

Learning from Roma minority youth about their needs

Roth Maria
Sergiu Raiu, Florina Pop, Anna Bernath

Babes-Bolyai University

Based on the testimonials collected from 30 Roma youth, the aim of the present study is to understand the resources and barriers that adolescents identify as influencing their occupational aspirations. We look at the future orientation construction process of Roma adolescents who were interviewed in diverse social contexts: some were met in high schools, others in vocational schools for special needs youth; some in foster-care, others in prisons; most of them were living with their own families, either out or in poor Roma communities. In our analysis, we followed three directions: (1) how do Roma children view themselves in relation with the others; (2) how do they describe their occupational aspirations; (3) how they express their needs and what resources and respectively barriers do they perceive in career aspirations. In order to gather testimonials of youth individual and focus group methods were used. In order to stimulate participation in the research we asked participants to draw their social atom and explain where they see barriers and resources for their future orientation. Results showed that Roma adolescents who were enrolled in high-school believed in their own personal characteristics, abilities and strengths to fulfil their aspirations in spite of being aware of discrimination and the scarcity of resources in their own environment. Most of the interviewed youth mentioned financial concerns and the need to provide for one's family, which hampered in the past and will continue to affect their access to the desired educational and subsequently occupational path. Some girls are marked by traditional family models, and some testimonials showed that teenagers lack options for the future, especially when they were aware of their disadvantages. On the other side, several others were also aware of their capabilities and were committed to school. Although some high-school students talked about the discrimination, they expect in the future employment, testimonials also showed that the main resource they had was self-confidence in their own personality, but they were not equipped with information on where and how they can get social and legal help. Perhaps acknowledging this finding could open new paths to social programs oriented to career development of Roma youth.

Keywords: future orientation, youth, testimonials.