

Career Preferences of Agricultural Undergraduates under the Economic Crisis Background in Sri Lanka

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Agriculture has been at the forefront as Sri Lanka has tried to address the effects of the ongoing economic crisis. Therefore, Agricultural undergraduates have a role to play in addressing the crisis. This research aims to study the career preferences of Agricultural undergraduates during the economic crisis in Sri Lanka. Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) was used to conceptualize the factors that affect career preferences. In addition, the effect of demographic factors on career preferences has been explored. Mixed methods, both quantitative and qualitative methods, were used on a sample of 269 Agricultural undergraduates of the University of Peradeniya, University of Ruhuna, Wayamba University of Sri Lanka, and Uva-Wellassa University. Data were gathered through an online questionnaire survey. Descriptive analyses showed that the majority of the participants changed their career preferences during the economic crisis compared to pre-crisis preferences, the main concerns were the lack of hiring into the public sector, market instability and uncertainty, and the desire to leave the country. A majority of students preferred the private sector for their careers after the economic crisis set in. Path analysis was conducted to find the effects of constructs of SCCT and demographic factors on the career preferences of Agricultural undergraduates. Path analysis revealed that self-efficacy and contextual supports significantly affect the outcome expectations of the career ($P < 0.05$) and self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and gender of the participants significantly affect the components of career preferences: the knowledge of possibilities and the trust in future career paths ($P < 0.05$). Contextual barriers and monthly income significantly affect goal clarity ($P < 0.05$). Contextual supports significantly affect both components of career preferences ($P < 0.05$). Self-efficacy and gender did not significantly affect goal clarity ($P > 0.05$). The findings of this study can be used by the university administration, career counselors, and policymakers when organizing career guidance programs for Agricultural undergraduates.

Keywords: Agricultural undergraduates, Career preferences, Economic crisis, Social cognitive career theory

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