

'The perceived effects of a conservative culture on students' career choices: a focus on final years high-school students in Kuwait'

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Why undertake this study?

Why do so many young students in Kuwait choose one of two very distinct careers paths: medicine or engineering? There is a growing number of students opting to study these careers in the USA and UK and "engineering and physical sciences are the most popular disciplines across all GCC countries" (Universities UK International, p.04). The general career aspirations of young Kuwaitis appear not to correlate with their academic performances. Al-Fanar media reports that the latest PISA results show an equally worrying trend as "the Arab region has again come out near the bottom in an international comparison of the abilities of 15-year-olds in reading, math and science" (Bollag, 2019). Therefore, this study provides an insight into the potential reasons behind such specific career aspirations amongst young Kuwaitis.

Research Questions

-Why are medicine and engineering popular career choices in Kuwait?

-How much influence does the family have on students' career choices in Kuwait?

-How much do cultural and societal expectations impact Kuwaiti students' career choices?

Research Design

Qualitative, semi-structured, digitally recorded interviews with 8 mixed gender final year High School students at A'Takamul International School (ATIS), Kuwait. Research ethics approval was obtained from both UWS and ATIS. Interview transcripts were analysed using a thematic analysis approach.

Findings

"You are regarded as lower class if you are not a doctor"

"The job you do is such a 'status thing' here in Kuwait"



"I don't know what Major I want to study; everybody in my family has an opinion and now I'm mixed up"

"Everybody wants to study the same course in Kuwait, so it's getting more difficult for girls"

Conclusions

The findings from this small-scale study show that many participants were directly feted by the significant amount of pressure and restrictions being placed upon them by their families, society, cultural traditions and the government when deciding their future.

Thematic analysis (codes, concepts, themes)

1. The importance of a lucrative career - Status

- Concerns of being perceived as 'lower class' if not a doctor or an engineer
- The need for the prestige that goes with a career in medicine or engineering
- Medicine of some form is okay, even dermatology, as long as it's medicine
- The most prestigious job in Kuwait is a doctor, so I have to study medicine

2. The power of persuasion - Parents & Society

- The father chooses the university they want their child to attend
- Students need to be respectful to their family's wishes
- My mother wants a family of doctors
- Duty to meet cultural expectations by pursuing a prestigious career

3. Cultural expectations - Restrictions

- The importance of a Government Scholarship to be able to study abroad
- GPA expectations are extremely high
- USA and UK are top university destinations
- Cultural expectations are that girls study in Kuwait

References

Bollag, B., 2019. Arab Countries Rank Poorly in Latest PISA Tests. [online] Al-Fanar Media. Available at: <https://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2019/12/arab-countries-rank-poorly-in-latest-pisa-tests/> [Accessed 27 February 2020].
Universities UK International. (n.d.). State of the relationship: UK higher education engagement with the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf - CORE Reader [online]. Available at: <https://core.ac.uk/reader/143474497> [Accessed 10 November 2019].

