Review Article

**THE IMPACTS OF DIFFICULTY IN CAREER CHOICE ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF THIRD-YEAR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AT COLÉGIO ASSIS CHATEAUBRIAND IN FEIRA DE SANTANA**

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**ABSTRACT**

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| **Introduction:** Adolescence is a phase marked by intense cognitive, emotional, and social transformations, which directly influence identity formation and decisions about the professional future. Early career choice can trigger significant impacts on mental health, especially under family, academic, and sociocultural pressures. **Objective:** To analyze the impacts of difficulty in career choice on the mental health of third-year high school students at Colégio Assis Chateaubriand, in Feira de Santana. **Methodology:** This is a descriptive bibliographic study with a mixed approach, based on a literature review conducted between 1999 and 2024. Descriptors such as “Mental Health,” “Adolescent,” and “Career Choice” were used in databases such as LILACS, SciELO, PubMed, and Web of Science. The analysis was based on nine thematic axes developed according to the specific objectives. **Results and Discussion:** Brain immaturity, hormonal fluctuations, and high social sensitivity make adolescents more vulnerable to disorders such as anxiety and depression. The pressure to define a career, combined with unequal access to information and excessive use of social media, contributes to insecurity, procrastination, and psychological distress. The lack of family or school support worsens this scenario. **Conclusion:** Difficulty in career choice compromises adolescents’ emotional well-being. Public policies, vocational guidance programs, and integrated actions between school and family are essential to promote mental health, resilience, and more conscious and healthier choices.  . |

*Keywords: Mental health; Career choice; Adolescence*

**1. INTRODUCTION**

According to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stressful moments of life, develop all their skills, be able to learn and work properly, and contribute to the improvement of their community (McCann et al., 2010). However, considering Erikson’s (1976) concept of adolescence — a phase of life that most strongly fosters identity development — adolescents may not yet be mature enough to make such important decisions as choosing a profession, a decision that, to some extent, will guide their entire life and may thus cause significant impacts on their mental health.

Furthermore, Papalia (2022) states that, due to advances in technology and the current volume of information exchange, adolescence has been extended, as young people tend to stay in school longer, get married, have children, and establish permanent careers later and with less certainty than in the past. In addition, Bandura et al. (2001) argue that self-efficacy beliefs are essential in helping to shape the occupational options students consider and the way they prepare for future careers. Still according to Bandura et al. (2001), self-efficacy is defined as the beliefs individuals have about their capacity to organize, develop, and carry out actions to achieve goals and accomplishments — a construct considered key in the career decision-making process.

Thus, reinforcing Erikson's (1976) postulates, identity construction occurs in interaction with the environment and with others, making a supportive family environment crucial in the career choice process. As stated by Jodl et al. (2001), this is not the reality for most Brazilian adolescents — specifically, in this case, the third-year high school students of Colégio Assis Chateaubriand in Feira de Santana.

Therefore, this study addresses the following question: “How does the difficulty in choosing a profession impact the mental health of third-year high school students in 2025 at Colégio Assis Chateaubriand in Feira de Santana?” Additionally, to answer this question, the group aims to analyze the relationship between the process of career choice and the mental health levels of students, considering that, according to the Ayrton Senna Institute, 70% of students report symptoms of depression and anxiety, which affect their daily routines and, consequently, their career choices.

**2. METHODOLOGY**This was a descriptive bibliographic study with a mixed approach, and the data collected were used for the development of the scientific article. Data collection was carried out through a bibliographic review based on research of scientific productions on the proposed topic, covering the period from 1999 to 2024. The inclusion criteria for content selection were: full-text publications aligned with the theme *The impacts of the difficulty in career choice on the mental health of third-year high school students at Colégio Assis Chateaubriand in Feira de Santana*, including documents, regulations, health authority norms, scientific articles, and institutional guidelines, published in Portuguese and English. The exclusion criteria included: articles without direct relation to the theme, duplicate materials, incomplete documents, reviews, abstracts, debates, and content unavailable in full.

The literature search was conducted in the following databases: LILACS, SciELO, PubMed, BVS, ScienceDirect, PsycINFO, and Web of Science. It is worth noting that these databases were accessed through the Virtual Health Library (BVS). Searches were conducted using the Health Sciences Descriptors (DeCS) from the Regional Library of Medicine (BIREME), as follows: [“Saúde Mental” / “Mental Health”; “Adolescente” / “Adolescent”; “Escolha da Profissão” / “Career Choice”], with the use of Boolean operators “AND” and “OR.”

The methodology employed in this study began with the careful selection of descriptors in DeCS, followed by the search in indexed databases. Using the main terms and their equivalents, tables were created containing the articles found in each database. Duplicate articles were removed, and a screening based on the relevance of the titles was then conducted.

Following this stage, abstracts were read, and subsequently, full readings were done for articles that met the established criteria. For data analysis, nine thematic axes were defined, built from the specific objectives and formulated as guiding questions. These questions guided the reading and critical analysis of the selected articles, forming the conceptual basis for the discussion and interpretation of the data. The answers obtained provided the theoretical foundation for the construction of the results and reflections proposed in this study.

**3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**Adolescence is marked by profound biological, cognitive, and social transformations, including puberty, brain maturation, and increased sensitivity to social contexts (BLAKEMORE & MILLS, 2014, p. 188). These changes shape behavior and affect decision-making, making career choice a common challenge during this period. The development of abstract thinking broadens the ability to reflect but can also generate doubts and insecurities in the face of multiple career possibilities (ARAIN et al., 2013, p. 450). Moreover, sex hormones modulate brain plasticity and emotional responses, intensifying mood swings and impacting judgment (ARAIN et al., 2013, p. 451).

Structural and functional changes in the brain — particularly in the prefrontal cortex and limbic system — directly affect emotional regulation and adolescent impulsivity, making it harder to rationally assess professional paths (BLAKEMORE & MILLS, 2014, p. 190; ARAIN et al., 2013, p. 452). This makes the decision-making process more vulnerable to external influences, such as family expectations, peer pressure, and academic demands. These factors lead to internal conflicts and contribute to difficulties in forming a life project that includes a conscious and realistic career choice (SAWYER et al., 2018, p. 224).

The family and school environments also play a decisive role in emotional development and identity construction during adolescence (SAWYER et al., 2018, p. 225; BENETTI et al., 2007, p. 1276). Fragile relationships, emotional instability, or excessive demands interfere with emotional well-being and can hinder important decisions such as career choice (BLAKEMORE & MILLS, 2014, p. 192). The lack of dialogue and support in schools undermines the development of a clear vision of future possibilities, limiting access to information about different career paths (SOARES et al., 2014).

Cultural, economic, and social issues also influence career decision-making. Factors such as inequality of opportunities, social stigma, and financial difficulties shape access to information and the resources needed to plan a professional future (SAWYER et al., 2018, p. 225; BENETTI et al., 2007, p. 1278; GOMES et al., 2020, p. 4391). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, worsened these disparities by disrupting emotional bonds and regular school routines, deepening isolation and insecurity among adolescents (MATTIA et al., 2025; GOMES et al., 2020, p. 4389).

Excessive use of social media affects self-image, self-esteem, and emotional well-being, interfering with the self-confidence necessary for important choices like career decisions (KELES, MCCRAE & GREALISH, 2020, p. 84; KHALAF et al., 2023, p. 118). Constant exposure to social comparison and the search for validation can lead to feelings of inadequacy, contributing to indecision and procrastination when defining the future (KHALAF et al., 2023, p. 117). Thus, identity and independence construction are compromised, directly affecting the autonomy and clarity needed for career choice (SAWYER et al., 2018, p. 225; REISNER et al., 2016, p. 205).

It is therefore essential to assess students’ levels of anxiety and depression, considering that adolescence is characterized by pronounced emotional instability due to brain immaturity, hormonal influence, and heightened sensitivity to social stimuli — all of which contribute to emotional reactivity (ARAIN et al., 2013, p. 453; SAWYER et al., 2018, p. 224; BLAKEMORE & MILLS, 2014, p. 191). This vulnerability is intensified by factors such as delayed sleep phase, chronic stress, mood changes, and the search for social validation, making adolescents more prone to anxiety, depression, and impulsivity (CROWLEY, ACEBO & CARSKADON, 2007, p. 605; SAWYER et al., 2018, p. 227).

Signs of emotional vulnerability include withdrawal, irritability, persistent bad mood, low self-esteem, reluctance to seek help, and social isolation — all commonly associated with psychological distress (ORBEN, TOMOVA & BLAKEMORE, 2020, p. 638; MEADOWS, BROWN & ELDER, 2006, p. 94; RADEZ et al., 2021, p. 186; KHALAF et al., 2023, p. 120). These manifestations highlight the importance of continuous attention from parents and educators, especially in cases with histories of marginalization, social pressure, or stigma — factors that increase the risk of worsening mental health disorders (REISNER et al., 2016, p. 204; BENETTI et al., 2007, p. 1279).

Experiences of bullying — including cyberbullying — significantly intensify emotional suffering, increasing anxiety, depression, and low life satisfaction, particularly among adolescents from marginalized groups (KELES, MCCRAE & GREALISH, 2020, p. 86; LÁZARO-VISA et al., 2019, p. 97; REISNER et al., 2016, p. 205; BENETTI et al., 2007, p. 1280). The absence of peer or family support worsens this condition by reinforcing feelings of loneliness and emotional helplessness (ORBEN, TOMOVA & BLAKEMORE, 2020, p. 636). Symbolic violence in unwelcoming school environments also contributes to the deterioration of mental health (BENETTI et al., 2007, p. 1280).

The pursuit of social acceptance and online validation influences adolescents’ behavior and well-being, leading them to act to please others — a pattern that can compromise emotional autonomy and lead to frustration (BLAKEMORE & MILLS, 2014, p. 193; KHALAF et al., 2023, p. 118; ORBEN, TOMOVA & BLAKEMORE, 2020, p. 637). Constant comparisons on social media and cyberbullying intensify feelings of inferiority and increase emotional instability (KELES, MCCRAE & GREALISH, 2020, pp. 85–84; KHALAF et al., 2023, p. 121). Social disconnection, especially during the pandemic, also worsened adolescents’ well-being (GOMES et al., 2020, p. 4389).

The implementation of school-based mental health education programs — such as Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) — promotes resilience, reduces symptoms of distress, improves emotion recognition, and encourages help-seeking behaviors (DURLAK et al., 2011, pp. 412–415; RADEZ et al., 2021, p. 187; SAWYER et al., 2018, p. 227). By addressing topics such as bullying, anxiety, self-esteem, and self-awareness, these programs help students develop coping skills and reduce emotional vulnerability. When combined with career guidance, they also allow young people to make healthier and more authentic decisions about their future.

Therefore, the influence of the family in career choice cannot be overlooked, even though young people do not base their decisions solely on family members. The family functions as a symbolic and emotional reference, which can either support or create doubts and conflicts in the adolescent’s professional project. Family discourse has a direct impact on the young person's emotional security: when there is support, the adolescent feels empowered to choose with autonomy, but in the face of negative or imposing messages, feelings of insecurity and dependence arise. Thus, the family environment can either promote or hinder the development of a life project (SAWYER et al., 2018; REISNER et al., 2016).

Academic stress significantly affects the physical and emotional health of college students. The burden of demands throughout the semester leads to physiological changes, such as increased blood pressure, which may evolve into more serious conditions such as gastritis, dermatitis, and hypertension (BENETTI et al., 2007). On an emotional level, the effects include anxiety, depression, and exhaustion — symptoms that affect around 20% of college students. Exhaustion undermines the body’s protective mechanisms, increasing the risk of illness and negatively impacting quality of life, especially in fields such as the humanities and exact sciences (SAWYER et al., 2018).

Psychological evaluation is a valuable resource in supporting career choice when applied critically and with sensitivity to individual particularities. Although traditional intelligence and interest tests are useful, their isolated and decontextualized use may limit understanding of young people’s real needs (ARAIN et al., 2013). The study highlights that qualitative approaches — such as interviews, reflective groups, and narrative interventions — promote self-awareness and help young people recognize their values, interests, and conflicts. In this way, assessment shifts from a normative role to a mediating process for reflection and context-aware guidance.

The integration of education and mental health in schools is an effective strategy to reduce emotional vulnerability and improve career decision-making. Interventions such as self-awareness workshops, discussion circles on anxiety and vocation, and SEL programs foster resilience, reduce aggression, bullying, and anxiety, and encourage help-seeking behavior (DURLAK et al., 2011, pp. 412–415). Schools that combine emotional care with vocational guidance help students make more authentic choices, free from idealizations or external pressures, fostering the development of sustainable life projects.

Lastly, public policies aimed at educational inclusion are essential to promote equity in access to higher education and to ensure the mental health of young people. Lack of access increases feelings of frustration and insecurity among students from underprivileged backgrounds, affecting their future expectations. Expanding programs such as Income-Contingent Loan Schemes (ICLs), placing psychologists in schools, and valuing multiple professional pathways (including technical courses) are viable ways to ensure that students can dream and plan without fear of failure, promoting emotional well-being and social justice.

**4. Conclusion**

**CONCLUSION**

The bibliographic analysis carried out highlights that the difficulty in career choice among third-year high school students is linked to multiple interconnected factors: neurological immaturity, family and social pressures, unequal access to information, emotional insecurity, and the negative influence of excessive social media use. These elements, especially when combined with a lack of school or family support, worsen adolescents' psychological distress, increasing the risk of anxiety, depression, and lack of motivation.

Adolescence, being a critical phase for identity formation and life trajectory definition, demands adequate support so that young people can reflect on their interests, skills, and values. In this context, it is essential that schools and families work together to create a welcoming environment, with active listening, emotional support, and critical, contextualized career guidance.

It is recommended that socio-educational initiatives be implemented in schools, such as self-awareness workshops, discussion groups on mental health and vocation, and ongoing social-emotional learning programs. In addition, public policies aimed at inclusion, expanding access to career information, and ensuring the presence of psychologists in schools are indispensable strategies to ensure emotional well-being and promote more conscious, secure, and realistic choices among students.

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