

Understanding and Addressing Career Anxiety Among Students: An Integrative Review of Psychological, Cultural, and External Factors

Dr. Tej Bahadur Karki

Doctor of Letters (D.Litt.) Scholar

Sikkim Sardar Patel University, Namchi, Sikkim, India

drtej.karki@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5059-3519>

Received: July 11, 2026

Revised & Accepted: September 15, 2026

Copyright: Author(s) 2026



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

Abstract

Recently, career anxiety has become a popular topic among college students due to the rapid transformations in the labor market and the impact of global disasters such as the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic. In the present literature review, more than 50 articles will be reviewed to understand the issue better and identify the aspects related to career anxiety, including psychological and external factors that lead to it. For example, personality features such as neuroticism, as well as dysfunctional career thoughts, are important causes of increased levels of anxiety among people. Other factors that are external are the pressure on academics, social expectations, and uncertainty created by the pandemic. Resilience and social support have been recognized to be significant protective factors for students suffering from employment anxiety and, as such, should be taken into account in intervention design. Spiritual, humanistic, and cognitive behavioral techniques have proven to be efficient counseling methods. Culture plays an essential role in career-related stress management. Among the directions for future research, the use of technology, the effectiveness of long-term interventions, and socioeconomic inequalities can be highlighted. To sum up, coping with career-related stress requires using several approaches, including resilience development, getting social support, and participating in culturally specific counseling.

Keywords: Career anxiety, resilience, social support, psychological interventions, cultural factors

1. Introduction

Career anxiety has become one of the most important psychosocial problems among students of different education levels. It implies long-term fear and worries about making career-related decisions and acquiring secure employment and a sustainable career (J. Li & He, 2025; Vandana et al., 2025). In response to the ever-increasing competition in the labor market, the high pace of social and economic transformations, and society's expectations, students have begun to suffer from career anxiety (Nuckols & Ranta, 2025). There is sufficient evidence of the multidimensional character of career anxiety and its effects on mental health and academic performance.

Career anxiety is a common issue affecting the lives of students at all education levels in various countries, which has a negative effect on their psychological well-being, academic performance, and future career success (Farah Qayyum et al., 2022; Jonck, 2021). In connection with the increasing complexity of the labor market due to the impact of globalization, technology, and economic instability, students have been exposed to uncertainties about their career prospects (Yang et al., 2025). This causes fear, indecision, and stress and is known as career anxiety (S. Li & Lee, 2025).

Psychological problems are very important in terms of affecting people in terms of career anxiety (Müceldili et al., 2025). There are issues such as neuroticism, dysfunctional career thoughts, and low levels of self-efficacy that affect people's concerns about their careers (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2011; SÖNER & YILMAZ, 2022). The dysfunctionality of these career thoughts may cause distortions of people's beliefs about what they are capable of doing and what kind of chances they have in the future, which results in an endless process of indecision and fear. Moreover, there are personality issues like neuroticism, which, due to being emotionally unstable, increases the probability of suffering from anxiety in career-related decisions (Li & Lee, 2025).

In turn, there are many external factors that bring a lot of challenges for the students in the considered situation. These challenges include school-related stress, societal pressures, cultural influences, and economic aspects (Cho & Hayter, 2021). For example, in collectivist societies such as China, Turkey, and other Asian countries, there is enormous pressure from society and family regarding career issues, hence restricting freedom of decision-making in the process of choosing careers (Reshu et al., 2025). Additionally, the global pandemic of COVID-19 adds yet another dimension to the discussed issue since disruption in learning and labor markets leads to a lack of job security among students (Kakazu et al., 2025). Academic stress and job insecurity contribute greatly to the development of fear among students, resulting in depression and various psychological problems (Yang et al., 2025).

However, resilience and social support are two critical protective factors that prevent the manifestation of career anxiety (Mecha et al., 2023; J. Wang & Zhang, 2025). Resilience, which can be defined as the ability to bounce back when encountering stressors, is a buffer against the effects of external factors in the process of making career choices by means of adaptation, coping,

and a positive attitude (Nwadi et al., 2025). Social support includes sources of comfort, information, and assistance from peers, family members, friends, and other institutions that help get rid of the fear and gain self-confidence among the students (Albasheer et al., 2025; Najar et al., 2025).

Among the approaches used in order to overcome career anxiety are counseling services providing psychological, spiritual, and developmental interventions (G. Wang et al., 2025). Counseling services help develop resilience training, career clarity, and the use of cognitive behavioral strategies in order to help students cope with their thoughts (Wang et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2024). It is important to highlight the fact that culture-specific counseling interventions that are developed in specific socio-cultural contexts prove to be highly efficient.

Despite the discoveries mentioned above, there is much work left to be done. The coronavirus pandemic has shown that mental health and career assistance should be flexible and accessible, even remotely (Kakazu et al., 2025). Another sphere of importance is the necessity to conduct longitudinal research in order to study the effects of these measures and socioeconomic inequalities in the formation of career anxiety. The multi-faceted nature of career anxiety requires a complex approach to address the aspects of individual characteristics, socio-cultural and environmental factors, and social support mechanisms.

2. Research Objectives

The aim of the literature review described in the paper is to give a holistic view of the existing body of research on career anxiety among students by considering the psychological, cultural, and environmental factors that contribute to the development and overcoming of the issue. The four goals are to determine personality traits and cognitive processes that cause career anxiety; to evaluate the impact of external sources such as educational pressure, societal norms, and the global pandemic of COVID-19; to discuss the buffer effect of resilience and social support; and to review interventions that help solve the problem.

3. Methods

The current literature review provides information from more than 50 empirical studies carried out between 2020 and 2025. Cross-sectional and longitudinal studies and evaluations of intervention programs are included in this research. Sources were taken from different databases and focused on peer-reviewed papers examining career anxiety, resilience, social support, and other psychological factors of students in different countries. Reliable scales of career anxiety, resilience, and social support (Career Anxiety Scale, Resilience Scale, social support survey) were used in studies.

The current literature review includes articles with various cultural backgrounds and methods to provide thorough information about factors affecting career anxiety. Attention is paid to new intervention programs that help reduce anxiety symptoms and improve students' mental health. A

theoretical framework including psychological factors, sociocultural issues, and external stresses, together with the effectiveness and applicability of interventions for specific cultures, was used.

4. Results

4.1 Factors Influencing Career Anxiety

There are some factors affecting the formation and exacerbation of career anxiety.

4.1.1 Psychological and Personal Elements

A number of studies reveal that neuroticism and dysfunctional career thoughts are two main psychological factors that exacerbate career anxiety. Thus, according to Li et al. (2025), neuroticism and dysfunctional career thoughts adversely affect individuals' decision-making abilities and, consequently, increase their indecisiveness. Besides, neuroticism is characterized by emotional instability and high levels of sensitivity to stress that contribute to career anxiety. Moreover, academic and performance expectations in the university worsen students' career anxiety by increasing pressure and fear of unemployment (Reshu et al., 2025; Yang et al., 2025). In addition, gender significantly affects the formation of career anxiety, as female students experience higher academic stress and are thus more susceptible to career anxiety (Li et al., 2025). Catastrophization and self-deprecating beliefs about career prospects are maladaptive beliefs that cause even higher levels of anxiety and make individuals stuck in a vicious circle of poor judgment and low self-esteem.

4.1.2 External Pressures and Socio-Cultural Influences

External sources of stress, such as academic pressure, societal expectations, and economic insecurity, have the potential to cause high levels of anxiety regarding the careers of the individuals (Yang et al., 2025). Collectivist societies tend to apply enormous pressure on students concerning the choice of careers, limiting their freedom and causing greater stress (Reshu et al., 2025). The current global health crisis adds additional levels of uncertainty since it changes the perspectives on employment and security among such groups of professionals as medical workers and teachers (Kakazu et al., 2025).

A number of socio-cultural factors have influenced the formation of the aforementioned experiences. For example, collectivist societies, which impose a lot of pressure on the younger generation, cause a low level of career decision-making self-efficacy among young people (Li & Lee, 2025; Reshu et al., 2025). Besides, the current crisis adds additional uncertainty among students due to the disturbances to academic and career-related activities (Kakazu et al., 2025).

4.1.3 The Protective Role of Resilience and Social Support

It turns out that resilience can be regarded as one of the factors that help resist the mentioned external pressure and stay flexible in order to cope with ambiguous situations (Nwadi et al., 2025). According to research, resilient individuals tend to demonstrate high levels of emotional regulation, creativity, and activity with regard to career problems. Social support, which is provided by the community, school, friends, relatives, etc., is considered to be a necessary factor

that gives one emotional support and professional advice, significantly reducing career anxiety (Najar et al., 2025).

4.2 The Role of Resilience and Support Systems

Resilience and social support play important roles in protecting individuals from the negative influence of career anxiety. As shown in several studies, resilience can be considered a mediating factor between academic stress and career anxiety (Yang et al., 2025). By increasing resilience through various means, such as mindfulness and cognitive behavioral therapy, the level of anxiety among students has decreased significantly.

In turn, social support from peers, family members, and educational establishments reduces fear in regard to careers (Albasheer et al., 2025; Najar et al., 2025). It helps to increase confidence and make adequate decisions regarding careers. In the case of collectivist cultures, social support becomes especially important as it helps to protect individuals from societal pressure (Kakazu et al., 2025; Reshu et al., 2025).

4.3 Interventions and Strategies to Mitigate Career Anxiety

Taking into consideration the multifaceted reasons behind career anxiety, a multidimensional strategy of intervention has been suggested for addressing the problem from different angles. Career intervention programs that include spiritual, resilience, and self-efficacy components are some of the most effective ones. In this connection, college counselors who adopt the spiritual and humanistic approaches can do much to foster resilience and the sense of career calling in students that, in turn, helps to minimize career anxiety. Some of the strategies that are used in this respect include the Transition Theory of Schlossberg and resilience training.

Furthermore, various behavioral strategies such as mindfulness-based stress reduction and cognitive behavioral therapy have proved to be successful in dealing with test anxiety and enhancing confidence related to education and career choices (Nwadi et al., 2025). Early interventions that aim at changing problematic career thoughts and provide information concerning career options can play a significant part in overcoming indecisiveness and fear, especially among vulnerable populations (S. Li & Lee, 2025).

4.4 Impact of External Factors and Future Directions

Environmental factors such as coronavirus disease have also demonstrated the importance of flexible counseling services in maintaining mental and career counseling for students. As a result of the virus spread, society faces serious threats, with depression, anxiety, and insomnia becoming common among college students who, in turn, suffer from career anxiety (Kakazu et al., 2025). Educational establishments need to introduce resilience planning and mental healthcare.

Future research may explore the long-term effects of introduced initiatives as well as the role of technology, including e-counseling and virtual reality simulations. Cultural issues and socio-economic factors should also be considered in further studies (Kakazu et al., 2025; Reshu et al., 2025).

5 Conclusion and Recommendations

The role of resilience and social support in protecting students from negative consequences of job-related stress and anxiety is an important aspect in this context. Development of resilience skills is essential for gaining emotional regulation skills and problem-solving strategies, whereas establishing a supportive system is important to ensure that the necessary resources are provided for people to cope with uncertainties. Positive results of this process have been shown by many studies; in particular, it may contribute to improving psychological condition, self-confidence, and adaptability of students, which will lead to career success in the future. Therefore, considering the importance of this issue, there is a need to establish resilience training and social support programs in colleges.

In order to make sure that the benefits of resilience and social support are taken into account, it is recommended that schools and universities conduct special interventions, such as training on resilience, peer mentoring, and counseling being easily available. One more approach would be to create an atmosphere where openness and cooperation between peers and involvement of family members would be welcomed in order to establish social support systems. It is also proposed that policymakers involve mental well-being and resilience in the curricula of educational institutions in order for people to have the necessary skills to deal with stresses connected with career development.

Source of Funding: This study is performed through self-funding.

Conflicts of Interest: There is no conflict of interest.

References

- Bullock-Yowell, E., Andrews, L., & Buzzetta, M. E. (2011). Explaining Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy: Personality, Cognitions, and Cultural Mistrust. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 59(5), 400–411. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-0045.2011.tb00967.x>
- Cho, S., & Hayter, C. S. (2021). Under pressure: A systematic review of stress and its impact among graduate students. *Science and Public Policy*, 47(6), 758–771. <https://doi.org/10.1093/scipol/scaa053>
- Farah Qayyum, Saira Maqsood, Fatima Naeem, Fatima Salman, Ruqayya Bano, & Muhammad Farhan Tabassum. (2022). “Academic Stress And Career Anxiety: Mediating Role Of Social Competence Among Students Of Public Institutions.” *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 6
- Jonck, P. (2021). Exploring the Theoretical Relationship Between Anxiety of Career Choice, Psychological Wellbeing and Career Self-Efficacy: Conceptual Model. *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change*, 15(10), 943
- Kakazu, R., Hiyajo, Y., Yara, M., Machida, H., Kinjo, K., & Ohta, R. (2025). Understanding the Reasons Behind Medical Students’ Intention to Join the Regional Quota Admission Program: A Qualitative Study in Okinawa, Japan.
- Li, J., & He, J. (2025). The Connection between Career Choice Dilemmas and Work-Related Anxiety among College Students. *Critical Humanistic Social Theory*, 2(3). <https://doi.org/>
- Li, S., & Lee, D. (2025). The development and validation of dysfunctional career thoughts scale for Chinese university students. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 16. <https://doi.org/10.33>
- Mecha, P., Martin-Romero, N., & Sanchez-Lopez, A. (2023). Relationships between Dimensions of Social Support and Resilience Variables and Influencing Pathways on Depression and Anxiety Prevalence in Young Adults. *The Spanish Journal of Psychology*, 26, e11. <https://doi.org/1>
- Mücelidili, B., Tatar, B., & Erdil, O. (2025). Career anxiety as an obstacle to life satisfaction in university students: the contribution of meaning in life and self-efficacy. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, 25(2), 1–25. <https://doi.org>
- Nuckols, J. A., & Ranta, M. (2025). Career Issues in Emerging Adulthood. In *Flourishing and Struggling with Finances in Emerging Adulthood* (pp. 146-162). Oxford University
- Reshu, Kumar, S., & Rathi, A. (2025). Academic stress and exam anxiety among adolescents during the post-COVID-19 pandemic period in school setting. *Acta Psychologica*, 261, 1
- SÖNER, O., & YILMAZ, O. (2022). The role of personality on the career anxiety and self-efficacy of adolescents in career decision-making process. *Journal of Teacher Education and Lifelong Learning*, 4(2), 110-
- Vandana, Haricharan, P. B., Kumar, V., & Oberoi, S. S. (2025). Career anxiety and its contributing factors in management students: the influence of education on driving change. *Asian*



Education and Development Studies, 14(5), 1036-1051. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AEDS-11-2024-0281>

- Wang, G., Wang, H., Gu, X., & Zheng, F. (2025). Effects of college counselor's spiritual guidance behavior on Chinese college students' employment anxiety: chain-mediated roles of resilience and career calling. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 16. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2025.1586101>
- Wang, J., & Zhang, R. (2025). The impact of employment stress on employment anxiety in physical education students: the mediating effects of social support and psychological resilience. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 16. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1533218>

Views and opinions expressed in this article are the views and opinions of the author(s), *International Journal of Atharva* shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability etc. caused in relation to/arising out of the use of the content.