

The Choice of Pedagogical and Psychological Study as a Result of the Negative Experiences in the Family

Abstract

Even though discovering true motives for studying at University/college is a difficult task, still it is indispensable. Identification of real motives may help to improve didactic and educational methods at Universities. Furthermore, the teaching process decides about the quality of education as well as the quality of the future graduates' work. The article provides an analysis of choice for studying psychology and pedagogy as a result of negative experience in the student's family.

Key words: *high education, motives of study choice, pedagogical and psychological study, negative experiences in family, alcoholics, violence.*

Introduction

Recognition of motives deciding which University and faculty one chooses deserves a great deal of attention. The better we realise these motives the better the didactic process at University will be. According to R. Górska motivating factors are one of the main determinants of success in studying. They have got a great impact not only on the studying itself but also the quality of future work. (1999: 28–46).

It is obvious that recognition of true motives is quite difficult especially if we realise the limitation in separating real motives from declared ones. Those declared often turn out to be different from the real ones. (Duraj-Nowakowa, 1984: 49–56).

The author's experience from the first years of studying, when most teachers used to ask for reasons for choosing pedagogy, stimulated him to put a lot of stress on recognising true motives of psychology and pedagogy students for studying

these subjects. The answers given by the students inspired the idea that working in any of these jobs should not be accidental.

If a frustrated shop assistant working in a supermarket (with all respect) should not smile at the customer at the cash board, should not say 'Hello' or 'thank you', then this fact rather will not spoil the rest of the customer's day, or will not change his or her entire life. However, if a child at a nursery school is taken care of by a lady who is not sure why she had studied pedagogy, or she feels underestimated and unfulfilled since she did not study law or medicine, and what is more, she does not know why she does this job (except the argument – 'that is all I can do – I have to do something') then who would like to entrust care of a child to a such person?

Closer studies of the subject: reading books and conversations with students concerning the decision of studying psychology and pedagogy, generated the idea that negative experiences in students' families (i.e. violence, alcoholism, parents' divorce) may constitute real motives for choosing the discussed subjects.

Around Motivation Theory

There is not one ultimate definition of a motive and motivation. K. Duraj-Nowakowa enumerates even twelve motivation theories – each having different variants depending on the author (1984: 49). The great number of meanings of the term 'motivation' may be exemplified by a paper where over a hundred and two definitions of this word can be found (Kleinginna, Kleinginna, 1981: 263–291). Furthermore, A. Maslow claims that every exact motivation theory should include 'sixteen assumptions concerning motivation' (1990: 55–71).

At first glance what we have here is conceptional chaos and a variety of statements. However, despite the fact that theorists start with different assumptions and use different nomenclature all theories have a similar outline. The term 'motive' is derived from a Latin word *emovere*, meaning 'move from a spot' (Mietzel, 1999: 259).

For almost a hundred years in the history of motivation there have appeared many ideas explaining this phenomenon. To quote J. Reykowski 'motivation process is a regulation process driving one's actions to achieve a particular effect such as: a change in physical or social state (make something, move something, get something, inform somebody, give a speech, pass an exam, organise a trip and so on...), a change of oneself (learn something new, lose weight, cure), or a change of one's condition either physical (go somewhere, go up somewhere), or social (get a promotion, change a job)' (1992: 71). In many cases 'an effect' should be treated as a 'scope of matters', i.e. 'studying', rather than a 'single point', i.e. getting to university.

P. Zimbardo and F. Ruch write about motives understood as formulated in categories of reasons, that is statements about probable cause for one's actions. 'A motive is a state, usually social or mental, which directs one's actions towards a specific goal'(1988: 671).

Referring to K. Obuchowski a motive is believed to be a 'verbalisation of an aim and plan which enables one to undertake certain actions'(1983: 33). Nevertheless, there appear doubts whether and to what extent a motive must be verbalised? Is imagining the aim a sufficient criterion for motive consciousness? Does the idea of planning actions go beyond a motive? Planning is in fact a result of making a decision, which is not provoked by a particular motive, only in the case when we remember of already completed tasks. Moreover, not all motives direct human behaviour (Przetacznik-Gierowska, Włodarski, 1994: 75).

Generally, motivation is considered as an internal state of tension which determines the direction of possible actions. This tension results from a discrepancy between noticeable real conditions and desired (ideal) ones. The discrepancy may lead to establishing or accepting particular life ideals, namely, long-term goals, which are important not only for the individual but also for other people. (Tomaszewski, 1977: 788-789).

According to T. Tomaszewski 'the tension may occur in two cases: either in connection with natural needs, resulting from the organism's structure, or because of permanent life conditions as well as those related to the task assigned by one or imposed by others.' (1971: 187).

In the literature there can be found a division into three groups of motives. Zborowski divides motives into external (heteronomic), indirect and internal (innate). The first group embraces reward and punishment, second- competition, imitation, teacher's authority. In the third group there are motives entailing life experience, beliefs of learners (interests, drive to studying, future job, profits) (Kacprzak, 1991: 106).

When speaking of motivation we think of a specific ability of the human psyche to formulate in one's mind a project of a certain condition which then focuses on actions and decides how much energy will be necessary for the realisation of the task. In other words, motivation determines the realisation of a plan - that is actions focused on achieving an objective. Nevertheless, we should remember that in some cases determination of actions may not be a result of previous planning. This situation takes place when previously established customs or stimuli take control and cause immediate reaction. However, the role of drives is rather limited.

The above-presented motivation theories may lead to a conclusion that family problems, such as: alcoholism, frequent arguments, physical and psychological violence or sexual harassment may increase the internal state of tension and as

a consequence – negative motivation a desire to avoid negative experiences. Realising the difference between the real, state (i.e. one's family) and the desired condition (idea of a perfect family) may result in accepting certain life attitudes and aiming at long-distance goals. Consequently, it may lead to the decision to take up psychology or pedagogy studies.

When discussing the problem of motivation we also have to take it into consideration that objectives appear in one's mind in sequences. The final result is not obvious from the very beginning- what follows is that each achieved aim generates another.

Additionally, motives may be realised to a certain extent. "If consciousness of the drives is weak then one feels only a 'lack of something', and what follows, discomfort and anxiety. The more realized is the motivation the better one can realise what is the direct source of the current condition". (Reykowski J., 1992: 76).

To conclude, the choice of the said subjects may be partly unconscious since being fond of helping others (as a reason for studying pedagogy or psychology) can be a derivative choice in fact. There appears a question: why is a student interested in an other human being? Why does he or she want to learn about human psyche and understand human behaviour? Why does he or she want to help those who are not doing well, whose families are broken by alcohol or violence?

Even if a student's choice is absolutely conscious we should bear in mind that there are different motives, however mainly the strongest drives determine ones' actions. Those motives usually take control over one's life and influence both the direction of the undertaken actions as well as their realisation (Tomaszewski, 1977.; 607).

When the tension – motivation is strong, (continual deprivation, serious danger) then a drive for bigger goals occurs. A prime example may be an analysis of a group of people who were deprived of food for a long period. The first place in their plans was occupied by actions connected with eating, henceforth they were going to choose jobs which would provide easy access to food (like a cook). They were imagining and planning how much and how tasty food they would eat. (Mietzel, 1999: 263–264)

It would be too easy to state that if the majority of students, no matter of which faculty, consider their future family as an objective (Kanonowicz, 2002: 85–96), then their current families are pathological (or at least problematic). However, continual problems, such as alcoholism, psychological and physical violence, parents' divorce or death, may develop strong motivational tension and directly influence their decision (choice of study). Following, if choosing either psychological or pedagogical studies results from motives as in the discussed theories then it may help to deal with existing problems as well as to avoid those in the future.

What is quite interesting and valuable is also A. Janowski's theory that states a motive to be: 'a state of an individual focused on achieving a certain goal or

provoking a specific psychological situation'. Accordingly, a motive produces a desire understood as 'a single, brief wish for achieving a specified object or state'. Then those wishes become aspirations that are 'quite permanent, strong demands which are supposed to create future life conditions and provide desired objects' (Janowski, 1977: 32–33).

Private research

Why this subject – idea of research

While analysing and processing the respondents' statements, speaking of their private motives, the main difficulties are caused by the fact that, first of all, people only partly realise what their real goals and reasons are, and secondly, revealing those is limited by many factors, one of which - the basic one, seems to be the need for social acceptance.

The research that has been done so far (Duraj - Nowakowa, 1984: 49-56; Skarzyńska, Gasparski, 2001: 445-461; Górska, 1999: 28-46; Kacprzak, 1991: 105–110; Depta, Pólturzycki, 1995; Sowa, 1970; Susułowska, Nęcki, 1977; Trawińska, 1965) did not try to reveal true motives. It is not sufficient. If a pedagogy or psychology student declares to be interested in human psyche, behaviour and in solving problems then he/she should be asked: 'Why are you interested in human psyche?', 'Why would you like to understand human behaviour?'. Perhaps the reason is the need to understand the mechanism that ruled his or her parents. Why do they drink too much alcohol, use violence, neglect their children? Why have they decided to break up?

Hence, the main question is: 'Are the negative experiences from home the reason why students decide to study pedagogy and psychology?'

Time, place and respondents

Table 1. Number of each year and discipline respondents.

Discipline	Year of studying	Number of questioned	Total number of questioned at each faculty
Pedagogy	I	92	178
	II	86	
Psychology	I	37	87
	II	50	
Total			265

Source: private research.

The research was conducted in February and March 2004. The total number of respondents was 265 first and second year students of Pedagogy and Psychology at Wrocław University. All the questionnaires were valid for further analysis.

Methodology

For the sake of the research a questionnaire was prepared. It contained 16 (sixteen) questions and a table with enumerated forms of violence where the respondents marked the frequency and types of violence in their families. In the research one of the most popular tests known as CAST - Children of Alcoholics Screening Test was also used. The test is useful in recognising alcoholics' children belonging to the so-called group of increased risk – namely those who lived or live with at least one alcoholic parent. It is a list of 30 (thirty) questions which are supposed to explore attitudes, feelings and experiences with relation to alcoholic parents' problems (Robinson, 1998: 163-166).

Negative experiences include violence, alcoholism, separation or divorce, parents' death, long separation of children from parents, suicidal attempt, suicide, rape, assault with detriment of one's health happening in family.

Analysis of results.

As written before, many scientists of different fields: pedagogy, psychology or sociology, have been wondering what young people's motives for choosing a specific subject for studying are, however, none of them has related this choice with negative experiences from students' families.

Very often such research resulted only in creating a list of motives. The majority of the students admitted to being simply interested in a particular field. There were, of course, some who just wanted to escape the compulsory military service or took up studying by accident. Some also gave other reasons such as: a good job in the future, prestige, parents' or friends' advice, sister or uncle model and many, many others.

Currently, most students decide to study a subject along with their interests. The rich literature of this matter does not, however, even mention what the reasons for certain interests may be. M. Trawińska in her quite archaic research notices a relation between studying and liking: 'I enjoy learning this subject' (1965: 299).

This, however, does not serve as a satisfactory explanation for the problem (or phenomenon) of a life choice. More helpful seems to be observation made by professor J. Guichard: a vast majority of high school graduates decide on the basis of the question: 'what is my favourite school subject?' – it rather does not assure a good choice. According to J. Guichard, that is why girls decide to study psychology – because they want to help people, and by analogy boys decide to take up politics.

There are 512 statements concerning faculty choice in total. (on average 1.93 from one student), 476 replies prove a general interest in both pedagogy and psychology, 36 report an accidental choice, no idea what to do further (together with unanswered questions).

The table below presents the percentage for each year and subject.

Table 2. Overall division of motives – along with interests and accidental

	Pedagogy 1 st year	Pedagogy 2 nd year	Psychology 1 st year	Psychology 2 nd year	Total
Interest in discipline	148 responds 89.16%	175 95.11%	71 93.42%	82 95.35%	476 92.97%
Coincidence, no answer	18 10.84%	9 4.89%	5 6.58%	4 4.65%	36 7.03%
Total	166	184	76	86	512

Source: private research.

It is worth noticing that almost 93% of the students decided to study along with their interests. There are only slight differences between the said subject.

To picture the motives for a specific choice let us have a closer look at the list of reasons produced on the basis of the response analysis. The figures in the 2nd column show the number of certain answers while in the 3rd the percentage of the respondents who gave this answer.

Table 3. List of motives for pedagogy students.

List of motives	Number of responses	Percentage of respondents
1. work with people/children	101	56.74
2. helping others	83	46.63
3. impulse, calling, inner need	23	12.92
4. previous work experience	21	11.80
5. helping oneself	20	11.24
6. interesting subject	18	10.11
7. model of a mother, father or friend	12	6.74
8. understanding of human psyche, problems and behaviour	11	6.18
9. interdisciplinary	11	6.18
10. many job offers	11	6.18
11. limited choice, rejection from other faculties	10	5.62
12. lack of other ideas, chance	9	5.06

List of motives	Number of responses	Percentage of respondents
13. self-development	9	5.06
14. interests – not specified	9	5.06
15. no answer	4	2.25
16. easy exams and studying in Wrocław	3	1.69
17. disease in family (cerebral palsy)	2	1.12
18. work in police	1	0.56
19. gaining master degree	1	0.56

Source: private research.

Table 4. List of motives for psychology students.

List of motives	Number of responses	Percentage of respondents
1. helping others	31	35.63
2. understanding of human psyche, problems and behaviour	26	29.89
3. interests – not specified	17	19.54
4. interesting subject	15	17.24
5. impulse, calling, inner need	14	16.09
6. helping oneself	10	11.49
7. many job offers	10	11.49
8. work with people/children	10	11.49
9. self-development	8	9.20
10. lack of other ideas, chance	7	8.05
11. interdisciplinary	5	5.75
12. model of a mother, father or friend	4	4.60
13. prestige	1	1.15
14. autistic brother	1	1.15
15. no answer	1	1.15
16. fondness of advertisement psychology	1	1.15
17. previous work experience	1	1.15

Source: private research.

Those results are just an introduction to a further analysis which will focus on negative experiences in students' families. The above-presented tables do not specify how many students declaring 'helping oneself' come from dysfunctional families.

Notwithstanding, it is significant that 11.24% of pedagogy and 11.49% of psychology students claim 'helping oneself' to be the reason for choosing their stud-

ies. In total, 30 respondents consider studying pedagogy or psychology to be helpful for themselves. It is hard to say whether the number is high. A closer analysis of the motives with respect to students' negative experience in family will show if it is the case.

What is equally important is the fact that the reason called: 'Impulse, calling, inner need' is similar to one just discussed. To explain: those who marked this answer added that 'something told them that they should study this subject but they really do not know why'. The 'inner need' 'forced' them to make a specific choice. There were 37 such answers, which makes 13.96% of the total questioned, 12.92% among the pedagogy students and 16.09% of the psychology students.

To conclude, the figures present only a list of motives given by the 1st and 2nd year students of Pedagogy and Psychology in the years 2003 and 2004. The following analysis will reveal if there is a difference in the responses of students with negative experiences and those who do not have such.

Diagnosis of Students' Community with regards to home violence

Among 92 pedagogy students (1st year) 40 (43.49%) experienced home violence; 52 (56.52%) did not. At the second year the proportions are: in families of 32 students (37.21%) there was a problem of violence and in 54 (62.79%) students' families there was no violence. In total 72 (40.45%) pedagogy students experienced home violence while 106 (59.55%) did not.

A little bit different results are in case of the psychology students. 10 1st year students (27.03%) suffered from violence in their families – 27 people (72.97%) did not. But among the second year students the situation is similar to this among the 2nd year students of pedagogy. 19 students (38%) were victims of home violence as opposed to 31 students (62%). In total 29 students (33.33%) experienced violence in their homes and 58 (66.67%) did not.

Table 5. Violence in family

	Home violence figures (percentage)	No home violence figures (percentage)	Total questioned
Pedagogy, 1 st year	40 (43.49%)	52 (56.52%)	92
Pedagogy, 2 nd year	32 (37.21%)	54 (62.79%)	86
Pedagogy	72 (40.45%)	106 (59.55%)	178
Psychology, 1 st year	10 (27.03%)	27 (72.97%)	37
Psychology, 2 nd year	19 (38%)	31 (62%)	50
Psychology	29 (33.33%)	58 (66.67%)	87
Total	101 (38.11%)	164 (61.89%)	265

Source: private research.

From this we can conclude that among the 2nd year students of pedagogy and 2nd year students of psychology there is a similar percentage of students who come from families with a violence problem. A similar tendency can be noticed among the 1st year students of both subjects. May it serve as an explanation to the idea that second year students, at the beginning of their studies, believed their families to have a problem with violence but then after a year of studying they changed their opinion?

Without trivialising, on the basis of the research, we may state that over 38% of the students of both subjects experienced or are still experiencing violence in their families. If we look at all the results, we may notice that ‘more or less’ the same number of each subject students suffered home violence, however, their awareness was different.

Diagnosis of Students’ environment with regard to parents’ alcoholism

What is noteworthy is the fact that only 153 students among 265 did not suffer because of parents’ alcoholism. In other words, over 40% were victims of alcoholic parents no matter whether the problem with alcohol was at the early stage or if it was a permanent addiction.

Table 6. Alcohol problem in student’s family

	Parents alcoholism	No alcoholism	Total
Pedagogy, 1 st year	37 (40.22%)	55 (59.78%)	92
Pedagogy, 2 nd year	37 (43.02%)	49 (56.98%)	86
Pedagogy	74 (41.57%)	104 (58.42%)	178
Psychology, 1 st year	12 (32.43%)	25 (67.57%)	37
Psychology, 2 nd year	26 (52%)	24 (48%)	50
Psychology	38 (43.68%)	49 (56.32%)	87
Total	112 (42.26%)	153 (57.74%)	265

Source: private research.

Decision of studying pedagogy or psychology with regard to negative experiences

Previously it was explained that the ‘negative experiences’ category may include more problems, starting with parents’ divorce or separation, through suicide to diseases together with necessary care of ill members of the family.

The used questionnaire was enriched with questions concerning the above-mentioned problems so that the results were more detailed.

If the questionnaire were limited only to the problems of home violence and alcoholism then we would not get a full analysis, and moreover, it may have had distorted observed tendencies and relations. There are some question-sheets with no number marked in table (the part concerning violence) and with no positive answer in CAST test, but the interpretation of the whole questionnaire proves the person to belong to the group with negative experiences.

Consider the following cases as an illustration:

- 1) Parents' divorce 16 years ago, suicidal attempts of a close friend at high school – psychology student.
- 2) Father's death 5 years ago, one of the siblings committed suicide – psychology student.
- 3) Father's death 11 years ago, schizophrenic aunt – pedagogy student.
- 4) Parents' divorce 17 years ago, living with step father for 15 years, suicide of a cousin 4 years ago, suicidal attempt of an aunt a year ago – pedagogy student.

It should be added that the group of students who experienced other problems than violence or alcoholism is much bigger than the examples show. So for the sake of this research those students will be included in the group with negative experiences. The table below contains the figures and percentage of negative experiences among the 1st and 2nd year students of both faculties.

Table 7. Negative experiences in students' family

	Negative experience	None	Total
Pedagogy, 1 st year	66 (71.74%)	26 (28.26%)	92
Pedagogy, 2 nd year	62 (72.09%)	24 (27.91%)	86
Pedagogy	128 (71.91%)	50 (28.09%)	178
Psychology, 1 st year	23 (62.16%)	14 (37.84%)	37
Psychology, 2 nd year	36 (72%)	14 (28%)	50
Psychology	59 (67.82%)	28 (32.18%)	87
Total	187 (70.57%)	78 (29.43%)	265

Source: private research.

As the table shows, over 70% of the students studying pedagogy or psychology at Wrocław University come from families where harmful events happened or still happen.

Since both subjects have much in common and there are so many motives, and additionally there has been introduced a criterion of 'negative experiences', it would

be useful to present a list of all the figures for all the questioned students. The table below contains 21 motives in the choice order.

Table 8. Motives for choosing a subject with regards to negative experiences

Motives	Negative experiences		None	
1) helping others	88	77.2%	26	22.8%
2) work with others/children	86	77.5%	25	22.5%
3) impulse, calling, inner need	32	86.5%	5	13.5%
4) understanding of human psyche, problems and behaviour	27	73.0%	10	27.0%
5) interesting subject	21	65.6%	11	34.4%
6) helping oneself,	29	96.7%	1	3.3%
7) interests (not specified)	12	46.2%	14	53.8%
8) previous work experience	11	50.0%	11	50.0%
9) many job offers	13	61.9%	8	38.1%
10) self-development	2	11.8%	15	88.2%
11) model of a mother, father or friend	11	68.8%	5	31.2%
12) no idea, chance	11	68.8%	5	31.2%
13) interdisciplinary	10	62.5%	6	37.5%
14) limited choice, rejection from other faculties	6	60.0%	4	40.0%
15) no answer	3	60.0%	2	40.0%
16) easy exams	3		0	
17) disease in family	3		0	
18) will to work in police	1		1	
19) will to gain higher education	1		0	
20) prestige	1		0	
21) fondness of advertisement psycholgy	0		1	

Source: private research.

Conclusions

The majority (77.2%) of the students who chose 'helping others' come from families with negative experiences. They also declare a will to 'work with people/children (77.5%).

86.5% of those studying pedagogy or psychology come from problematic families. Even more, because almost 96.7% of the students seek help in studying.

73% of the students who desired to understand human psyche, problems and behaviour come from families with negative experiences.

However, contrary to that is an argument of self-development and self-understanding. Those students who gave this as a reason are usually from families with no negative experiences.

So we can divide the motives into two groups. The first group includes such arguments as: helping oneself, helping others, inner need, work with people. Those arguments were given by the students from families with problems. In the second group of motives, which were provided by the students with no negative experiences, we can enumerate: self-development and not specified interests. Using the numbers from Table 8 we see that motives from 1,2,3,4,5 form the first group then 7 and 10 – the second. A deep analysis reveals statistics at the $p=0.01$ level. The relation is rather weak and shows $\varphi = 0.37$. If we take into consideration the motives of self-development and helping oneself, which can be treated together, then the relation between motives and negative experiences in family is statistically important and makes $\varphi = 0.86$. More data and results can be obtained from the author.

Summary

The motivational factors are believed to be one of the major elements of success in studying. They have an impact not only on studying itself but on the quality of a future job. Revealing deep rooted motives for studying a particular subject can significantly help to improve the didactic and educational process at universities. This is the reason why the research paper is not limited only to the declared motives where interest in the subject has the first position on the scale.

Almost 97% of the pedagogy and psychology students at Wrocław University have chosen those subjects along with their interests, indeed. If this interest results from the will to help others, help oneself, self-development, work with children or work in the police so there arises a question why? Why is this person interested in human psyche? Why does he or she want to help others? More than 11% of the questioned declared 'helping oneself' as motivation. Further analysis proved that the students who come from families with problems have different reasons for being interested in pedagogy or psychology .

The students without negative experiences wrote about self-development and interest (without specifying); conversely those who had negative experiences gave a will to help others, help oneself, an inner need and work with people as motives.

Revealing true motives for choosing specific studies is difficult but at the same time of a great importance, undoubtedly research on the problem must be carried on. This is significant for student life during the course as well as in their future work and life in general.

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