

Academic Motivation on Students’ Career Aspirations at the *Justice Institute of British Columbia*

Jairus Korpa

Introduction:

Education is one of the most important resources available to Canadians because it directly affects each person's future. With a post-secondary education, students can have an enhanced quality of life for themselves, their families, and their communities. Career choice and outcome for many professionals are dependent on education, which supports future development and improves interpersonal skills required for successful careers. The purpose of this study was to explore the influence that a law enforcement studies education, from the *Justice Institute of British Columbia* (JIBC), had on a students' career aspirations. Of the 123-surveyed participants, 98% of students enrolled at JIBC for their post-secondary education had specific career goals related to law enforcement or public safety.

Background:

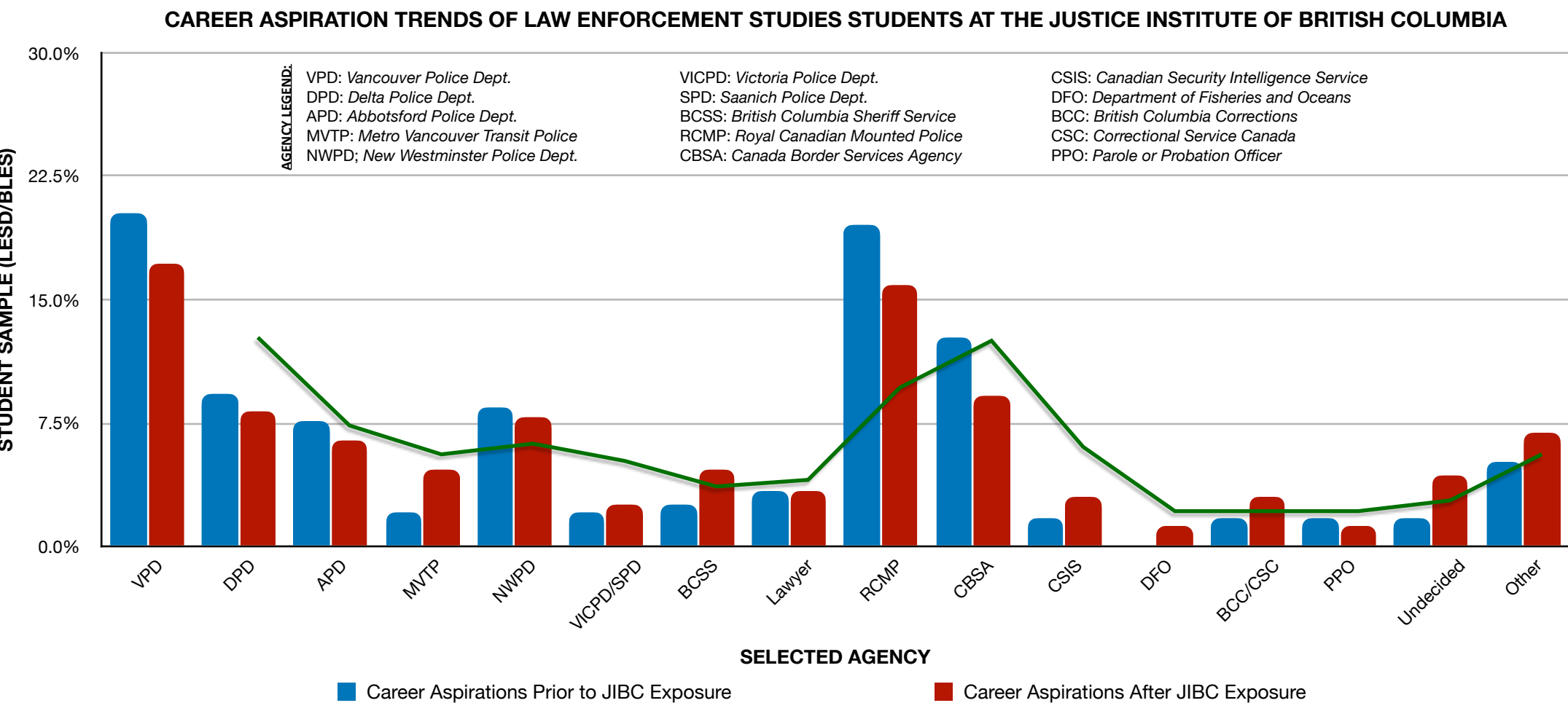
A post-secondary education has become the norm in pursuit of a professional career. Career goals may be influenced by a variety of motivations, both intrinsic and extrinsic. Such motivations support the perspective that psychosocial factors also influence career goals and aspirations. In many western countries (G7) such as Canada, a post-secondary education supports professional career development and success. According to Weingarten, Hicks, Jonker, Smith, and Arnold (2015), “Educational institutions may be the most important public institutions in Canada to ensure a vibrant and robust quality of life and economy” (p. iii). Extrinsic motivations contribute to the high enrolment amongst students, post high-school graduation. However, academic research suggested differing perspectives as to why individual’s seek certain career paths. The literature reviewed suggested 3-common influencers: 1) psychological and social motivators; 2) subject matter and education; and 3) the glamourized influence through entertainment and media.

Methods:

This study was based on a mixed methods approach, where collected quantitative data supported one of the researched common influencers on career aspirations, specifically subject matter and education. Anonymous quantitative data was collected from 7 cohorts who were currently enrolled in both JIBC’s *Law Enforcement Studies Diploma* (LESD) and *Bachelor of Law Enforcement Studies* (BLES) programs. The data retrieved was collected using a group-administered questionnaire which consisted of 8 questions. The multiple-choice styled questions ranged from what program the student was currently enrolled in, what career goals the student had prior to their education at JIBC, and what career goals the student had after their exposure to a JIBC law enforcement studies education. The purpose for collecting quantitative data was to provide insight into whether a law enforcement education at JIBC influenced a change in career goals. The qualitative portion of this study explored existing academic studies as to why career goals and aspirations change over time.

Results/Findings:

The quantitative research determined that 66% of the (123) student participants had changed their career goals, following exposure to their law enforcement studies at JIBC. The top 3 agencies students selected included: *Vancouver Police Department*, *Royal Canadian Mounted Police* (RCMP), and *Canada Border Services Agency* (CBSA). The most dramatic change in career choice amongst students was a 3.6% decline towards future careers with CBSA and the RCMP. The two most notable increases students selected was for *Metro Vancouver Transit Police* (MVTP) and the *Undecided* category, which both increased by 2.6%. Totals further indicated that 57% of the students surveyed would be applying to their agency of



choice within 6 months of their respective program completion. As a result, the primary research supported that 93% of the student participants agreed that their education at JIBC introduced them to new career opportunities.

Discussion:

Most career aspirations start with setting a goal, which some students have had since childhood, while others had set goals in their adult years. Students who made efficient use of their educational experiences were more likely to seek out the various career opportunities available to them. A primary goal for most post-secondary institutions is to teach students to think critically while searching for credibility and validity. Historically, the media has glamourized law enforcement professions, where policing appears to be exciting and adventurous. However, as many experienced police officers have expressed, the reality can be very different. Therefore, a post-secondary education taught by educated and experienced professionals may help clarify the myths presented in the media, such as in television and movies. The correlation between higher education and a successful career had emerged from both the qualitative and quantitative findings.

Conclusion/Recommendations:

The findings indicated that a motivation to work through the challenges of achieving one’s career goals may be intrinsic, extrinsic, or a combination of both. Ascencio (2018) suggested, in order to organize and sustain the behaviour and actions that lead to a successful outcome, it is essential to set goals. A law enforcement education is specialized to prepare students for a professional career in policing and public safety. Unlike general studies, where it is relatively easy to change majors, a law enforcement education is specific towards a specialized profession. Indecision can create unnecessary anxiety and challenges if the student wants to change their focus. It is encouraged that families and students research prospective careers before they enrol, as misinformation of the criminal justice system is prevalent. Future research into motivations towards specialized careers may be explored at post-secondary institutions that offer specialized studies. This study focused specifically on a small sample of law enforcement studies students at JIBC. Future research may be expanded with additional specialized studies, such as within the *School of Public Safety* and the *School of Health, Community, and Social Justice* at the *Justice Institute of British Columbia*.

References:

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