Cypriot P.E. Teachers' Opinions on Occupational Prestige and Social Capital

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ABSTRACT

Physical Education teachers have a special role in the community but sometimes their fellow citizens may not be conscious of it. This paper is based on research which was conducted in order to study P.E. teachers' opinions about the relationship between social capital and their employment in the different sectors. Another objective of this article is to find out how P.E. teachers perceive themselves in relation to other occupations and whether they are satisfied with their position in the Cypriot labour market. The methods applied for this research were documentary analysis and survey method, but it is essential to remark that this paper is based on a larger investigation. Two sub-samples were created in order to compare their opinions towards the three objectives of this study. Results indicate that according to P.E. teachers; medical doctors have the highest prestige in Cyprus. They also believe that social capital has a great influence on their employment at the Cypriot Sport Organization but it is important to note that the majority of them are satisfied with their position in the labour market. This paper provides some evidence about the opinions and feelings of Cypriot P.E. teachers.

KEYWORDS

physical education teachers, Cyprus, occupational prestige, social capital, labour market

Introduction

People usually speak about doctors and scientists with great honour and esteem, but they discredit individuals who are working in blue-collar occupations (manual labour). Of course, in any society each type of social role will possess more or less prestige relative to other types of roles (Penn 1975). Prestige is a word commonly used to describe reputation or esteem, but speaking about jobs it is better to be specified as "occupational prestige". In this article various occupations will be referred to in order to emphasize their social standing in the occupational prestige ladder of Cyprus. Unfortunately, there is little literature regarding the specific issue, but the author will mention some remarks according to the findings of international literature.

It is noteworthy that occupational prestige might be the same for each social role in many countries if the accepted criteria of worthiness are similarly alike (Penn 1975). In opposition, Kraus, Schild and Robert in their article (1978) argued that people living at different times, persons living in different societies, and members of different groups in the same society may evince remarkably

similar evaluations of occupations, not because they share parallel conceptions of the occupational world, but because they have been instructed to evaluate occupations along a more or less common yardstick selected by researchers rather than by themselves.

The objectives of this article are first of all to discover how Physical Education (P.E.) teachers perceive themselves in the Cypriot society in relation to other occupations such as medical doctors, elementary teachers, taxi drivers, salesmen, bartenders, interior designers and governmental employees. Some sociologists believe that the evaluation of prestige for various occupations depends on the social characteristics of the respondents (Guppy 1982) however; in this research the respondents have the same level of education and income since all of them are P.E. teachers and work at state schools in Cyprus. Prestige is an observable phenomenon, which is why individuals are supposed to evaluate the occupational social standing according to their perception of a behavioural structure of deference (Kraus, Schild and Robert 1978).

According to previous studies the only consensus of occupational prestige was that of the profession of doctors, which used to receive the highest honour among other occupations. Hence the order rank among the other kind of jobs differs between several countries in accordance with their social values. For example in 1975 teachers had higher prestige in Poland than in the USA and locomotive drivers had more prestige in Czechoslovakia than in the USA. It is important to mention that prestige of any particular social role is based on a different combination of factors which produce its relative moral worthiness and consequently entitle it to the show of deference behaviour (Penn, 1975). Unfortunately throughout the review of related literature it was found that there has been no study dealing with the prestige of P.E. teachers in Cyprus. Indeed, even if they do similar work in schools to high-school teachers, people usually have different a opinion of them. Particularly in Cyprus, individuals believe that P.E. teachers do not deserve the same esteem as high school teachers. It is also obvious that in Cyprus the subject of physical education in schools is considered to be an insignificant lesson. Physical education lessons are abandoned when time is required for reading and mathematics or for revision purposes and tests on academic work (Joe Ken 2000).

Moreover the author would like to discover whether P.E. teachers are satisfied with their position in the Cypriot labour market, and it would also be interesting to find out the opinions of Cypriot P.E. teachers regarding the relationship between social capital and employment. Social capital means different things to different people, and usually those who use the term see it as an ingredient of the resource allocation mechanism (Partha Ismail 2000). Cyprus is a small island where people may know each other or may have common relatives; so they take this fact as an advantage. When Cypriots seek employment in a specific job, a familiar person will certainly be pleased to help even if individuals may not deserve the certain position.

Methods

A comprehensive study was carried out in Cyprus by the author, in which the social role of the P.E. degree holders was studied using qualitative and quantitative methods. These are the analysis of documents (P.E. curricula and programs), in-depth interviews (N=16) and survey method. The questionnaire consisted of 33 open and closed questions.

The number of all P.E. teachers who are employed in state schools in Cyprus is 392. The information presented in this paper is based on two sets of data collected in a separate sample collected randomly (N=53). The first sub-sample includes P.E. teachers who found employment immediately after their graduation from universities (N1=26); 10 males and 16 females. The second sub-sample includes P.E. teachers who had to wait for their employment at schools (N2=27); 20 males and 7

females. The individuals belonging to both sub-samples are nowadays employed at state high schools in Cyprus and their age is over 36 years old. In more details, 19 individuals are 36 to 45 years old and 34 persons were recruited from the 45 to 65 age group.

Results

Occupational prestige

In this chapter the P.E. teachers' evaluation of the prestige of different occupations in Cyprus are presented. The jobs for evaluation were chosen according to a pilot study based on in-depth interviews. In the pilot study the respondents could refer to any occupation they wanted. Those jobs that were most frequently appreciated are presented here. The various occupations that P.E. teachers had to award certain percentages of honour (from 0% to 100% scale) for this article were: teacher, medical doctor, governmental employee, salesman, interior designer, taxi driver, bartender and P.E. teacher. It is worth mentioning that the analysis of the results of the two different groups of this investigation showed that the rank order of these occupations was the same. That means that P.E. teachers share the same opinion on the specific occupations and they evaluated their prestige and reputation similarly. There were only few differences in the average mean of the occupational prestige. It seems that those P.E. teachers who had to wait for their employment at schools, observe the esteem of some occupations differently; especially the profession of taxi-driver, bartender and salesman. According to Table 1 below, there is a difference of 6% between the two groups when analyzing the occupational prestige of salesman. Another 2% difference as for the occupation of taxi-driver and finally 6% difference for respect towards the bartender profession. Perhaps the respondents of the second group had been working in different areas before their employment at state schools and perceive the importance of various social roles differently.

Table 1. Rank orders of occupational prestige in Cyprus by P.E. teachers.

Occupations	First Group (Average Mean)	Second Group (Average Mean)
Medical Doctor	87%	83%
Teacher	73%	70%
P.E. Teacher	71%	68%
Governmental employee	68%	67%
Interior Designer	56%	57%
Salesman	35%	41%
Taxi-driver	32%	34%
Bartender	28%	34%

As is shown in Table 1, the occupation of bartender has the lowest level of prestige among the remaining occupations. Usually in Cyprus, people who are actually involved in this area do not consider it as a main job but as a chic and fast way to earn extra money. Apparently, there are jobs (blue-collar occupations) with even lower prestige than that of bartenders, but they were not included in this paper.

Furthermore, Table 1 indicates that the profession of medical doctor has the greatest honour of all. This is not that unusual, because according to Penn in 1975 the profession of doctor also used to have the highest level of prestige in the USA, Czechoslovakia and Poland. But if we compare the results for 2009 in Poland, we realize that especially doctors' esteem has decreased a lot since then;

because nowadays professors have the highest prestige with an average mean of 84%, followed by miners and nurses with 77% and eventually doctors with 73% (Karolina 2009). Of course the results of the present paper do not indicate the opinions of society as a whole towards the specific occupations but just the Cypriot P.E. teachers' view. It is obvious that the first group's participants gave a higher percentage for occupational prestige of medical doctors than the second group's participants.

Figure 1. P.E. teachers' opinion about occupational prestige in Cyprus.

It is also essential to mention that the analysis of both sub-samples showed that the evaluation of teachers' prestige is higher than the prestige of P.E. teachers. Typically, in several research projects the P.E. teachers are included in the profession of teacher, but since the sample of this investigation was constituted by P.E. teachers exclusively, we treated it as separate occupation. In 1999, a Polish researcher named Falkowska showed that teachers came third in the rank order of occupational prestige. University professors were top of the ladder, ahead of doctors in second place. Furthermore, the first sub-sample gave higher prestige for P.E. teachers than the second sub-sample. It can be expected that those individuals who have been working for a longer period of time as P.E. teachers at schools respect their profession more than those who have worked fewer years at schools. In addition, the first group's evaluation of teachers' prestige is 3% higher than the second group's. Here, it is important to state that only after 1850 were people in Cyprus able to study the profession of teacher (Maratheftes 1992), which was considered as the most honourable job in society. Evidently, in that period of time people were not so educated and only few people had the opportunity to attend school. Later on, as the educational system expanded, the rank order of occupational prestige changed as well.

In addition, we were interested in P.E. teachers' opinions regarding the evaluation of teaching the subject of physical education at elementary schools. In Cyprus, P.E. teachers are not allowed to teach physical education in elementary schools because the Ministry of Education authorized traditional elementary teachers for that area. Considering the results, both sub-samples gave a very low percentage for elementary teachers' ability to teach the certain lesson to children and a very high percentage to P.E. teachers' ability. The average mean of the answers from the first group was 12.4% for elementary teachers and 97.6% for P.E. teachers; and from the second group it was 14.4% for elementary teachers and 94.8% for P.E. teachers.

Although the profession of P.E. teacher plays a significant role, Cypriots usually do not consider it to be an honourable job. Nevertheless, the teaching of physical education at schools has many purposes and it seems that the whole procedure does not only have an impact on students' health but can also form their character and ideals later in life (Kapardis 1999).

Lastly, it is interesting that the occupation of interior designer and governmental employee are similarly evaluated by the two sub-samples; only 1% was the difference between their prestiges. In Cyprus, a person who is a governmental employee is usually considered as a providential individual because of the large number of benefits he/she obtains through his/her job. Contrary to this, politicians and governmental employees have much lower prestige in Poland and Hungary than in Cyprus.

P.E. teachers' satisfaction about their position in the labour market.

Regarding the satisfaction of the P.E. teachers' position in the Cypriot labour market, the respondents had to give answer to a five-scale evaluation, from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). The majority of both sub-samples were very satisfied with their salary and with their position in the labour market. In Cyprus it is commonly known that those individuals who work for the government enjoy far more advantages than those who are involved in the private sector. Their salary is superior to others', and even when they retire they actually receive more money than people who work in other occupations, the number of hours worked per day is fewer, they receive hospital care free of charge and they cannot be fired easily.

The answers of the first group show that nine individuals were very much satisfied, thirteen people were very satisfied, only three gave a neutral answer, and only one person did not answer. The answers of the second group were a little bit different, although the average mean of the results is similar. The average mean of the first group is 4.07 and the second group's is 3.85. In other words, seven people were very satisfied with their position in the labour market, twelve were very satisfied, seven answered neutrally and only one individual did not know how to answer the question.

Opinions about the influence of social capital

According to Bourdieu (1983) the importance of social capital has increased in all societies, especially in small countries such as Cyprus where people know each other. The author presents the P.E. teachers' opinions concerning the involvement of social capital in their employment in the different sectors, especially the employment in the public sector (schools) and at the Cyprus Sport Organization (CSO). The Cyprus Sport Organization is a semi-governmental organization enacted by the 1969 – 1996 laws on the Cyprus Sport Organization acting as the Supreme Authority in the Republic of Cyprus. One of their major activities as an organization is the "sport for all" program, in which there are only eighty P.E. teachers employed. P.E. teachers believe that only few are able to work for the CSO; those who are fortunate enough to have the greatest social capital. This can be shown by the average mean of the results which is 4.28 in the first sub-sample (5 persons did not answer at all) and 4.41 in the second sub-sample (3 persons did not answer). Contrary to these results we can see that P.E. teachers do not share the same opinion about the relationship between social capital and employment to state schools. They believe that employment at state schools cannot be influenced by the social capital because the waiting list for P.E. teachers is published and everyone can check it according to the year of graduation and the credits of each degree. Of course there are always some exceptions regarding the people who were involved in the war or those who belong to families with many children. The average mean related to that issue is 2.7 for the first group and 2.59 for the second group. The various results are illustrated in detail in Table 2.

Table 2. P.E. teachers' opinions about the influence of social capital for their employment.

	Not import ant at all		Little importance		Partly important		Important		Very important	
	G1*	G2*	G1	G2	G1	G2	G1	G2	G1	G2
Employment at state schools	3	3	11	14	5	3	3	5	4	2
Employment at CSO	-	-	2	-	1	3	7	8	11	13

* G1 – Indicates the first group of the research

**G2 – Indicates the second group of the research

Conclusion

The results of this paper indicate that the majority of P.E. teachers are very satisfied with their position in the Cypriot labour market. Their salary is very good and that is because they work at state schools as governmental employees. The current study also examined the various occupational prestiges according to the P.E. teachers' point of view. It is noteworthy that the results for the two sub-samples did not have significant differences. Like in many other countries, medical doctors received the highest respect of all, because of their special ethical and legal duties. The teachers' occupation is the next, followed by the profession of P.E. teacher. It is commonly known that teachers have a special role in the community because they are responsible for transmitting knowledge, culture, social values and norms to the younger generation. Here, it is also essential to refer to the differences of prestige evaluation between the two sub-samples. It is quite obvious from the results that those who have longer experience in teaching physical education rank their job higher than those who found employment later. The second group gave a higher prestige evaluation for the next three occupations, namely taxi-driver, bartender and salesman. Nonetheless, the occupation of governmental employee and interior designer are evaluated similarly by both sub-samples.

Another interesting aspect of this research is the comparison between the two sub-samples regarding the social capital. On this point there is a relation, because both groups believe that the social capital is vital for employment at the Cyprus Sport Organization (CSO). As was mentioned above, Cyprus is a small island where citizens have common friends or relatives among them, who can always support them for a particular position. In addition, according to the results, social capital is not involved in the employment at schools.

This paper gives some evidence about the opinions of P.E. teachers of Cyprus who are employed at state schools at present. In Cyprus there are 1488 P.E. degree holders who are not employed at schools as P.E. teachers yet. In the future, the author intends to discover their opinions too. And finally, although P.E. teachers evaluated their profession highly in terms of prestige, they have the feeling that their special role in the community is not so highly evaluated by the society. Therefore it is understandable that P.E. teachers are not more optimistic and more proud of their special role in the community. It is expected that if they try to fulfil their tasks with more commitment and enthusiasm, their fellow citizens will eventually respect their occupation with greater honour.

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