, and similar results were found in other cultures.

The assumption of J. Holland that more than one type can dominate was confirmed in Bulgarian sociocultural setting. It is logical for adolescents who are about to enter the period of adulthood due to different factors which influence the career choice. The other important result is related to the irregular hexagonal structure of the career preferences, which was registered in Bulgarian conditions. These results are valid for all participants in terms of gender, age and group of respondents- students and undergraduates. The results are congruent with results in previous research, cited in the aforementioned paragraphs. However, the current study clearly has some limitations. It was conducted on a sample of 509 Bulgarian students and undergraduates, studying at schools and universities in Sofia, Plovdiv and Burgas, so findings may not necessarily be generalized to the larger population. In spite of this the authors believe that the provided work has important implications for further research in the field of personality psychology and could support psychologists and counsellors in the process of finding the appropriate career type so that people can work the job which satisfies them the most.

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