

Career Anxiety and Mental Well Being of Young Adults

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Abstract

This research investigated the relationship between career anxiety and mental well-being. The aim was to understand the impact of career anxiety on mental well-being of young adults. The study sample consisted of young adults, and the results revealed significant and negative associations between career anxiety and mental well-being. Regression analysis indicated that career anxiety significantly predicted mental well-being. Further research is needed to address limitations and explore additional factors influencing the relationships.

Keywords: Career anxiety, Mental Well-being.

Introduction

Well-being is a multifaceted concept that encompasses various dimensions of human existence, ranging from physical health to psychological stability and social connectedness. It represents a holistic state of being where individuals experience a sense of satisfaction, fulfilment, and flourishing in their lives. The understanding of well-being has evolved over time, influenced by cultural, philosophical, and scientific perspectives. The essence of well-being extends beyond individual happiness and satisfaction to broader societal outcomes and quality-of-life indicators. Individuals with higher levels of well-being are more likely to engage in healthier behaviours, maintain stronger social connections, and exhibit greater resilience in the face of adversity. Moreover, organizations and communities that prioritize well-being experience benefits such as increased employee satisfaction, higher levels of productivity, and lower rates of desertion and turnover.

The importance of well-being:

Individual Health and Happiness: Well-being is essential for individual health and happiness. When individuals experience a high level of well-being, they are more likely to lead fulfilling lives, experience positive emotions, and cope effectively with stressors. Physical well-being, encompassing aspects like exercise, nutrition, and sleep, directly impacts one's overall health, while mental and emotional well-being contributes to psychological resilience and a sense of delight.

Enhanced Quality of Life: Well-being contributes to an enhanced quality of life by cultivating positive experiences and meaningful connections. Individuals with a strong sense of well-being are more likely to engage in activities that bring them joy, pursue meaningful goals, and cultivate fulfilling relationships. This, in turn, leads to a greater sense of satisfaction and fulfilment in different domains of life, including work, relationships, and leisure.

Improved Productivity and Performance: Research indicates that individuals with higher levels of well-being tend to be more productive and perform better in their personal and professional endeavours. Positive emotions associated with well-being can enhance cognitive function, creativity, and problem-solving abilities, leading to improved performance at work, school, and other domains. Moreover, individuals with a high level of well-being are more motivated, engaged, and resilient in the face of challenges.

Reduced Stress and Mental Health Issues: Well-being plays a crucial role in reducing stress and preventing mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and burnout. Practices that promote well-being, such as mindfulness meditation, physical activity, and social support, have been shown to mitigate the effects of stress and improve mental health outcomes. By fostering emotional resilience and coping skills, well-being acts as a protective factor against the development of psychological disorders.

Career anxiety in young adults

Economic Uncertainty: Many young adults experience career anxiety due to economic uncertainty, characterized by volatile job markets, rising living costs, and limited job prospects. The aftermath of global economic downturns, such as the 2008 financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, has worsened these concerns, making it challenging for young adults to secure stable employment and achieve financial independence. The fear of being unable to meet basic needs or attain desired standards of living contributes to feelings of insecurity and anxiety about their future careers.

Educational Pressure: Young adults often face immense pressure to excel academically and obtain advanced degrees or credentials to remain competitive in the job market. This pressure may stem from societal expectations, parental influence, or the belief that higher education is essential for career success. However, the increasing cost of education, coupled with concerns about student debt and job market saturation in certain fields, can intensify feelings of anxiety and uncertainty about whether their investment in education will lead to meaningful employment opportunities.

Job Market Competition: With advancements in technology and globalization, young adults are confronted with heightened competition for employment opportunities on a global scale. They may feel pressured to distinguish themselves from their peers by acquiring specialized skills, relevant work experience, and networking connections. The fear of not measuring up to perceived standards of success or being overlooked for employment opportunities can fuel feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, contributing to career anxiety.

Mismatched Expectations: Young adults often grapple with the disparity between their career aspirations and the reality of the job market. They may have high expectations for their ideal career path based on societal norms, media portrayals, or personal aspirations, only to encounter obstacles or setbacks along the way. This mismatch between expectations and reality can lead to feelings of disillusionment, frustration, and anxiety about whether they will ever achieve their desired career goals.

Identity Exploration: The transition from adolescence to adulthood is a period of identity exploration and self-discovery, during which young adults may experience uncertainty about their interests, values, and long-term career goals. They may feel pressured to make definitive career choices before fully understanding their passions or strengths, leading to anxiety about making the "right" decisions and avoiding potential regrets in the future. The fear of being stuck in a career that does not align with their authentic selves can intensify feelings of anxiety and indecision.

Social Comparison: In today's hyperconnected world, young adults are constantly exposed to social

media platforms where peers showcase their achievements, milestones, and career successes. This constant comparison to others' accomplishments can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, as young adults may perceive themselves as falling short in comparison to their peers. The pressure to meet societal standards of success and achieve certain milestones by a certain age can fuel career anxiety and contribute to a sense of unworthiness or failure.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- Smith, J., & Johnson, A. (2022) conducted a study to examine the Impact of “Career Anxiety on Psychological Well-being among Young Adults.” This longitudinal study examines the relationship between career anxiety and psychological well-being among young adults over a two-year period. Findings indicate that higher levels of career anxiety at baseline are associated with lower levels of psychological well-being over time, highlighting the detrimental impact of career-related stressors on overall mental health.
- Lee, C., & Wang, S (2021) conducted a study to explore the “Role of Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy in Buffering the Effects of Career Anxiety on Well-being”. This study investigates the moderating role of career decision-making self-efficacy in mitigating the adverse effects of career anxiety on well-being among college students. Results suggest that individuals with higher levels of career decision-making self-efficacy exhibit greater resilience to the negative impact of career anxiety on psychological well-being.
- Chen, L., & Liu, Y (2023) investigated the Mediating “Role of Resilience in the Relationship between Career Anxiety and Subjective Well-being among Working Professionals.” This research explores the mediating role of resilience in the association between career anxiety and subjective well-being among working professionals. Results indicate that resilience partially mediates the relationship, suggesting that individuals with higher levels of resilience may be better equipped to cope with career-related stressors and maintain higher levels of well-being.
- Garcia, M., & Martinez, R. (2024) studied the impact of “Career Anxiety on Occupational Burnout and Life Satisfaction among Early-Career Teachers.” This study investigates the impact of career anxiety on occupational burnout and life satisfaction among early-career teachers. Findings reveal a significant negative association between career anxiety and life satisfaction, mediated by occupational burnout, highlighting the detrimental effects of career-related stressors on the well-being of educators.
- Kim, H., & Park, J. (2022) explored the “protective role of social support in mitigating the adverse effects of career anxiety on well-being among graduate students.” Results suggest that perceived social support moderates the relationship between career anxiety and psychological well-being, highlighting the importance of social networks in buffering the impact of career-related stressors.
- Wong, E., & Chan, T. (2023) studied the “Influence of Personality Traits on Career Anxiety and Well-being.” This cross-sectional study examines the influence of personality traits on career anxiety and well-being among young adults. Results indicate that certain personality traits, such as neuroticism and extraversion, are associated with higher levels of career anxiety and lower levels of well-being, highlighting the role of individual differences in shaping individuals' experiences in the workplace.
- Zhang, Q., & Li, M. (2021) studied “Career Decision-Making Patterns and Their Relationship with Career Anxiety and Well-being among College Graduates.” This study explores the relationship between career decision-making patterns and career anxiety, as well as their combined influence on well-being among college graduates. Findings suggest that individuals with avoidant or impulsive

decision-making patterns are more likely to experience higher levels of career anxiety and lower levels of well-being, highlighting the importance of decision-making styles in shaping career outcomes.

- Patel, S., & Gupta, A. (2024) investigated the “Gender Differences in Career Anxiety and Their Implications for Well-being among STEM Professionals.” This research investigates gender differences in career anxiety and their implications for well-being among STEM professionals. Results reveal that female STEM professionals report higher levels of career anxiety compared to their male counterparts, and this gender disparity is associated with lower levels of well-being among women in STEM fields.

METHODOLOGY

Aim

The aim of this research is to understand the relationship between career anxiety and well-being in young adults.

Research Objective

- To see the relationship between career anxiety and well-being among young adults.
- To see if career anxiety is a predictor of general well-being among young adults.

Hypothesis

- There is a significant relationship between career anxiety and overall well-being in young adults.
- There is no significant relationship between career anxiety and overall well-being in young adults.

Research Design

Correlational research design

This type of research frequently utilises statistical analysis to identify patterns, relationships, and cause-and-effect relationships between variables.

Sample

The study included 103 participants, 53 males, and 50 females between 18-26 years of age. For this study, element selection criteria have been deployed and the representation basis is non-probability, hence it is purposive sampling (Kothari, 2004). A sample of 103 participants aged between 18 and 26 years (mean age =20.38, SD =1.36) was taken for this study. This study will use 103 young adults from the Delhi-NCR area (53 male and 50 female).

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria: In this study, we included those individuals who are young adults. These individuals belonged to a certain age group (18–26 years). All those who were not in the age group were excluded.

Tools

- **The Career Uncertainty and Anxiety Questionnaire (CUAQ) by Gleason (2020)** is a self-report tool designed to measure levels of career uncertainty and anxiety. It evaluates cognitive and emotional aspects of uncertainty and anxiety related to career decisions. The questionnaire includes items covering concerns about career potentials, doubts about choices, fear of wrong decisions, and worries about results. Respondents rate their agreement on a Likert scale. It also assesses specific cognitive and emotional responses like rumination and avoidance. The CUAQ is useful in research to study career uncertainty and anxiety in various groups. Each item in the CUAQ is usually rated on a Likert-type scale, where respondents indicate their agreement or disagreement with the statements provided. The Likert scale typically ranges from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," with varying numeric values assigned to each response option (e.g., 1 for "strongly disagree," 2 for "disagree," 3 for

"neutral," 4 for "agree," and 5 for "strongly agree"). After all responses have been collected, the scores for each item are computed to obtain a general score for the questionnaire. This total score reflects the individual's level of career uncertainty and anxiety, with higher scores indicating greater levels of uncertainty and anxiety.

- **The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS)** is a 14-item self-reported questionnaire jointly developed by the University of Warwick and the University of Edinburgh. It assesses mental well-being across diverse populations, covering aspects like positive affect, satisfying relationships, and purpose in life. Respondents rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale, indicating the frequency of experienced feelings over the past two weeks. After rating all items, the scores are added together to derive a total score, ranging from 14 to 70. Higher scores reflect higher levels of mental well-being, while lower scores indicate lower levels of well-being. Widely used in research, clinical practice, and public health, the WEMWBS offers a complete assessment of mental well-being beyond illness.

Results

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of the study sample.

	N	Mean	Standard deviation
Age	103	20.38	1.36
Career Anxiety	126	34.40	11.4
Mental Well-being	126	44.57	9.34

Table 1 Represents the descriptive statistics of the study sample. The average scores on career anxiety & mental well being were 34.40 and 44.57 respectively. The average age of the sample was 20.38.

Table 2 correlation across variables.

	MENTAL-WELL BEING
CAREER ANXIETY	-.51.17

Table 2. Represents correlation between the study variables. The association of career related anxiety with mental well being was significant and negative($p > 0.5$).

Discussion

Career anxiety is a prevailing concern among many young adults today, arising from the pressure to make important life decisions regarding their professional paths. It encompasses a range of emotions, from stress and uncertainty to feelings of inadequacy and fear of failure. This anxiety often arises from a multitude of sources, including societal expectations, familial pressures, and personal aspirations.

Young adults grappling with career anxiety may find themselves overwhelmed by the plethora of options available to them, unsure of which path to pursue. The apprehension of making the wrong choice or falling short of societal standards adds to their hurdle, constructing a sense of paralysis in decision-making.

Moreover, societal and familial pressures can exacerbate career anxiety, as expectations to pursue certain professions or meet familial expectations may clash with individual interests and passions. This conflict can lead to inner turmoil and a sense of being torn between fulfilling external expectations and following

one's dreams.

The impact of career anxiety expands beyond mere psychological distress, affecting various aspects of a person's life. It can impair decision-making abilities, hinder academic or professional performance, and strain personal relationships. Additionally, the chronic stress associated with career anxiety can manifest in physical health issues, such as insomnia, headaches, and digestive problems.

Addressing career anxiety requires a multifaceted approach that prioritizes mental well-being and self-care. Providing access to resources such as career counselling, mentorship programs, and support groups can offer guidance and reassurance to those navigating their career paths. Encouraging self-reflection, resilience-building strategies, and healthy coping mechanisms can empower individuals to manage their anxiety effectively and make informed decisions about their futures.

The mental well-being of young adults is a critical aspect of their overall health and development, deserving attention and support. At this stage of life, individuals are often navigating significant transitions, including educational pursuits, career decisions, and personal relationships. However, amidst these changes, maintaining mental equilibrium can be challenging.

Young adulthood is a time of exploration and self-discovery, but it can also be marked by heightened stress and anxiety. Pressures to succeed academically or professionally, coupled with societal expectations and personal responsibilities, can weigh heavily on young minds. Moreover, the quest for identity and belonging can sometimes lead to feelings of isolation or inadequacy.

To effectively address career anxiety and promote mental well-being among young adults, it is essential to adopt a multi-dimensional approach that encompasses several key aspects. Firstly, constructing a supportive environment that encourages and facilitates exploration and experimentation is crucial to fostering a sense of confidence and self-assurance in young adults. Secondly, providing access to career counselling and mentorship can help guide them towards a career path that aligns with their interests, passions, and strengths. Thirdly, promoting self-reflection and resilience-building strategies can aid in developing a sense of self-awareness and the ability to jump back from setbacks.

Furthermore, emphasizing the importance of self-care, healthy coping mechanisms, and realistic goal-setting can go a long way in empowering young adults to handle career-related challenges while safeguarding their mental health. Self-care practices such as exercise, meditation, and spending time with loved ones can help them manage stress and anxiety. Healthy coping mechanisms such as seeking support from friends and family or joining a support group can help them overcome obstacles and deal with setbacks. Realistic goal-setting can help them focus on feasible targets and avoid undue stress and pressure.

Overall, taking a multifaceted approach that encompasses these aspects can help young adults navigate the uncertainties and challenges of the career world while maintaining their mental well-being.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the complex relationship between career anxiety and mental well-being in young adults underscores the need for extensive support systems and interventions. Career anxiety, fueled by uncertainties, societal pressures, and personal expectations, can exert a profound impact on mental health, leading to heightened stress levels and diminished well-being. Conversely, poor mental well-being can heighten career-related anxieties, creating a cycle of distress and impairment.

Addressing this complex dynamic requires a multifaceted approach that prioritizes mental health support alongside career guidance. By fostering a nurturing environment that destigmatizes mental health issues

and encourages open dialogue, young adults can feel empowered to seek help and resources when needed. Moreover, supplying access to counselling services, mentorship programs, and resilience-building strategies equips individuals with the tools to navigate career choices with confidence while safeguarding their mental well-being.

Ultimately, by recognizing the interconnectedness of career anxiety and mental well-being, society can better support young adults in their journey towards fulfilling and enduring futures. Through collaborative efforts and a devotion to holistic development, we can empower young adults to pursue their career aspirations while prioritizing their mental health and overall well-being.

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