

**Research Report: Career Adaptability, Knowledge of the Job Market, and their relationship to
Career Anxiety**

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationships between Knowledge of the Job Market, Career Adaptability and Career Anxiety. We hypothesised that, career anxiety would be greater in students attending university compared to TAFE and that the more knowledge one has of the job market the greater their career anxiety will be. Furthermore, we hypothesised that those with high career adaptability will experience less career anxiety as knowledge of the job market increases. The study involved a total of 440 participants who had voluntarily partaken in a survey measuring perceived knowledge of the job market, career adaptability and career optimism. As well as a career anxiety scale survey. It was revealed that no major difference was found in career anxiety experienced between university and TAFE students, but that a change was measured between the means when they were split into specific genders. Moreover, contrary to our hypothesis, although those in the high adaptability group did experience less career anxiety with greater knowledge of the job market, no significant relationship was found. Overall, our findings suggest that there are certain relationships amongst the aforementioned variables that are definitely worth investigating as they add to an all-important subject area affecting all students.

Most undergraduate students say they have some degree of worry and indecision about their future careers (Daniels et al. 2011). Furthermore, recent research has suggested that career anxiety can be affected by variables such as knowledge of the job market and career adaptability. Career Anxiety is typically viewed as a trait or as an emotional condition (Vignoli, 2015). It also refers to a perception of being unable to forecast, control, or achieve intended effects or outcomes within the job market (Shin & Lee, 2019). This is not to be confused with career indecision, although career anxiety has been shown to be a precursor to career indecision, they are different (Jia et al. 2022). Career indecision involves a person's apprehension or lack of ability to make a decision regarding their career. Moreover, knowledge of the job market refers to the amount and type of information a person has about his/her future career market e.g., unemployment rates, location or how competitive a particular industry may be (Rottinghaus et al. 2011). Furthermore, career adaptability is a psychological concept that indicates a person's capacity and resources for managing their current and future occupational development demands (Douglass & Duffy, 2015).

In a study conducted by Daniels et al. (2011), 844 participants had been selected from the Motivation and Academic Achievement (MAACH) Project database, an ongoing program that examines the experiences of undergraduate students. To determine what factors predict undergraduates' anxiety and indecision regarding their careers, this study looked at individual differences (age, gender, and perceived control) as well as factors related to the learning environment (year in college, participation in an orientation programme, and faculty affiliations). It was concluded that while perceived control (primary and secondary) predicted lower levels of job anxiety and hesitation, traditional individual differences like age and gender had no impact. However, despite these findings the study did not track specific students throughout their undergraduate studies to learn about the career choices they made, whether the choice eliminated their anxiety and indecision or if these negative emotions and cognitions persisted, and whether the effects of perceived control had a long-lasting impact on the outcomes.

Furthermore, in a study conducted by Duffy (2010), the relationship between sense of control and professional adaptability, as well as the mediator role it can play for other known predictors was tested. This was done by using 1,991 participants, all who were first-year students at a large, public university. The Career Futures Inventory's subscale for measuring career flexibility was employed to measure career adaptability. The subscale used a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The Sense of Control composed of two subscales, Mastery (4 items) and Perceived Constraints (8 items). Each item used a 7-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. It was concluded that students who felt more in control of their lives were more likely to think they could adapt to the working world. In addition, students' feelings of control over their lives appeared to play a role in the extent to which supportive connections, self-esteem, and a hopeful outlook on the future of their careers were associated to adaptability. However, it must be noted that since the data was gathered cross-sectionally, it is challenging to pinpoint the direction of the evaluated constructs. As a result, while it is clear from the current sample that adaptability and sense of control are substantially correlated, it is unclear how much one influences the other.

Yet, despite these limitations, this research and other previous research on the topic of career anxiety and adaptability provides a solid base for our research. We plan to take this research further, building on what has already been suggested. We hypothesise that career anxiety will be greater in students attending university compared to TAFE and that the more knowledge one has of the job market the greater their career anxiety will be. Furthermore, we hypothesise that those with high career adaptability will experience less career anxiety as knowledge of the job market increases.

Method

Participants

This study involved a total of 440 participants, including 240 males and 200 females. Of these participants 240 were university students and the other 200 were TAFE students. To break this down further, of the 240 university students, 120 were male and 120 were female. Of the TAFE students,

120 were male and 80 were female. On-campus and online advertisements were used to find participants, who were then invited to tell their peers about the study.

Overall, the mean age of participants was 21.45 ($SD = 8.12$), for males the mean age was 19.61 ($SD = 6.16$) and females the mean age was 22.10 ($SD = 7.47$). For university students in total the mean age was 21.93 ($SD = 7.32$) and for TAFE students it was 20.45 ($SD = 8.04$).

Materials

For our research, we used a shortened form of the Careers Future Inventory (CFI-9) (McIlveen et al., 2013): This measure consisted of 9 items that described perceived knowledge of the job market (3 items), career adaptability (3 items) and career optimism (3 items). Participants indicated their level of agreement on a 5-point scale: 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), with higher scores indicating more of that construct. Furthermore, we also used the Career Anxiety Scale (Daniels et al., 2011): This measure consisted of 9 items that described career anxiety. Participants indicated on a 10-point scale: 1 (Not worried) to 10 (Very worried), with higher scores indicating higher levels of career anxiety. In addition to this, demographics were collected on age, sex, and type of student (TAFE or university).

Procedure

Participants were recruited by on-campus and online advertisements; they were then invited to tell their peers about the study. All subjects participated voluntarily and had the option to withdraw at any time. Participants accepted were able to complete the survey at a time and location convenient for them. Consent was implied by the completion on the study. Moreover, approval was obtained from the university's Human Research Ethics Committee for this research to be conducted.

Results

A one-sample t-test was performed to investigate any possible mean differences in career anxiety experienced by university students compared to TAFE students. The results can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1.

Mean and standard deviations for career anxiety as a function of a 2(gender) X 2(education institution) design.

Gender	Education Institution			
	University		TAFE	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Male	57.00	11.00	45.00	10.00
Female	53.00	11.25	65.00	15.00
Total	55.00	12.25	55.00	13.00

Note: M and SD represent mean and standard deviation, respectively.

Following this, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to explore and investigate the relationships between career adaptability, knowledge of the job market and its possible effect on career anxiety. In a random sample of 440 students, there was a weak to moderate, positive, linear relationship between Knowledge of the Job Market and Career Adaptability, and Pearson's r shows that this relationship is significant, $r = .30$, $n = 440$, $p = <.001$. Furthermore, there was a weak, positive, linear relationship between Knowledge of the Job Market and Career Anxiety, however Pearson's r shows that this relationship is significant, $r = .25$, $n = 440$, $p = .008$. In addition, there was a weak, negative, relationship between Career Adaptability and Career Anxiety, and Pearson's r shows that this relationship is non-significant, $r = -.11$, $n = 440$, $p = .21$.

After this, the variable Career Adaptability was then divided into low and high groups via a median split. For the Low Career Adaptability group, there was a moderate, positive, linear relationship between Knowledge of Job Market and Career Anxiety, and Pearson's r shows that this relationship is significant, $r = .31$, $p = <.001$. For the High Career Adaptability group, there was a weak, negative, linear relationship between Knowledge of Job Market and Career Anxiety, and Pearson's r shows that this relationship is non-significant, $r = -.17$, $p = .09$.

Discussion

In our study we hypothesised that career anxiety will be greater in students attending university compared to TAFE and that the more knowledge one has of the job market the greater their career anxiety will be. Furthermore, we hypothesise that those with high career adaptability will experience less career anxiety as knowledge of the job market increases. Our one samples t-test revealed no significant difference between total means of Career Anxiety between university and TAFE students. However, when broken down by gender there was a difference with university male students recording more Career Anxiety than males from TAFE. In contrast, females in TAFE recorded more Career Anxiety females in university. Therefore, our hypothesis was partially supported, although the total means showed no major difference, a difference was seen between genders. This somewhat contradicts the findings of Daniels et al. (2011) who found that those in professional faculties would experience less career anxiety compared to students studying a more abstract degree such as the arts. Our study showed no major difference.

Furthermore, our multiple linear regression analysis did not support our hypothesis that those with high career adaptability would experience less career anxiety as job knowledge went up. Although once a median split had occurred, there was a weak, negative relationship found between the two variables for high career adaptability, it was determined that it was still non-significant. However, this contradicts the findings of Rottinghaus et al. (2011) who found that people with high career adaptability had better coping strategies and therefore experienced less career anxiety.

However, in addition to these findings we also found that in general (prior to the median split) as Knowledge of the Job Market increased so did Career Anxiety, with this relationship presenting a significant relationship. This did support our first hypothesis. Again, once the median split has occurred a statistically significant relationship was also found between Knowledge of the Job Market and Career Anxiety for those in the low adaptability group, where, as Knowledge of the Job Market increased so did Career anxiety. Moreover, our regression analysis revealed a statistically significant relationship between Knowledge of the Job Market and Career Adaptability, meaning that as knowledge increase so did career adaptability.

These results of the current study imply that Knowledge of Job Market can have a significant effect on a person's career adaptability and that this in turn can influence the amount of career anxiety he/she will experience. Thus, suggesting that the more knowledge one has about the field he/she will enter, the more prepared they will be to face the already known challenges that lie ahead. However, this may not necessarily be true for those who have a predisposition to low adaptability in general. This could possibly be because they may already have poor coping strategies in place to deal with the perceived challenges the future job market will present. In contrast, those with naturally high adaptability find the challenges of the future job market less anxiety inducing as they may possibly have better and stronger coping strategies.

Some limitations that should be noted is that firstly this was not a longitudinal study, therefore similar to previous research we were unable to track the decisions the participants made in relation to their future jobs and if once in the job market the same level of career anxiety was present, or if how, or by how much it had changed. Secondly, in relation to our groups certain social demographics and opinions had not been measured such as perceived gender equality within a particular field. For example, perhaps more career anxiety was experienced by females in TAFE because they're entering a more male dominated job market. Therefore, future research benefit by analysing and measuring social constructs like gender equality in the job market and how that influences the anxiety and adaptability felt by participants. Moreover, this subject would benefit from a longitudinal study that clearly measures how and if anxiety and adaptability change once someone enters the job market.

However, in conclusion the research and findings presented in this study add to the growing foundational knowledge we have on how and why undergraduates in particular experience apprehension and anxiety around their future careers and how to best prepare students for what their future work life may throw at them.

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