Uncertain Futures: How Career Anxiety Affects the Self-Esteem of Psychology Students

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ABSTRACT

Given their uncertainty about their future careers, psychology students suffer a lot with career anxiety. This study used a quantitative, correlational approach to investigate, among psychology students at National University Baliwag, the association between career anxiety and self-esteem. Using Pearson's r correlation, data from 100 students were examined to find a weak but positive correlation. This implies that students who suffer with career anxiety may have low self-esteem. Interestingly, even with comparable data of career anxiety, male students showed somewhat higher self-esteem than female students. Still, age had no significant effect on either variable. Emphasizing the need of addressing both career anxiety and self-esteem, the results show the psychological consequences of stress connected to careers on students. The study supports the need of confidence and self-efficacy in career decision-making with the used of Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Theory with Social Cognitive Career theory (SCCT). The results imply that organized career counseling, mentoring, and mental health assistance are crucial in lowering career anxiety and improving self-esteem given the changing job market and competitive character of psychology-related professions. By explaining the effect of career anxiety on self-esteem and offering ideas for academic institutions, teachers, and counselors in creating programs that support students' emotional well-being and career confidence, this study adds to already existing research. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the study, future studies should investigate other aspects including academic pressure and social support.

Keywords: Career anxiety, Career decision-making, Career counseling, Gender differences, Self-Esteem

1. Introduction

The anxiety related to career decisions and future professional achievement worries psychology undergraduates since the career paths in psychology are several: clinical psychology, counseling, research, academia, and more (Brown & Hirschi, 2021). Combined with the need for further degrees and credentials, as well as the increased competitiveness of the job market, leave students feeling uncertain about their future. Gati and Levin (2015), career anxiety is common among psychology students, particularly when it comes to making decisions about their future. Students who suffer this kind of anxiety may be unclear of their professional direction, leading to self-doubt and procrastination in choosing steps that may help their careers.

Self-esteem, according to Rosenberg (1965), reflects a person's attitude toward themselves and influences their desire, capacity for decision-making, and capability to go beyond challenges. Moreover, Grolnick et al., (2021) show that those with higher self-esteem have a development mindset, which maintains and allows one to acquire more skills and intellect. This kind of thinking motivates more academic participation and perseverance.

This study intends to investigate how career anxiety of NU Baliwag Psychology students influences their self-esteem. It seeks to clarify to which career anxiety influences students' self-esteem, therefore enabling counselors and teachers to create stronger support systems and to add to already conducted research on students' anxiety and self-esteem.

Career Anxiety

Making career decisions is a lifetime process from which one may grow and learn. It is considered vital for both personal development and professional success (IISS, 2019). According to Vignoli (2015) career anxiety characterizes as the fear of failure people experience during their process of professional and academic development, especially with their future. Seker (2021), adolescents who experience career anxiety find difficulty making decisions about their future. Moreover, Yavruturk (2023) asserts that career anxiety in adolescents leads to unhappiness, poor concentration, reduced performance, and lower self-esteem. The lack of preparedness signifies an individual's difficulties prior to embarking on their chosen career path. This

covers lack of motivation, indecisiveness—steady and consistent personality quality that impairs decision-making. Active career planning, mentoring, and adaptive coping strategies are more likely to be adopted by them (Cheng et al., 2023).

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem has established a strong correlation between career anxiety (Deci & Ryan, 2023) as it indicates an individual's overall sense of value and confidence in their abilities. Kim & Lee (2023) claimed that low self-esteem students are more prone to have more career anxiety because of their fear of failure, self-doubts, and perceived incapacity in professional environments. As stated by Rossier et al., (2018) those with higher self-esteem are more intentional also a proactive in their professional actions. It is evident that self-esteem can act as an inhibitor against career-related anxiety by promoting a more determined approach to career planning. Bandura's theory of social cognitive predicts better self-efficacy and self-esteem, stronger strength for career demands.

Career Anxiety in Self-Esteem

Self-esteem and career anxiety are closely related and affect a person's capacity to make judgments about their work and manage professional difficulties. People with higher self-esteem show more confidence and resilience in the face of career-related stress, hence Sandra and Mularsih (2021) emphasize how important self-esteem is to career decision-making. Huang et al., (2021) discovered that self-esteem moderates the link between career anxiety, imposing that those with higher self-esteem suffer less professional success and less career-related stress. Emphasizing the need of career counseling and self-esteem building programs in lowering career anxiety. Gati and Levin (2021) showed that organized interventions can greatly enhance professional confidence. Therefore, people with higher self-esteem are more likely to believe that their efforts will result in positive outcomes and are eager to take on challenges. Low self-esteem, on the other hand, might cause doubts about one's capacity to succeed in a career, resulting in decreased motivation and restricting career options.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994), which suggests that self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations shape interests, influencing choices and behaviors. The theory also takes personal and environmental elements into account in goal setting. Inspired by Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory, the theory emphasizes the need of self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals in determining a person's behavior. SCCT offers a new approach in guiding adolescents' interest, professional choices (career), and performance (Lent, 2013).

According to Ow (2023), a person's assessment of their capacity to carry out activities can be impacted by anxiety over one's career prospects. High levels of career anxiety may decrease self-esteem, which can result in lower aspirations and avoidance of career opportunities, impacting decision-making and pursuit of career goals.

Using Roseberg's Self-Esteem Theory (1965), one can better understand how career anxiety influences the confidence and self-esteem of an individual. Students who are unsure about their future could start questioning their skills. This anxiety gradually erases their self-esteem, which reduces their motivation and capabilities. Low self-esteem, according to Rosenberg, might cause students to withdraw and avoid the situations, thus they might be reluctant to seek for their career paths. By using this theory, the study explores how career anxiety affects self-esteem and emphasizes the importance of support systems to enable students to develop confidence in their future careers.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the study offers a clear structure for understanding how career anxiety affects self-esteem. It serves as a guide to achieving the study's main objective: determining whether career anxiety significantly affects self-esteem.
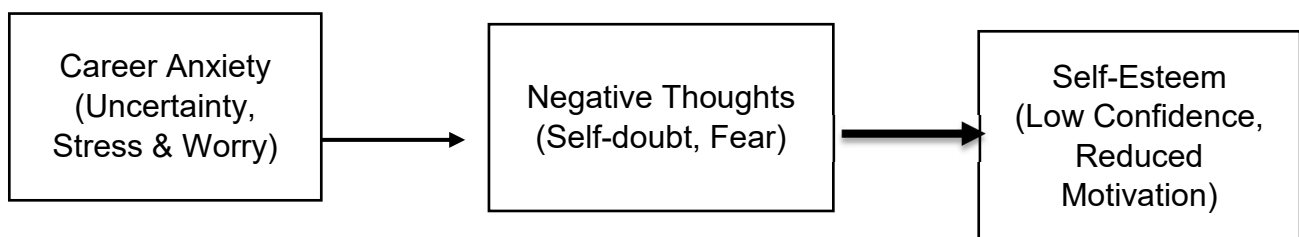

| Career Anxiety (Uncertainty, Stress & Worry) | → | Negative Thoughts (Self-doubt, Fear) | → | Self-Esteem (Low Confidence, Reduced Motivation) |

Figure 1. Paradigm of the study

Statement of the Problem

Career anxiety is a common issue among students pursuing psychology, given the diverse career paths, postgraduate education requirements, and competitive job market. Understanding how career anxiety affects self-esteem can help in developing intervention to support students' mental well-being and career decision-making processes.

Specifically, this study aims to answer the following questions:

1. Does age influence the level of career anxiety and self-esteem among psychology students?

2.   Does gender play a role in career anxiety and self-esteem levels?

3.   What is the level of perceived career anxiety among psychology students?

4.   What is the level of perceived self-esteem among psychology students?

5.   Is there a significant relationship between perceived career anxiety and self-esteem?

Hypothesis

H_o: Age does not influence the level of career anxiety and self-esteem among psychology students

H_o: Gender does not make any significant difference in career anxiety and self-esteem levels

H_o: Psychology students do not significantly experience career anxiety at all levels

H_o: Psychology students' self-esteem levels are not significantly different

H_o: There is no significant relationship between career anxiety and self-esteem

2. Method

This study utilized a descriptive quantitative, correlational approach which investigates the relationship that career anxiety and self-esteem have among NU Baliwag psychology students. Given the variety of career paths available to psychology students, future uncertainty is a common concern. NU Baliwag was chosen for its strong psychology program, which provides a solid foundation in theories, research, and practical skills. To understand the students' experiences, we randomly surveyed 100 students from different year levels.

Research Instrument

Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire

The career decision-making difficulties questionnaire (CDDQ) is intended to examine the problems that individuals face when making professional decisions. It aids in identifying several elements that may lead to career decision-making challenges, such as a lack of information, personal ambiguity, or external pressures. The questionnaire consists of 34 items (questions or phrases) addressing various areas of career decision-making challenges. Respondents are asked to assess each item on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A study conducted by Rochat, S. (2019), stated that CDDQ seems to be an efficient tool for practice in addition to being a helpful research tool. Counselors are urged to thoroughly examine responses at the item level to completely reap the benefits of its richness, better understand their clients' intervention requirements, and deliver more effective therapy.

Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1965) consisted of 10 items with a 4-point Likert-type rating scale (1 strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). It reported internal consistency and reliability of RSE ranging from .85 to .88 for college samples, .60 in the present study. In addition, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale correlates to the prediction with measures of depression and anxiety.

Data Gathering Procedure

Researchers used a quantitative approach to carefully review and measure respondents' responses, producing empirical data to support the goals of the study. Researchers adapted standardized survey questionnaires. Online and hardcopy questionnaires were made accessible depending on the different preferences and accessibility of the respondents.

Data Analysis

Researchers applied JAMOVI, a statistical software that makes simpler computations. Using Pearson correlation analysis, researchers investigated how career anxiety and self-esteem correlates.

Ethical Considerations

Research integrity was maintained, and respondents' and researchers' privacy were kept safe by closely observed ethical standards. Informed consent was secured by the researchers before proceeding into distributing surveys to the respondents. Researchers also advised respondents beforehand that their participation was entirely voluntary, and their data was solely for research purposes, and they would stay anonymous, therefore guaranteeing confidentiality. The utmost respect and consideration also extended to all respondents and other individuals engaged in the study.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1. Age

		Age	CA	SE
Age	Pearson's r	--		
	df	--		
	p-value	--		
CA	Pearson's r	-0.030	--	
	df	98	--	
	p-value	0.764	--	
SE	Pearson's r	-0.101	0.289***	--
	df	98	98	--
	p-value	0.318	0.004	--

Table 1 reveals that age has no significant relationship with career anxiety (r = -0.030, p = 0.764), as well as between age and self-esteem (r = -0.101, p = 0.318). On the other hand, a weak positive correlation was identified between career anxiety and self-esteem (r = 0.289, p = 0.004), suggesting a significant relationship between these two factors. Orth, Erol, and Luciano (2018) discovered that self-esteem tends to remain stable during adulthood. This supports the weak and non-significant negative correlation between age and self-esteem (r = -0.101, p = 0.318), indicating that age has a minimal influence on self-esteem. Moreover, a study by Robbins and Judge (2019) found that the relationship among age and work-related anxiety, as well as self-perception, is inconsistent. This is reflected in the very weak and non-significant negative correlation found between age and career anxiety (r = -0.030, p = 0.764), suggesting that age has little effect on career anxiety.

Table 2. Gender

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	SE
SE	F	77	97.6	20.81	2.372
	M	23	103.8	17.67	3.685
CA	F	77	27.2	3.70	0.422
	M	23	27.3	2.93	0.611

Table 2 shows gender-specific descriptive data for self-esteem (SE) and career anxiety (CA). Female participants (N = 77) have a mean SE score of 97.6 (SD = 20.81, SE = 2.372). In contrast, male participants (N = 23) scored higher at 103.8 (SD = 17.67, SE = 3.685), indicating that males have a higher SE with slightly less variability. In contrast, CA findings are almost identical between genders, with females averaging 27.2 (SD = 3.70, SE = 0.422) and men averaging 27.3 (SD = 2.93, SE = 0.611), indicating that performance differences are slight and nearly equal.

Our results yielded that males had higher self-esteem (SE) scores with slightly less variability than females. Previous research has shown that male self-esteem is influenced more by young adulthood, whereas female self-esteem is shaped more by childhood and adolescence (Arsandaux et al., 2023). Other research statements suggest that different factors influencing career decision-making differ by gender. A study by Yuan, B., & Li, J. (2019) found that males' career decisions are more influenced by childhood experiences than females', supporting the belief that societal expectations encourage males to become financial providers.

Table 3. Career Anxiety Reliability

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's a
Career Anxiety	2.92	0.591	0.929

The table demonstrates that both (M=2.92; SD=0.591) of psychology students scored on average. Cronbach's alpha measures the dependability of scale, which comes out to be (a=0.929), meaning that the questionnaires used to evaluate career anxiety are quite stable with each other. This indicates that the scale is capable of and has a consistency expressing an individual's career-related anxiety.

Table 4. Self-Esteem Reliability

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's a
Self-Esteem	2.75	0.569	0.850

With a standard deviation of 0.569, the average self-esteem (M=2.75), Cronbach's alpha measures the scale's dependability (a=0.850), indicating that the items used to measure self-esteem are aligned and is a reliable tool for assessing individuals' self-esteem.

Table 5. Career Anxiety and Self-Esteem Correlation

		Self-Esteem	Career Anxiety
Self-Esteem	Pearson's r	--	
	df	--	
	p-value	--	
Career Anxiety	Pearson's r	0.289***	--
	df	98	--
	p-value	0.004	--

Table 5 shows the connection between self-esteem and career anxiety, with a Pearson's r value of 0.289***. The results show that there is a weak positive correlation. This suggests a weak positive correlation. The statistical significance is supported by a p-value of 0.004, which is below the 0.05 threshold, and the degrees of freedom (df) are set at 98. According to Çetin (2018), there is notable evidence of a connection between self-esteem and career anxiety.

Discussion

Table 1 and Table 2 presented the demographic characteristics of the participants, including age and gender. The results in Table 1 indicate a weak positive correlation between Career Anxiety (CA) and Self-Esteem (SE), with a Pearson's r of 0.289 and a p-value of 0.004. This finding is not consistent with the study of Noor Muhammad (2024), that there was a moderate positive correlation between age and general interview anxiety. While Career Anxiety (CA) levels are nearly identical for both genders.

Table 2 demonstrates that men have higher Self-Esteem (SE) scores with less variability than women. According to a study by Shazia Zamir & Nadia Nazir (2023), compared to female students, male students show a much higher degree of self-esteem and have a near identical mean score on test anxiety that can affect career decision-making.

Table 3 presents a Career Anxiety scale that indicates excellent reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.09290, with a mean score of 2.92 (SD = 0.591), indicating moderate levels of Career Anxiety. This finding is consistent with a previous study, by Noor, H., Nabeel, T., & Mehwish, A. (2023). Development and Validation of Career Anxiety Scale for Adolescents with Hearing Impairment, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.92 and a satisfactory test-retest reliability, the scale showed strong internal consistency and reliability in measuring career-related anxiety in this sample.

Good internal consistency was demonstrated by the self-esteem scale (Cronbach's alpha = 0.850) shown in Table 4, suggesting that the construct was reliably measured. The participants' Self-Esteem (SE) proved moderate (M = 2.75, SD = 0.569). A thorough review was necessary to guarantee accuracy considering several items had reversal scores. The measure is a good tool overall, and future studies might look at aspects like life experiences or social support that affect self-esteem.

The results in Table 5 indicate a weak positive correlation between Self-Esteem (SE) and Career Anxiety (CA), with a Pearson's r value of 0.289 and a p-value of 0.004. According to a study in *Frontiers in Psychology* by Anne, P., Merlin, R., & Houssemand (2023), people with higher self-esteem tend to feel more confident about making career decisions, making the process feel less overwhelming. This statistically significant finding implies that as self-esteem increases, career anxiety also tends to rise.

Conclusion

For psychology students, choosing a career path causes a lot of stress, particularly considering the uncertainty of job opportunities. This study revealed that self-esteem and career anxiety are weak positive correlated; students who worry more about their future often suffer with less self-esteem. Interestingly, although career anxiety was the same across genders, male students claimed somewhat better self-esteem than their female counterparts. These results stress and need for career guidance, mentoring, and emotional support in enabling students to feel more confident about their future.

Recommendation

By providing webinars, workshops, mentoring, and career counseling to help psychology students overcome career anxiety and increase self-esteem, institutions can improve their career guidance programs. Initiating mental health advocacies and platforms such as peer support systems and personal growth can make students more engaged and feel more competent. Moreover, letting students feel that they are in a real-life professional field, stress management and goal setting strategies will enhance students to create and establish appropriate coping mechanisms. Furthermore, researchers advise future researchers to look at other aspects such as societal support or family expectations. These variables will enable educational institutions to let all students approach and plan their future career with confidence and clarity.

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