

The Relationship Between Social Support and Employment Anxiety Among College Students: The Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy

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Abstract: To investigate the effects of social support on employment anxiety and the mediating role of self-efficacy among college students. A total of 449 valid questionnaires were returned through a web-based survey using the Social Support Rating Scale, the Employment Anxiety Scale, and the General Self-Efficacy Scale. The study showed that social support was significantly and negatively correlated with employment anxiety ($r=-0.371$, $P < 0.01$), social support was significantly and positively correlated with self-efficacy ($r=0.313$, $P < 0.01$), and self-efficacy was significantly and negatively correlated with employment anxiety ($r=-0.309$, $P < 0.01$). Self-efficacy partially mediated the relationship between social support and employment anxiety, and the mediating effect accounted for 18.1% of the total effect. Social support of college students can directly affect employment anxiety, but it can also affect employment anxiety through the mediation of self-efficacy.

Keywords: Employment anxiety; Social support; Self-efficacy

Introduction

With the popularization and development of higher education, the number of higher education has been surging year by year, and the number of graduates has correspondingly shown a substantial upward trend, and the scale of graduates of national ordinary colleges and universities is expected to reach 11.79 million in 2024, an increase of 210,000 year-on-year, which will be a record high. Literature about college students' employment and psychological influences in the past ten years at home and abroad shows that most college students have difficulties in employment and increased employment pressure, especially after 2020, graduates will have more difficulties in employment, and the pressure load will increase, which will lead to serious psychological problems such as employment anxiety and depression.

According to a survey conducted by the University of International Business and Economics (UIBE), the overall mood of university students is affected by the employment situation to a large extent depending on the grade, and the higher the grade, the greater the impact of their mood on employment, and in the face of the dual pressures of studies and employment, students are prone to psychological problems.

Many college graduates realize that their employment will be greatly challenged, thus creating employment anxiety. Employment anxiety refers to the persistent and intense psychological state of worry and nervousness, accompanied by a series of changes in physiological and behavioral responses, which belongs to a kind of state anxiety, mainly including the pressure of employment competition, the lack of employment support, the lack of self-confidence, and the worry about the prospects of employment^[1], and long-term anxiety will jeopardize the physical and mental health of the individual.

Research has shown that employment anxiety is the result of a combination of internal and external factors, and most previous studies have analyzed the influencing factors of employment anxiety from the perspectives of social support and socioeconomic status. However, some scholars have pointed out that internal psychological factors are important mediators of the role of the external environment on behavior, such as comprehending social support, individuals subjectively perceive external support will be internalized into their own emotional and cognitive schema, and then act on behavior^[3]. Related studies have found that internal factors such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and psychological flexibility are effective predictors of employment anxiety^[2], and internal psychological factors may play a significant role in employment anxiety.

Wu Jia^[4] found that social support was significantly negatively correlated with all dimensions of employment anxiety and the total score, indicating that the higher the individual's level of social support, the lower the degree of employment anxiety. Yong Tingjun et

al^[5]. found that social support and self-efficacy were significantly positively correlated, and the higher the level of social support an individual felt, the higher his or her self-efficacy would be. It has also been shown that the higher the level of social support, the stronger the self-efficacy in career decision-making. Zhang Bin et al^[6]. found that self-efficacy had a negative effect on employment anxiety, and the higher the self-efficacy, the less likely they were to have employment anxiety.

Therefore, this study proposes the research hypothesis that college students with higher levels of social support are less prone to employment anxiety, due to the fact that higher levels of social support are more able to adapt to different changes in society, increase their confidence in facing unknown factors, improve their self-efficacy to cope with setbacks and difficulties, and enhance their confidence in finding a desirable job, which in turn reduces employment anxiety.

1. Research Objectives and Methods

1.1 Research Objectives

Taking junior and senior students as the research object, 465 questionnaires were collected within the southwest area of China, and 449 questionnaires (96.5%) were valid. The scope of the survey included Chengdu, Yibin, Chongqing, Yunnan and other provinces and cities, of which 185 were male students and 264 were female students.

1.2 Methods

A total of 3 scales were used in the study.

1.2.1 Social Support Scale

The Social Support Rating Scale (SSRS) compiled by Xiao Shuiyuan was used^[7], including subjective support, objective support, and utilization of support. The sum of the three dimensions equals the total social support score. The questionnaire was modified appropriately for the characteristics of college students and has high reliability and validity.

1.2.2 Employment Anxiety Scale

The Career Choice Anxiety Questionnaire (CCAQ) developed by Yuzhu Zhang and Zhongyong Chen was used^[8], which contains four dimensions: pressure to compete for employment, lack of employment support, low self-confidence, and concern about employment prospects. The internal consistency reliability of the scale was 0.931 in this study.

1.2.3 General Self-Efficacy Scale

The Chinese version of the scale compiled by Wang Caikang and Schwarzer was used^[9-10]. The internal consistency reliability of the scale was 0.872 in this study.

1.3 Statistical Analysis

SPSS 24.0 software was used to analyze the data and compare the differences between gender, grade level, place of origin, and different majors on each indicator. Regression analysis was used to test for mediating effects.

2. Results

2.1 Overall Employment Anxiety, Social Support, and Self-Efficacy Among College Students

Generally speaking, the level of employment anxiety of college students is at a moderately high level, with a theoretical mean of 2.5 points per entry (on a 4-point scale), of which worry about employment prospects and lack of social support are higher than the theoretical mean, and low self-confidence and pressure of employment competition are lower than the theoretical mean. Self-efficacy has a theoretical mean of 2.5 points per item (on a 4-point scale), and the total score is slightly higher than the theoretical mean of 25 points, which is at a moderately high level, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Variable Means and Standard Deviations

Variable	Maxima	Minima	Average	Standard Deviation	Theoretical Mean Value (2.5)
Employment Anxiety	102	28	65.61	13.30	65
Worry about Employment Prospects	24	7	16.37	3.42	15
Lack of Social Support	32	8	20.68	4.46	20
low Self-Confidence	27	7	17.36	4.24	17.5
Pressure of Employment Competition	20	5	11.20	3.05	12.5
Social Support	54	16	34.63	6.24	25
Self-Efficacy	40	12	25.28	5.17	25

2.2 Demographic Differences in Employment Anxiety, Social Support, and Self-Efficacy

Difference-in-differences analysis found that there were significant differences in employment anxiety, level of social support and self-efficacy among college students with different places of origin; there were also significant differences in employment anxiety, level of social support and self-efficacy among college students with different grades; female students were significantly more anxious than male students, and the level of social support was also significantly higher than that of male students.

Table 2. Demographic Analysis of Variance for Each Variable ($\bar{x}\pm s$)

Variable	Sample Size (%)	Employment Anxiety	Social Support	Self-Efficacy
Male	185 (41.2)	63.61±13.72	33.28±6.43	33.37±6.43
Female	264(58.8)	66.41±13.11	35.12±6.08	25.21±5.27
t		-2.001 *	2.671 * *	0.519
Urban Dwellers	201(44.8)	64.01±13.73	35.48±6.09	25.86±5.42
Rural Dwellers	248(55.2)	67.08±12.74	33.88±6.32	24.74±4.81
t		-2.453 *	2.729 * *	2.406 *
Science	205(45.7)	64.81±13.41	34.81±6.53	24.88±5.01
Economic Management	136(30.3)	66.33±13.26	34.32±6.18	25.21±5.42
Art	85(18.9)	66.24±13.72	35.57±5.78	25.76±4.42
Others	23(5.1)	64.16±12.91	34.21±5.95	26.57±4.74
F		0.564	0.674	1.273
Junior	120(27)	59.44±12.34	35.35±6.05	26.49±5.12
Senior	329(73)	69.92±12.25	34.13±6.32	24.46±4.95
t		-8.862 * * *	2.070 * *	4.212 * * *

Notes: * $P < 0.05$, ** $P < 0.01$, *** $P < 0.001$

2.3 Correlation Analysis Between Employment Anxiety, Social Support, and Self-Efficacy

The data showed that social support was significantly negatively correlated with employment anxiety ($r = -0.371$, $P < 0.01$), and the higher the level of individual social support, the lower the level of employment anxiety. Social support was significantly positively correlated with self-efficacy ($r = 0.313$, $P < 0.01$), and self-efficacy was significantly negatively correlated with employment anxiety ($r = -0.309$, $P < 0.01$), and the three variables were significantly correlated with each other, which provided the conditions for mediation analysis.

2.4 The Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy Between Employment Anxiety and Social Support

The mediating role of self-efficacy was examined using a three-step testing procedure by Wen Zhonglin et al^[11]. In the first step, college student support was regressed as the independent variable and employment anxiety as the dependent variable to obtain model 1 and test the regression coefficient c ; in the second step, social support was regressed as the independent variable and self-efficacy as the dependent variable to obtain model 2 and test the regression coefficient a ; in the third step, social support and self-efficacy were regressed as the independent variables at the same time, and employment anxiety as the dependent variable to obtain model 3 and test the regression coefficient c' , see Table 3. Regression coefficient c' , see Table 3.

Table 3. Test of the Mediating Effect of Self-Efficacy

Steps	Standardized Regression Equation	β	F	t	Adjusted R-Squared
Model 1 (Approach c)	$Y = -0.371X$	-0.371	71.161 * * *	-8.436	0.135
Model 2 (Approach a)	$M = 0.313X$	0.313	48.452 * * *	6.961	0.096
Model 3 (Approach c')	$Y = -0.304X$	-0.304	48.446 * * *	-6.724	0.175
(Approach b)	-0.214M	-0.214		-4.726	

Notes: Y refers to employment anxiety, X refers to social support, and M refers to self-efficacy

The data showed that social support had a significant negative predictive effect on employment anxiety, and social support had a significant positive predictive effect on self-efficacy. After the mediating effect of self-efficacy was invoked, the negative predictive effect of social support on employment anxiety was significantly reduced but still significant, and the adjusted R-squared value became larger, indicating that self-efficacy partially mediates the relationship between social support and employment anxiety, with the mediating effect accounting for 18.1% of the total effect ($a*b/c$).

3. Discussion

3.1 The Relationship Between Social Support and Employment Anxiety Among College Students

The results show that the level of social support of college students can significantly predict the degree of employment anxiety, and the higher the level of social support, the lower the employment anxiety. This is consistent with the results of previous studies, many college graduates in the face of employment preparation, do not know how to go to the community and work, worried about their own profession can not find a good job, the lack of a reasonable perception of their own, prone to anxiety, panic, depression, nervousness and other anxieties, if at this time to get the community, school, family and other aspects of social support, can greatly reduce the level of student employment anxiety. If we get social support from society, school and family, it can greatly reduce students' employment anxiety level, improve their objective cognition of the employment situation, and enhance their confidence in employment.

3.2 Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy

It is found that self-efficacy plays a partial mediating role between social support and employment anxiety, that is to say, college students' social support affects employment anxiety, and part of it is mediated by self-efficacy to employment anxiety. Social support affects self-efficacy, and the more social support an individual feels from family, school, and friends, the more self-efficacy he or she can improve, and the more he or she can face the difficulties encountered in the job search with a positive mindset, believing that he or she has the ability to find a desirable job, and reduce the anxiety of employment. Self-efficacy as a mediator variable is logically explainable and tested in the data.

Overall, this study validated the experimental hypothesis that self-efficacy mediates the relationship between social support and employment anxiety. This result reminds college educators that social support from society, family, and school is needed to alleviate the employment anxiety of students, especially college seniors. At the same time, college students should build their own social support network, establish good interpersonal relationships with others, and improve self-efficacy to alleviate employment anxiety.

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