

## AN EVALUATION OF THE VOCATIONAL READINESS PACKAGE FOR GIRLS: A SOLUTION TO ONE PROBLEM

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### Abstract

In this study the effectiveness of the Canadian Vocational Readiness Package for Girls was investigated. It was hypothesized that exposure to this program would significantly increase the vocational awareness level of highschool girls. It was also predicted that participation in this program would stimulate highschool girls to investigate their individual career plans with a counsellor. The data from this study supported both hypotheses. The *Vocational Readiness Package for Girls* appeared to be an excellent program for meeting the special vocational counselling needs of today's female adolescent.

### Résumé

Cette étude discute l'efficacité du "Canadian Vocational Readiness Package for Girls". L'hypothèse soutenait que les filles du niveau secondaire exposées à ce programme manifesteraient un intérêt accru vis-à-vis le choix d'une carrière. Également, on prédisait que ces filles chercheraient à explorer leurs projets de carrière avec un conseiller. Les données relevées par cette étude appuient ces deux hypothèses. Ce programme s'avère donc un auxiliaire précieux pour aider les filles dans leur choix de carrière.

The need for improvement in the career counselling of today's female adolescent is a widespread Canadian issue. The Royal Commission on The Status of Women in Canada (1970) recognized the difficulty counsellors encounter when attempting to make girls think beyond the goal of marriage. It appears that many female highschool students are totally unaware of the realities of their societal milieu (Shields, 1974).

Statistics Canada (1975) reported that the number of women in the labour force increased by sixty percent during the last decade. In Ontario alone, sixty-two percent of working women are married (Ontario Ministry of Labour, 1974). Recent labour predictions for the future indicate that eight out of ten women presently in school will work outside the home for twenty-five to thirty years (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1976).

Concomitantly, it is becoming more and more difficult for counsellors to individually deal with the issue of: "Plan a career! Why should I? I will work after highschool until I get married. Then, I will stay home and raise my family."

The issues of marriage, the concomitant problem of home-career conflict, the subtle psychological influence of what the opposite sex

will think, counsellor bias, test bias, occupational sex stereotyping, and the realities of today's working world are of paramount importance in the vocational counselling of highschool girls (Farmer & Bohn, 1970; Hawley, 1971; Thomas & Stewart, 1971; McMillan, 1972; Schlossberg & Goodman, 1972; Schlossberg & Pietrofesa, 1973; and Baruch, 1974).

Many researchers have made recommendations concerning specific programs that counsellors could implement to assist female students in realistic career planning (Scott & Rabin, 1971; Farmer, 1971; Berry, 1972; Hansen, 1972; Lewis, 1972; Schlossberg, 1972; and Oliver, 1975).

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the Canadian adaptation of the Vocational Readiness Package for Girls (Scott & Rabin, 1971). It was predicted that exposure to this program would significantly increase the vocational awareness level of highschool girls. Vocational awareness level referred to the degree of vocational knowledge ascertained by participants as a result of exposure to the Vocational Readiness Package. It was also hypothesized that exposure to the Vocational Readiness Package would stimulate participants to investigate their individual career plans by requesting an appointment with a counsellor.

### *The Canadian Vocational Readiness Package for Girls*

The Vocational Readiness Package for Girls was adapted to a Canadian version by Hamilton (1972). The experiential program consists of five daily sessions of approximately 50 minutes in length with a maximum of 30 girls. Six fictitious girls are verbally presented to the participants as real life models. Each participant chooses one of these real life models and plans this person's life from the period of highschool until 10 years after her graduation. Interest is maintained throughout the program by use of roleplaying and a simulated game approach. The purposes of the program are to make girls aware of the following (Hamilton, 1972):

- (1) the importance of planning in their lives;
- (2) the fact that they may have to support themselves and their families;
- (3) how to choose a career for themselves;
- (4) choices in regard to career and lifestyle;
- (5) the relationship between acquisition of job skills and earning power;
- (6) their future roles, including sexual roles.

## METHOD AND PROCEDURE

### *A. Subjects*

The highschool selected for experimentation was located in a small industrial town. It was thus believed that a relatively homogenous socio-economic background was characteristic of the subjects tested. Permission was granted to conduct experimentation on a Senior Girls' Home Economics class and a Senior Girls' Health class. Each class was randomly assigned to either a treatment or a control group. In the present study, the Home Economics class comprised the treatment group whereas the Health class comprised the control group. Each group consisted of 20 female subjects.

### *B. The Instrument*

In order to evaluate the Vocational Readiness Package for Girls, the program was reviewed to determine specific instructional objectives which could be objectively measured. A paper and pencil test was devised to obtain a performance assessment of these instructional objectives. One sample item requested both groups to circle the appropriate number of years that they believed most girls now in highschool would work outside the home during their lifetime. The instrument consisted of thirteen total items. These items were scored for correctness based upon the specific information contained in the Vocational Readiness Package. The level of each subject's vocational awareness or knowledge was measured by its score on the instrument. The maximum and

minimum attainable scores on the instrument were 45 and zero respectively. Six open-ended questions were also utilized in order to determine each individual participant's opinion regarding the utility of the program.

### *C. Testing Procedure*

The treatment group was exposed to the Vocational Readiness Package for five consecutive days. The day after completion of the program, this group was requested to indicate their opinions on certain issues concerning women and the work by filling out the questionnaire. Participants in the program were also requested to fill out an evaluation form on the Vocational Awareness Package for Girls.

The control group was asked to give their opinions on certain issues concerning women and the world of work by filling out the same questionnaire as the treatment group.

The instrument was administered to both groups on the same day.

In order to determine the number of girls in the treatment group that would request an appointment with a counsellor to investigate their individual career plans, request cards for appointments were monitored for one month after completion of the Vocational Readiness Package.

## RESULTS

A statistical analysis of the data revealed that significant differences existed between the treatment and control groups level of vocational awareness (Table I).

Table I

Summary Test of Significance Between Treatment and Control Groups Level of Vocational Awareness

$\bar{x}_1$	$\bar{x}_2$	$\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2$	$S\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2$	t
27	17	10	1.61	6.21**

\*\*p < .01 (two-tailed)

Critical t = 1.70 (.05)

2.42 (.01)

An analysis of the qualitative data revealed the following results:

- (1) Sixty percent of girls in the treatment group indicated that most girls now in highschool would work outside the home between 16 to 25 years, whereas 60% of girls in the control group indicated that most girls now in highschool would work outside the home between one to 10 years;
- (2) Sixty percent of girls in the treatment group

indicated that it would work outside the home between 16 and 25 years, whereas 60% of girls in the control group indicated that it would work outside the home between one to ten years;

- (3) One hundred percent of the girls in both the treatment and control groups planned on getting married.
- (4) The majority of girls in the treatment group (75%) and in the control group (60%) believed that a career was as important to a woman as it was to a man;
- (5) Eighty-five percent of the girls that participated in the Vocational Readiness Package for Girls believed that all highschool girls should be given this program;
- (6) Sixty-five percent of the girls that participated in the Vocational Readiness Package indicated that they would request an appointment with a counsellor in order to obtain individual career planning assistance;
- (7) In regard to the remaining 35% that indicated they wouldn't request an appointment with a counsellor, 25% stated that they had already investigated their career choice and 10% stated that they did not want to investigate careers at this time;
- (8) Within the month following the program, 20% of the girls in the treatment group had actually requested an appointment with a counsellor, whereas no subject in the control group did request an appointment.

#### DISCUSSION

It appears that the exposure of highschool girls to the Vocational Readiness Package resulted in a significant increment of vocational knowledge. In comparison with the control group, the group that participated in the program was more knowledgeable concerning the following vocational information:

- (1) that women today are employed in the labour market for a significant part of their lives;
- (2) that there is a relationship between a girl's amount of education and her lifetime earning power;
- (3) that the average working woman today makes less money than the typical average Canadian;
- (4) that a woman earning the minimum wage would experience difficulty supporting herself;
- (5) that interests, abilities, personality, physical characteristics, and education are important factors to consider before making a career decision;
- (6) that education, special qualifications, ways to enter the field, chance of advancement,

earnings, supply and demand are important factors to investigate about a career before a career decision is finalized;

- (7) that specific resource materials such as Student Guidance Information Services, Guidance Monographs, post-secondary institutional calendars, etc., were available in their Student Services Office.

The treatment group also appeared to be more knowledgeable of various life skills than the control group. Participants in the program were more knowledgeable regarding information required by employers on a Job Application form. The treatment group was also more aware of the various living expenses that would have to be paid out of their salaries in order to support themselves.

In view of future labour predictions concerning the number of years women presently in school will work outside the home, it is most noteworthy that exposure to the Vocational Readiness Package resulted in the majority of participants indicating longer terms of employment than the control group for both their own lives and the lives of most highschool girls. In terms of career planning, it would seem logical to conclude that a girl who believed she would work outside the home for 16 to 25 years would give more serious consideration to career selection than a girl who believed she would work outside the home for one to 10 years. Thus, it would appear that the Vocational Readiness Package is a most viable method of educating highschool girls about the increasing number of years that women are remaining in the labour force.

The majority of the subjects in both the treatment and control groups indicated that they believed a career was as important to a woman as it was to a man. Seventy-five percent of the experimental group expressed this opinion in comparison with 60% of the control group. The majority of the girls in both groups expressed the opinion that a career was important to a woman for self-fulfillment. The majority of the girls in the treatment group also strongly emphasized that a career was important to a woman due to the fact that a situation might occur where a woman would need to support herself, her husband, and/or her children. Only one girl in the control group realized that a career was important to a woman for financial security. Thus, it would appear that participation in the Vocational Readiness Program results in girls being more knowledgeable about the possible unforeseen circumstances that occur in life. This fact is most important when one considers that in 1974, 39% of Canadian women in the labour force were working due to pressing financial need caused by separation, divorce, being single, unemployment of spouse, etc. (Ontario Ministry of Labour, 1974).

An evaluation of the Vocational Readiness Package by the treatment group revealed many interesting results. Eighty-five percent of the subjects believed that all highschool girls should be given this program. When asked to give reasons for their answer, the most typical explanation was that the program would help all girls "to a better way" of finding out what they wanted to do later in life. As one girl stated:

All girls should be given this program because most girls just don't seem to think about all the things they may experience in later life. Girls think that once they get married, everything will be alright.

Many girls also emphasized the importance of the preventive nature of the program. According to many girls, the program should be given to all highschool girls "because maybe by picturing themselves in the place of the girls' lives in the program, they might be able to cope with different problems". Thus, it appears that participants in the Vocational Readiness Package were strongly in favor of the exposure of all highschool girls to this program. It would seem logical to conclude that this opinion reflected some utilitarian value of the program to the participants.

What did the participants feel that they had learned from the program? One girl stated:

This program opens your eyes to things you don't think of seriously as happening to you. Its important to use knowledge instead of being hasty when making serious decisions. I now know that I will go into a career first, establish a place called home, then think of marriage. This program makes you realize how important a career would be if something went wrong in marriage such as divorce or death.

Many girls indicated that the program had made them realize how long they would work outside the home. As one girl stated:

"I've learned that getting out into the world is not going to be a lot of fun. I may have to work most of my life!"

The following career planning skills were stated by many of the girls as being learned from the program: what factors to consider about themselves before selecting a career, how to investigate a career, how to make career decisions, and where to get information about careers. Many girls also mentioned that they had learned how to fill out a Job Application form and how to plan a budget once they were working.

The treatment group was told on the last day of the program that they could request an appointment with a counsellor if they wanted some help with their individual career plans. When asked on the evaluation form if they planned to request an appointment with a counsellor, 65% of the girls indicated the affirmative. Within the month following the administration of the Vocational Readiness Package, 20% of these girls actually did request an appointment with a counsellor.

Due to the fact that the Vocational Readiness Package was taught during the later part of the school year, it is possible that the remaining percentage of girls would request an appointment with a counsellor during the next school year. It is also most encouraging to note that 25% of the girls had already discussed their career plans with a counsellor. Exposure to the Vocational Readiness Package does appear to exert some impetus in stimulating highschool girls to investigate their career plans with a counsellor.

## CONCLUSION

It appears that the exposure of highschool girls to the Vocational Readiness Package is an excellent method of meeting the vocational counselling needs of today's female adolescent. In the Vocational Readiness Package for Girls, highschool counsellors have a viable Canadian tool for resolving the issue of: "Plan a career? Why should I . . .?". The exposure of highschool girls to this program allows girls an experiential opportunity in a group setting to discover for themselves the importance of planning a career.

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