



FUTURE CAREER ANXIETY BASED ON PARENTAL PRESSURE AND GENDER DIFFERENCES AMONG PUBLIC UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN DELTA AND EDO STATES

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Abstract

The study investigated future career anxiety based on parental pressure and gender differences among public university students in Delta and Edo States. Two research questions guided the investigation. The study adopted the descriptive design of research. The descriptive design was appropriate in other to statistically describe the variations. The population of the study is 110,220 students in all Eight (8) Public Universities in Delta and Edo States. The sample for the study consists of 460 undergraduate students. The Multistage and simple random procedure was used to arrive at the sample. The research instrument titled “Future Career Anxiety Scale Based on Parental Pressure (FCABPPS)” was designed by the researcher. A reliability coefficient of 0.88 was obtained for the items on the questionnaire. The researcher personally visited the various sampled universities to administer the instrument. Data collected were subjected to data analysis procedure using descriptive statistic such as mean and standard deviation in SPSS software version 20. Since the response format was based on four-point scale, the decision rule was that any statement having a mean score of 2.50 and above stood for future career anxiety based on parental pressure while the mean score rating below 2.50 stood for no future career anxiety based on parental pressure. The findings of the study show that there are future career anxiety based on parental pressure among public university students in Delta and Edo States and that there are future career anxiety based on gender differences among public university students in Delta and Edo States. Based on the findings of this study it was recommended among others that parents should embrace the exploration of individual children to transform stress into strength that is, not pressuring them to take a career for personal and professional accomplishment.

Introduction

Transiting from a student to a career expert involves numerous struggles ranging from financial concerns, parental pressure among others. Anxieties about career choices about the future are common companions (Niharika & Bikash, 2023). In the current background of global insecurity, future anxiety among adolescents and young adults is an increasingly prevalent concern, with parental pressure emerging as a central factor in exacerbating these anxieties. The 21st century has seen rapid shifts in technology, education, and employment opportunities, all of which have contributed to a heightened sense of instability about the future. Future career anxiety is a multidimensional psychological condition characterized by persistent worry, fear, and uncertainty about one's professional future. It encompasses concerns about job security, career development, financial stability, and personal fulfillment in the workplace (Niharika & Bikash, 2023). Individuals with career anxiety may experience fear of job insecurity, uncertainty about career pathways, pressure to Succeed and a fear of obsolescence (Howard et al, 2021). The consequences of future career anxiety are far-reaching. In the short term, individuals may experience heightened stress, difficulty focusing, and a lack of confidence in their professional decisions. This may lead to poor job performance, procrastination, or avoidance of career planning altogether. In the long term, persistent anxiety can contribute to mental health issues such as depression, burnout, and chronic anxiety disorders. Additionally, the pressure to constantly strive for success without a clear sense of direction can lead to decision fatigue and a fear of failure, which further exacerbates career paralysis. The failure to manage these anxieties effectively can prevent individuals from taking proactive steps to advance their careers or develop new skills, ultimately perpetuating a cycle of fear and stagnation. Factors that may contribute to career anxiety could include parental pressure and gender differences.

The relationship between parental pressure and future anxiety is a complex and multifaceted issue that warrants urgent attention. The pressure to make the right decision can be paralyzing and the fear of missing out often clouds opinion and

creates an unsaid pressure to choose what others think is right for them. Career trajectories are rarely linear, though. Skills grow, interests change, and the opportunities themselves are ever-shifting. Corey (2015) opined that this inherent uncertainty fosters a sense of vulnerability leading to anxiety about the future. A growth mindset cultivates resilience and lessens career anxiety by viewing obstacles as chances for personal development (Corey, 2015). Combating career and future anxieties requires a multi-pronged approach. Niharika and Bikash (2023) strongly stated that self-exploration which entails the identification of strengths, interests, and potential for career paths can be used to fight the anxiety of future careers, informational interviews, volunteer internships, skill development, building confidence embracing uncertainty can be used to fight the anxiety of future career.

Parental expectations, while often motivated by a desire to protect children and ensure their success, can unintentionally contribute to rising anxiety levels. By pushing children to meet unrealistic goals, particularly in terms of academic and career success, parents may inadvertently create a sense of pressure that stifles personal growth and fosters anxiety. Parental pressure on children's career choices can negatively impact their development. When parents decide their child's path without considering the child's interests, it causes stress and anxiety as the child feels forced into a career they do not want. This pressure to only pursue high-paying fields like engineering or medicine also shapes children's views to revolve around money rather than passion. At the heart of this issue is the growing tendency of parents to pressure their children to succeed in an increasingly competitive and uncertain world. According to a study conducted by Li et al. (2021), parents often exert unrealistic expectations on their children regarding academic performance, career choice, and personal achievements, which leads to a heightened sense of anxiety about the future. These pressures manifest in various forms, from academic excellence to securing prestigious career paths, with many parents believing that these pressures will better equip their children for an uncertain and volatile future. However, research suggests

that this can backfire, resulting in significant emotional distress and a pervasive fear of failure (Kim & Lee, 2022). The cultural emphasis on individual success, particularly in Western societies, has amplified the psychological toll of these pressures, contributing to a rise in anxiety disorders, depression, and feelings of inadequacy (Park, 2023).

To guide children best, parents should listen to understand their interests and make suggestions that fit the child, without unrealistic expectations that burden them. The role of parents is to help, not pressure their children into career decisions before they are ready to choose their own path. Within this context, the expectations placed on young people by their parents have become a critical point of focus in the psychological discourse surrounding anxiety. In an era marked by the rapid pace of technological advancements and global socio-economic changes, traditional career paths and educational systems are often ill-equipped to prepare students for the complexities of the future. The constant evolution of industries, coupled with automation and artificial intelligence (AI), has created an environment where job security is increasingly precarious (Smith & Zhao, 2020). Consequently, parents, in their attempts to shield their children from future uncertainties, may impose unrealistic expectations of success in fields that are rapidly evolving or becoming obsolete. This mismatch between parental expectations and the realities of the job market fosters anxiety among young people, who often feel they are being pushed to achieve something that may not be feasible or even desirable in the future (Taylor & Jiang, 2023).

The rising complexities of the labour market, rapid technological advancements, and shifting societal expectations have all intensified career-related stress across different demographics. Future career anxiety, particularly as it pertains to gender differences, has emerged as a significant concern in recent studies. Future career anxiety is undeniably shaped by gender differences, with women and gender minorities facing heightened and unique forms of stress due to societal expectations, workplace inequality, and historical barriers to professional success. While men also experience career anxiety, particularly in relation to societal expectations of success and failure,

women's career concerns are more complex, often tied to the dual pressures of professional success and traditional gender roles. Gender, however continues to play a pivotal role in shaping individuals' perceptions and experiences of career anxiety. A multitude of factors, including societal expectations, workplace disparities, and gendered career pathways, contribute to the unique anxieties that men and women experience regarding their professional futures. This anxiety is particularly prevalent among females and minorities, who face structural and institutional barriers that limit their career opportunities and affect their confidence in achieving professional success. Research indicates that women and men experience future career anxiety differently due to deep-seated societal and institutional gender roles. Historically, women have faced significant obstacles in achieving career progression due to systemic discrimination, the gender pay gap, and the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles. Park et al. (2022) explored the nuanced ways in which women's career development is often undermined by gendered expectations. They argue that women frequently encounter greater career anxiety, particularly regarding work-life balance, and the perceived conflict between family responsibilities and career ambitions. While men are generally not as burdened by the same dual expectations, women's career ambitions are often clouded by societal pressure to fulfill traditional roles of caretakers and homemakers (Park et al., 2022). The anxiety surrounding career progression for women is further exacerbated by persistent gender biases within hiring processes and promotions, where women are often overlooked in favor of their male counterparts, even when they possess equal or superior qualifications (Binns, 2021).

The intersection of gender compounds these anxieties leading to even higher levels of career-related stress. Smith and Williams (2023) reported that women face compounded discrimination, both due to their gender and racial identities, resulting in higher levels of career uncertainty and anxiety. This marginalization both in workplace and the society as a whole tends to limit their access to professional opportunities, mentorship, and career growth. In comparison to their male or female counterparts, women are less likely to be promoted, and their career success is

often more scrutinized (Smith & Williams, 2023). These compounded challenges contribute significantly to their heightened anxiety regarding their future careers, as they struggle to navigate environments where they are frequently undervalued and overlooked. Men, on the other hand, are typically socialized to experience and express career anxiety differently. Traditional gender roles have long associated success with male identity, and thus, men are often faced with expectations to succeed professionally to prove their worth. Chen and Lee (2021) found that male anxiety related to career success is often linked to concerns about failure or the inability to fulfill societal expectations of financial stability and success. The study emphasizes that while men may not face the same gendered constraints as women in terms of work-life balance, they are still significantly impacted by gendered pressures. Men are expected to occupy positions of power and authority in the workplace, and those who fail to meet these expectations may experience feelings of inadequacy or fear of social and economic decline. Additionally, men may struggle with internalized norms that discourage them from seeking support or counseling when they feel career anxiety, further compounding the problem.

Gender roles and expectations in the workplace also influence the types of career anxiety men and women experience. Harris and Zhang (2024) highlights how workplace cultures, often shaped by masculine norms, contribute to gendered career anxiety. In male-dominated industries, women may face a “chilly climate,” where they are either excluded from critical networks or expected to outperform their male peers to gain recognition. This not only leads to anxiety about job performance but also fosters a fear of professional isolation and career stagnation. Meanwhile, men in female-dominated fields may experience anxiety about appearing vulnerable or incapable of meeting traditionally masculine expectations, which could hinder their career advancement. Harris and Zhang's research suggests that the pressure to conform to these norms creates a feedback loop of anxiety, as both men and women are forced to navigate their careers within gendered frameworks that can restrict professional mobility and satisfaction. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic, which has

disrupted global workforces, has amplified gender disparities in career-related anxiety. As noted by an International Labour Organization (2023) report, the pandemic exacerbated gendered divisions of labour, with women taking on a disproportionate share of caregiving and domestic responsibilities. This shifting of responsibilities has had long-term effects on women's career trajectories, contributing to higher levels of anxiety about their professional futures. Despite the flexibility of remote work, which initially seemed like a potential boon for balancing work and life, the uneven distribution of household duties means that women are still more likely to experience career stagnation during periods of economic uncertainty. In contrast, men have been more likely to experience career anxiety related to the economic impact of the pandemic and its consequences for job security. Thus, the pandemic further emphasized the gendered nature of career anxiety, with women bearing more of the burden, both at home and in the workplace.

Statement of the Problem

The increasingly complex, rapidly changing world and the uncertainty surrounding job markets, technological advancements, and societal shift are leading individuals especially young adults to face high levels of anxiety about their future careers and a pervasive sense of apprehension on their professional path. This future career anxiety affects students, undergraduates, graduates, and even mid-career professionals who are grappling with the evolving demands of work in the 21st century. Understanding the root causes, implications, and potential solutions to career-related anxiety is critical in helping individuals navigate their professional futures with confidence. With the rise of remote work the gig economy, and a desire for growing emphasis on autonomy, flexibility, and personal fulfillment have created an environment where individuals feel they must not only secure a job but also find meaningful work that aligns with their values and goals. Could these values and goals (career) create anxiety in the future with respect to pressure and gender differences among university students in Delta and Edo State?. To provide an answer to this question necessitated this study within the scope

of public universities in Delta and Edo State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study

1. What is the level of future career anxiety based on parental pressure among public university students in Delta and Edo States?
2. What is the level of future career anxiety based on gender differences among public university students in Delta and Edo States?

Methods

The study adopted the descriptive design of research. The population of the study was 110,220 students in all Eight (8) Public Universities in Delta and Edo States. The sample for the study consisted of 460 undergraduate students. The Multistage and simple random procedure was used to arrive at the sample. Using the multistage procedure, 60% of the entire public universities in Delta and Edo was selected. In other words, 3 universities from Delta State and 2 public universities from Edo State summed up to make 5 universities in Delta and Edo State that was used. Secondly, simple random sampling techniques (SRST) was employed to select 92 undergraduate students from each of the sampled universities in Delta and Edo State making 460 sampled size. The research instrument titled

“Future Career Anxiety Scale Based on Parental Pressure (FCABPPS)” was designed by the researcher. The instrument was validated by two measurement and evaluation experts. The reliability of the instrument was done using Cronbach method. The “Future Career Anxiety Scale Based on Parental Pressure (FCABPPS)” was administered to a private university in Delta State. The Cronbach Alpha was applied for the computation of the reliability coefficient. The internal consistency reliability coefficient of the instrument yielded 0.88. The researcher personally visited the various sampled universities to administer the instrument. Data collected were subjected to data analysis procedure using descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation in SPSS software version 20. Since the response format was based on a four-point scale, the decision rule was that any statement having a mean score of 2.50 and above stood for future career anxiety based on parental pressure while the mean score rating below 2.50 stood for no future career anxiety based on parental pressure.

Discussion of findings

The findings were discussed using the mean and standard deviation

Research Question 1: What is the level of future career anxiety based on parental pressure among public university students in Delta and Edo States?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on career anxiety based on parental pressure among Nigerian university students

S/N	Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision
1	A accepted my career just to please my parents	460	2.00	1.00	Low anxiety
2	I experience heightened stress when I tell them I am interested in a specific career	460	2.72	.75	High anxiety
3	My parents are happy about the career path I have chosen even when I am not happy	460	3.62	.57	High anxiety
4	I develop difficulty focusing because I followed my parent's decision	460	3.73	.46	High anxiety
5	I lack confidence in my profession because my parents tell me about specific career	460	3.48	.57	High anxiety
6	I procrastinate any task on my career just to cool-off my head	460	3.67	.54	High anxiety

7	I avoid team career planning and just keep my failures	460	3.34	.49	High anxiety
8	The pressure of my parents constantly strive for success without a clear sense of direction	460	3.55	.51	High anxiety
9	My parents did not accept my career due to the inability to reflect their educational qualification	460	3.63	.55	High anxiety
10	My career is as a result of my parent's decision	460	3.43	.58	High anxiety
11	I am regretting the career decision forced on me by my parents	460	3.36	.60	High anxiety
12	My career decision creates fatigue which further exacerbates career paralysis due to the pressure from my parents	460	3.58	.58	High anxiety
13	My career had created fear and stagnation because I satisfied my parents	460	3.34	.84	High anxiety
Average mean		3.65	0.62		

Table 1 clearly highlights the mean and standard deviation on future career anxiety based on parental pressure among public university students in Delta and Edo States. According to the data gathered in Table 1 the average means of

3.650 is higher than the benchmark means of 2.50. This implies that there are high level of future career anxiety based on parental pressure among public university students in Delta and Edo States.

Research Question 2: What is the level of future career anxiety based on gender differences among public university students in Delta and Edo States?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on the future career anxiety based on gender differences among public university students in Delta and Edo States

S/N	Item Statement	Male (N=207)			Female (N=253)		
		Mean	SD	Remark	Mean	SD	Remark
1	A accepted my career just to please my parents	2.11	.88	Low anxiety	1.9209	1.09	Low anxiety
2	I experience heightened stress when I tell them I am interested in a specific career	2.78	.71	High anxiety	2.6798	.77	High anxiety
3	My parents are happy about the career path I have chosen even when I am not happy	3.69	.54	High anxiety	3.5731	.59	High anxiety
4	I develop difficulty focusing because I followed my parent's decision	3.77	.47	High anxiety	.47	.03	High anxiety
5	I lack confidence in my profession because my parents tell me about specific career	3.42	.58	High anxiety	3.53	.55	High anxiety

6	I procrastinate any task on my career just to cool-off my head	3.76	.47	High anxiety	3.60	.58	High anxiety
7	I avoid team career planning and just keep my failures	3.32	.51	High anxiety	3.36	.48	High anxiety
8	The pressure of my parents constantly strive for success without a clear sense of direction	3.56	.49	High anxiety	3.54	.53	High anxiety
9	My parents did not accept my career due to the inability to reflect their educational qualification	3.71	.50	High anxiety	3.56	.59	High anxiety
10	My career is as a result of my parent's decision	3.43	.53	High anxiety	3.42	.62	High anxiety
11	I am regretting the career decision forced on me by my parents	3.35	.58	High anxiety	3.37	.61	High anxiety
12	My career decision creates fatigue which further exacerbates career paralysis due to the pressure from my parents	3.61	.57	High anxiety	3.55	.59	High anxiety

Table 2 clearly highlighted the mean and standard deviation of the future career anxiety based on gender differences among public university students in Delta and Edo States. Each variable except variable 1 in Table 2 has means greater than the bench mark mean of 2.50. A careful look at Table 2 revealed that grand mean value for gender difference is greater than bench mark mean of 2.50. This implies that there are high level of future career anxiety based on gender differences among public university students in Delta and Edo States.

Discussion of Findings

Analysis of data concerning the first research question shows that there are future career anxiety based on parental pressure among public university students in Delta and Edo States. This future anxiety stemmed from the pressure of parents as a result of fear of job insecurity, poor self-assurance in their professional decisions and fear to succeed. This finding aligned with that of Taylor and Jiang (2023) who stated that parental expectation and the realities of the job market

fosters anxiety among young people, who often feel they are being pushed to achieve something that may not be feasible or even desirable in the future.

Analysis of data concerning the second research question shows that there are future career anxiety based on gender differences among public university students in Delta and Edo States. This future career anxiety based on gender difference is a growth mindset among men and women that skills and abilities can be developed by viewing obstacles as chances for personal development without necessarily pushing for a career that will have an effect on career flight, in increasing the levels of anxiety about their professional futures. This finding aligned with that of Harris and Zhang (2024) who stated that men and women role expectations, cultures and norms in their workplace influence the types of career anxiety.

Conclusion

In line with the findings of this study, it is concluded that, there are future career anxiety

based on parental pressure and gender differences among public university students in Delta and Edo States.

Recommendations

On the bases of findings and conclusion, the following were recommended:

1. Parents should embrace the exploration of individual children to transform stress into strength that is, not pressuring them to take a career for personal and professional accomplishment.
2. Parents should be more conscious of the undue career pressure on their children and be open to alternative choices
3. Youth should develop effective strategies like enlightenment campaign for reducing future anxiety among younger generations.

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