



Teenage Dreams: can adolescent aspirations be used to inform new conservation initiatives in Kazakhstan?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This thesis presents the findings of research gathered from May to August 2014, with interviews conducted in the Ural region of Kazakhstan and questionnaires completed by conservationists in the UK, Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Mongolia. The thesis research aimed to identify whether the aspirations and preferred social activities of teenagers in Kazakhstan could be used to engage them with current conservation initiatives regarding the saiga antelope. Different ways of engaging and inspiring teenagers were then explored with input from conservationists working in the saiga range areas in order to construct a framework of recommendations for future teenage engagement.

AIMS The goal of the research is to explore ways positively to change teenage attitudes and consequently behaviour (in this case, refraining from poaching), a necessity if the saiga antelope is to continue to exist. Despite the growing emphasis on initiatives such as environmental education or community-based conservation in recent decades, there is an absence of literature on influencing teenage behaviour for the benefit of conservation; a vital undertaking as teenagers will be the next generation making decisions that will impact upon the environment. A literature review was conducted to illuminate the different methods and initiatives used in the psychology sector to engage teenagers and initiate behavioural changes. Using psychology practises to fill the gaps in the conservation experience is a novel method to address negative behaviours and produce more positive ones (Figure 1).

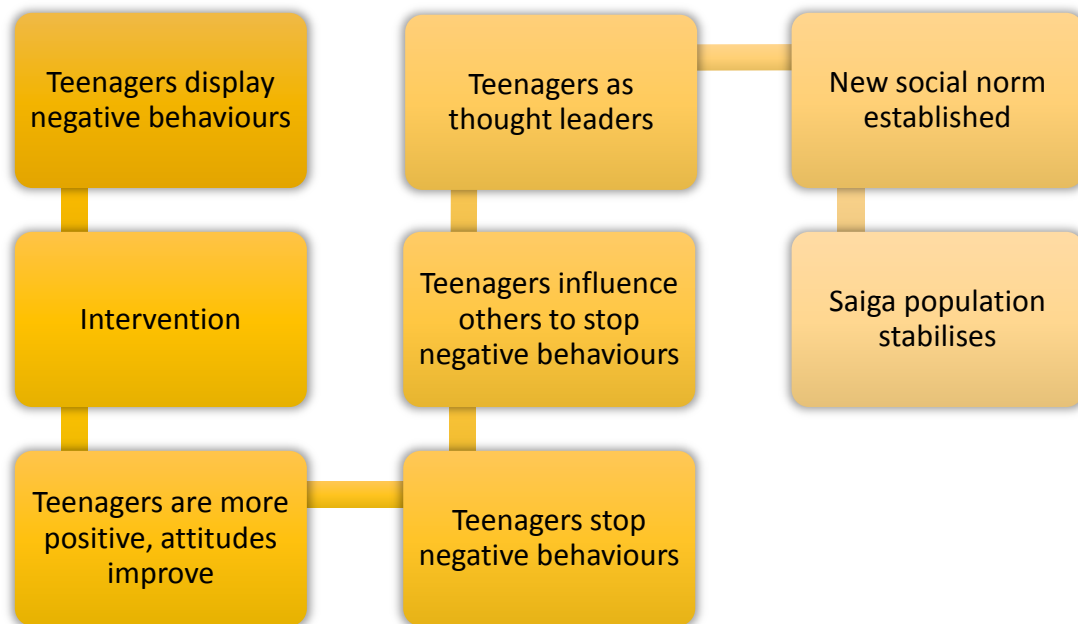


Figure 1. Hypothesised causal links for potential teenage interventions.

METHODOLOGY In West Kazakhstan, teenagers in two villages – Azhibay and Nursay – were individually interviewed using a pre-constructed set of questions designed to investigate their attitudes and preferences towards school, free time, future careers, parents’ occupations, and current conservation being undertaken locally. The interviews were held in the village schools to obtain the largest sample size (30 teenagers in Azhibay and 26 in Nursay) and allow more teenagers to be interviewed simultaneously by the five research assistants. To gain a greater understanding of how and why young people from the saiga range states move into the conservation sector, six Key Informants were selected because of their young age and their work with the SCA, and undertook a questionnaire that investigated youthful aspirations, motive behind current career choices, parental influence, and ideas for interesting young people in conservation.

FINDINGS: psychology The literature review of psychology methods used to engage and change teenage behaviour found that five methods had been most commonly experienced and relied upon by practitioners (Table 1).

Psychological intervention	Key messages
Family-based interventions	Systematic treatment of entire family groups instead of a focus on the individual
Family and peer influences	Family and friends have the potential to influence an individual's behaviours
Motivational interviewing	Enhancing an individual's positivity and self-belief, supporting self-efficacy for change
Behavioural therapy	Recognising high-risk situations and acquiring skills to address them
Decision-making	Allowing the individual to make their own decisions, not bombarding them with facts

Table 1. Summary of the psychological literature findings on teenage behaviour change and their key messages.

However, knowing what interventions to instigate and their level of success depends upon the situation the teenager is in. By understanding the living circumstances and aspirations of the teenagers in the saiga range areas, engagement interventions can be specifically designed to best help the teenagers achieve their personal goals, replacing negative attitudes and behaviours with positive action and feelings towards conservation.

FINDINGS: teenagers The most popular career aspirations for the teenagers in the Kazakh villages were teacher, doctor, architect/designer, conservation and singer. Comparing the teens' aspirations to their future career predictions found that the jobs with the most congruence were singer, architect/designer, painter/artist, hairdresser, government, sport and ranger (Figure 2). Fewer teenagers thought they would be teachers than wanted to be, but this response was still very popular.

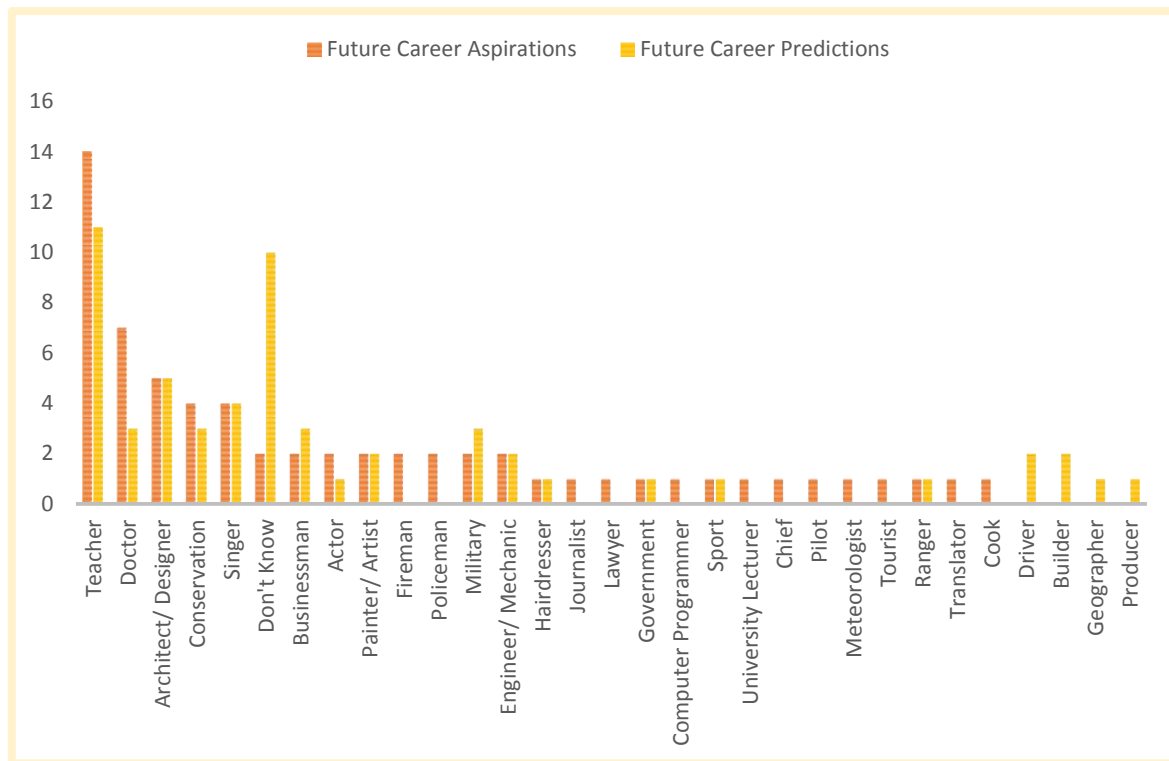


Figure 2. Comparing teenage career aspirations to the jobs they predict for their futures.

The teenagers gave their views on what might prevent them from being able to pursue their job aspirations; the most popular reasons stated were education or exam results (with 25% of teens stating these), and money or financial reasons (21% of teens). 13 of the 14 teenagers who stated 'education/exam results' as a barrier were aspiring for jobs needing higher education, such as doctor, computer programmer, or architect. Aspirational careers linked to money or financial barriers were for the same kinds of jobs, suggesting that higher education is viewed as a constraint by teenagers.

Comparing the teenagers' aspirations and career predictions to their parents' occupations was interesting as the most common occupation for parents was unemployment or 'staying at home' (23 teenagers stating this). However, none of the teenagers aspire or predict having no job in the future, even when one or both of their parents do not work. Girls also do not express any desire to become homemakers, housewives or full-time parents, responding with only with career choices, which again is interesting as many girls in the region marry in their late teens and early 20s. It appears that the teenagers do not wish to

do the same jobs as their parents and also do not predict that they will do them in the future. One of the more common parental occupations was owning a private business, but none of the teenagers whose parents actually had this job wanted or predicted it as a career for themselves. Likewise, in Nursay, 3 teenagers stated that their parents were involved in agriculture or breeding cattle, and none of them stated that this was a career aspiration or prediction for them.

The teenagers also provided information regarding what they did in their free time (Figure 3). The responses given can be used to design activities and interventions that the teenagers will enjoy participating in, for example, 26 teenagers across the sample (both boys and girls) said that they enjoyed playing sport of all different kinds, so sport might be a good way to engage teenagers in saiga conservation. Computing-based activities were also popular, suggesting engaging teenagers with international conservation efforts online might be a useful way forward.

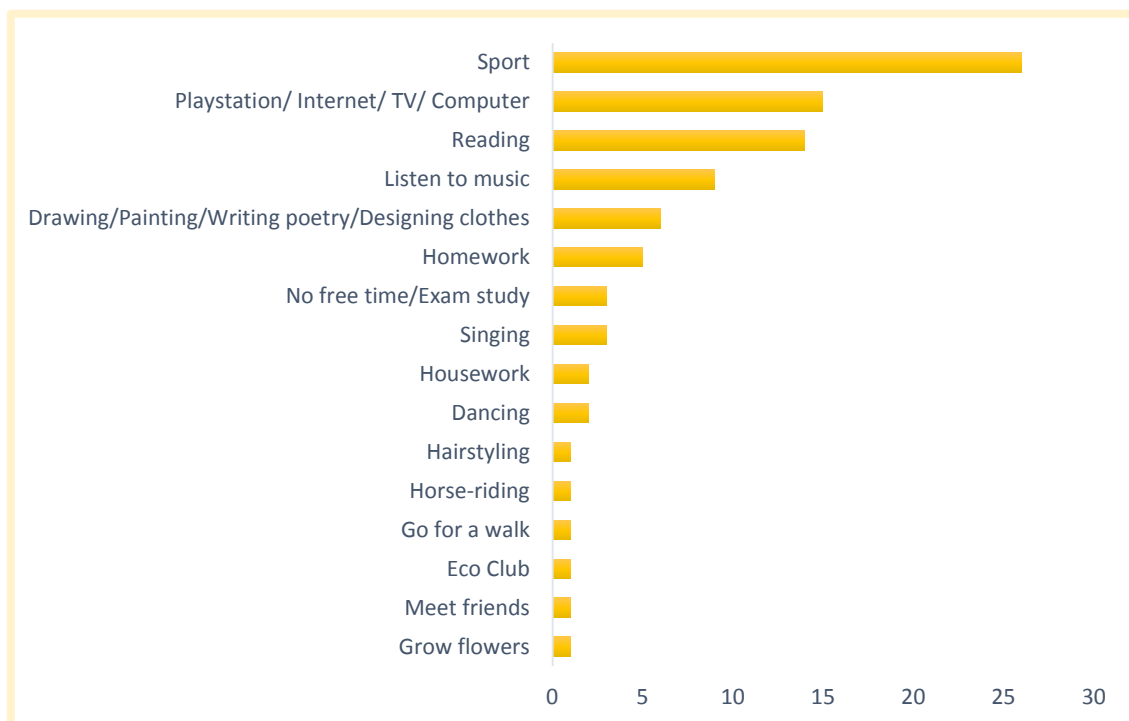


Figure 3. Free time activities of the teenagers.





FINDINGS: key informants The 6 young people selected for the Key Informant questionnaires live and work across the world and are involved in conservation in a range of ways. All respondents stated that their interests in conservation were strongly influenced by childhood experiences of natural areas; other important factors were having family members who valued the environment and the influence of pro-environment organisations. Reminiscent of the teenagers in Kazakhstan, the Key Informants expressed varied and contrasting answers for their youthful career aspirations, current jobs, and parents' occupations (Table 2).


KI Aspiration	KI Occupation	Father's Occupation	Mother's Occupation
English teacher	Manager of saiga conservation projects at CWA	Engineer	Housewife
Explorer/ Famous researcher/ University professor	Lead for conservation science at WCS Mongolia	Emergency Agency's Fire Department (now retired)	Accountant at Police Department in Khentii Province of Mongolia
Travel agent	Conservation volunteer	Conservation	Conservation
David Attenborough	Research assistant at Cambridge University	Teacher/ Education advisor	Artist
Astronaut	Project and ecotours coordinator at ACBK	Teacher (now retired)	Engineer (now retired)
Artist/ Doctor	Network development coordinator at ACBK	Teacher	Akim (Chief) of home village


Table 2. Comparing the Key Informants' youthful aspirations with their current careers and parents' occupations.


RECOMMENDATIONS


Based on the results of the teenage interviews in Azhibay and Nursay and the Key Informant questionnaires, the specific engagement recommendations have a sound link with methods advocated in the psychology literature, with a focus on teenagers both changing their behaviour and acting as advocates for others to do the same, both in the saiga range states and consumer countries:


-  Homework clubs or private tutoring sessions could inspire more confidence in the teenagers to pursue their aspirations
-  Fun activities based on the career predictions of teenagers could make them seem more appealing for the future, for example building birds' nests or saiga shelters could result in the job of 'Builder' seeming more aspirational, or learning to drive a ranger or police car could do the same for 'Driver', and also connect teenagers with male role models who could have a positive influence on their behaviour.
-  Saiga-related activities run all-year round instead of just in relation to Saiga Day would ensure that teenagers (and their parents) do not forget their plight, for example having saiga story competitions, with winners being published in a short story book, reading groups with new books and literature provided by NGOs, steppe art competitions, with prizes for ingenuity and conservation message. Villagers could apply to a teenage mural group to paint the walls of their houses with steppe flora and fauna, and a saiga singing club where teens could make their own music videos to be posted online by themselves or NGOs, as well as talent shows with judges made up of their peers
-  Teams for all different kinds of sport could be created with saiga logos and play for their village, and in tournaments with other villages, creating unity between different ages and communities, with teams being mentored by different community leaders, police, and parents, so that the teenagers' enthusiasm could influence their mentor and vice versa


-  More emphasis should be placed on the Steppe Wildlife Clubs, with camping trips, events, competitions, games and learning; the clubs could incorporate members of the community each month as 'sponsors', who organise trips or activities for the teenagers, encouraging parents and teenagers to learn and become enthusiastic about nature together


-  Teenagers should be enabled to experience more natural areas, so as to enhance their connection with nature and encourage compassion and enthusiasm; this could be done with the SWCs, or with teens being taken out with NGOs to help with conservation work, both allowing them to help with saiga protection and creating peer influence as friends and siblings will also want to participate


-  NGOs should try to connect more with teenagers as an ever-present entity, not just for Saiga Day or when they require data; in schools to build upon wildlife lessons already being implemented in the curriculum, with teachers, giving ideas on how to make the subject more interesting and interactive.

-  NGOs could offer short courses for teenagers in conservation subjects, which they can apply for like university degrees but will not have the worry of bad exam grades or financial difficulty to deter them

-  New activities created should have connections to local traditions so as to encourage more of the community to participate, thus increasing distribution of conservation messages

-  Using positive and negative lectures, imagery and debates to allow teenagers to understand the consequences of behaviours, and creating debating teams so that teens could come up with solutions themselves

-  Conservation needs to be presented as a new trend, a 'cool' activity that is alluring for teenagers, who often experiment with new interests; having foreign experts or celebrities endorse the 'trend' will make it even more appealing for teenagers

 Using social marketing techniques for city teenagers or creating campaigns such as the recent 'no make-up selfie' or the saiga-related 'sand bucket challenge' to raise awareness, with teenagers engaging others in for the benefit of conservation

For the SCA to move forward and utilise the engagement recommendations in its approach for conserving the saiga antelope, original interventions and already established activities must first be built upon, and then expanded to include new initiatives outlined in the recommendations. The recent 'sand bucket challenge' was a step forward, but more campaigning and awareness is needed in order to raise the SCA's profile. However, it is a step in the right direction, a foundation for conservation behaviours to become the new 'trend' for young people in the saiga range states.

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