

Future family and career goals evident in teenage years

November 4 2014

Career and family, often seen as competing parts of life, can actually complement each other, and when young people's goals for the future encompass family and career, the outcome is more likely to be success in both arenas, according to Penn State researchers.

"I'm really interested in career development, but also how that interacts with [family](#) life," says Bora Lee, postdoctoral scholar, [human development](#) and family studies. "I was interested in how adolescents weighed their goals within work and family domains."

The researchers used selected records from a larger dataset initially collected for the Youth Development Study, which took place from 1988 through 2009. This study included responses from 995 subjects, at ages 14 to 15 and again at 17 to 18 years old, to questions about anticipated future importance of career and family, as well as respondents' "self-efficacy beliefs" about these goals. Self-efficacy beliefs were a rating of a respondent's certainty that she or he would achieve an aim, and showed how confident teen respondents were that they would realize family and career goals in the future. Then, as adults aged 35 to 36 years old, the same subjects responded to questions regarding their "perceived success in work life" and "perceived success in [family life](#)," according to the researchers, whose work appears in the *Journal of Vocational Behavior*.

Lee, working with Fred Vondracek, professor emeritus of human development and family studies, used a statistical approach to sort

respondents into groups based on the relative importance they assigned to work and family goals, and their belief that they would achieve these goals. These groups included, among others, subjects with work-focused goals and strong belief in their ability to achieve them, those with family-based goals with corresponding belief, and those whose goals encompassed both family and career and who believed they would find success in both arenas. The analysis also indicated how likely people were to move from one group to another over time.

Many previous studies, implicitly assuming that goals do not change over time, include only a single snapshot of goal preferences, said Lee, but "it's kind of a dynamic process, actually." The researchers found that teens were likely to shift their family and work goals from ages 14 to 15 to ages 17 to 18—but that one-third of those who expressed a comparable interest in both work and family goals retained this position through time.

"The biggest group was people who placed relatively high importance on both work and family," said Lee. "Almost half of the adolescents said that work and family are both important for me, and also that it is pretty highly likely that I can achieve these goals."

Indeed, confidence in meeting expressed goals was a key component of the outcome.

"Those who do show more confidence about achieving their goal were also more likely to achieve those goals in young adulthood," said Lee. "So those who placed a lot of importance on work and family and had very high confidence in those were more likely to report that they felt successful in work than other people."

This group also reached higher education levels than those who placed high importance only on family-oriented goals but had only moderate

confidence in achieving them.

Furthermore, the authors found significant differences among the five groups in terms of relationship status – married or cohabiting, or not – as adults. Respondents' career and family goals and beliefs at ages 14 to 15 and 17 to 18 were significantly associated with their relationship status in their mid-30's, with a smaller percentage of those who identified strongly work-oriented goals in adolescence married or cohabiting at 35 to 36 years old.

Lee and Vondracek said "individuals tend to end up being more successful in their goal attainment when they are motivated to achieve in both the work and family domains. In effect, work and family should be viewed as allies rather than as competitors."

"Nowadays people do want to pursue their [goals](#) in both domains, [work](#) and family," said Lee.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

Citation: Future family and career goals evident in teenage years (2014, November 4) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-11-future-family-career-goals-evident.html>

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