

Research Paper

Career Decision-Making Difficulties, College Self-Efficacy, Fear of Covid-19 And Future Anxiety Among College and University Students: A Cross-Disciplinary Study

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ABSTRACT

A review of previous literature suggests that a negatively-significant relationship exists between career decision-making difficulties and college self-efficacy within students, but studies inspecting the association of these factors with future anxiety and the new-normal life have been scarce. Present study therefore aims to investigate the Career Decision-Making Difficulties, College Self-Efficacy, Fear of Covid-19 and Future Anxiety among College and University Students. Data were collected, in the year 2021, from 200 adults (Mean age= 19.75, SD= 1.70, 63% females), all college and university students (95% undergraduates) of different disciplines by administering (a) *Career-Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire* developed by Gati et al. (1996), (b) *College Self-Efficacy Questionnaire* developed by Solberg et al. (1993), (c) *Fear of Covid-19 Scale* developed by Ahorsu et al. (2020) and (d) *Future Anxiety Scale* developed by Zaleski (1996). Statistical analysis included Descriptive Statistics, Correlation Analysis and Regression Analysis. Findings revealed that fear of Covid-19 is negatively-correlated to, while future anxiety is positively-correlated to career decision-making difficulties. And college-efficacy is weakly correlated to, but not predicting career decision-making difficulties. Further, Multiple Regression Analysis shows that only future anxiety significantly predicts career decision-making difficulties ($\beta=0.60$, $p<0.001$), explaining 35% variance in the career decision-making difficulties. The study findings shed light on the mechanism in which the career decision-making of the university students is getting affected due to future anxiety. It is important to note that fear of Covid-19 hardly impacts the career decision-making of the students but it is their future anxiety that is playing a cardinal role.

Keywords: *Career Decision-Making Difficulties, College Self-Efficacy, Fear of Covid-19, Future Anxiety*

A college student is faced with various decision-making difficulties and potential life-long decisions are established. Due to the fear of the Covid-19 situation, forming sound career choices and maintaining college self-efficacy have become quite demanding; giving rise to anxiety regarding one's future, and presenting the students with newer challenges which never existed earlier. Existing literature suggests that a negatively-significant relationship exists between career decision-making difficulties and college self-

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efficacy. Present study, therefore aims towards investigating the Career Decision-Making Difficulties, College Self-Efficacy, Fear of Covid-19 and Future Anxiety among College and University Students.

Career Decision-Making Difficulties in Students

Career decision-making difficulties are the **internal and external conflicts faced before and during the career determination process**. This is a time when an individual is mightily confused regarding their choice of stream, in terms of what will be best suited for them, when will be affordable, what matches their personality, etc. As observed by Amir and Gati (2006), career choices made by individuals in early adulthood “have significant implications on their lifestyle and personal and occupational life satisfaction” (Amir & Gati, 2006, p.483). According to Zhou and Santos, career decision-making difficulty is an important aspect in “framing and understanding factors contributing to an individual’s career development” (Zhou & Santos, 2007, p.220).

College Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is “the belief in one's ability to successfully perform a given behavior which is required to produce certain outcomes” or “people's beliefs in their capabilities to produce given attainments”. The concept of self-efficacy finds significance in Albert Bandura’s (1986) Social Cognitive Theory and Self-Efficacy Theory. According to Bandura (1989), an individual’s self-efficacy beliefs can either “enhance or impair his or her academic or social performance by affecting thoughts, emotions, motivations and selection processes” (as cited in Jenkins, 2007). College self-efficacy, however, is domain specific and is associated with self-efficacy beliefs in an academic setting.

Future Anxiety

Future anxiety, is a state of apprehension, fear, uncertainty and anxiety of undesired changes expected to occur in the future. Future anxiety is one factor that has been typically related to **career indecision**. And self-efficacy, as related to career decision-making constitutes topical concerns of much of the college decidedness literature. Future anxiety is considered one of the “main features as a result of economic and social changes, and increasingly emerges among university students not only because of the fear of failure in the study, but also because of the fear of lack of job opportunities – the thing that affects joining their specializations” (Hammad, 2016).

Relationship with Fear of Covid

The fear of Covid-19 pandemic is characterized by the constant and severe anxiety one faces with regard to their possibility of catching the virus and facing the consequences. Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, the mental health of the people all around the world is severely disrupted and the future workforce is getting anxious about their career-decisions. Thus, in the present study we’ll explore how the above-mentioned factors influence career decision-making in college and university students.

The widespread outbreak of SARS-Cov 2 causing a worldwide pandemic, has resulted in governments implementing disease containment measures such as school closures, social distancing, and home quarantine. A direct negative impact of these actions is being faced by children and adolescents, especially students, who are being forced to stay in prolonged state of physical isolation from their peers, teachers, extended families, and community networks. In adults, negative psychological effects including confusion, anger, and posttraumatic

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distress is being caused by the prolonged quarantine (Brooks et al., 2020). A significant result of the Covid-19 pandemic has been the shift to online classes. This transition to the “new normal life” has proved to be stressful in terms of academics in case of many students, giving rise to feelings of career indecision, and future anxiety.

In 2013, Lydia Hurley found a negatively-significant relationship between career decision-making difficulties and college self-efficacy within college students. This was found due to the fact that students excelling in academics were seen to have higher levels of self-efficacy, and they generally had a specific career path cut out for them. However, individual differences also showed that few students having high college self-efficacy faced higher levels of career decision-making difficulty as they had several career paths to choose from. A negative correlation between future anxiety and academic specialization, and gender differences in favor of males was found by Hammad in 2016. Differences in future anxiety for Humanities students was also found. This study observes differences in attitudes and behaviours towards specialization in favor of Science as specializations, however, gender differences were absent here.

In 2020, Mahmud et al. found that due to the outbreak of COVID-19 people are becoming depressed and anxious about their future career, creating a long-term negative effect on human psychology. This was found due to the fact that a significant shift to online classes and exams has decreased the possibility of acquired results to be deemed deserving. Moreover, several applications-based subjects require hands on experience to be gained by a college student, which the Covid situation did not permit. In addition, the economy has taken a serious hit which may affect the pay structure of the future workforce.

And, Martinez et al. found that future anxiety and resilience are negatively significant in a Covid-19 context.

A college student is faced with various decision-making difficulties and potential life-long decisions are established. Due to the fear of the Covid-19 situation, forming sound career choices and maintaining college self-efficacy have become quite demanding; giving rise to anxiety regarding one’s future, and presenting the students with newer challenges which never existed earlier. Existing literature suggests that a negatively-significant relationship exists between career decision-making difficulties and college self-efficacy. Empirical studies suggest that career decision-making difficulties and college self-efficacy are negatively-significant, but studies inspecting the association of these factors with future anxiety and the new-normal life have been scarce.

Present study, therefore aims towards investigating the Career Decision-Making Difficulties, College Self-Efficacy, Fear of Covid-19 and Future Anxiety among College and University Students.

METHODS

Participants:

Data were collected from 200 adults, all college and university students, of different disciplines.

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Tools Used:

i. Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire

The Career Decision Making Difficulties Questionnaire or CDDQ, developed by Gati et al. in 1996, is based on the taxonomy of Career Decision-Making Difficulties. It is a 34-item, self-report measure, with 9-point rating categories ranging from “does not describe me” to “describes me well”, and is used to validate the proposed taxonomy and to be a means for locating the focuses of individuals’ **career decision-making** difficulties, a step that is among the first in providing individuals with the help they need.

ii. College Self-Efficacy Questionnaire

The College Self-Efficacy Inventory or CSEI developed by Solberg et al. in 1993 is used to examine the level of confidence students have in completing college related tasks. It is a 20-item self-report measure, with a 10-point Likert type scale ranging from “not confident at all” to “extremely confident”. The CSEI produces 3 subscales measuring course efficacy, roommate efficiency, and social efficiency. By adding the individual subscale-scores, a total of CSEI score can be obtained.

iii. Fear of Covid-19 Scale

The Fear of Covid-19 Scale developed by Ahorsu et al. in 2020, is a 7-item self-report measure, where the participants indicate their level of agreement with the statements using a five- item Likert type scale. Answers included “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” “neutral” “agree” and “strongly agree”. The minimum score possible for each question is 1, and the maximum is 5. A total score could be calculated by adding up each item score (ranged from 7 to 35). Statements include: “I am afraid of losing my life because of Corona.”; “When I watch news and stories about Corona on social media, I become nervous or anxious.”

iv. Future Anxiety Scale

The Future Anxiety Scale developed by Zaleski in 1996 is a 29-item self-report measure, using a seven-item Likert type scale, ranging from “Decidedly False” to “Decidedly True”. It measures the tendency to think about the future with anxiety and uncertainty and to anticipate disasters in the future. Statements include: “I am terrified by the thought that I might sometimes face life’s crises or difficulties.”; “I tremble with fear at the thought of what the next day, month, year will bring”; “I am disturbed by the possibility of a sudden accident or serious illness (e.g. AIDS, cancer)”.

Procedure

Data were collected in an online survey method using Google Forms. Convenience sampling procedure was followed. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before collecting data. The information schedule contained information asking about the participants’ name (in initials), age, sex, academic qualification, and mode of study adopted by their respective institution. After data collection, data were cleaned and then analyzed using appropriate statistical methods.

Statistical Analysis

Statistical analysis included Descriptive Statistics, Correlation Analysis and Regression Analysis. Descriptive Statistics was done to summarize the data. Correlation Analysis & Regression Analysis were done to explore the relationship among the variables.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics

Descriptive Statistics gave a basic insight into the raw data before formal statistical analyses.

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation of Career Decision-Making Difficulties, College Self-Efficacy, Future Anxiety and Fear of Corona of students (n=200)

Variables	Mean	SD
Career Decision-Making Difficulties	164.60	63.99
College Self-Efficacy	137.05	35.51
Future Anxiety	94.70	32.48
Fear of Corona	22.70	7.63

Association between Career Decision-Making Difficulties, College Self-Efficacy, Future Anxiety and Fear of Corona

Findings revealed that fear of Covid-19 is negatively-correlated to, while future anxiety is positively-correlated to career decision-making difficulties. And, College-efficacy is weakly correlated to, but not predicting career decision-making difficulties.

Table 2. Correlation matrix showing the relationship between Career Decision-Making Difficulties, College Self-Efficacy, Future Anxiety and Fear of Corona (n=200)

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Career Decision-Making Difficulties	1.00			
2. College Self-Efficacy	-0.09	1.00		
3. Future Anxiety	0.60**	-0.11	1.00	
4. Fear of Corona	-0.31**	-0.16*	-0.47**	1.00

Prediction of Career Decision-Making Difficulties by College Self-Efficacy, Future Anxiety and Fear of Corona

Multiple Regression Analysis shows that only future anxiety significantly predicts career decision-making difficulties ($\beta=0.60$, $p<0.001$), at a significance value of less than 0.001, explaining 35% variance in the career decision-making difficulties.

Table 3. Multiple regression analysis with Career Decision-Making Difficulties as dependent variable

Predictors	Adjusted R Square	F value	Beta	t-value	p-Value
College Self-Efficacy	0.35	22.67**	-0.25	-0.43	0.67
Future Anxiety			0.60	8.70**	0.0001
Fear of Corona			-0.03	-0.43	0.66
Age			0.007	0.12	0.90
Gender			-0.06	-1.04	0.30

** $p<.0001$

DISCUSSION

Here, Descriptive Statistics was used to describe and summarize the data. Correlation analysis was used to determine whether positive, negative or no correlation existed between the variables. We found that career decision-making difficulties is significantly and positively predicted by future anxiety. Similar findings were obtained by Vignolli (2015), he

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found that adolescent career indecision and career exploration were positively and significantly related to general trait anxiety and career anxiety. This occurs as the pressure of choosing an effective and active career may provoke fear and uncertainty about the future, and the future may become a source of anxiety as a result of the misperception of potential events. Present study showed that college self-efficacy is weakly correlated to career decision-making difficulties but not predicting it; although Lydia Hurley (2013) found college self-efficacy to be negatively significant to career indecision. This change can be explained due to the fact that, factors like Covid-19, which hiked a wave of future career anxiety in young adults; did not exist back in 2013.

Multiple Regression Analysis was used to determine which factors matter most, which factors can be ignored, and how these factors influence each other. It was seen that only future anxiety predicted career indecision, the other factors didn't. This occurred as there can be 'N' number of other factors influencing the relationship but these factors are outside the purview of present study. If we had considered those, we might have gotten a stronger prediction. We also found that fear of Covid-19 is negatively correlated to career decision-making difficulties. Although, Mahmud et al. (2020) found that without the presence of depression, as a mediator, there exists a significant relationship between Fear of Covid-19 and future workforces' career anxiety, but the presence of depression disproves this finding. This difference in outcome in the present study can be as a result of the increased psychiatric morbidity brought about by the onset of the 2nd wave of Covid-19, which acts as a mediator between career indecision and future anxiety.

Findings will have implications in career counselling and more emphasis should be given on dealing with future anxiety in students facing career indecision. Effective strategies for managing future in students can be taken up by educational institutes as blended learning is coming into practice, and students are going through another phase of transition, giving rise to another set of new academic challenges.

A significant limitation of the research relates to the chosen sampling method. Convenience sampling method was used due to time and money constrictions, which might have decreased the statistical validity. Another limitation is the distribution of sample as it predominantly consisted of Indian undergraduates, which might be overshadowing the variations in responses (if any) by school students, postgraduates or Ph.D. students.

An evenly-distributed sample can be considered for future comparative studies. Future studies could also incorporate new variables to provide further predictors of career indecision. It is also recommended that future research be carried out to further investigate the variation in responses by school and college students; and online versus offline learning.

CONCLUSION

The study findings shed light on the mechanism in which the career decision-making of the university students is getting affected due to future anxiety. It is important to note that fear of Covid-19 hardly impacts the career decision-making of the students but it is their future anxiety that is playing a cardinal role.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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